

HIGH SCHOOL PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORT PARTICIPATION: IMPACT ON YOUNG ADULT PHYSICAL ACTIVITY BEHAVIORS

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Abstract

The link between High School Physical Education and High School Sport participation and subsequent young adult physical activity habits was explored in this study. There is evidence that activity behaviors track from adolescence to adulthood and these programs have high participation rates, yet very few studies have evaluated their potential for long-term public health impact. A survey was developed and used to collect data from college undergraduate students, ($n=1339$) about previous high school physical education and sport participation experiences and current college behaviors including body mass index, days of: aerobic, muscle strength, and flexibility and minutes of sport activity. Correlation, regression, ANOVA, and chi-square analyses revealed relationships of statistical and practical significance. More physical education classes was associated with higher adult activity levels (PE explained between 0.5%- 2% of unique variance). Tracking effects were identified and those who participated in either program reported higher activity levels than those who participated in minimum requirements or neither program (mean differences ranged from .91 days to 1.65 days more activity). National recommendations were used to compare groups on rates of healthy activity behaviors. Those who participated in physical education, both programs, and sport only reported the least, middle, and most individuals meeting recommendations for weekly activity respectively (effect sizes ranged from .092-.123). The HS PE requirement for graduation is too low to support healthy behavior tracking. Increasing the graduation requirement to

daily physical education for all four years is recommended. Additional evidence for long-term health behavior benefits of sport participation was also discovered.