



The Movement Disparity: Parent and Principal Perspectives on Physical Activity in Schools | Spring 2019

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The *Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans* recommend that children and adolescents ages 6 through 17 years should do 60 minutes or more of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity daily¹, yet national data shows that many fall short of this guideline.

Active Schools is a national collective impact movement dedicated to helping K-12 schools in the U.S. provide students with equitable access to 60 minutes or more of physical activity and play every day. Active Schools' vision is to reimagine school environments that provide opportunities for academic, social, emotional *and* physical learning so that all children have the ability, confidence and desire to lead active, healthy lives. Active Schools recognizes the critical roles that parents and principals play in prioritizing and providing an active school.

Active Schools conducted two nationally representative surveys—one with U.S. parents and another with U.S. K-12 school principals. The surveys were developed and funded by Active Schools and its home organization, Action for Healthy Kids. They were administered and analyzed by NORC at the University of Chicago. Both surveys were English language, web-based and included respondents from all 50 states and the District of Columbia. In total, 1,015 parents of school-aged children completed the Parent Survey and 1,019 principals completed the Principal Survey.

The survey results show that while most parents and principals have positive attitudes about the importance and benefits of physical activity at school, their behaviors do not always reflect those beliefs.

Among the key findings:

- A high percentage of respondents on both surveys, 81 percent of parents and 93 percent of principals, believe that children and adolescents who are physically active are better learners.
- Most principals (83 percent) believe schools should have the same responsibility for students' physical, academic and social and emotional learning, but only half (50 percent) said their schools equally address all three. Similarly, 87 percent of parents believe schools should have the same responsibility for these three types of learning.
- Over half of parents (54 percent) and principals (53 percent) said that it is extremely or very important that their school is an active school. Based on the definition of an active school provided in the survey, 60 percent of parents and 47 percent of principals said their school is an active school.

¹ US Department of Health and Human Services. 2018 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans. Washington, DC: US Department of Health and Human Services, 2018.

- While a majority of parents (54 percent) said that it is extremely or very important that their child's school is an active school, only 39 percent reported communicating with their child's principal about it. Principals provided a different account with only 12 percent reporting that parents communicated with them about physical activity programs during the past school year.
- Forty-eight percent of parents and 62 percent of principals said that it is extremely or very important for their school to provide physical activity in the classroom. Eight-nine percent of principals said that at least some classroom teachers at their school integrate physical activity into their classrooms as part of academic lessons and/or by providing physical activity breaks. However, 41 percent said that less than half do, and 10 percent said that none do.
- Principals are influenced to provide physical education and physical activity programs for a variety of health and academic reasons. The two most common influential outcomes are overall health (81 percent) and students' engagement in academic learning (77 percent).