

Active Living Research

Using Evidence to Prevent Childhood Obesity
and Create Active Communities

ARTICLE SUMMARY

February 2013

Policy Impacts on Physical Education and Recess

Introduction

Schools can help increase children's physical activity through physical education (PE), recess, and classroom activity breaks. School wellness policies set goals for school-based physical activity and other health-promoting programs. Unfortunately, the implementation and enforcement of such policies vary widely, and many schools have dramatically reduced or completely eliminated PE and recess. This study assessed the relationship between elementary school district and school PE policies, school PE environment, and PE and recess time.

Key Findings

Overall, few PE policies were significantly related to the number of weekly PE or recess minutes. School policies that required an annual evaluation of PE programs were significantly related to more PE time; however, the adoption of such policies was rare. PE policies were related to numerous school PE environmental variables that were subsequently associated with PE and recess minutes. We also found that adopting strategies to improve PE such as having all PE taught by a single certified PE teacher and having smaller PE classes may limit the PE minutes individual children receive

Methods

We randomly selected 65 elementary schools located in the western, mid-western, and eastern regions of the US and identified one person at each school to serve as the key informant and school liaison. We used the School Physical Activity Policy Assessment (S-PAPA) and the Physical Activity Record for Classes (PARC) to gather information about district- and school-level physical activity policy, related school environmental variables (e.g. presence of a gym and other facilities), policy implementation, and physical activity opportunities during PE and recess.

Implications

Though few direct associations between PE policies and PE time were found, policy adoption and even partial implementation have important implications for total minutes of PE and recess. Findings suggest that district PE policy adoption encourages similar policies at the school level and that having district policies for PE may be very important.

SOURCE

Lounsbery, M.A.F., et al. (2013). District and School Physical Education Policies: Implications for Physical Education and Recess Time. *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, 45(1Suppl): S131-S141.

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