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Do Perceptions of Classroom Physical Activity Breaks

Vary by Size of School District?

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Abstract

Background: Classroom physical activity (PA) breaks offers a way for schools to increase children's PA, improve time on-task, and improve academic scores. Professional development delivery models, technology infrastructure, and opportunities for collaboration are influenced by school district size. These factors may impact teachers' perceptions of instructional issues, including PA. However, little is known on how the size of school districts may impact teachers' perceptions of classroom PA. **Purpose:** The purpose of this study was to explore if teachers' perceptions of classroom PA vary based on district size. **Methods:** Sixty teachers from five school districts (1 large public, 3 medium (2 public, 1 private), and 1 small public) took part in a semi-structured interview. Data were analyzed through the process of immersion/crystallization. **Results:** There were a few key differences between districts. The largest district more often reported integrating PA into reading and writing while all other districts most often incorporated PA into math. Additionally, the largest district most often incorporated classroom PA 1-2 times/day while other districts more frequently reported utilizing PA 3+ times/day. The medium-sized public districts were most likely to incorporate classroom PA during transitions between subjects and to utilize online video resources (e.g., GoNoodle) compared to other districts who were more likely to incorporate PA during instruction and incorporated more general movement (e.g., stretching). Interestingly, the smallest district reported the least amount of teacher collaboration in regards to discussing classroom PA with their colleagues. **Conclusion:** Results provide evidence that teachers have positive views of classroom PA but there are differences on teachers' perceptions of

Introduction

Classroom PA breaks offer a way for educators to increase children's PA, improve on-task behaviors, and positively influence academic outcomes. However, the successful implementation and maintenance of classroom PA breaks is often influenced by the size of school districts through such factors as technology infrastructure and opportunities for collaboration. With teachers indicating positive views of classroom PA breaks, gaining an understanding of how to best promote classroom PA breaks across varying district sizes is indicative of successful implementation. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore if teachers' perceptions of classroom PA breaks vary based on district size.

Methods

- Classroom PA breaks were defined as taking a short break (typically 3-5 minutes) within the classroom to perform some type of PA that could be incorporated into academic concepts (e.g., jumping for the number that equals 2+2) or performed only for movement purposes (e.g., jumping jacks, having children dance to music).
- Sixty teachers (n=12/district) from five school districts (large n=1, medium n=2; small n=2) completed a semi-structured interview in person or over the phone.
- Interview questions were guided by socio-ecological model.
- Interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and uploaded into NVivo10 (QSR International, 2012).
- Transcriptions were analyzed via immersion/crystallization.

Results

Across all districts:

- All teachers felt classroom PA was important. *"They just learn better through movement, acting things out, repeating."*
- A majority of teachers had a desire to implement more classroom PA than they currently were. *"There's always room for more brain breaks."*
- A majority of teachers incorporated classroom PA breaks due to cognitive rationales (e.g., memory retention, focus). *"They have very short attention spans and I see a need for movement to get their mind off things or get some other senses going so they can start to focus again."*
- Two-thirds of teachers reported the biggest barrier to implementation was time. *"Absolutely more time, there's never enough time."*

Teachers in large districts were more likely to:

- Integrate classroom PA breaks into reading and writing. *"If the kids aren't interested in the story, we still have to read it, so just for that use of reenergizing them and getting them motivated to do the next activity."*
- Incorporate classroom PA breaks 1-2 times/day.
- Report struggling with infrastructure barriers (e.g., lack of space, slow internet speed). *"Sometimes, um, the size or the room or the ability for all of the children to find enough space to move around."*

Results Continued

Teachers in medium-sized districts were more likely to:

- Report integrating PA breaks into math *"Math, you need a lot of brain power to do math in sixth grade so having that break in between...it's actually a lot quieter in our activity so it's just nice to get their energy out for a minute and then move on."*
- Incorporate classroom PA breaks during transitions between subjects. *"It gives them a break because they have to sit so long and think for so long."*
- Utilize online video resources (e.g., GoNoodle). *"My students loved GoNoodle, they wanted to do it all the time."*
- Incorporate classroom PA breaks primarily because of physical rationales, such as student health. *"We just need it and um just getting their heart rate flowing and kind of loosening them up a bit."*
- Report a barrier of classroom management. *"They have a really hard time calming down after the brain breaks."*

Teachers in small districts were more likely to:

- Incorporate 3 or more classroom PA breaks per day *"Every 20 minutes we stop and do something different even if its getting up and changing our seats or our seating arrangement."*
- Utilize classroom PA breaks 4-5 days/week.
- Report the least amount of teacher collaboration regarding classroom PA breaks. *"Oh not very often. We don't have a lot of shared planned time."*

Discussion

Results provide preliminary evidence that teachers have a positive view of classroom PA breaks. However, there were several differences between district sizes including the type and amount of PA breaks provided, type of classroom PA break resources used, reasons for implementing classroom PA breaks, and barriers that impacted their ability to implement. It is important to note that many of these differences could also be impacted by characteristics of the district and not strictly by size with such factors as percentage of English Language Learners, percentage school mobility rate, or student race/ethnicity. Identifying the differences based on district size is imperative to understanding the infrastructure needed (e.g., professional development, collaboration), to successfully implement PA break strategies.