BOKS Gets Kids Moving

"A bout of exercise is like taking a little bit of Prozac and a little bit of Ritalin."

- John Ratey, MD

AN INCREASING NUMBER OF ADHD EXPERTS believe that physical activity helps children pay attention, control their behavior, and do better in school. Yet, too few schools are providing children with access to exercise programs capable of deriving these benefits. Kathleen Tullie, a mom from the Greater Boston area, may have come up with the solution.

Tullie started a program known as Build Our Kids' Success (BOKS), which provides schools with a well-designed, structured before-school aerobic activity program that's fun and easy to implement. What's more, the program provides free curriculum, training, and support. The program is run by volunteers—parents, teachers, and other interested community members—who feel passionately about the role physical activity plays in improving children's physical and emotional health.

Geared initially for students in grades K-5, BOKS recently expanded to include both early childhood and middle school. Since its inception in 2009, the program has grown exponentially. An initiative of the Reebok Foundation, BOKS has enrolled more than 1,800 schools.

How it works

The twelve-week program occurs three times per week, 40-45 minutes before the school day begins. Each lesson starts with a ten-minute check-in period, followed by a five-minute warm-up. A ten-minute running activity occurs next, followed by a ten-minute introduction to the Skill of the Week (sit-ups, planks, squats, to name a few). A five-minute end-of-class game occurs next, incorporating the skill of the week. The final activity, a five-minute cool down/nutrition talk, helps children develop healthy eating habits (BOKS Bits). Children learn how to test whether a snack is "super healthy" or not. One fun, simple test: Place the snack under a water faucet. If you can still eat it (apples or other fruits, hardboiled eggs, carrot sticks, etc.) it passes the test. If not (cookies, potato chips, donuts, etc.), it fails.

"One of the most amazing things we've seen with the program is that our BOKS kids are becoming the change agents," says Tullie. "Children are reminding their parents to shop the perimeter of the grocery store and read nutrition labels. We're teaching children how to live a healthy lifestyle by encouraging them to run around and play, and they're teaching the older generations."

BOKS also provides teachers with brief physical activities designed to keep children active and moving throughout the day (BOKS Bursts). Some schools use these two- to five-minute bursts throughout the day, others before children sit down to take standardized tests. Some families have incorporated them into their homework routine.

The BOKS program is very flexible. Some schools choose to implement BOKS midday, during recess period. Other schools implement the program on fewer than three days a week, some schools more. "We just want to get kids moving," says Caeli Sullivan, the program's senior marketing manager. "Our program is adaptable to your schedule—it's been created to work into your timeframe."

All BOKS curriculum offerings can be downloaded from the Trainer Hub and anyone can implement the program. As with any program requiring buy-in from a school, BOKS does require an enthusiastic champion who can bring the program forward and work with other

How to Bring BOKS to Your School

1. Find a champion of change to run the program.
2. Start moving and get principal or superintendent approval.
3. Enroll your school online.



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parents, teachers, and community volunteers to help sustain it over the long haul. Once BOKS receives email confirmation that the program is approved in your community, the keys to the program are provided.

In collaboration with the American Council on Exercise, BOKS offers both professionals and nonprofessionals a BOKS Kids Fitness Certificate. Upon successful completion of a BOKS training program and exam, the certificate holder is empowered to advise schools on the necessary steps for a successful rollout. The certificate is not a requirement, however, to become a BOKS trainer. BOKS will also launch a virtual online training later this year, so people all over the world can experience the training from the comfort of their homes.

Recognition and support

With recognition from First Lady Michelle Obama and Let's Move! Active Schools, American Council on Exercise, Partnership for a Healthier America, Alliance for Healthier Generation, Shape America, Institute of Medicine, and the Aspen Institute, BOKS continues to make strides throughout the nation.

Through research studies with National Institute on Out Of School Time (NIOST), Dr. Wayne Westcott and now Harvard Medical School, BOKS is showing people the importance of getting kids moving in the morning. Evaluations by NIOST (2011-2014) and Dr. Wayne Westcott (2014, published in JESO) found that BOKS has a significant impact on physical activity intensity and daily duration, body composition (body fat percentage), nutrition knowledge, test scores, executive functioning of the brain, and school attendance. They've also found that at least 90 percent of parents and children would sign up for BOKS again, and teachers can attest to its positive effects on learning readiness and classroom behavior.

Visit the BOKS website, www.bokskids.org, to learn more about the studies on the program's effectiveness. The program can also find further support from the growing body of research extolling the benefits of aerobic exercise on children's learning and behavior, including its potential benefits for children with ADHD (see references below). To learn about the three-step process for bringing BOKS to your school, visit www.bokskids.org/enroll-school.

Visit the Sparking Life website, www.sparkinglife.org, to learn more about how strenuous physical exercise can improve overall wellbeing. You can also read about the different models schools are developing to weave structured exercise programs into the school day. And be sure to watch the TED talk by John Ratey: http://tedxmanhattanbeach.com/past-events/october-2012-conference-journey-to-purpose/presenters/john-ratey.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Hoza, B., Smith, A.L., et al (2015). A Randomized Trial Examining the Effects of Aerobic Physical Activity on Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder Symptoms in Young Children. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 43(4): 655-667.

Ratey, J. (2008). *Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain*. New York: Little, Brown and Company.