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Strategies to promote children's school based physical activity: Transform-Us! Mid-intervention findings

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Many children engage in suboptimal levels of PA despite the associated health risks. Schools (n = 20) in the Transform-Us! program were randomized to one of four intervention arms that target increases in children's PA (PA), reductions in sedentary behavior (SB), both behaviors (SB+PA) or control current practice (C). This examination focuses on the PA promotion strategies employed in the PA, SB+PA arms compared with the C arm. To promote children's PA each PA, SB+PA class was provided with sporting, circus equipment; asphalt line markings were installed at the school, teachers were asked to encourage PA. Grade 3 children at participating schools were invited to take part in evaluation assessments including the completion of a self-report survey. Findings from the PA promotion strategy questions at baseline (Feb–June 2010), T2 (Nov/Dec) are reported here. Children (n = 425, 55% female) were asked to respond (yes/no) to five items asking about social support for PA from their class teacher, which were then summed to create a 'teacher social support' scale. Children were also asked to indicate if there are markings on the walls or on the school playground to help us play games' (perceived availability of line markings); if they are 'allowed to use school sports equipment during recess, lunch breaks' (perceived accessibility of sports equipment), how much they like 'the areas to play in at school' using a 5-point Likert scale (perceived school environment). Between baseline, T2, teacher social support increased in both PA (1.7[1.4] vs 2.1[1.4]), SB arms (1.9[1.4] vs 2.4[1.4]) but declined in C (2.6[1.4] vs 1.7[1.5]). For all three arms, increases were seen in perceived availability of line markings (PA: 53.2% vs 69.4%; SB+PA: 59.3% vs 71.4%; C: 60.0% vs 69.8%); perceived accessibility of sport equipment (PA: 87.7% vs 97.2%; SB+PA: 80.7% vs 94%; C: 85.4% vs 97.6%), perceived school environment (PA: 1.44[0.9] vs 1.42[0.8]; SB+PA: 1.5[0.8] vs 1.6[0.7]; C: 1.4[0.9] vs 1.5[0.7]) between baseline, T2. All findings were significant at a 1% probability level. At the mid-intervention time point, findings suggest that PA strategies have increased perceived availability of line markings, accessibility of sport equipment, perceived school environment in children allocated to the PA, SB+PA arms. However, there were also unexpected increases in the C arm for three out of four items. Post-intervention findings will add to these preliminary findings.

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