

news release

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Schools Most Likely to Offer More Time for Physical Education When States Require It

Chicago, December 5, 2011 – A new study released today by the *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine* finds that schools are significantly more likely to meet physical activity recommendations when state and school district policies mandate 150 minutes of weekly physical education and suggest 20 minutes of daily recess.

This is the first study to examine the impact of state and school district-level policies on physical education and recess practices in a nationally representative sample of U.S. public elementary schools. Researchers surveyed schools about their physical education and recess programs for three years, from 2006–07 to 2008–09. They also analyzed corresponding requirements for physical education and recess included in state laws and school district wellness policies. The sample size was 1,761 schools located in 690 school districts and 47 states.

Researchers found:

- Schools in states or districts that required 150 minutes of weekly physical education were significantly more likely to offer third-grade students that amount of physical education time than were schools in states without such policies.
 - On average, across the three-year period, only 18 percent of schools offered 150 minutes of physical education per week; 13 percent of states had a law that required it.
- Schools in states with policies that encouraged daily recess were more likely to offer third-grade students 20 minutes of recess daily, but district policies were not significantly associated with school recess practices.
 - About 70 percent of schools offered recess for at least 20 minutes per day. While many of these schools were in states that had no law regarding daily recess, schools in states with a law that encouraged daily recess were much more likely to offer it. Only 11 percent of states in the sample encouraged daily recess, and an additional 6 percent of states required it.
- Schools that offered 150 minutes of weekly physical education or 20 minutes of daily recess were less likely to offer the other. This suggests that schools are substituting one opportunity for another instead of providing the recommended amount of both.

- Schools serving more children at highest risk for obesity, including Black and Latino children and those from lower-income families, were less likely to have daily recess than were schools serving predominately White students and higher-income students.
- Having a longer school day was positively associated with meeting the national recommendations for both physical education and recess.

“We found that mandates for both physical education and recess are needed to help elementary school students meet the national recommendations for physical activity,” said lead researcher Sandy J. Slater, PhD, of the University of Illinois at Chicago.

The study “The Impact of State Laws and District Policies on Physical Education and Recess Practices in a Nationally Representative Sample of U.S. Public Elementary Schools,” was funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation through its Bridging the Gap program and by a grant from the National Institute on Child Health and Human Development.

Contact Laurie Lennon at (704) 765-1531 or llennon@burnesscommunications.com if you have questions or would like to interview the lead author.

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About Bridging the Gap

Bridging the Gap is a nationally recognized research program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation dedicated to improving the understanding of how policies and environmental factors influence diet, physical activity and obesity among youth, as well as youth tobacco use. For more information, visit www.bridgingthegapresearch.org.

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