

Physical Activity Program Evaluation, 2010

Background

In 2010, a physical activity program was delivered within five elementary schools that are served by Saskatoon Health Region's (SHR) Building Health Equity (BHE) program. The physical activity program was based on best practices, as agreed upon by the participating schools. The program vision was a multi-component strategy that would combine physical activity in the classroom, in physical education classes, at recess, at school events, and would involve family and the community. The goals were to provide more opportunities for children to be active more often during the school day and to increase physical fitness.

Our purpose

The purpose of our evaluation was to assess how well the program increased exposure to physical activity opportunities and environments supportive of physical activity. We also assessed whether the program increased fitness levels among students.

What we did

Each student in the program (generally grade six students in the participating schools) took part in a fitness challenge. The fitness challenge occurred both at the beginning and at the end of the program. The challenge consisted of eight stations that each measured a different aspect of the student's fitness (e.g., cardio, strength, flexibility, etc.). Furthermore, each teacher that was involved in the development and administration of the physical activity program in their school was invited to participate in an on-line survey about the program.

What we looked at

The fitness challenge was used to determine if increased exposure to physical activity during the school day improved student physical fitness. The on-line teacher survey looked at teachers' implementation of the program, as well as their satisfaction with the program components, implementation of the program, and the fitness challenges.

How we interpreted the data

Frequencies and paired-sample t-tests were used for the fitness challenge data. Frequencies and content analysis were used for the on-line teacher survey.

What we found

- The nature of the program varied from school to school to address their specific needs.
- Overall, student performance on the fitness challenges significantly improved, statistically speaking, from baseline to post-program for almost all fitness challenge stations, including for sit and reach, curl ups, pro agility run (left side only), skipping, vertical jump (1st attempt only) and triple hop.
- The majority of the teachers had very positive views of the program and its benefits.

"My students seem much more confident about participating physically in a variety of activities. They are stronger than they were at the beginning of the New Year."

Limitations

- Each school implemented the program differently, which was difficult to track. Differences in delivering the program may have produced different outcomes.
- It is unclear if changes in physical fitness levels are entirely attributable to the program alone since other factors were not considered and there was no control group.
- Fitness challenge administration varied since different people assisted with the fitness challenges each time.

Summary

The fitness challenges showed that there were many significant changes in the fitness of the students from pre- to post- program; however, it is unclear if this is entirely attributable to the physical activity program due to the evaluation limitations. It was also found that the majority of the teachers had very positive views of the program and its benefits. Future evaluations should consider using at least one control group in order to reach stronger conclusions regarding the outcomes of the program.

For further information, contact Christina Scott at 655-4678 or Dr. Jennifer Cushon at 655-4634.

pho@saskatoonhealthregion.ca