

Child Care & Early Education RESEARCH CONNECTIONS

Physical Activity in Early Care and Education Settings

September is National Childhood Obesity Awareness Month. While there have been some recent declines in obesity rates among some groups of young children, overall the proportion of children who are obese has doubled over the past several decades (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (U.S.), n.d.). Currently, over 3 million children between the ages of 2 and 5 are estimated to be overweight or obese (Ogden, Carroll, Kit, & Flegal, 2014).

Let's Move! Child Care was initiated in June of 2011 by First Lady Michelle Obama; 2015 marks the fourth anniversary of this initiative to support child care providers in encouraging healthy eating and physical activity and limiting screen time for young children. The Office of Child Care has gathered resources for parents and practitioners to support this initiative, including *One Step at a Time*, *Bright Futures Obesity Training for Providers*. This training includes three modules: Promoting Physical Activity for Young Children, Promoting Physical Activity in Child Care Programs, and Working with Parents. Other resources include those developed in coordination with Let's Move! Child Care by the Nemours Children's Health System for the Early Childhood Education Learning Collaboratives Project funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

In March 2012, *Research Connections* published its resource list on child care and obesity prevention (Child Care & Early Education Research Connections, 2012). Since then there has been more research on promoting physical activity for young children in early care and education programs. Two major strategies for increasing opportunities for physical activity are through the adoption and implementation of specific practices in early care and education settings and through child care regulations and requirements. This **Topic of Interest** focuses on research summaries in these two areas--interventions to increase opportunities and caregiver practices promoting physical activity, and regulations for specific facility arrangements, schedules, staff behaviors, and policies to ensure these opportunities and practices in licensed child care settings.



Interventions to Promote Physical Activity

The following studies reviewed results from a range of intervention strategies to assist early care and education programs and providers in increasing opportunities for physical activity for the children they serve.

- Published in 2013, *Effectiveness of physical activity interventions for preschoolers: A meta-analysis* reported the results of an analysis of 15 studies examining the effectiveness of interventions on physical activity participation among preschoolers (Gordon, Tucker, Burke, & Carron, 2013).
- A 2014 review, *A socio-ecological approach to physical activity interventions in childcare: A systematic review*, classified interventions from 23 studies, 6 conducted outside the United States (Mehtala, Saakslanti, Inkinen, & Poskiparta, 2014).
- An August 2015 review of interventions, *Interventions to increase physical activity in children aged 2-5 years: A systematic review*, highlighted 8 interventions conducted in child care centers that increased objectively measured physical activity, finding that interventions with multiple components targeting both parents and their children produced promising results (Ling, Robbins, Wen, & Peng, 2015).
- Also in August 2015, *Obesity prevention interventions in early childhood education and care settings with parental involvement: A systematic review* summarized the findings of 15 studies of interventions, including those with physical activity components, that all involved some level of parental involvement (Morris, Skouteris, Edwards, & Rutherford, 2015).

Child Care Regulations Regarding Physical Activity

The following publications have assessed state regulations related to physical activity in licensed child care facilities and programs.

- *Achieving a State of Healthy Weight*, produced by the National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education, with US DHHS Healthy Weight Initiative Child Care Workgroup, has been published annually since 2010 (National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care (U.S.), 2015). This series provides a national assessment of child care regulations in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, using the Caring for Our Children national health and safety standards for preventing childhood obesity, including eleven standards specifically related to physical activity.
- In 2014, using the Institute of Medicine recommendations as the base of comparison, *A review of state regulations to promote infant physical activity in child care* examined regulations specifically to promote infant physical activity in child care for this age group (Slining, Neelon, & Duffey, 2014), and *States lack physical activity policies in child care that are consistent with national recommendations* reviewed state regulations for young children from birth through preschool age (Duffey, Slining, & Neelon, 2014).

- The National Center on Child Care Quality Improvement in 2012 published the findings from its analysis of state child care licensing requirements related to the five goals of Let's Move! Child Care, including those related to the goal of providing 1-2 hours of physical activity during the day, including outdoor play when possible (National Center on Child Care Quality Improvement, 2012).

Additional Resources

Explore recent additions to the *Research Connections* collection on the topic of physical activity.

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