



# **MAXIMIZING STUDENT SUCCESS:**

## **THE VITAL ROLE OF STANDARDS-BASED PE AND MOVEMENT BREAKS**

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# Executive Summary

In an era where only 20 to 28% of children in the United States achieve the recommended daily physical activity levels, the school environment has become a critical environment for both student health and academic achievement. Evidence shows that moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA) is a powerful catalyst for success, proven to improve cardiovascular function, reduce stress, and foster the cognitive self-regulation necessary for literacy gains. However, many schools struggle to meet national instruction standards due to budget constraints, a lack of certified specialists, and the reality that students often spend less than half of their scheduled physical education (PE) time engaged in health-enhancing MVPA. This white paper outlines a high-impact strategy for administrators to bridge these gaps by integrating quality, standards-based PE and "movement breaks" directly into the classroom. By utilizing accessible digital tools like Pocket PE, schools can remove the planning burden from teachers and ensure every student has the physical and cognitive "reset" required to thrive.



## Our Mission

Our mission at Pocket PE is to empower teachers to lead confident, effective, and engaging physical education for every student, everywhere.

## Our Vision

At Pocket PE, we envision a future where movement and learning go hand-in-hand, supported by educators who feel empowered and well-equipped.

# The Current Landscape of Student Health

Inadequate physical activity and excessive sedentary behaviors are major contributors to poor health and academic outcomes among American children. Currently, only 20 to 28% of children in the United States achieve the recommended 60 minutes of daily moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA) (1). This is a critical concern, as MVPA has been proven to improve cardiovascular function, reduce stress, and increase prosocial skills (2-4). Furthermore, physical activity promotes cognitive gains in self-regulation and fosters age-related literacy (5). For many students, the school day is the primary opportunity to accumulate this essential activity (6).

## Barriers to Effective Physical Education

While Physical Education (PE) is the cornerstone of school-based activity and Comprehensive School Physical Activity Programs (CSPAPs), current data suggests it is often insufficient.

- Students frequently spend less than 50% of PE class time engaged in health-enhancing MVPA (6)
- Schools face significant barriers to instruction, including deficit district budgets and a lack of certified PE specialists (7,8)
- General education teachers are often responsible for delivering PE, but may lack the specialized pedagogical knowledge or lesson delivery tools to manage active classrooms effectively (9)
- Widespread state mandates for 150 minutes of weekly PE are rarely met due to these resource and staffing constraints.

# The Power of Standards-Based Movement

To mitigate teacher burden, schools require integrated programs that are appealing and easy to adapt. Quality movement is not just about "being active"; it must be standards-based and instructionally appropriate. Engaging in Moderate to Vigorous Physical Activity (MVPA) and fundamental movement skill activities provides a "high dose" of physiological and neurological benefits that are critical for developing students (10).

## Enhancing Academic Readiness and Cognitive Function

Research consistently demonstrates that physical activity is a powerful driver of academic success. MVPA has been shown to foster significant cognitive gains in self-regulation and age-related literacy (2-4). Specifically, regular participation in MVPA and movement skill activities are linked to improved academic performance in mathematics and reading (11). These benefits are attributed to the way physical activity prepares the brain for learning, increasing focus and reducing stress.

## Cardiovascular and Physiological Health

From a health perspective, MVPA participation achieved during PE is essential for improving cardiovascular function and overall physical health (4). Circuits-based PE lessons, or rotating activity stations performed in small groups, have been proven to improve muscular endurance and aerobic capacity in children, even when delivered in short sessions (12). By focusing on creative standards-based instruction, schools can maximize the time students spend in MVPA and movement skill activities, directly impacting their well-being and classroom achievement (13).



# Integrating Classroom "Movement Breaks" for Cognitive Benefits

Beyond structured PE lessons, the integration of brief, self-contained physical activity breaks performed in the classroom or outside—often called “movement breaks” or “brain breaks”—is essential for maintaining classroom focus (14).

- Brief physical activity breaks help satisfy the biological need for movement during long periods of sedentary classroom time (15)
- Consistent movement throughout the day is a national priority for multiple health outcomes (15)
- School-wide adoption of structured movement breaks with standards-aligned curriculum contribute to state mandates for physical education minutes



## Conclusion: A Call to Action for Administrators

Investing in a hybrid model of physical activity—combining quality, standards-based PE with frequent classroom movement breaks—is a high-leverage strategy for improving both health and academic outcomes for students. By providing teachers with the right digital tools, administrators can ensure that every student has the opportunity to move, learn, and succeed regardless of their background.

Pocket PE is a digital app designed specifically for 3rd-5th grade classrooms to meet these exact needs. Pocket PE was created with classroom teachers in mind, providing accessible, standards-aligned physical education tools for any instructional setting. The app also supports PE specialists and adapts seamlessly to hybrid and collaborative models, ensuring every educator can deliver effective, engaging PE—regardless of background or teaching environment.

For questions, to request additional resources materials, or receive a review copy of the Pocket PE app, please contact:

Jeanette Ricci, PhD  
(541) 395-4424  
jeanettericci@pocketpe.app



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