

The 2013 California physical education lawsuit's impact on physical education in elementary schools

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For more than 40 years, California has mandated a minimum number of physical education minutes for all elementary schools in the state. Yet, a majority of schools in the state were non-compliant. In 2013, a lawsuit was filed against 37 non-compliant school districts. The suit was settled in 2015, with a four-step action-plan put into place. This study examined the effect of the lawsuit, including any unintended consequences.

STUDY DESIGN

- » Research team conducted phone interviews with district administrators, school principals, physical education teachers, and 5th grade teachers. The study included 14 districts and 14 individual schools that were parties to the lawsuit, and 15 districts and 25 individual schools that were not involved in the lawsuit (control group).
- » A number of school districts and schools who were party to the lawsuit declined to participate in this research, which could hinder future efforts to study similar policies and serve as a roadblock towards collaboration.

KEY FINDINGS

- » **Increased physical activity minutes:** For the fear of being sued prompted schools to think about the importance of physical education and how it is taught.
- » **No improvement in the quality of physical education:** Many interviewees were frustrated that the lawsuit punished schools that were not in compliance, but the Department of Education has not been providing additional financial support to help schools meaningfully satisfy the state law requirements.

CONCLUSION

- » To promote elementary physical education, a compliance law is not enough—schools need more resources in the form of financial support for more teachers, evidence-based curricula development, professional development for class room teachers, and trainings/technologies to help schools track and report physical education minutes.

Evidence for Action

Investigator-Initiated Research to Build a Culture of Health

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