

# Evaluation of a Comprehensive School Physical Activity Program: Be a Champion!



JUST SIX  
QUESTIONS  
RESEARCH  
SUMMARY

*“While [physical activity] may not be a primary focus for some school settings due to other barriers, introducing the idea that the schools have the ability to improve and revise activities speaks strength and stability into programs” (p. 58).*

## 1. WHAT IS THE RESEARCH ABOUT?

In the United States, many children in elementary schools are not meeting the recommended daily physical activity guidelines: a minimum of 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity for those aged 6 to 17. Many schools use Comprehensive School Physical Activity Programs (CSPAPs) to support meeting these guidelines through the provision of opportunities during school time, teacher/staff modeling, and parent/community engagement. However, there has been little effort to create an evaluation strategy for this programming. This article outlines an evaluation process for CSPAPs, gives examples of potential evaluation tools, and addresses the strengths, limitations, and considerations for ‘Be a Champion!’, designed by the authors as “an implementation framework to guide the tailored delivery of a CSPAP in schools” (p. 55).

## 2. WHERE DID THE RESEARCH TAKE PLACE?

The research was conducted in the Kershaw County School District, located in a rural region of South Carolina in the United States.

## 3. WHO IS THIS RESEARCH ABOUT?

Students (in grades 2 to 5), faculty, and school staff participated in the study.

## 4. HOW WAS THE RESEARCH DONE?

Of the 11 schools in the district, five were selected to participate in the study. The schools were matched by size and randomly selected to either continue their existing physical activity program practices or to implement ‘Be a Champion!’ Data was collected using self-report instruments, direct observation tools, and activity monitors.

**Direct observation** (collecting information using your senses) was conducted separately by up to three individuals and took place from September to April. Observations occurred on one half-school day every two weeks, before and after school and during physical education, recess, and class. Researchers used three direct observation tools to document youth and staff behaviours (Observing Staff Promotion of Activity and Nutrition (SPOSPAN), System for Observing Student Movement in Academic Routines (SOSMART), and Observing Play and Leisure Activity (SOPLAY)).

The activity monitors were wearable technology provided to a random sub-sample of students within each elementary school. The monitors were worn on students’ belts and placed on their right hip; they were worn at all times, with the exception of when sleeping and bathing. The activity monitors objectively measured students’ physical activity.

## 5. WHAT ARE THE KEY FINDINGS?

The data collection methods used provided researchers with a better understanding of the number and quality of physical activity opportunities offered to students within their school settings. The ‘Be a Champion!’ evaluation framework was proven to be rigorous and comprehensive, enabling:

- The assessment of student physical activity;
- The identification of assets and needs in settings;
- An understanding of challenges to CSPAP implementation;
- The provision of implementation solutions that are reflective of the setting and governing policies; and
- Continuous feedback and opportunities for program modification.

The authors indicate that there must be collaboration between school administrators, faculty, staff, and wider school communities to ensure the continued delivery of program components. Findings demonstrate that elementary schools with a culture and appreciation for physical activity obtained more results using this framework.

## 6. WHY DOES THIS RESEARCH MATTER FOR YOUTH WORK?

Physical activity and free play can improve physical and mental health and wellbeing for children and youth. Although this research focused on such programming in schools, youth workers can consider opportunities for physical activity and free play in a variety of program contexts, as well as the evaluation of these activities, which is critical to inform future practice and program improvements.

This research emphasizes the importance of evaluating physical activity programs to ensure that youth participants are meeting recommended daily physical activity guidelines, and offers a comprehensive framework. ‘Be a Champion!’ can be implemented to evaluate and improve physical activity programming as it evaluates activity, addresses the current needs of the context/setting, identifies obstacles to the implementation of physical activity programs, and provides guidance on existing and emerging issues.

- 🔍 Singletary, C. R., Weaver, G., Carson, R. L., Beets, M. W., Pate, R. R., Saunders, R. P., Peluso, A. G., & Moore, J. B. (2019). [Evaluation of a comprehensive school physical activity program: Be a Champion!](#) *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 75, 54-60.