

Nutrition and Physical Activity Interventions in the School – Is it a Win-Win Situation?

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Background – Schools are continually used as settings for interventions to improve health outcomes in children. While school-based interventions have reported positive health-related changes (eg in student knowledge, behaviour and body measures) there is a dearth of research addressing the wider impact that such interventions may have on the school itself – particularly on the curriculum, the basis of students’ learning framework.

Objective - to investigate the effect of the ACT Department of Education’s *Health, PE and Sport Policy* (from 1997) on curriculum, teachers and resources; and to assess the strengths and limitations of the use of policy in school-based preventive health using, as a case study.

Design - Surveys of ACT primary and high school principals (n=23) and primary teachers, high school PE and health, and food studies teachers (n=131) were conducted. Schools were selected on the basis of size, index of relative disadvantage and geographic location.

Outcomes - Principals and teachers raised concerns over the impact of the *Health, PE and Sport Policy* on resources, on the structure of the curriculum and on subject areas other than health and PE. Teachers reported that key strengths were that the policy ensured that physical activity was included in the curriculum and provided guidelines for teaching. However, the primary limitation was that while the policy mandated time, it did not address resource issues.

Conclusions - We found that placing additional demands on the school curricula without assessing the consequences for the school, teachers and other curricula areas reduced sustainability and compliance of health interventions, and compromised student learning in other unrelated areas through effects on curricula and resource allocation.