

ARTICLE REVIEWED

Whole-of-School Physical Activity Promotion: Findings From Elementary Schools in the United States

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THE PROBLEM

Three out of four children in the United States are not meeting the recommended daily physical activity as outlined by the national guidelines. Schools play an important role in promoting physical activity, since they provide daily opportunities for students from diverse socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, and geographic backgrounds. It is recommended that schools provide at least 30 minutes of daily physical activity through a Whole-of-School (WOS) approach; however, the extent to which schools implement this strategy is not well understood. Therefore, it is important to determine whether schools provide physical activity opportunities for the students as outlined in the WOS, and to gain insights into disparities in physical activity promotion within school settings.



Research Summary

This study examined how U.S. elementary schools implement the WOS approach to promote physical activity and analyzed how school-level characteristics influence the physical activity opportunities for the students. This study included 162 elementary schools participating in the National Football League (NFL) PLAY 60 FitnessGram Project. To examine associations between school characteristics and WOS index scores, a staff member at each school completed surveys on physical activity practices including physical education, recess, before- and after-school programs, classroom-based approaches, and active transport. This study revealed that schools serving higher proportions of economically disadvantaged students scored significantly lower on the WOS index compared to those serving lower proportions. Additionally, schools with greater race/ethnicity disparities, had lower WOS index scores. Furthermore, suburban schools achieved significantly higher WOS index scores than schools located in cities.

Conclusion

Schools with a higher percentage of economically disadvantaged students often face challenges in providing opportunities for the students to engage in physical activity at school. To examine the disparities in physical activity opportunities at schools, additional national investigation is needed to determine the impact of physical activity on students' academic performance and overall well-being. This information is helpful for the organizations and decision makers to develop strategies to ensure equitable physical activity opportunities for all students.

Key Takeaway

Low-socioeconomic (SES) status elementary schools and schools with minority students in the U.S. offered fewer physical activity opportunities for the kids than high-SES schools. Ensuring that all schools provide quality physical education, adequate recess, and classroom physical activity breaks can help children gain the health benefits of being active and reduce health and academic disparities.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Densley, B., Calvert, H. G., Boedeker, P., & Turner, L. (2021). Implementation of physical activity in US elementary schools: The role of administrative support, financial resources, and champions. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 18(9), 4476.