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| **Do social relations in the school class change after participation in a physical activity intervention? A study of teacher-perceived social “side effects” of a national Danish physical activity competition campaign** |
| **Background/Objectives**A specific approach in school-based health promotion are competition programs where whole school classes compete for prizes by collectively aiming at increasing healthy behaviors. Since the approach is based on common efforts and joint activities of the whole group, benefits may occur not only for the primary behavioral target, but there may be additional positive “side effects” on social relations in class. The study investigated whether teachers whose classes had participated in a free nationwide Danish school competition to promote physical activity perceived positive changes in social relations in the classes and whether differences in perceptions were associated with socio-demographic characteristics of the students and the social environment of the school setting. **Methods**A cross-sectional survey was conducted after completion of a national Danish school campaign in 2015, aimed at school children aged 5-17. Data were collected by a standardized questionnaire sent to all teachers (N = 5.892) after completion of the program. 2.097 teachers returned the questionnaire and 1.667 complete datasets could be included in the analysis. Data were analyzed with the help of multiple logistic regression.**Results**About half of the surveyed teachers perceived improvements of class climate, of cooperation among the children, and in terms of a stronger sense in the class of belonging together. However, it was also found that perceptions differed depending on contextual and student characteristics. Thus, for instance improvements in children’s sense of belonging were reported in particular by teachers who had participated with classes with a higher percentage of children from immigrant families (OR = 1.52; CI = 1.128-2.059), who perceived high as compared to low levels of support from their school principal for the program (OR = 1.55; CI = 1.118– 2.038) and those who to a higher degree had succeeded in involving not only the children but also their families in the program (OR = 1.43; CI = 1.128-1.814).**Discussion**Findings suggest that a competition-based physical activity intervention program may have additional benefits for social well-being and integration, particularly for classes with a higher level of heterogeneity in terms of students’ background and when the school context as well as children’s home environment were in support of the program.**Keywords**School health promotion; physical activity; competition; social benefits; school social context; |