

Experts: Gym gone but not forgotten? Parents want more physical activity at school for kids

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Childhood obesity affects 1 of every 6 kids in the United States, in part due to a lack of physical activity. Schools can play a key part in offering elementary-age kids lots of chances to be active-on the playground during recess and when they're in gym.

But recent increasing expectations about academic achievement, coupled with budget cuts, have prompted many schools to cut back on both recess and gym class.

The U-M C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health asked parents of children 6 to 11 years old for their views about [physical activity](#) in schools.

"Parents are virtually unanimous that it's very important for elementary-school kids to get physical activity during every [school](#) day," says Sarah Clark, M.P.H., associate director of the poll and associate director of the Child Health Evaluation and Research (CHEAR) Unit at the U-M Medical School . "However, one-third of parents think that their kids do not get enough physical activity at school."

35 percent of parents feel their children's elementary schools have too little time in gym class, 26 percent think there is not enough playground equipment and 22 percent say there is too little time for recess.

"Academic and budget pressures threaten schools' ability to provide outlets and opportunities for children's physical activity. Many parents are noticing that something is missing," says Clark.

Another key result from this poll is that parents' own weight is related to perceptions of the need for schools to help children be physically active. With regard to time for gym, playground equipment, time for recess and playground space, overweight and obese parents were more likely than other parents to say their kids did not have enough during the school day.

"This is a new insight at the national level, indicating that parents with their own weight challenges are even more likely to see schools as a key partner in addressing the risks of obesity for their own [kids](#)," says Clark.

"School officials should note the strong support from parents for the importance of physical activity during the school day for children in the elementary grades," continues Clark. "Parents see many reasons why physical activity is valuable for their children-not just in preventing obesity but also in promoting healthy physical development. For [parents](#) of children in elementary school, it is critically important that children get the physical activity they need during the school day."

More information: Physical activity for children and teens
www.uofmhealth.org/health-library/aba5595

Provided by University of Michigan Health System

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