

Go Out and Play: Physical Education

Go Out and Play: Youth Sports in America is a comprehensive, 184-page research report, which covers a range of topics, including children's participation in organized sports, youth involvement with exercise, links between athletic participation and family life, gender and the frequency of physical education, associations between athletic participation and children's physical and emotional well-being, age of entry into sports and drop-out rates, how gender equity varies across communities (urban, suburban and rural), gender and interest in sports and physical activity, and sports involvement among understudied populations (children with disabilities, children in immigrant families).

In recent decades, many schools have cut back on physical education offerings or stopped requiring "gym classes" entirely. One in five U.S. schools does not offer physical education at all. The findings in Section Four show that physical education is available for some children but not others, and that gender and school location powerfully influence who is being provided access to this health resource. The main findings include:

- Similar percentages of girls and boys in third through 10th grades have no physical education classes whatsoever.
- Significantly higher percentages of 11th- and 12th-grade boys than girls have four or more physical education classes per week than girls.
- Eighty-four percent of urban girls in the United States report having no PE classes at all in the 11th and 12th grades. Rural girls in the same grades are not far behind with 68% reporting no PE classes.

- Across the United States, young, low-income children—both girls and boys—are underserved with regard to school-based physical education. Generally, more boys attend PE classes than girls, especially in urban and rural schools.
- For both girls and boys fewer days of weekly physical education are associated with lower rates of average overall physical activity. Among those children with no physical education classes at all, only 9% were frequent exercisers, while 27% were infrequent exercisers. In contrast, among the children with four or more PE classes per week, 35% were frequent exercisers, compared to 24% who were infrequent exercisers.

Conclusion: Urban girls are the "have-nots" of physical education in the United States. Our findings show that only about two out of 10 urban girls in 11th and 12th grades attended PE classes, compared with 5.5 out of 10 of their male counterparts. The physical education gender gap increases as children get older, especially among urban girls, but also for rural girls. The declines during adolescence are not as marked for boys.

To access the full report, go to
www.WomensSportsFoundation.org/GoOutandPlay

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