Lack of Staff is Associated with Not Meeting State Requirements Regarding Physical Education Class Time in California Public Elementary Schools

Lindsey Turner, Frank Chaloupka, Sandy Slater & Jamie Chriqui
University of Illinois at Chicago

Introduction

Physical education (PE) is an essential aspect of school-based physical activity programming. The National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) recommends that elementary schools offer students 150 minutes of PE per week (mins/wk PE); however, in 2009-10 only 22.2% of U.S. public elementary schools met that criterion. Prior research demonstrates the importance of state laws. Slater and colleagues found that schools in states with a law requiring at least 150 mins/wk PE were significantly more likely to offer that amount of PE to third graders. In addition, schools were more likely to offer 150 mins/wk PE if the school day was longer, but less likely to do so if they also offered 20 minutes of recess daily. Having a strong district policy requiring 150 mins/wk PE was associated with offering 150 mins/wk PE.

California law requires that elementary students (grades K through 5) be offered 200 minutes of physical education class every 10 days—in other words, an average of 100 mins/wk. The current analyses examined the characteristics of schools in compliance—or not—with this law.

Methods

Annually during the 2006-07 to 2010-11 school years, BTG researchers sent surveys to a nationally-representative sample of U.S. public elementary schools. Only schools from California were selected for these analyses, and the data are not weighted. The sample was selected to be representative at the national level, not the state level; 361 schools in California responded (33 did not provide data on PE and are not included here). District policies were collected and coded for each school for the year of survey participation.

Table 1: Characteristics of Participating CA Schools (n = 328)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity of Students</th>
<th>% schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Majority (&gt;66% White)</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majority (&gt;50% Black)</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majority (&gt;50% Latino)</td>
<td>49.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diverse (no majority)</td>
<td>37.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: School Characteristics, by Weekly Minutes of PE (% schools endorsing each item)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall</th>
<th>&lt;100</th>
<th>100+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Offers third-graders 20+ minutes of recess daily</td>
<td>89.9</td>
<td>89.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrator rated gymnasium facilities as adequate</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>32.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrator rated playing fields as adequate</td>
<td>81.8</td>
<td>81.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrator rated playground facilities as adequate</td>
<td>88.0</td>
<td>84.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusion

Lack of staff was a barrier to schools offering the state-mandated amount of PE time. It is important that schools have the budgets to employ staff to deliver quality PE programs. Although few administrators considered their gymnasium facilities adequate, most did rate the outside facilities (fields and playgrounds) as adequate. However, these factors were not associated with PE time. Unlike prior research in Los Angeles schools, PE time was not found to be associated with free/reduced-price lunch eligibility. Most CA schools (89.9%) in the current study offered 20 minutes/day recess, but offering recess was not associated with less likelihood of meeting the PE criterion, nor was the length of school day. This may be because it is easier to offer both daily recess and meet the 100 mins/wk PE criterion (versus 150 mins/wk) given that it is easier to schedule 100 minutes in a school week.

For more information:
www.bridgingthegapresearch.org
lindseyt@uic.edu