



EVALUATION OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND SPORT PROGRAMMING



Introduction

The evaluation of physical activity and sport opportunities at schools allows individual schools to determine the benefits or barriers to, or strengths and weaknesses of, their programming. As schools are increasingly called upon to help combat the escalating paediatric obesity rates, proper evaluation of programming can help schools set goals and targets based on specific school issues (such as sport participation rates and activity levels of students), as well as to be accountable to established provincial and territorial standards. This section examines the proportion of schools that do, in fact, evaluate their physical activity and sport opportunities. For those who do evaluate their programming, the criteria used is explored. The data are analyzed by region of school locale, student population size, and other school demographics such as setting, type, language and general income distribution of the students' families. The analyses also compare trend data over time where possible. This section also provides policy and program recommendations.

Frequency of physical activity resource evaluation

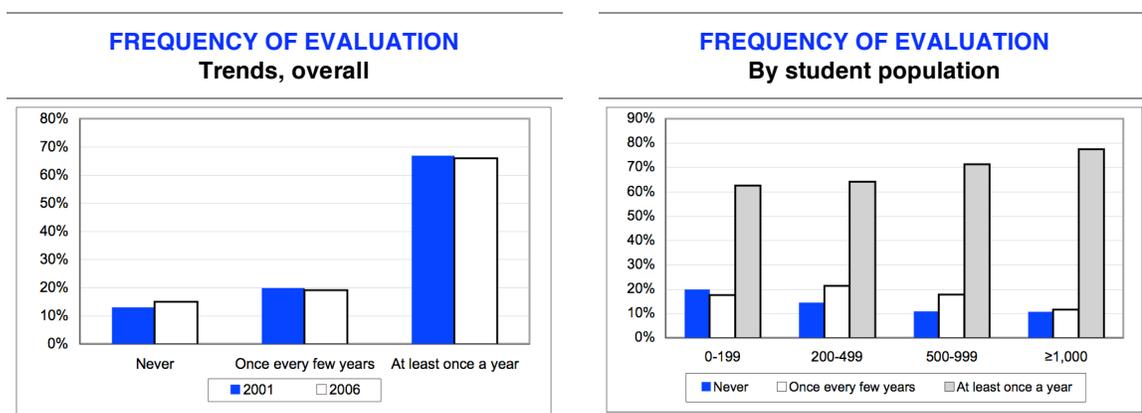
The majority of Canadian schools (66%) formally evaluate their physical activity programs, facilities and instruction at least once a year. About one-fifth (19%) conduct an evaluation once very few years, while a further 15% never do.

Region Although at a regional level (Atlantic, Quebec, Ontario, West, North) there are no differences in the proportions of schools that conduct evaluations of varying frequencies, there is one notable difference at the provincial level: schools in Nova Scotia are more likely to evaluate their physical activity and sport programming at least once a year compared the average Canadian school (79% in Nova Scotia compared to 66% in Canada overall).

Student Population Size Small schools (less than 199 students) are almost twice as likely as larger schools (500 to 999 students) to state that they *never* evaluate their physical activity programs, facilities, and instruction (20% compared to 11% respectively).

School demographics There are no significant differences between public and non-public schools in reporting how often they undertake a physical activity evaluation. Moreover, there are no differences between English, French, immersion, bilingual and school of other languages when evaluating their programs, facilities, and instruction. Similarly, there are no differences in the proportion of schools that evaluate by the location of the school or the size of the community in which the school resides. There are no significant differences between schools with children primarily from higher income families and schools with children primarily from lower income families in reporting how often they undertake a physical activity evaluation.

Trends Since 2001, there has been no change in the proportion of schools who formally evaluate their programming. The pattern that appeared in 2001, where smaller schools are more likely than larger schools to never evaluate their programming at all, still appears today. The regional differences that appeared in 2001, however, are no longer evident in 2006.



2001 & 2006 Survey of physical activity in Canadian schools, CFLRI

2006 Survey of physical activity in Canadian schools, CFLRI

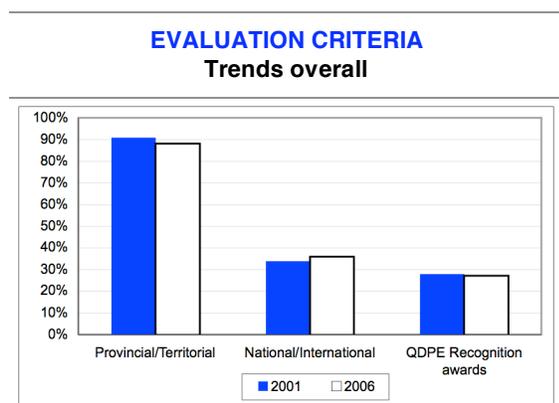
Evaluation criteria

The criteria used most often to evaluate physical activity programs are provincial or territorial curriculum standards; they are used by 88% of all Canadian schools. Just over one-third (36%) use national or international guidelines, while 27% use Quality Daily Physical Education (QDPE) recognition award standards.

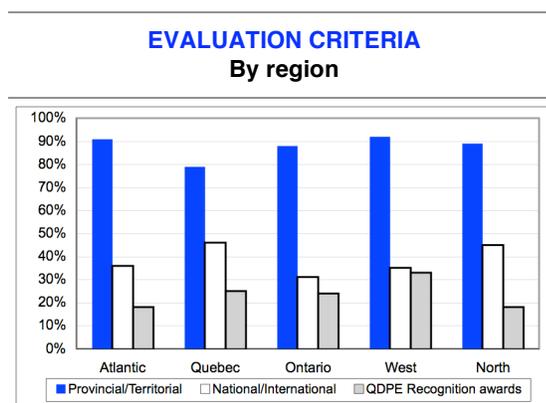
Region Although there are no regional differences among schools reporting that they use provincial or territorial, or national or international standards when evaluating their physical activity opportunities, schools in the Atlantic region are less likely to use QDPE recognition award standards compared to the average Canadian school. At a provincial level compared to the average Canadian school, schools in Alberta are more likely to evaluate using provincial and territorial curriculum standards. Similarly, schools in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba are more likely to evaluate using QDPE recognition award standards compared to an average Canadian school.

Student population size There are no significant differences in the proportion of schools that use the various criteria for evaluation and student population size.

School demographics While there are no significant differences between public and non-public schools in using national or international guidelines or QDPE standards, public schools are more likely to use provincial or territorial standards, as would be expected. There are no significant differences among school settings (i.e., inner city, urban, suburban, rural or other types of schools) when using provincial/territorial, national/international, or QDPE recognition award standards. Schools located in communities with 75,000-299,999 residents are less likely than those located in slightly smaller (10,000-74,999 residents) and slightly larger (300,000 or more residents) communities to report using national or international standards in their evaluations. English schools are more likely than French schools to use provincial or territorial standards when evaluating physical activity programs; however, they are equally as likely to use national or international guidelines or QDPE standards.



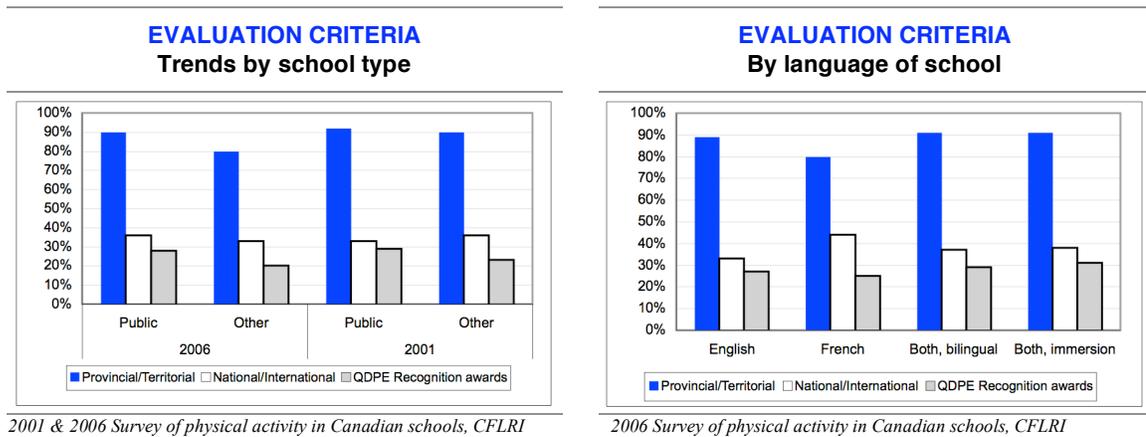
2001 & 2006 Survey of physical activity in Canadian schools, CFLRI



2006 Survey of physical activity in Canadian schools, CFLRI

Evaluation criteria (cont'd)

Trends Since 2001, there have been no significant changes in the proportion of schools that evaluate using the various criteria or standards. Over time, some regional trends have remained consistent. Namely, Atlantic provinces are generally less likely, whereas the Prairie provinces are more likely, to use QDPE standards when evaluating their programs. Regional differences in the proportion of schools that used provincial or territorial criteria in 2001 are no longer apparent in 2005-06. However unlike 2001, Alberta schools are now more likely to evaluate against provincial curriculum standards. Over time, public schools have decreased their use of QDPE standards and increased their use of using provincial or territorial curriculum standards compared to non-public schools.



Summary of section

The majority of Canadian schools evaluate their physical activity and sport opportunities at least once a year. Moreover, roughly one-fifth of schools conduct an evaluation once every few years, while a further 15% never evaluate their opportunities. Small schools are much more likely than larger schools to *never* evaluate their physical activity and sport opportunities.

Almost 9 out of 10 schools use provincial or territorial curriculum standards when evaluating their physical activity and sport opportunities. In addition, 36% use national or international guidelines, while 27% use Quality Daily Physical Education (QDPE) recognition award standard. Moreover:

- schools in the Atlantic region are less likely to use QDPE recognition award standards compared to the average Canadian school;
- public schools are more likely to use provincial or territorial curriculum standards for evaluation compared to non-public schools; and,
- English schools are more likely than French schools to use provincial or territorial standards when evaluating physical activity programs.

Since 2001, there have been no changes in the proportion of schools that evaluate their programs and in the types of criteria used by schools when evaluating their programs. Regional differences that appeared in 2001, however, are not evident in 2006, although schools in Alberta are now more likely to employ provincial curriculum standards than they were previously. Public schools have decreased their use of QDPE standards over time and increased their use of using provincial or territorial curriculum standards compared to non-public schools.

Discussion, Implications and Recommendations

Evaluation can be defined as “the systematic examination and assessment of features of an initiative and its effects, in order to produce information that can be used by those who have an interest in its improvement or effectiveness”.³⁹ A regular and comprehensive evaluation of the amount and quality of physical activity programming, facilities, instruction, training and development, as well as policies related to these factors is important for schools,²⁵ especially for influencing policy; building capacity; realizing and sharing what works and what doesn’t; and contributing to sustainability.⁴⁰ Results from this section indicate that the majority of schools evaluate their programs *at least once a year*. Relatively few schools (15%) *never* evaluate the physical activity opportunities available at their school.

Schools, especially those who do not currently evaluate their program, may consider using existing models, frameworks, and checklists for the evaluation of physical activity opportunities and modify existing tools for their own purposes. Data in this section reveal that the majority of schools base their evaluation of their physical activity programming on provincial and territorial curriculum standards. As such, it is critical that these provincial and territorial standards be based on evidence-based research and recognized guidelines for determining a sufficient physical activity criterion for children and youth. Provinces and territories can provide schools with comprehensive tools which will allow

them to evaluate their physical activity and sport programs against their standards, identify strengths and weaknesses in their programming, provide effective alternatives for overcoming barriers in programming; and financially supporting evaluations.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has published a framework that details six steps for program evaluation.⁴⁰ In developing evaluation tools, provinces, territories and school boards could consider using such a framework. The CDC's six steps are summarized below:

Step 1 – Involve stakeholders

Stakeholder input helps to ensure that the evaluation meets their needs and may even be useful to encourage support for and participation in programs. In a school based setting, stakeholders include faculty and staff, teachers', administrators' and parent-teacher associations, school boards, students, parents, and the community in which the school is located.

Step 2 – Describe or plan the program

The CDC framework suggests that there are three important components for describing or planning the program: identifying what the current stage of development is for the evaluation (planning or maintaining a program); determining the problem or need and how the program addresses these; and, developing a logic model for planning the program. The logic model will describe the program, tie the program to outcomes, and include context for the program.

Step 3 – Focus the evaluation

This step clarifies the reason for the evaluation, such as improving or determining the effectiveness of the program, and develops questions that the evaluation might answer. These questions can be process-oriented or outcome-based. For example, tools for principals may use process-oriented evaluation to determine which physical activity or sport programs are well attended or successful. School boards, however, may use outcome-based evaluation to determine whether the physical activity or sport programs have an effect on overall student fitness, health and curriculum objectives, maintaining or enhancing achievement levels or absenteeism rates, and hence, whether the programs warrant financial support.

Step 4 – Quality and credible data collection

This step of the evaluation requires credible data sources to be selected for the evaluation and indicators for the questions identified above. For schools, these can include enrolment and attendance sheets for physical activity and sport programs, fitness tests, objective measures of physical activity (pedometer or accelerometer data, etc.), or other types of criteria or standards relating to curriculum and other outcomes. Over time, the rate of change from baseline data can be measured.

Step 5 – Conclusions from evaluation

Data collected in step 4 permit conclusions about the process and outcomes of physical activity programming in schools. To determine progress, regular evaluation and monitoring are required.

Step 6 – Prepare and share results

Recommendations based on the conclusions determined in step 5 can be disseminated among key stakeholders. For schools that use provincial or national curriculum standards for their evaluation, results can be compared with other schools or can be used for recommendations to inform school board-level and provincial/territorial-level decisions.

For evaluating physical education programs more specifically, schools can be directed to existing programs such as the Canadian Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance's (CAHPERD) Quality Daily Physical Education (QDPE) Recognition Award Program (RAP). This program recognizes and promotes high quality school physical education programs. Schools that are successful in fulfilling certain conditions can be eligible to receive national recognition for the programs as well as other benefits (see http://www.cahperd.ca/eng/rap/about_rap.cfm).