

## OP-ED

## Guest Commentary

Getting  
our kids  
moving

By Steven Grasmick

All work and no play makes Johnny a dull boy. That old saying is taking on a new meaning these days. In fact, we now know that "all work and no play" doesn't just make Johnny (and Susie too) dull, as in no fun. It also makes them dull, as in less likely to succeed at school.

Researchers from the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York studied 10,000 students who were 8 and 9 years old. What they learned was that kids who have at least a 15-minute break during the school day have better classroom behavior.

It is not surprising then to know that physical activity is linked to higher test scores and academic achievement, better grades and higher self-esteem. Better-behaved kids pay more attention in the classroom and are going to perform better academically.

I've seen the same thing in my school. Two years ago, we implemented a Recess Before Lunch program. This research-based program documented improvement in mealtime atmosphere and students' behavior. Discipline problems on the playground and in the classroom decreased.

With the success of Recess Before Lunch, we realized we needed to do even more. We installed a "Grizzly Fitness Trail," a ½-mile circuit with various fun physical activities for the kids to do. Our physical education teachers started a mileage club to give credit to students for the amount of laps they walk during recess. The students are honored with rewards at monthly assemblies.

We also put in a traversing/climbing wall. The wall has been a huge hit with the kids and the benefits are endless.

The results of all of these activity programs? We are seeing better-behaved kids who scored better on the CSAPs, Colorado's academic performance tests. Fowler has been a high-rated school in the School Accountability Report for the past four years, and was recognized as a "School of Distinction" by the Colorado Department of Education in 2008.

I'm proud of my school's outcomes. As a Coloradan, I would be even prouder to see every child in our state have the same supports they need to succeed. Our kids are not getting enough physical activity during the school day, but we can (and should) do better. Senate Bill 131, which has bipartisan sponsorship, will make sure all children from kindergarten through eighth grade get at least 150 minutes of physical activity per week in school.

It is easy to make this happen, and it doesn't have to cost money. Physical activity means moving around — recess, physical education in gym class, exercise breaks during class, jumping jacks after coming back from lunch. These and other activities help our children be better learners and feel better about themselves.

In this time of tight budgets, we can and should be looking for no- and low-cost things we can do to make our kids healthier and perform better academically. SB 131 is one important step forward.

Steven Grasmick is principal of Fowler Elementary School in southeastern Colorado.