



Evaluation of *Let's Move!* active schools activation grants

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ABSTRACT

Let's Move! Active Schools (LMAS), now Active Schools, is a national initiative in the United States (US) that aims to engage schools to increase students' opportunities to be physically active. This evaluation describes changes in school-level practices related to physical education (PE) and physical activity (PA) among schools that received an LMAS-partner grant from ChildObesity180 or Fuel Up to Play 60 (FUTP60). ChildObesity180 and FUTP60 asked grantee schools to complete nine common questions, between October 2013 and August 2014, before and after receiving the grants to assess progress in implementing practices for PE and PA. "Yes" responses indicated presence of PE/PA-supportive practices. For schools with complete pre and post data ($n = 972$), frequencies of "yes" responses were calculated for each practice at pre/post. Schools receiving a FUTP60 partner grant reported statistically significant improvements from pre to post across five practices for PE and PA, and ChildObesity180 grantees reported significant increases on all practices except daily recess, which was already in place at 95% of schools at pre-survey. Schools across both grant programs reported the largest increases for promoting PA via messaging, implementing classroom PA breaks, and providing PA before and after school. Schools in both programs reported smaller, but statistically significant, increases in requiring the recommended minutes of PE. This study illustrates the feasibility of offering small grants, at a national scale, for schools to make changes that support PA throughout the day. Results suggest that schools can shift PA policies and practices over the course of a school year.

1. Introduction

The Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans recommend that children and adolescents engage in at least 60 min of daily moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (MVPA) (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2008). According to the 2016 National Physical Activity Report Card, less than half of US children and adolescents meet the national recommendation (National Physical Activity Plan Alliance, 2016). The vast majority of children and adolescents in the United States attend school; (Fast Facts, n.d.) therefore, schools are particularly important places for equitably providing PA opportunities for students. The Institute of Medicine recommends that children engage in at least 30 min of MVPA (half of the daily recommended 60 min) within the school day (Institute of Medicine, 2013).

Although the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other national organizations provide guidance and resources to create active

school environments (Institute of Medicine, 2013; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013; SHAPE America, 2015), implementation is not widespread. The 2014 School Health Policies and Practices Study showed that, in a nationally representative sample of elementary, middle, and high schools, less than 4% required daily PE for the entire school year; less than half (45%) provided opportunities for students to participate in classroom PA breaks; only 55% offered opportunities for students to participate in PA clubs or intramural sports programs; and the majority of schools had 10% or less of their students walking or biking to and from school (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015). Such limitations on school-based PA may be one contributing factor underlying children's and adolescents' failure to achieve the nationally recommended minutes of daily PA.

Let's Move! Active Schools (LMAS) was launched to develop and empower champions within schools to help them create PA-supportive

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environments with the goal of increasing PA among all students ([The White House, 2013](#)). LMAS has partnered with organizations that provide grants to schools to improve PE and PA practices. These grants are considered “activation” grants and provide schools with funding that supports specified programming. Enrollment in LMAS was not required to receive an LMAS-partner grant. Schools that received LMAS-partner grants were encouraged to enroll in LMAS, if they had not already. This study evaluated the programs of two LMAS partner organizations, [ChildObesity180 \(n.d.\)](#) and [GENYOUth \(n.d.\)](#).

ChildObesity180 awarded schools grants to implement one of three programs: a before-school PA program, an in-class PA break program, or a school-based walking and running program ([Hatfield et al., 2016](#)). These programs were identified for nationwide dissemination through a national competition designed to surface innovative school-based PA program models that were both cost-effective and ready for scale. The before-school program is a structured PA program that aims to get students moving at the start of the school day. The in-class program is designed to get students up and active using activity cards that educators or assigned students use to lead the class in PA. The school-based walking and running program presents students with a straightforward challenge to accumulate miles over the course of the school year by running, jogging, or walking during designated program times before, during, or after school. ChildObesity180 grantees were provided \$1000 to support program implementation.

GENYOUth's flagship program, Fuel Up to Play 60 (FUTP60), awarded schools grants to implement a PA “Play” from the 2013–2014 Fuel Up to Play 60 Playbook. “Plays” are customizable action strategies designed to increase opportunities for and participation in PA before, during, or after school ([FuelUpToPlay60, n.d.](#)). Grantees implemented a PA Play focused on adopting in-class PA breaks, implementing walking clubs at school, creating a dance activity or events at school, or championing for PE in school. FUTP60 provided grantees with funds ranging from \$300 to \$2000 to support the implementation of the FUTP60 PA plays.

Previous studies have identified effective strategies to increase PA among youth during school hours ([Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans Midcourse Report Subcommittee of the President's Council on Fitness, Sports, and Nutrition, 2012](#)). This study evaluates changes in PE and PA practices among schools participating in a grant partnership initiative. The primary purpose of this evaluation was to determine the extent to which schools that received LMAS-partner grants reported changes in select PE and PA practices.

2. Methods

ChildObesity180 and FUTP60 collected pre-implementation and post-implementation survey data from grantee schools. ChildObesity180 collected the first round October 2013 through November 2013 and the second round May 2014 through August 2014. FUTP60 collected the first round from August 2013 through November 2013 and the second round from May 2014 through June 2014. Throughout this report, the term “pre” is used to refer to the time period when grant participants completed the initial surveys and “post” to refer to the surveys completed at the follow-up period. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Tufts University approved the collection of ChildObesity180 data. IRB approval was not needed for FUTP60 data collection, as the data have no individual identifiers and were aggregated for release.

ChildObesity180 and FUTP60 each developed their own evaluations but included the same set of nine questions on the pre and post surveys to assess whether schools had adopted specific practices for PE and PA. These nine questions ([Table 1](#)) were identified by the LMAS Evaluation Committee and assess support for a comprehensive school PA program. All nine questions had “no” or “yes” response options. ChildObesity180 and FUTP60 also collected grade-level data and school enrollment numbers via surveys or other publically available data sources (e.g.,

National Center for Education Statistics). Additionally, ChildObesity180 asked on the post-survey whether, at the time the survey was completed, the respondent had used all, some, or none of their grant funds and also included an item regarding how funds were used. Respondents selected all that applied from the following options: equipment, printing, events, training, supplies, student incentives, teacher/staff incentives, other.

In total 1587 schools received grants from FUTP60 and ChildObesity180. Pre and post surveys were completed by 1041 schools. Fifteen unique schools received grants from both programs and were excluded from the analysis. Schools that provided incomplete data were also excluded ($N = 39$). This study presents findings about the 972 schools that participated in one of the two LMAS-partner grant programs and had complete data for pre survey and post survey.

In May–June 2015, ChildObesity180 sent grantees a short follow-up survey that asked whether the PA program was sustained in the 2014–15 school year. Respondents who indicated they did not sustain programming were asked to identify challenges that prevented re-implementation (options included: space for the program, financial support for the program, personnel support, scheduling, participation, other). Respondents who sustained programming were asked whether they planned to re-implement again in the 2015–16 school year.

Stata version 13 (College Station, TX: Stata Corp LP) was used to conduct all statistical analysis. We present frequencies of “yes” responses for pre survey and post survey for each LMAS-partner organization. We tested for statistically significant differences between pre and post periods using two-sample tests of proportions. A z-score was used to determine statistical significance.

For the ChildObesity180 subsample, we calculated the percentages of schools that responded to questions on the post survey regarding their funding (e.g., how much of their funds were used and for what kinds of purchases). The percentages of schools reporting response options to questions related to program sustainability in the 2015 follow-up survey were also calculated.

3. Results

Of the 972 schools in the analytic sample, 72% ($N = 698$) received a grant from ChildObesity180 and 28% ($N = 274$) received a grant from FUTP60. ChildObesity180 awarded a higher percentage of its grants to elementary schools (91%) than did FUTP60 (69%). Across participating schools, enrollment ranged from 18 to 3099 students. The potential reach of these grant programs, that is, the total enrollment of students in participating schools, was 487,476. Schools in 49 states and the District of Columbia (D.C.) are included in this sample, with FUTP60 grantee schools in 40 states and ChildObesity180 grantee schools in 49 states and D.C. Participating schools were primarily from urban (33%) and suburban (33%) areas as well as towns/townships (11%) and rural communities (22%).

In the pre surveys, a large proportion of schools from both programs reported having many of the PE and PA practices in place; however, schools varied in which practices they had already adopted ([Table 2](#)). Among schools enrolled in ChildObesity180's grant programs, daily recess was the most prevalent, with 95% of schools reporting having this practice in place in the pre survey. The most prevalent practice among FUTP60 schools was offering professional development to PE teachers (91%). The least common practice among grantees from both programs was requiring the recommended minutes of PE; this requirement was reported to be in place at only 40% of ChildObesity180 grantee schools and 41% of FUTP60 grantee schools.

In the post survey, FUTP60 grantee schools reported significant increases for promoting PA via messaging, requiring the recommended minutes of PE, providing active classrooms, offering daily recess, and offering before- and after-school physical activity. ChildObesity180 schools reported significant increases for all practices except daily recess, which started out and remained high at 95%. For grantees from

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