Investing in PA/PE in Schools to Improve Learning and Reduce Health Disparities

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Overview

- Background
  - Our research
  - Why PA/PE is important
- Study: How schools decide to implement PA strategies and reasons for those decisions
- Findings
- Recommendations
- Q&A
The Socioecological Model

1. Do policies influence racial/ethnic child health disparities?

2. Do community food environments near schools bolster/undermine policy effects?

The Multiple Benefits of PA/PE

- School-based physical activity strategies: associated with favorable outcomes...
- improved heart health, bone growth, body composition,
- cognitive function and academic performance.*

PA/PE Benefits Obstacles

➢ The majority of children do not get the recommended minimum of 60 daily minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity.*

➢ Children of color and socioeconomically marginalized children are typically less likely to meet the daily PA recommendations

➢ Often attend schools with less resources for PA**, and are located in environments with obstacles for PA.***

Schools Play a Critical Role*

- Existing infrastructure to implement and evaluate programs/policies
- Large number of children can be reached
- Local policy makers can target populations for reducing health disparities
- A variety of strategies: active transport, classroom activity breaks and especially PE*

Increasing PA in Schools*

➢ More PA practices, more PA for elementary school children**


Purpose: To investigate decisions to prioritize physical activity strategies in schools*

Interviewed 42 key informants from 42 schools in 17 states and the District of Columbia

- 86% elementary schools
- 9.5% middle schools
- 4.8% alternative school serving 6-12 grades and a school district

https://paresearchcenter.org/project-profiles/san-francisco-state-university/
Details in the research brief and full report* are available at:

https://paresearchcenter.org/project-profiles/san-francisco-state-university/

## Findings: Key Themes

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<td>1</td>
<td>Schools prioritize physical activity <em>because</em> it helps <strong>advance learning and health</strong></td>
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<td>2</td>
<td><strong>Policies and standards</strong> for PA/PE reinforce the importance of physical activity</td>
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<td>A <strong>culture of learning and health</strong> advances decisions to offer physical activity</td>
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<td><strong>Advocates</strong> play a key role in generating support to integrate physical activity</td>
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<td>Stakeholder <strong>buy-in</strong> enables decisions to increase physical activity opportunities</td>
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<td><strong>Funding and resources</strong> drive decisions to put physical activity strategies in practice</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td><strong>Collaboration</strong> can facilitate decisions to enhance physical activity strategies</td>
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“We had a principal that told us…when anything is in policy, you better be following it. He said if it’s not in policy, you’re going to have trouble getting people to do those things. Suggestions are not going to be followed, but (with) policy you’re going to get in trouble for not doing what you’re supposed to be doing.”

Figure 1.
How important are state policy mandates for specific weekly PE minutes in your school decisions to select and implement physical activity strategies?

*Data from the online survey: n=42
California PE Law

- Elementary schools (grades 1-6): a minimum of 200 minutes\(^\wedge\) of PE instruction every 10 school days\(^*\)
- Secondary school grades (7-12): a minimum of 400 minutes every 10 school days\(^**\)
  - California PE policies, alone, are insufficient to increase PA

\(^\wedge\)minutes exclude lunch period and recess
\(^*\)California Education Code 51210;
\(^**\)California Education Code 51222
A CULTURE OF LEARNING AND HEALTH ADVANCES PHYSICAL ACTIVITY DECISIONS

“It’s all about building a culture in your school. That it’s not just the PE teacher’s job to keep the students active; it’s everybody’s job and…it benefits everybody…it’s a really big piece.”
How do Schools Build a Culture of Learning and Health?

- Advocates
- Buy-in
- Collaboration
- Funding & Resources
“The bottom line is that you have to have PE teachers or somebody in the school that is going to promote (PA). Whether it is a parent or principal or staff member, it has to come from the passion of the people that work there.”
STAKEHOLDER BUY-IN ENABLES DECISIONS TO INCREASE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY OPPORTUNITIES

“We have an administration right now that has great buy-in, and they are seeing. It’s not just that they're buying in because we are saying this needs to be a priority, but because we have initiated some of these programs in advance, they are seeing the great benefits that are coming from it.”
COLLABORATION CAN FACILITATE DECISIONS TO ENHANCE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY STRATEGIES

“Your brain just explodes with all that information. And then we were able to then share it with our school, and that’s been a terrific adventure. We’re looking to get a movement lab put in for the whole school.”
“The school’s county-wide budget obviously is (the source of) our bigger purchases...And if they don’t budget (it), we can’t get it. Our (parent teacher organization) does stuff here and there but not a lot...the main source for our bigger stuff comes from grants.”

“I got grants and bought equipment for (teachers) to use in the classrooms and I got...exercise balls for the kids to sit on and...in the old days before I figured out how to email people stuff, I would print off ideas of things that I would see online or the things that would get sent to me.”

| Importance of cost in school decisions to select and implement PA strategies |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| Degree of Importance            | Percent (n)     |
| Very Important                  | 38.1 (16)       |
| Moderately Important            | 45.2 (19)       |
| Not as Important                | 16.7 (7)        |

*Data from the online survey: n=42*
Target Health Equity Goals

- Children from socially and economically disadvantaged families: generally at highest risk for inactivity, least likely to be physically fit and most likely to live in neighborhoods with limited opportunities for PA. For these children, schools may be the only venue for PA.
Large Inequities Across SF Schools

Students needing improvement: low vs high eligibility for free/reduced price meal participation

Data: publicly available physical fitness test results combined with school database from CA Department of Education
https://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/PhysFitness/PFTDN/Summary2011.aspx?r=0&t=1&y=2017-18&c=38684786115901&n=0000
Reducing racial or ethnic PA disparities early in life has the potential to reduce (and perhaps even prevent) health disparities more broadly.
Recommendations

- Increase compliance with state PE laws in SF schools
  - PE appears to be the most important opportunity for increasing PA in elementary schools*
  - The presence of PE teachers – associated with more PA
  - District-level compliance with state PE policy has been minimal**
    - 50% of elementary school districts non-compliant with PE law.
    - 82% elementary school children attended school in non-policy compliant districts

Recommendations

- Fully fund physical education at all schools
  - Allocate funding to implement PE and other PA strategies.
  - Target low resourced schools with high proportions of students who do not meet the healthy fitness zones (for aerobic capacity and body composition)
  - Funds could be used to pay for full time PE teachers at each school, and to pay for PA equipment, collaborations focused on PA and professional development.
Recommendations

- Create and promote a culture of learning and health in schools

- Foster collaboration and provide technical assistance focused specifically on PA
Recommendations

- **Strengthen policies governing PA/PE**
  - Guidelines for implementation
  - Compliance measures
  - Monitor and evaluate progress
Leading the Nation

- Forward thinking
  - Invest in PE among children in all schools
  - Prioritize and target low SES schools with high proportion % of overweight/obese students
- Reduce health disparities early in life
- Increase health equity among the current generation of children under 18 years old
- Improve future overall population health
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The full report, which includes citations, is available at: https://paresearchcenter.org/project-profiles/san-francisco-state-university/
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Extra Slides
Study Limitations

- Case study. Convenience sample, mostly elementary public schools. Generalizability of findings may be limited
- Self-reported, anecdotal
- Unable to independently verify the implementation of physical activity strategies in participant schools
- Findings/conclusions are suggestive
- Point to areas that could be explored more systematically in future studies
  - E.g., to understand how PA strategies can be increased in schools
- Critical insights, promising applications for policy and decision-makers

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