



## Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds



Your typical conference starts with a continental breakfast, followed by a tired group of attendees in business casual attire shuffling to their seats and preparing for a day of keynote speakers, PowerPoint presentations and networking.

Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds was not your typical conference, as the attendees kicked off day one of the two-day, August conference by running in place to get the heart and brain moving.

According to recent research in the field of neuroscience, as you exercise, your muscles contract and release chemicals that travel to the brain, stimulating the release of a protein called BDNF (brain-derived neurotrophic factor). As Dr. John J. Ratey, Harvard psychiatrist and author of

**Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain**, puts it, BDNF “serves as Miracle-Gro for the brain, fertilizing brain cells to keep them functioning and growing.”

And yet, the question remains: How do you take research and make it actionable in the classroom? That’s what the Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds Institute set out to answer for teachers and administrators in attendance.

Matthew Moyer, principal at Rupert Elementary in the Pottstown School District, was in attendance with a large team of teachers. He said, “First, what I was looking for was why this will ultimately benefit our students. One of the presentations that stood out for me was how children with

significant behavior issues were able to learn after participating in classroom workouts. We need to find ways where each and every child can learn—where every child is valued.”

**Our entire school is doing a 10-minute workout every morning, and we’re continuing to develop brain energizers to be used on a regular basis.**

*Matthew Moyer talks about what his school is doing to promote the mind-body connection.*

Christopher Vecchio, a Physical Education teacher at Governor Mifflin, also joined the conference with a large contingent from his school. “Some of the most meaningful parts of the conference were the presentations that focused on the science behind the brain-body connection,” he said. “They were able to tie together the scientific concepts you study in college with good common sense, and apply both to how individuals learn.”

He continued, “Traditionally, when students went to class, they spent 44 minutes without moving at all. Instead, we have incorporated Brain Breaks and you can generally tell exactly when your students

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# a message from our director



Dear Community,

“Exercise is the single best thing you can do for your brain in terms of mood, memory and learning.”

That’s a quote from Dr. John J. Ratey, author of *Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain*. It’s also a powerful statement to keep in mind when considering the benefits of active learning.

In his book, Dr. Ratey utilizes the well-documented success story of Naperville Central High School, located just outside of Chicago, Illinois. Their approach to physical activity has been a case study for the nation—one that showcases improved test scores and grassroots leaders for a movement that many educators hope takes hold in more schools.

When it comes to learning, it’s more motivating to be active, rather than passive. To use your critical thinking skills, rather than just try to absorb information. To collaborate with others, rather than individually acquire new ideas. It’s true for students, as you’ll read in examples taken from a number of schools from across the area. It’s also true for adults, since we never stop learning. Or generating new brain cells by exercising!

Over our ten years of grant making, we’ve found that programs and initiatives that have a strong sense of active learning deliver dual positive outcomes both for education and for health.

On behalf of the Foundation, I hope you find the stories in this issue inspiring, both for you and your family. We think you’ll enjoy learning more about what’s going on right here in our community!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David W. Kraybill".

David W. Kraybill, Executive Director

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need to take a break! Some of the Brain Breaks we do are simple stretches or toe touches. Others add layers of activity meant to further wake up and stimulate your brain. For instance, we’ll do arm circles. But, one arm must be forward and one backward. It’s not as easy as it sounds!”

Hosted on the campus of The Hill School in Pottstown and sponsored by the Pottstown Area Health & Wellness Foundation, the event featured nearly 40 sessions from well-respected scientists, educators and researchers.

## A body in motion stays in motion. A mind in motion stays in motion.

*Jessica Peconi-Cook’s way of describing the power of the mind-body connection.*

“The program is different,” said Cook. “It’s a fun and unique way to exercise without realizing it. It’s also a great cardio program that ties music and fitness.”



Likewise, Charlie McGarvey led a series of three unconventional and inspired presentations:

See It, Believe It, Teach It! Cup Stacking, Moving to Music, and Quick Hitters for PE Class. Of cup stacking, McGarvey says, “It’s like a track meet for your hands at warp speed! Moving goes hand in hand with learning. It could be as simple as asking students a question and asking them to move to different corners of your room depending

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## Our bodies are made to keep moving.

*Christopher Vecchio*

Jessica Peconi-Cook led the presentation Get the Brain Alive with Drums Alive. The program was created by Carrie Ekins, co-founder, CEO and Education Coordinator for a fitness and wellness consulting company in Germany. While she was recovering from a surgical procedure, she noted the positive effects that drumming had on her physically, as well as mentally. The program uses drum sticks and stability balls and may be adapted for any age.

## Did you sweat? Did you have fun? If so, then this was a successful gym class.

*Charlie McGarvey’s question to students after class.*

[www.pottstownfoundation.org](http://www.pottstownfoundation.org)



## Pottstown School District Is Energized!

Brain Energizer DVDs... before-and-after school physical activity programs... International Walk to School Day... stability ball chairs... these are the ways students of the Pottstown School District are getting active.

More than 30 faculty, staff, administrators, and nurses attended the summer Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds Institute, and they returned to the district energized with exciting information and ideas to activate their students' learning potential.

The District is working collectively to reach the common goal of helping students excel in the classroom. A Brain Energizer Committee, including administrators, principals, nurses and teachers, was formed after attending the summer institute.

According to David Genova, the District's Wellness Coordinator, "The gathering of this committee provides a chance to discuss the current challenges and benefits district schools are experiencing in regards to active learning. All of our classrooms are performing brain energizers on a regular basis, and we can learn from each other's successes."

A variety of physical activity opportunities are available. Students at Rupert and Barth Elementary Schools participate in a morning 10-minute Brain Stimulation Video pilot program, and their data is being collected for future evaluation. A stability ball-chair pilot program is in place in two elementary classrooms and one middle school classroom, and is also collecting data for future assessment. The Middle School and Rupert Elementary School received donated cardio equipment, which is being used for learning/behavior support students, with "amazing" results.



A Brain Energizer DVD is being created featuring the district's own teachers and students. A book club has been created to discuss Dr. John J. Ratey's book [Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain](#), and more than 600 students participated in the International Walk to School Day!

And since there is no age limit to the benefits of active learning, teachers in the District also present brain energizers at faculty meetings! Everyone is energized in the Pottstown School District!



### CONFERENCE FEEDBACK:

*This conference was so helpful to our district in so many ways.*

*Very well organized.  
Very enjoyable!*



# Owen J. Roberts Is on Board with Active Learning

"I don't know what I would do without them. The [brain] breaks have totally changed my ability to capture the class's attention and move to instruction." These are the words of Marshal Vogel, a 5th grade teacher at West Vincent Elementary School in the Owen J. Roberts School District (OJRSD).

"I have also personally tried linking movement to instruction during my Kindergarten intervention reading groups. The children are perfect candidates because their stamina is slowly building, and naturally we need many movement breaks to keep attention," remarked Susan Wendel, Reading Specialist for the OJRSD.

Teachers from the OJRSD support the physical and emotional wellness of students, and they are learning the impact of physical activity in the classroom as well. Staff who attended the summer Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds

Institute returned to the District eager and excited to share the information with their peers, and incorporate it into their work with students. By developing a 'share folder' on the schools computer network called Brain Boosters, all staff at North Coventry Elementary have easy access to numerous articles, links and video clips that can be utilized in the classroom.

Active learning is benefiting students in all grade levels. The Healthy Lifestyles group supports high school students who are identified as having needs which interfere with their ability to successfully benefit from academic instruction. Capitalizing on the research that correlates physical activity with emotional wellbeing, this group of students begins each day with small group physical education.

Beginning the day with enjoyable forms of exercise has allowed many students to make remarkable strides in the development of the positive coping and interpersonal skills necessary to thrive personally and academically throughout the school day. As a group, these students are demonstrating improved attendance, improved grades and fewer disciplinary issues.

It is evident in the OJRSD, that physical activity and brain breaks provide the foundation for students to be more successful in the classroom academically, emotionally and socially. The 'brain-body' connection is a 'win-win' for everyone.

## CONFERENCE FEEDBACK:

*Two days well spent both personally & professionally. I will continue to recommend this to others!*



# Boyertown School District Knows the Importance of Physical Activity

Opportunities to be active during the school day are evolving throughout the entire Boyertown Area School District. Whether it is in the form of physical activity before class, participating in a running club after school or creating programming for a local access TV channel with a focus on nutrition and exercise, teachers at all levels are developing opportunities for students to be active.

The concept of the brain-body connection, as defined in Dr. John J. Ratey's book, [Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain](#), has been the focus for the district for several years, and serves as the basis for incorporating programming that involves physical activity into the curriculum.

Sophomore students attending the Berks Career Technology Center have learned the importance of cardiovascular exercise and academic achievement from members of Dr. Ratey's team. Students request opportunities to 'move' when they're having a particularly stressful day, or need to focus on a particular task. They have noticed an improvement in both their test scores and behavior.

In an effort to improve students' PSSA scores, 11th grade students are provided with a variety of activities to choose from before taking the exam. According to Steph Petri, Assistant Principal at Boyertown East Junior HS, the state has changed the secondary exam to the Keystone exams, so the current test scores will be used to create baseline data to track results.

## CONFERENCE FEEDBACK:

**WOW! AWESOME!! LOVED IT!!!**

*Best workshop I've ever attended.*

West Road Warriors is an eight-week running club that meets twice a week at Junior High West. The program is geared to students of any activity level and is conducted in a strong supportive setting, concluding with a 5K race at the end of the program.

Elementary schools in the District are incorporating the Action Based Learning model. This initiative has the ability to impact more than 3,700 students, and will be instrumental in improving a student's impulse control, behavior and standardized test scores.

The District maintains an integrated approach by utilizing the high school's TV production class to create and produce "Fit in 15", a 15-minute fitness program focused on school-aged teens and pre-teens. Episodes focused on how to get a complete workout in 15 minutes with limited equipment, how to choose a balanced diet, and exercise routines for elementary aged children that can be done at home.

Mrs. Petri, who is also the former LEAD PE Teacher for BASD, was instrumental in coordinating the District's annual summer Health and PE conferences. This event evolved into the two-day Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds Institute held this past summer which attracted more than 160 Health and PE teachers, school nurses, faculty and administrators from schools within and beyond the tri-county area.

"It was great to see classroom teachers, nurses, administrators, and PE teachers working together towards a common goal of helping students be successful through physical activity interventions and support." According to Petri, "The key piece is collaboration and practicing what we preach."

## Active Learning Starts as Early as Pre-K in the Pottstown School District



Educators, at every level, are learning that the brain needs to be activated through physical activity. Focusing on the whole child and the fact that academic achievement is directly connected with the body, is the take-away received by Mary Rieck, Coordinator of Pottstown Early Action for Kindergarten Readiness (PEAK), from the summer Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds Institute. For long-term results, the brain needs to be activated and that is achieved through physical activity.

Three- to four-year-old Pre-K students in the district are reaping the benefits of leveraged resources that focus on active learning. On-site physical fitness classes and weekly nutrition lessons are taking place in 21 classrooms and is impacting 341 children. Music CDs are used with brain energizers to get the students up-and-moving.

The Smart PE Lab training took place recently and provided an engaging opportunity for Pre-K Counts teachers, assistants and Pottstown School District Pre-K teachers to learn more on the connection between brain research, movement and achievement. One school district teacher commented, "This was the best in-service I have ever attended."

The importance of activity and learning doesn't stop at the end of the school day, though. Pre-K Counts teachers are spreading the word through parent/child workshops and will teach the parents about the importance of movement and learning so it will continue into the home as well. Everyone is getting on board with active learning.

## profile



### Ashley Pultorak

Ashley Pultorak joined the Foundation in 2011 and hit the ground running. Given her promotion to Program Officer for Schools, Recreation and Active Living, it's likely that she won't be slowing down anytime soon! In her new role, Pultorak will be responsible for managing grant programs and funding to schools, preschools, parks and recreation centers, and community organizations involved with physical activity programs.

But those who either presented or attended the recent Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds Institute know her as one of the key Foundation staff members who planned and organized the event. Of the planning stages for Institute, she said, "Through the sharing of research and ideas, as well as some great local examples, we found that the topic of Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds was one to invest in and share with as many who would listen. In turn, the conference became a great way for people with a passion for teaching and learning to get together and cultivate more ideas for their own students. And we had a lot of willing speakers, so there was something for everyone."

What's coming up in 2014 for Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds? "The initiative is still building momentum, as we continue to get as many people as we can both engaged and connected," said Pultorak. "Those who participated this year are already laying the foundation, and in 2014 they will continue to grow and develop these initiatives."

In the community, Ashley has served as an Assistant Coach to the field hockey program at Ursinus College, as well as with a local chapter of Girls on the Run. She is a resident of Schwenksville, PA and graduated from Duke University in 2009 with a degree in Art History.



## The Wyndcroft School Is "Stacking Up"

Have you heard of cup stacking? Have you ever tried it? Allison Carr, school nurse at The Wyndcroft School, has taken the sport to a different level. Cup stacking increases bilateral proficiency and develops a greater percentage of the right side of the brain, which houses awareness, focus, creativity and rhythm. It also promotes individual self-esteem.

However, Ms. Carr is using the sport of cup stacking to teach 7th graders how difficult it is to function under the influence of drugs and alcohol. Students experienced a simulated impairment by wearing "foggy glasses" and then spinning around to the point of becoming dizzy. Upon reaching the point of impairment, the students were then required to perform cup stacking. This was no easy task, and created a realistic perspective of how difficult it is to perform normal functions while under the influence of drugs and alcohol.

Cup stacking is one of the many new tools Ms. Carr learned at the summer Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds Institute. Teaching dance skills by using sign language is another skill she learned, and is planning to implement this knowledge into her curriculum for both the 2nd and 6th grades as she teaches them about hearing impairment.

The Wyndcroft School has recently implemented a wellness team and is committed to incorporating new ideas, in addition to maintaining the well-established programs through the Healthy for Life project. Programs such as: Food is Elementary, Fresh & Local Friday, and Yoga for Kids all work together to achieve Wyndcroft's goal of promoting sustainable healthy living through nutrition and wellbeing programs.





## “Foundations for Life” Blog with Dr. Laurie Betts

Find inspiration and advice by following Dr. Betts as she discusses family life, exercise, nutrition and more. She will cover topics everyone can relate to, so join in the conversation and share your challenges and your successes.

[Click here](#) to follow Dr. Betts today!

### CONFERENCE FEEDBACK:

*Early work-out session... awesome!*

*I left with tons of great ideas for Brain Breaks and have thought of many other ones to use.*

*Great conference – great speakers, materials and ideas shared. Thank you so much to all!! Food was great and I had a wonderful experience!!*

*Absolutely terrific in every way! Lots of information to incorporate this school year. Looking forward to next year.*

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on what they think the correct answer is. It gets them out of their seats for a brain break.”

“I see the difference with my kids,” said McGarvey. “They need time to be active and to socialize. They’re inside for a good portion of the day and their time is so tightly scheduled, so it’s important to break things up and get some fresh air to the brain. As a result, they’re more energized.”

The growing body of research on positive impacts of physical activity on the brain

demonstrates the power of the brain-body connection, especially for students. It keeps young minds focused and alert. In fact, there is substantial evidence that physical activity can have an impact on cognitive skills, academic behavior and test scores even as far as sparking new brain cell growth.

Bottom line: It’s important to recognize that taking small steps in the classroom—even if it’s simply a two minute “brain blast”—can have a profound impact on students and their performance.

**Save the date**

**2nd Annual  
Healthy Bodies...  
Healthy Minds  
2014 Institute**

**August 5-6, 2014  
The Hill School**

Look for more details in 2014.

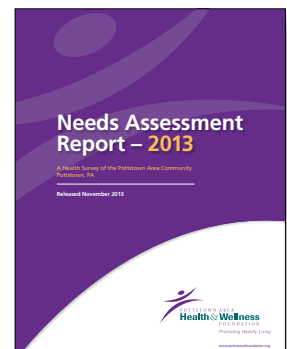
**Spring 2014  
Grant Round**

Letters of Intent due –  
**February 1, 2014**

Click [here](#) for more information.

## Now available! Needs Assessment Report 2013 A Health Survey of the Pottstown Area Community

Current and accurate information and trends on people, their interests, needs and demographics can be difficult to find in one place. This comprehensive needs assessment will identify our progress and our challenges in the tri-county area. For the full report, [click here](#).



## Celebrating 10 Years of Great Opportunities for Grant Making

Over the past ten years, Pottstown Area Health & Wellness Foundation has provided more than \$22 million to nonprofits with a shared vision for building healthy communities. In October, the Foundation celebrated by hosting an event and premiering a video which features area children—those who will lead our healthy, dynamic community in the future.



View our video premiere [here](#).



152 E. High St., Suite 500  
Pottstown, PA 19464  
Phone: 610-323-2006  
Fax: 610-323-0047  
[www.pottstownfoundation.org](http://www.pottstownfoundation.org)



[www.missionhealthyliving.org](http://www.missionhealthyliving.org)