



National Association for Sport & Physical Education

An Association of the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance

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PARENTS' VIEWS OF CHILDREN'S HEALTH & FITNESS

A SUMMARY OF RESULTS

*A Survey Conducted by Opinion Research Corporation International of Princeton, NJ,
for the National Association for Sport and Physical Education*

Introduction

The Centers for Disease Control now estimates that more than 60 percent of American adults are overweight, while almost one out of three is obese. In the last 20 years, the proportion of overweight children between ages 6 and 19 has tripled, to nearly one of every three kids. In December 2001, Surgeon General David Satcher stated that 300,000 deaths per year are associated with overweight and obesity, and projected the annual public health cost of this condition at \$117 billion, due to the life-threatening complications of overweight and obesity such as diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, cancer, kidney failure and other ailments.

The National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE), a nonprofit education association of over 18,000 professionals in the fitness and physical activity fields, wanted to explore the beliefs and attitudes about the causes and preventions of obesity with adults and parents. Here are highlights of those results. NASPE is the only national association dedicated to strengthening basic knowledge about sport and physical activity among professionals and the general public. Putting that knowledge into action in schools and communities across the nation is critical to improved academic performance, social reform and the health of individuals.

CHILDREN'S HEALTH

Most Important for Children

- ◆ Given three choices and asked which one they think is most important for their children, the largest number of parents with children living in their household who are younger than 18 think optimal health is most important (44%), with having friends/getting along with peers (20%) and academic success (16%) well behind. Nearly two in ten parents (18%) volunteered that all three were equally important.
- Optimal health is the top choice of parents across the board.
- Less-educated parents rate health less important than parents who have a college education.

Least Important for Children

- ◆ Asked which of the three choices they believe is least important for their children, 40% of parents choose having friends/getting along with peers, with 28% choosing academic success and only 13% optimal health.

Worries about Childhood Obesity

- ◆ Only about three in ten parents (28%) say they worry that their children are or might become overweight or obese.

Explanations for Rise in Childhood Obesity

- ◆ Parents were given five factors and asked to rank how important each was in the doubling of the number of overweight and obese children in the last 20 years. Over 50% of parents chose lack of physical activity or sedentary activities as the most important cause for the rise of childhood obesity. This included 29% lack of adequate physical activity outside of school, 17% too much TV viewing, 4% lack of school physical education programs and 2% computer time.
- ◆ 46% of parents chose eating habits as the main cause.

Parental Responsibility

- ◆ Parents were asked how responsible they believe they are for their children's weight and physical fitness at various ages. Nearly all parents (91%) think they have a great deal of responsibility for the weight and physical fitness of children under six, while perceived responsibility drops for older children. Eight in ten (80%) think parents have a great deal of responsibility for their 6-11 year olds weight and physical fitness, and only 43% think they do for children 12-17; for those two age groups, more parents think they have partial responsibility, rather than a great deal of responsibility.

Perceived Causes of Obesity

- ◆ Asked to identify the keys to a healthy lifestyle for children, by far the most frequent responses are a balanced diet (46%) and daily or regular activity (52%).
- ◆ 12% think restricting snacks like chips, candy and soft drinks is important to a healthy lifestyle for children.
- A balanced diet and daily or regular activity are the top answers of parents across the board.
- Physical Education classes are mentioned most by parents 45-54 years old (17%).

Parents Encourage Children's Activity

- ◆ A majority of parents say they do one or more of the following things to get their child to be active or more active:
 - Provide outdoor/indoor physical activity access at home (86%)
 - Participate with them (83%)
 - Plan family activities that include physical activity (80%)
 - Register them for physical activity programs (70%)

- Remind them (63%)
- Older parents (35+) are more likely to register their children for physical activity programs (78%) than younger ones (58%). Parents in urban areas are more likely than those in rural areas to do so as well (73% vs. 63%). Parents in the most-affluent and best-educated households are also most likely to register their children for physical activity programs.

Strategies for Balanced Diets

- ◆ Parents use a number of strategies to get their children to eat balanced diets:
 - Cook or prepare nutritious meals (92%)
 - Talk to them about food choices (77%)
 - Serve as a role model by eating a healthy, balanced diet (76%)
 - Restrict high caloric foods and beverages from their home (50%)
 - Middle-aged parents (35-54) are most likely to talk to their children about food choices (82%).
 - Better-educated and more-affluent parents are also more likely to say they serve as role models for their children by eating healthy, balanced diets.

Daily Physical Activity

- ◆ Parents believe their children should average about 75 minutes of physical activity per day.
- There is little difference in the amount of time by demographic subgroups.

CHILDREN'S HEALTH AND SCHOOLS

Making Decisions about What Students Eat and Drink at School

- Most parents (73%) think parents and school officials together should make decisions about what students eat and drink at school.
- ◆ Well behind are parents who believe state governments (16%), parents alone (16%), the federal government (12%), students (10%), school officials alone (10%) or community watchdog organizations (9%) should make those decisions.

Physical Activity and Academics

- ◆ Nearly all parents (95%) think regular, daily physical activity helps children do better academically; only 3% disagree. More than nine in ten parents in all demographic subgroups agree.

Physical Education as Part of Curriculum for K-12

- ◆ The vast majority of parents of children under 18 (95%) think physical education should be part of a school curriculum for all students in grades K-12. Once again, more than nine in ten parents in all subgroups agree.

Importance of Physical Education Compared with Other Subjects

- ◆ Parents were asked to rate the importance of Physical Education compared with other subjects. For all subjects, more than half think Physical Education is at least equal in importance. The results are little different among the most affluent and best-educated parents.
- Eighty-four percent of parents think Physical Education is at least as important as **Art**; 29% think it is more important.
- More than eight in ten (82%) think Physical Education is at least equal in importance to **Music**; 27% think it is more important.
- Nearly three in four parents (72%) think Physical Education is at least as important as **a foreign language**; 29% think it is more important.
- More than seven in ten (72%) think Physical Education is at least equal in importance as **computers**; 22% think it is more important.
- Six in ten parents (61%) think Physical Education is at least equal in importance to **Science**; 11% think it is more important.
- More than half of parents (56%) think Physical Education is at least as important as **Math**; 11% think it is more important.
- More than half (54%) think Physical Education is at least as important as **English**; 10% think it is more important.

Physical Education Helping to Control or Prevent Childhood Obesity

- ◆ Three in four parents (76%) think more school Physical Education could help control or prevent childhood obesity; only 23% disagree.

Nutrition Education

- Large majorities of parents in all areas and subgroups do not think five hours of nutrition education a year is enough.
- ◆ More than half of parents think students should spend as much time on nutrition education as they do on electives such as Health Education (74%), Physical Education (67%), Art (60%) and Music (59%).

Paying for Physical and Nutrition Education

- ◆ Two in three parents (67%) say they would be willing to pay higher taxes to provide Physical and Nutrition Education classes.
- ◆ Nearly all parents (93%) think partnerships between local schools and businesses can be important sources for financial support for schools.

Testing

- ◆ Parents are only slightly less likely to think their child should be tested regularly in school on their fitness status (78%) and health screening, such as immunizations (86%), as think they should be academically tested (92%). Significant majorities of parents across the board believe their children should have regular fitness testing and health screenings in school.

◆ **Quality Physical Education**

- ◆ Essential component of a quality education—whole child
- ◆ Supports positive cognitive and psycho-social as well as physical development
- ◆ Facilitates development of skills for lifelong physical activity
- ◆ Provides physical activity and fun for kids
 - ◆ Move away from team sports; highly competitive activities; laps and calisthenics
 - ◆ “Guiding youngsters in the process of becoming physically active for a lifetime
 - ◆ Unanswered questions—parents are an important part of the process along with physical education programs

Goal of contemporary pe—turn kids on to sports/physical activities...

1. They can do for a lifetime
2. Are as enjoyable as eating
3. More enjoyable than watching television or playing computer games

Action Steps

Encourage more quality programs of p.e.—unfortunately we are not there yet; but there is a revolution going on

Mandate recess and physical activity breaks

Parents need to be good role models; encourage physical activity for their kids (restrict sedentary activity); plan family activity time

Movement to create environmentally friendly invitations to be physically active—walking paths; sidewalks; fitness courses and playgrounds

Additional Information

Survey Methodology

The survey, which was conducted by Opinion Research Corporation International of Princeton, NJ, is based on interviews with a nationally representative sample of 2,038 adults (18 years of age and older, 50% male/50% female, 573 parents), living in private households in the continental United States. The margin of error for the adult sample is + or – 3 percentage points; when broken into subgroups (those with children in the household) the margin of error is + or – 6 percentage points. The margin of error for the teen sample is + or – 4 percentage points. All information was collected between April 3-7, 2003.

ORC uses the state of the art systems, sampling procedures and data analysis available for conducting survey research and adheres to the Code of Standards of the Council of American Survey Research Organizations.