

Active Living Research

Using Evidence to Prevent Childhood Obesity
and Create Active Communities

ARTICLE SUMMARY

February 2013

Sports for All Youth

Introduction

Schools can be a great place for youth to be physically active, but opportunities for extracurricular sports in schools have declined in recent years. This study looked at how much middle school students participated in sports. We compared participation levels between students in schools with intramural sports (IM), which are open to all students and focus on participation rather than competition, to schools with an interscholastic (IS) model, which permits only the best athletes and focuses on competition. Intramural sports included both traditional (e.g. soccer, volleyball, basketball) and non-traditional “lifetime” sports (e.g. bowling, tennis, golf). Interscholastic sports included football, baseball, volleyball, track and field, and cheerleading.

Key Findings

Intramural sports attracted more students to play sports than did interscholastic sports, and may be especially important for students from low-income households or students of color. In IS schools, 27.3 percent of students participated on one or more of their school's sports teams, in contrast to 35.9 percent of students in IM schools having participated in school sports.

Methods

We surveyed 2,582 middle school students in North Carolina using an online questionnaire. The survey asked students to identify which school sports they participated in during the school year and whether they had played any sports outside of school (e.g. community-sponsored sports).

Other Findings

Girls were more likely to participate in sports at IS versus IM schools, which could be the result of Title IX legislation in ensuring equitable opportunities for girls in IS programs. In contrast, girls were less likely than boys to play sports at IM schools. This could be due to the emphasis on more masculine values in sports (e.g. aggression), which may deter girls from joining co-educational teams, or to girls' fear of injury, threat, or embarrassment in the presence of boys. Students from low-income and/or Black households attending IM schools were more likely to be involved in school sports than their peers at IS schools.

Implications

Our findings suggest that after-school intramural sports is a promising way to increase sports participation among middle school students, particularly children from Black and/or low-income households. Intramural programs should also consider including sports opportunities that allow girls to participate without the presence of boys.

SOURCE

Kanters, M.A., et al. (2013). School Sport Participation Under Two School Sport Policies: Comparisons by Race/Ethnicity, Gender, and Socioeconomic Status. *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, 45(1Suppl): S113-S121.

Open access to the full text article is available at:

<http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12160-012-9413-2>

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR

Michael A. Kanters
North Carolina State University
Campus Box 8004
Raleigh, NC 27695

Email: mkanters@ncsu.edu

Phone: 919-513- 0279

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visit: www.activelivingresearch.org/