

Active Living Research

Using Evidence to Prevent Childhood Obesity
and Create Active Communities

ARTICLE SUMMARY

February 2013

Do Policies to Improve Physical Education Work?

Introduction

Low-income children and children of color are less likely to be physically active and more likely to be overweight or obese. These populations are also less likely to have sufficient amounts of good quality physical education (PE) in their schools. California state law requires schools to provide at least 200 minutes of PE instruction by a qualified teacher every 10 school days for elementary school students and at least 400 minutes for middle school students. However, the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) was not enforcing this law. An organized advocacy campaign led the LAUSD to adopt a policy requiring schools to comply with and implement the state's PE laws and guidelines. This study examined whether the implementation of this policy is leading to improvements in the quantity and quality of PE in the LAUSD.

Key Findings

Class size did not change overall, but among low-income middle schools, there was a 60 percent drop in the number of classes that exceeded the class size cap of 45 students. Across all grade and socioeconomic levels, there were increases in the average length of PE classes. Only high-income elementary schools experienced statistically significant increases, where class duration increased from almost 10 minutes per class. The only statistically significant change in percent of PE class time spent in moderate-to-vigorous physical activity was a 33 percent decrease among low-income schools.

Methods

We observed PE classes using the System for Observing Fitness Instruction Time in 34 elementary, middle, and high schools to assess changes in PE class size, class duration, and the amount of time students spent in vigorous physical activity.

Implications

Our study showed that although some modest improvements occurred in the quantity and quality of PE in LAUSD schools, the PE policy was not yet fully implemented throughout the district. This could be because the time frame for implementation was insufficient in light of the district's large size and budget constraints. We recommend developing strategies to reliably communicate the policy to all school administrators and teachers and support principals and teachers so they can more effectively implement the policy in their schools. It will also be important to establish protocols to enforce compliance with the policy over the long term. Parents, local community members, and teachers should receive training to monitor compliance.

SOURCE

Lafleur, M., et al. (2013). Physical Education and Student Activity: Evaluating Implementation of a New Policy in Los Angeles Public Schools. *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, 45(1Suppl): S122-S130.

Open access to the full text article is available at:

<http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12160-012-9431-0>

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