

Implementing a Policy to Increase Physical Activity

What Was the Question?

North Carolina’s State Board of Education amended their Healthy Active Children Policy to include the requirement of 30 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity daily for all K-8 students. The mandate stated that physical activity, physical education, recess, and any other type of physical activity could not be taken away as a form of punishment. The policy also stipulated that teachers could not use severe exercise as a form of punishment. Evenson, Ballard, Lee, and Ammerman (2009) conducted a survey to find out whether this state-wide requirement succeeded in increasing physical activity among elementary and middle school students.

What Was Done?

A 50-item survey was developed and disseminated online to the 111 public school districts in the state. Little information was provided about the details of the survey, but topics included school health advisory councils, healthful living, recess and physical activity, and the coordinated school health program. Ninety-six percent of the districts responded.

What Was Found?

Among the responding elementary schools, 69 percent of the additional physical activity time comes from daily recess, 34 percent from daily use of classroom “Energizers” (classroom-based activities that integrate physical activity with academic concepts), and 28 percent from daily physical education. At the responding middle schools, additional physical activity came from daily physical education (46%), daily recess (24%), daily classroom Energizers (19%), and intramurals (7%).

Ninety-two percent of the responding schools indicated that all teachers complied with the

policy that physical activity not be taken away nor imposed as a punishment. Nearly eight percent of the schools reported that they had at least one teacher violate the policy against using physical activity as punishment.

School districts also reported that, although there were some difficulties—such as lack of participation among teachers, insufficient time in the school day for the increased physical activity, and academic concerns—there were notable behavior and academic benefits. Over 27 percent of the elementary schools reported an increase in students’ focus in class, and 19 percent of elementary schools reported increased awareness of health and physical activity among students. Additional benefits included increased student alertness (17 percent at both elementary and middle schools) and enjoyment (14 percent), improved behavior, and overall increased compliance with rules and regulations.

What Does the Study Mean?

This study illuminated the effectiveness of requiring regular

participation in physical activity during the school day. Increasing the physical activity requirements within schools makes sense for addressing the current obesity epidemic, and this study supports the effectiveness of doing so. Other states should consider these results when developing their own physical education policies.

Reference

Evenson K. R., Ballard K., Lee G., & Ammerman, A. (2009). Implementation of a school-based state policy to increase physical activity. *Journal of School Health*, 79, 231-238.

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