



# Sustaining weekly physical activity in schools: Influential factors and useful strategies



PLAIN LANGUAGE SUMMARY MARCH 2022

## KEY MESSAGE

Strategies that teachers found most useful were related to acquiring skills, having resources available and creating a whole school physical activity plan. Teachers are less interested in ongoing support or monitoring from the program team.

## What is this study about?

To achieve long-term health benefits from physical activity, it is important that schools keep up the delivery of weekly physical activity programs after the initial program support is withdrawn. However, many programs are delivered at a lower quality or stopped altogether once support is removed.

In this study we aimed to:

- use a thorough and proven measure to look at the factors that are related to schools continuing to deliver weekly physical activity once initial support is withdrawn.
- find out which strategies teachers think are most useful (and are therefore most likely to keep using) to support their ongoing delivery of physical activity programs.

## How did we carry out the study?

This study is part of a larger group of studies using the Physically Active Children in Education (PACE) program to increase the scheduled minutes of physical activity across the school week.

We collected data using teacher logbooks immediately after the PACE program support finished and again six months later. We also surveyed teachers six months after support ended to find out which strategies they thought were useful to support their ongoing delivery of physical activity. The survey also measured influential factors for sustaining weekly physical activity using the Program Sustainability Assessment Tool (PSAT) which we have adapted and evaluated for use in primary schools.

## What did we find?

We found that neither school nor teacher-reported school characteristics were clearly associated with sustaining the delivery of weekly physical activity.

We found that the most useful support strategies, according to teachers, include:

1. Providing equipment packs that enable energisers (in-class activity breaks) or active lessons.
2. Providing an information pack to upskill new staff about the program and how to apply it.
3. Creating a whole school physical activity plan outlining the school's steps to ensure the physical activity policy is met in the future.

Support strategies that teachers thought were less useful include training sessions; monitoring and feedback; and ongoing contact or support from external program providers.

This study suggests that less intensive strategies may be effective to help maintain delivery of weekly physical activity.

## What next?

More long-term studies are needed. Few existing studies extend beyond two years after program support ends, meaning that little is known about what is relevant beyond this time period. Further robust research will help us to develop, tailor, refine and test support strategies to ensure ongoing benefits from school-based health programs.

## Partners

NSW Department of Education Schools Sports Unit; Catholic Schools Office; NSW Ministry of Health (PACE advisory group).

## About Us

This research was conducted by researchers at the University of Newcastle, Hunter New England Population Health and the National Centre of Implementation Science (NCOIS). NCOIS is an NHMRC funded Centre for Research Excellence associated with the University of Newcastle. The research is led by Dr Nicole Nathan, and will form part of a PhD thesis by Adam Shoesmith.

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## Full article

Shoesmith, A., Hall, A., Wolfenden, L. et al. School-level factors associated with the sustainment of weekly physical activity scheduled in Australian elementary schools: an observational study. *BMC Public Health* 22, 1408 (2022).

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