

Exergames at School

Using Videogames to Get Our Kids Moving

The US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) recommends that kids get at least 60 minutes of physical activity each day. Studies have shown that regular physical activity, especially throughout the day, leads to better academic performance and can have a positive impact on grades and standardized test scores. Physical activity can also improve mood and self-esteem and reduce anxiety in children, which in turn can help them learn better.

When playing videogames that are *exergames*, or *active video games* you use your body to move, jump, swing and dance, instead of sitting on a couch and controlling a game with only your hands. Exergames can be a much more enjoyable way to get exercise: you may have so much fun; you don't even *realize* you are moving more! Exergames also bring convenience: they can be used indoor when it is too hot, cold or windy to be outside, and can be used for short periods of time without a lot of required set-up, or without moving the entire classroom of students. As part of their work with exergames in Las Cruces classrooms, NMSU researchers have found additional surprising outcomes. In one local elementary school, students school-wide would start the day with an exergame dance. In addition to increasing alertness and readiness for instruction, fewer students were late to class than before the exergame initiative started.



Your child may start using exergames as part of their Physical Education time, morning announcements or in various activities in the classroom. Physical activity is one of the many tools we use to help your student succeed academically, and exergames makes that physical activity easier and more fun for your student.

Using Exergames at Home

This is an exciting time for exergames. There are many different games available for several systems. The Nintendo Wii has several exergaming titles available and this fall, PlayStation and xBox manufacturers are both releasing new exergaming components.

Replace some passive screen time with active screen time

If your family already spends time playing videogames, consider replacing some of that “screen time” with games that get your gamer can moving, jumping and swinging. Games like *Dance, Dance Revolution* — in which players dance on a mat, following music and stepping to the beat in the game — can burn many calories and are available for systems as old as the PS2. Nintendo's Fit board, used with the Wii console, has games that require balance and stability, including yoga, step aerobics and strength training. Exergames are available for almost any console, including Wii, PlayStation 2, PlayStation 3, and Xbox 360. If you need help finding them, visit exergamesunlocked.org or ask at your local store for games that can get your family moving.

Find ways to play as a family

It's easier for families to play together when the games don't require specialized skill with your thumbs and a controller. Set up a family game night where family and friends can all play together. Get involved in the gaming life of your children and ask them to show you how to play. Games are fun, even for adults.



Don't use active games as a substitute for physical activity

While active games can help convert passive screen time to active screen time, they should not be used as a substitute for other forms of physical activity. Find ways to encourage movement and ways your family can play together in or outside.