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Recreation Connections Manitoba Inc. is a provincial organization working alongside and for recreation professionals. Recreation Connections Manitoba, Inc. exists to collectively share the passion and spirit of recreation and is dedicated to enhancing the health and wellness of all Manitobans through the development and support of recreation professionals, practitioners and volunteers.

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* The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of the Public Health Agency of Canada.
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The full version of this report is available online at:

http://afterschoolmanitoba.com/assets/after the bell_july24_final.pdf
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recreation Connections Manitoba, in partnership with Green Action Centre, delivered the After The School Bell Rings: A Manitoba After School Recreation Project. The pilot project was a provincial initiative designed to promote and support increased access and opportunities for children and youth, ages 6-12 years, to engage in physical activity and healthy living practices in the critical after school time period between 3:00 – 6:00 pm.

Methods

The research and evaluation aspect of the project were developed in consultation with experts from the Health, Leisure & Human Performance Research Institute, University of Manitoba. A variety of quantitative approaches were utilized to characterize physical activity behavior, fitness and motor skill development of children attending the after school project sites. Data was collected in Fall 2011 (i.e. pre or baseline data collection) and then again in Spring 2012 (i.e. post data collection). Qualitative approaches were also utilized to capture information about the experiences of the children and parents of children attending the after school sites as well as the leaders and community stakeholders who have a connection with after school program sites.

Effectiveness of the blended program framework in the after school programs

The primary intent of the pilot project was to determine the effectiveness of implementing a mix of recreational, learning, health and local content activities (i.e. a blended framework) within after school programs. This objective was more challenging to address than expected because of relatively low levels of attendance amongst the children who volunteered to participate in the research project. For example, 36% of children attended the program sites once or twice a week; whereas, 16% of children attended the after school programs three or more times per week. Even so, there were larger median increases in the total amount of moderate to vigorous physical activity (+6 minutes/day) and total steps (+399 steps/day) performed during the after school period by children attending the intervention sites that implemented the blended framework, as compared to those attending an after school program that did not implement the intervention (i.e. a control site). It was also notable that the children who increased the number of steps they took during the after school period also increased the overall amount of moderate to vigorous physical activity that they accumulated on a daily basis. In fact, a larger proportion (+3%) of children attending the intervention sites were accumulating at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity on a daily basis in Spring 2012, as compared to Fall 2011.

A different part of the research project characterized motor skills amongst children attending both the control and intervention sites and determined that children’s motor skills were below average (i.e. ranked from the 1st – 50th percentiles). Even so, children in the intervention group improved their motor skills overall by 6 percentiles from Fall 2011 to Spring 2012; whereas, the children in the control group declined by 3 percentiles over the same time period.

Further evidence indicating that the implementation of the blended framework was somewhat beneficial was the observation that larger changes in flexibility and muscular strength were observed amongst children who attended more than 50% of the after school programming. However, this outcome was not observed amongst the full cohort of children who completed the fitness assessments in Fall 2011 and Spring 2012, which may be an indication that children who attend the after school programming more often benefit from the implementation of a blended framework to a greater extent than children who attend the programming less often.

It was also notable that, although one aspect of the blended framework sought to promote the utilization of active transportation to and from the after school program, the proportion of children who utilized active modes of transportation was higher in Fall 2011 (61%) than it was in Spring 2012 (50%). With this in mind, it is apparent that alternate approaches to enhance the utilization of active modes of transportation during the after school period remain to be developed. Finally, although it is not possible to specifically attribute this change to the implementation of the blended framework, it is worth noting that a larger proportion of children reported that ‘they like being a leader’ or they were ‘better able to cope effectively with challenges’ after the implementation of the blended framework, as compared to Fall 2011.

In summary, many of the physical activity and healthy living practices outcome measures suggest that the implementation of the blended framework at the pilot sites could be considered a qualified success, or at the very least had no negative implications.
Information about what was experienced by the after school program sites

This report identifies some good information about what was experienced at the pilot sites to illustrate the potential for implementing a blended framework within after school programming. For example, the leaders who work or volunteer in the after school programming are from diverse populations. Many leaders reported that they encouraged the children to participate in physical activity and spent time teaching the children new physical activity skills during the after school program. A majority of leaders also reported that they had opportunities to provide healthy food to children during the after school period and had the knowledge to teach the children about healthy eating. The majority of leaders said they were encouraging the children to use active transportation, but only 36% of leaders reported that they spent time teaching the children about ways to use active transportation.

Although one aspect of the blended framework included an emphasis to support learning, only 63% of leaders reported that children were encouraged to complete their homework while they were at the after school program. Leaders reported having a lack of staff, time and space to provide optimal homework opportunities for the children. This point was also supported by information reported by parents with children attending the after school program pilot sites, as only 33% of parents felt as though their child was encouraged to complete their homework during the after school program.

Another aspect of the blended framework emphasized local content. However, even though 67% of parents felt as though the after school program provided children with the opportunity to participate in local programming, 45% of parents reported that the after school program lacked the resources to effectively deliver local content. This notion was supported by the 45% of leaders who reported that they did not have equipment and access to resources needed to provide local programming. Furthermore, only 36% of the leaders agreed that they had the knowledge to teach the children about participating in local programming. This information highlights the need to more fully develop resources and programming to better support the delivery of local programming during the afterschool period. The importance of community connections and partnerships were viewed as a viable approach for providing local program content. Stakeholders suggested that local program content could be delivered by community members so the children would benefit from cultural activities and traditions. Intergenerational activities were specifically noted in one community as an opportunity to support the delivery of local program content. For example, in one community fostering relationships with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) was strategically initiated by the key stakeholder as a way to enhance local programming. The following quote summarizes the contribution that was made…“So he was dancing with them in his uniform and all of a sudden their tone changed. So, then the kids asked when are you going to come back again sir?” This example highlights the possibilities of partnering with local content experts to better support local program initiatives.

Finally, the leader survey data indicated that a majority of leaders suggested that their after school program site should continue using the blended framework after the completion of the project.

This report has also identified some of the real issues that are faced by after school programs, such as accessing sustainable resources, staff turnover, staff training, and the lack of sufficient transportation resources or planning. Although the majority of the leaders felt as though the after school program was able to successfully incorporate the blended framework into the program design, the leaders indicated that implementing the blended framework would be easier if they had more time, space and staff to help out in the after school program. Leaders at all sites also suggested that there was a shortage of funding for recreation programming and that the After the School Bell Rings initiative was instrumental in sustaining programs that were already in existence, albeit under-funded. Leaders also suggested that they recognized the need for more community support, funding and partnerships to make the after school program more effective.

It was notable that higher attendance rates were observed amongst after school programs located in school settings, as compared to after school programs that were located in the community without formal connections to school facilities. In fact, sites that either had a lack of facilities to accommodate physical activity or lack of knowledge about how to implement and promote physical activity suggested that the activity emphasis of the blended framework helped them to forge new partnerships with other community organizations and leaders in meeting the activity criteria. This was positively viewed as it served to build community capacity and develop relationships within the community. This information supports what other jurisdictions have said about things like the benefits of local partnerships with schools and other facilities.
OVERVIEW

After The School Bell Rings: A Manitoba After School Recreation Project is a provincial initiative focusing on promoting and supporting increased access and opportunities for children and youth, ages 6-12 years, to engage in physical activity and healthy living practices in the critical after school time period.

When is the ‘after school period’?

For this project, we have defined the after school period as programs for children ages 6 -12 years that take place on weekdays between 3 and 6 pm. After school programs include a wide variety of recreational, educational, social and physical activities provided by organizations such as child care centers, recreation departments, community centers, non-profit organizations, friendship centers, parent groups, schools, etc.

Why is this project being done?

Research shows that most Canadian children and youth, ages 6-12 years, are not getting enough daily physical activity to gain health benefits. Too many children are overweight or obese and are at risk of serious health problems. The after school time period is a critical time for children to engage in physical activity and healthy living practices.

How will this project enhance programming for children and youth during the after school period?

1) The After The School Bell Rings: A Manitoba After School Recreation Project identified and developed resources to assist providers of after school programs to increase physical activity, healthy eating and active transportation within their programs. The resources included:

   > A website with program ideas, training opportunities, hints and tips;
   > Information on best and promising practices in after school programming across the province and the country;
   > Resource manuals to help with planning and running after school programs
   > A blended program framework for after school programs including recreation, health, learning, local content and active school travel planning components;
   > Training opportunities for program planners and leaders;
   > Research to develop a better understanding of what works for the targeted age group;
   > A network of stakeholders in after school programming; and,
   > Public education materials to increase the understanding of the importance of the after school time period related to physical activity.

2) The project provided opportunities for providers of after school programs to communicate with each other, to share ideas and seek resolutions to issues and to look at ways to work together to provide effective after school programs.

3) The project engaged stakeholders from a wide range of sectors to share information and ideas; to talk about how to work together; and to learn from one another.

4) The project provided funding and supports to 6 pilot sites to use the blended program framework and test approaches to increase physical activity, healthy eating and active transportation from September 2011 to June 2012.
What is the blended program framework?

The blended program framework was developed by the Alberta Recreation and Parks Association (ARPA) to reflect a recommended mix of recreational, learning, health and local content activities to be included in after school programs. We have adapted it for this project to include active and safe travel planning. Further detail on the framework is available on the After the School Bell Rings Project website (http://www.afterschoolmanitoba.ca).

The approach proposed by the Alberta Recreation and Parks Association (and being adopted or adapted by other After School Recreation Initiatives among other Provincial jurisdictions across Canada) reflects the need to strike a balance between ensuring purposeful programs that can achieve measurable outcomes and the need to recognize the wide range of capacities and interests that exist across the province. So while the framework suggests an optimal balance of programming, there is a strong and necessary emphasis on a community development approach where local partners and parents can shape program components based on their unique circumstances (e.g. facilities, service clubs). Local direction in program development is essential if after school recreation programs are to build on - and fit within - existing programs and services. The time percentages shown are approximate and are to be reflected in the program over a month's time, they are not expected to be followed on a daily basis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTIVE AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM PROPOSED PROGRAM FRAMEWORK</th>
<th>(This framework was developed by ARPA)</th>
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<td><strong>Program Components by Time %</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Recreation 30%</strong></td>
<td><strong>Health 20%</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>&gt; Individual / team sports</td>
<td>&gt; Nutrition, healthy eating / cooking</td>
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<tr>
<td>&gt; Moderate to vigorous physical activity</td>
<td>&gt; Assorted health &amp; harm reduction strategies</td>
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<tr>
<td>&gt; Skill development, physical &amp; sport literacy</td>
<td>&gt; School or community based health promotion partnerships</td>
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<td>&gt; Yoga, dance, Pilates, alternative activities</td>
<td>&gt; Snack and/or dinner provided</td>
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<td>&gt; Outdoor activities / Enjoying natural environments</td>
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<td>&gt; Trips to special and public recreation facilities</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>&gt; Programs linked to active school / community initiatives</td>
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<td>&gt; Arts and Cultural activities</td>
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<td>&gt; Leadership training and team building skills</td>
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<td><strong>Learning 20%</strong></td>
<td><strong>Local Content 30%</strong></td>
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<td>&gt; Child, youth, parent &amp; community interests</td>
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<td>&gt; Remedial &amp; enriched learning opportunities</td>
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<td>&gt; Special skills and training (4H, trade readiness)</td>
<td>&gt; Community partners, Service clubs</td>
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<td>&gt; Programs linked to school curriculum and learning strategies</td>
<td>&gt; Skill development, employment readiness</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&gt; Leadership training and development</td>
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<td></td>
<td>&gt; Volunteer contributions and community service</td>
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Safe and Active School Travel Planning
Why does the project include active and safe travel planning?

Active transportation is an excellent way for people to be physically active. Traditionally, most children and youth would travel by foot to and from school or participate in active forms of play during the after school period. Today, most children are bussed or transported by car to and from school or community events. Many parents also feel that it is safer or easier to drive their children to and from school. With this in mind, it is important to bring together community stakeholders and after school program providers to identify barriers to active travel and to address those issues through an Active and Safe Travel Planning process. This approach may help more families to see active travel as a realistic choice for increasing the daily physical activity levels of their children.

Purpose of this report

The purpose of this report is to provide data describing the physical activity and healthy living practices of the children attending the after school program sites, as measured in Fall 2011 and again in Spring 2012. This report also contains survey and focus group information collected from parents of children attending the after school project sites, leaders who work or volunteer within the after school programs and community stakeholders who self-identify as having a connection with after school programs. Finally, the report considers the influence of the after school intervention on outcomes.

How this report is set up

The report is organized into sections based on four participant groups (i.e. children, parents, leaders and community stakeholders) and chapters to describe specific pieces of information collected using different approaches or tools. Each chapter begins by providing a brief overview of key findings, recommendations and identified research gaps and ends with a more detailed description of the specific information generated from the research approach.

Limitations

The information presented in this research report must be considered in the context of the strengths and weakness of the research approaches utilized. For example, a strength of this research project is that it collected information in Fall 2011 and Spring 2012 (Pre/Post blended framework implementation) from multiple after school program sites in real world settings. However, a weakness of the research project was that only 35% of the children attending the after school project sites participated in some aspect of the research data collection. The number of participants that participated in some aspects of research varied significantly at each specific data collection. For example, 59 children in Grade 4-6 completed the child survey in Fall 2011; whereas, 29 children in Grade 4-6 completed the survey in Spring 2012. It is likely that this change in research participation was influenced by the children's attendance at the after school program sites on a daily and seasonal basis, as the research indicates that 36% of children attend the after school programs 1-2 days a week and there was a trend of decreasing attendance in the months of April, May and June 2012. The number of participants in the research aspect of the project also varied significantly between the different research approaches utilized. For example, 54 children aged 6-12 years wore accelerometers to measure their physical activity levels; whereas, a total of 101 children completed the fitness testing. With this in mind, the reader should be aware that the information presented in this report represents a summary of the people who volunteered to participate (n.b. or in the case of children, had their parents approval to participate) in the research project and may not precisely represent the population of
children, parents, leaders and community stakeholders associated with the after school programs. Most research studies that utilize voluntary participation have similar selection bias or limitations.

A second limitation that must be acknowledged is that most aspects of the research did not make direct comparisons between after school program sites that did implement the blended framework (i.e. an intervention site) and a site that did not implement the blended framework (i.e. a control site). The project did approach and recruit one control site to participate in the research in order to enable this type of direct comparisons to be made. However, the sample size of the people who volunteered to participate in certain aspects of the research at the control site was limited. With this in mind, only certain aspects of the research (e.g. children’s motor skills) were able to make direct comparisons between the control and intervention sites; whereas, other sections present research findings describing the changes that occurred over time based on the data collected in prior to (Fall 2011) and after the implementation of the blended framework (Spring 2012). This approach is commonly used to describe the outcomes of projects designed to inform practice in real-world settings.
CHILDREN ATTENDANCE
This section of the report describes the attendance rates for children who participated in the research aspect of the project at the six after school program sites that implemented the blended framework as well the attendance rates for one control site that did not implement the blended framework.

KEY FINDINGS
>
> Thirty-five percent of the children attending the after school program sites were enrolled in the After the School Bell Rings research project.

> Average attendance for the children in the research study ranged from 20 to 90%.

> About 36% of children attend after school programs 1-2 days a week; whereas, 16% attend 3-4 days per week.

> There was a progressive decline in attendance rates in the months of April, May and June.

> Higher attendance rates were observed in after school programs that were run in school settings, and in programs that had specific transportation strategies implemented into the program design.

> The after school programs located in Southern Manitoba had higher attendance rates compared to those located in Northern Manitoba.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Agencies that plan to implement a new after school program should consider the merits of locating the program in a school, or at least in close proximity to a school. This approach may enhance attendance rates for children in the after school program. Additionally, this approach may better enable the after school program to access facilities (such as gym space) where children can be more physically active.

2. After school programs should consider the merits of creating a transportation strategy as a means to increase after school program attendance. For example, the program could create an active transportation plan for children or have staff pick up and walk with children from school to the after school program. Alternatively, there may be an opportunity for a more structured transportation approach if sufficient funding can be secured.

RESEARCH GAPS

> More research is needed to determine how program resources, such as accessibility to facilities, influence the attendance of children during the after school period. For example, very little information exists regarding the attendance of children in after school program located within a school as compared to non-school based programs.
CHILDREN DEMOGRAPHICS

This section of the report describes the demographics of the children who participated in the research aspect of the project at the six after school program sites and one control site that did not implement the blended framework.

KEY FINDINGS

> Children attending after school programs in Manitoba come from diverse populations around the world.

> A majority of the children that attended the after school programs speak English at home.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. After school programs should consider the value of participating in a variety of different cultural activities as a way to teach the children about diversity.

RESEARCH GAPS

> More research is needed to examine the breadth of diversity amongst children across a greater number of after school programs. This information would help programs and funding agencies to better understand the population that participates in after school programs.
CHILDREN SURVEY

This section of the report describes survey data collected from a cohort of children in grades 4 to 6 at the six after school program blended framework sites and one control site that did not implement the blended framework. The information presented here was collected using surveys to capture the children's view of themselves and their experiences with the after school program.

KEY FINDINGS

> Walking was the most reported method of active transportation in both Fall 2011 (i.e. 60% of the combined 909 arrival and departure entries) and Spring 2012 (60% of the 262 combined arrival and departure entries). In contrast, very few children cycled to the after school program in Fall 2011 (i.e. 5 responses) or Spring 2012 (i.e. 9 responses). It was also noteworthy that the proportion of children who utilized active modes of transportation was higher in Fall 2011 (61%) than it was in Spring 2012 (50%).

> Children had positive score summaries in terms of school engagement and success, friendships and social skills, community engagement, the ability to help and respect others, self-esteem, self-confidence, optimism, pro-social attitudes, clear values, and sense of belonging that was maintained over time.

> From Fall 2011 to Spring 2012, there was an 18% increase in children that had friends who were born in another country and moved to Canada in the last few years.

> In Fall 2011, 20% of children reported they never wanted to be the leader, while only 3% reported feeling that way in Spring 2012.

> More than 50% of children reported that the person they feel they can confide in was a family member.

> Children involved in the after school program appear to cope with challenges better over time. Specifically, at the end of the project children reported a 10% improvement in their response to the comment “if something looked hard, they wouldn’t even bother to try it most of the time”, as compared to the answer they provided at the beginning of the project.

> A higher percent of children felt like they “belonged at school” over the course of the 1 year project.

> Children report a variety of factors influence their physical activity behavior choices. For example, children reported that their decision not to participate in physical activity within the after school period was influenced by their friends (14%) or by other activities happening outside of the after school program (38%).

In both cases, the proportion of children who reported these two factors as an influence on their choice not to be more physically active was lower in Spring 2012, as compared to Fall 2011.

> Four factors that were reported as reasons why children did not participate in more physical activity were:

  >> They do not have time to be active or the confidence to participate in activities.

  >> Factors outside the program influenced their choice to be active.

  >> The program did not have activities for them to do.

  >> Their friends influence their decision about what they participate in.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. After school programs could utilize neighborhood walking trail maps to promote active transportation for children.

2. The leaders of the after school program should seek children’s input about the types of programming offered in the program as a strategy to increase participation of the children in the program. This approach may also empower the children to take a more active role in planning and may increase participation in all the activities that go on in the after school program. This approach may also increase the awareness that the program leaders have of the factors that influence a child’s decision to participate in activities.

RESEARCH GAPS

> More research is needed to examine the breadth of diversity amongst children across a greater number of after school programs. This information would help programs and funding agencies to better understand the population that participates in after school programs.
**KEY FINDINGS**

> Children who attended the after school program sites were more physically active than the average child in Canada and Manitoba.

> Children were most physically active during the after school period from 3:00-6:00 pm, but much less active throughout the rest of the day.

> Although children were more active than the average child in Canada and Manitoba, the children enrolled in the project spent a total of 9 hours a day being sedentary. This is an issue because higher amount of sedentary behaviour can negatively influence health.

> The children who increased the number of total steps they took during the after school period were also more likely to increase their physical activity levels over the course of the project.

> When the data was analyzed using the paired approach to identify differences between the control and intervention sites from pre to post, it was evident that larger median changes for the total amount of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity and total steps performed on a daily basis as well as during the after school period between 3:00 to 6:00 pm was observed amongst the intervention sites that implemented the blended framework, as compared to the control site.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. After school programs should develop strategies to incorporate active transportation and a variety of activities into their programs, with the intention of increasing the total number of steps that children take during the after school period.

2. Children should be encouraged to engage in activities that involve a lot of total body movement during the after school program, so they breathe a bit harder or sweat a little while being active.

3. After school programs should identify ways of decreasing the total time children spend engaging in sedentary behavior. Strategies include limiting the total time children sit in front of a screen, modifying games that children play so they spend less time standing around or sitting on the bench.

**RESEARCH GAPS**

> More research is needed to determine how program resources, such as accessibility to facilities, influence the physical activity behaviours of children during the after school period. For example, very little information exists regarding the activity levels of children who attend an after school program located within a school as compared to non-school based programs in Manitoba.
CHILDREN FITNESS ASSESSMENT

This section of the report describes the fitness levels of 101 children attending the six after school program sites that implemented the blended framework and one control site that did not implement the blended framework. The fitness assessment evaluated five major areas of health-related fitness, which include cardiovascular (aerobic) fitness, flexibility, muscular endurance, muscular strength and body composition. One additional test was also utilized to measure muscular power.

KEY FINDINGS

> On average, the children who participated in this portion of the research project had very low levels of aerobic fitness.

> Although fitness levels did not change over the course of the project for the full cohort of children in the research project, fitness levels did increase amongst the children who attended more than 50% of the after school programming.

> The majority of 6-10 year old children in after school programs were found to be of healthy body composition based on body mass index.

> Although a significant difference was not seen for fitness parameters amongst the full cohort of children who completed the fitness assessment in Fall 2011 and Spring 2012, children who attended more than 50% of the after school programming did show a trend for increasing some fitness parameters over time.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. After school programs should be encouraged to utilize games and activities where children are moving as much as possible as a strategy to help children to increase their fitness.

2. Children should be taught that aerobic fitness and strength fitness levels influence their health. Children should be encouraged to participate in different types of activities that incorporate both aerobic and strength fitness components.

RESEARCH GAPS

> More research is needed to determine how to best implement games or activities with the capacity to enhance the physical fitness levels of children.

> Additional research should examine the influence that program attendance has on changes in fitness over time amongst children attending the after school program.
KEY FINDINGS

> Overall, children’s motor skills were below average to average with percentile rankings ranging from 1st - 50th.

> An intervention designed to increased physical activity led to measurable differences in the performance of gross motor skills. On average the children in the intervention group improved by 6 percentiles whereas the children in the control group declined by 3 percentiles. The pattern of improvement was consistent for both the locomotor and object control tests.

> Improvements in gross motor skills may help children gain the confidence they need for life long participation in recreational physical activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. After school programs should utilize games and activities to help children to more fully develop their gross motor activities.

RESEARCH GAPS

> The TGMD-2 is limited to children who are 10 and under. The age restriction limited the age range of the participants who could complete the gross motor skill testing. Future work should consider using a test to determine if motor skills change amongst older children attending the after school programs.

> More research is needed to examine the link between changes in gross motor skills and changes in physical activity patterns of children attending the after school program.
PARENT DEMOGRAPHICS

This section of the report describes the demographics of 35 parents who completed a survey at one of the six blended framework sites or the control site that did not implement the blended framework.

KEY FINDINGS

> The parents of the children attending the after school programs in Manitoba come from diverse populations around the world. However, most of the parents were born in Canada.

> The majority of the parents that completed the surveys were female, between the ages of 30 to 45 years old, and spoke English at home.

> A little less than one half of the parents did not have an education past high school and were making less than $20,000 for their estimated total household income.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Surveys should be completed at the after school program to increase the likelihood of completion.

2. After school programs should include diverse cultural activities with parents in order to teach children about the importance of diversity because of the diverse population of children and their parents in the after school program.

RESEARCH GAPS

> More research is needed to better understand what influences a parent’s decision to enroll their child in an after school program. This type of information may influence the location of after school programs or the types of services provided by the program.
KEY FINDINGS

> The majority of parents with children attending the after school programs report that their child consumes less than the recommended 4-6 servings of fruits and vegetables per day.

> Over two thirds of parents believe their child is eating healthy and learning about eating healthy at the after school program.

> Fifty-five percent of parents believe the after school programs are providing their child with opportunities and encouragement to participate in physical activities and are learning about the benefits of healthy eating.

> Only 62% of the parents who completed the survey believe that the after school program had the equipment needed to offer physical activities.

> Seventy-eight percent of parents believe the after school programs are promoting active transportation.

> Less than 50% of the parents believe their child received the opportunity to complete their homework during the after school program.

> Sixty-seven percent of parents believe that the after school programs allow their child to provide input for local programming.

> Overall, parents were satisfied with the after school programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The after school programs should provide more fruits and vegetables for their snacks to help the children get the recommended 4-6 serving of fruits and vegetables per day that they need.

2. After school programs could utilize diaries to record active transportation, physical activity and healthy eating behaviours so the children can take these diaries home to show their parents. This strategy would provide parents with a better understanding of what healthy behaviours are being promoted at the after school program.

3. After school programs should develop strategies to assist children with their homework. They should also keep parents informed of the strategies that are currently being utilized to help children do their homework within the program.

RESEARCH GAPS

> More research is needed to better understand the importance of the information that is shared with the parents of the children attending the after school program. It is also important to determine how the parents utilize that information to guide their children’s participation within the different aspects of the after school program.

PARENT SURVEY

This section of the report describes the information provided by 9 parents who completed a survey at one of the six blended framework sites in Spring 2012. This survey collected information about the parents’ perceptions about the after school program in areas related to the various aspects of the blended framework.
LEADER DEMOGRAPHICS

This section of the report provides some information about the demographics of the leaders who work or volunteer at the six after school program sites that implemented the blended framework and one control site that did not implement the blended framework.

KEY FINDINGS

> The leaders of the after school programs in Manitoba come from diverse populations. The majority of the leaders were born in Canada and spoke English at home.

> The majority of the leaders that completed the surveys were female, between the ages of 20-25 years old.

> The majority of after school program leaders had completed some level of post-secondary education. Fifty-five percent of them were making an estimated annual salary of $40,000 or less.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. After school programs have an opportunity to utilize the first-hand experience of the program leaders to inform the development of different cultural activities and program initiatives.

RESEARCH GAPS

> Many after school program leaders are younger than 25 years of age. Therefore, it would be of value to conduct research designed to identify and more fully understand the specific factors that influence a leader’s decision to remain with the program year after year. This type of research may help programs to retain the more experienced leaders within the after school programs.
KEY FINDINGS

> Leaders reported that the blended framework enabled them to adopt new skills to better support the after school programming. Specifically, leaders learned the skills necessary to find new relevant information, creative skills, and learned ways to reach their goals.

> Leaders rarely served soft drinks during the after school program throughout the year. Less than half of the leaders reported serving water at least once a day in Fall 2011 and Spring 2012, respectively.

> Most leaders felt that the program provided opportunities for children to eat healthy, and the majority of leaders encouraged children to eat healthy.

> In Spring 2012, most leaders reported that the after school program provided physical activity opportunities for children and most leaders spent time teaching children physical activity skills.

> Leaders felt like they lacked the resources to implement the active transportation component of the blended framework and few leaders reported that they taught children about ways to use active transportation.

> Although some leaders reported that the program did not provide opportunities for children to complete their homework within the after school period, most leaders indicated that they possess the knowledge to help children with their homework.

> All leaders who provided a response agreed or strongly agreed that the blended framework worked well in their after school program.

> All leaders who provided a response were satisfied with the blended framework, and 89% reported that their program should continue using the framework.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Program leaders should be provided with the appropriate training required to teach children about active transportation and local programs.

2. Water should be served on a more frequent basis.

3. The leaders felt the blended framework worked well and should be continued at their sites.

RESEARCH GAPS

> Research is needed to examine the interactions between leaders and children during after school programming. These interactions play an important role in the way that the blended framework is implemented and also the leader’s evaluations of the blended framework. These interactions between leaders and children also influences the way that children participate in different aspects of the program.

> Further research is needed to determine the optimal approaches for supporting healthy eating and active transportation initiatives within after school programming.
KEY FINDINGS

> Participants at all sites suggested that there was a shortage of funding for recreation programming and that the After the School Bell Rings initiative was instrumental in sustaining programs that were already in existence, albeit under-funded.

> The After the School Bell Rings initiative, with its emphasis on physical activity, was positively received and stakeholders and recreation leaders alike agreed that it encouraged them to actively consider how they could include more active recreation programs into their existing curriculum.

> While most program leaders and stakeholders agreed with the philosophy of the After the School Bell Rings project, a dominant theme that emerged across the sites was that the project was seen as a means of securing funding in contexts of fiscal restraint for recreation programming. This perspective is an illustration of how after school program providers perceive funding as a significant challenge and how they will interpret grant opportunities based on needs.

> Sites that either had a lack of facilities to accommodate physical activity or lack of knowledge about physical activity suggested that the activity emphasis of the blended framework forced them to forge partnerships with other community organizations and leaders in meeting the activity criteria. This was positively viewed as it served to build community capacity and develop relationships within the community.

> The adaptability of the blended framework program was positively reviewed, particularly in communities that had a higher percentage of Indigenous people, as it allowed leaders to add a local flavor (and thus relevance) to the programming.

> Funding for healthy snacks was also received positively, especially in communities where food insecurity was identified as a problem.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. National and regional strategies designed to promote daily physical activity should be accompanied by sustainable funding that supports community recreation and service organizations.

2. National and regional physical activity strategies should be adaptable to the local context, allowing for cultural elements to be integrated into programming, thus enhancing the cultural relevance of activity programs.

3. The adaptability of the blended framework model also enabled community organizations to re-tool their existing programs to incorporate physical activity programming through using available physical and human resources. The adaptability of the blended framework should be considered as a model for broader national and regional physical activity promotion strategies.

RESEARCH GAPS

> Future research needs to examine how funding shortages and cut backs to physical activity and recreation providers impact levels of physical activity within the community.

> Future research needs to examine how culturally relevant programming impacts physical activity levels of culturally diverse communities.

QUALITATIVE SECTION

This section of the report describes information collected through interviews with stakeholders or leaders and focus groups with children and parents.
GETTING GIRLS ACTIVE:

Examining the Physically Active Recreation Experiences of Ethno-Racially Diverse Girls

KEY FINDINGS

> The girls were overwhelmingly positive about the girl-centered recreation programming of the “Girls Night Out”.

> Beyond the safe and supportive girl-centered recreation programming of “Girls Night Out”, the girls identified a number of social constraints that negatively influenced their participation in physically active recreation, including peer-bullying, gender discrimination, adult-centered and child unfriendly cultures, racism and parental misunderstandings and fears.

> The girls described being both victims and perpetrators of body-based bullying and harassment (e.g. gender discrimination, ageism, racism).

> The girls identified that their parents, as primarily new Canadians, had fears about the their participating in recreation. They suggested that such fears were partly a result of their parents’ disconnection from the community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Girl-targeted and girl-empowerment recreation programming offers a valuable opportunity for girls to experience physical activity, recreation and human movement in safe, comfortable and supportive environments. This type of girl-centered and gender sensitive programming should be considered in other regional and national strategies to get girls more active.

2. Given that body-based bullying and harassment were central to the girls’ experiences of physical activity and recreation, strategies intended to get children and youth active must account for how experiences of social inclusion and exclusion influence activity levels.

3. It is recommended that intergenerational recreation programming be considered as a strategy to engage children, youth and their parents in recreation activities (e.g. community feasts) as a mechanism for breaking down social and cultural isolation barriers and challenging perceptions and fears.

RESEARCH GAPS

> Future research should examine how social exclusion impacts activity levels. Such research needs to move beyond universal understandings that tend to dilute how processes of social exclusion operate (e.g. ‘bullying’ as a catch-all category) and consider how gender, social class, ‘race,’ ethnicity and age, for example, converge and crystallize within specific contexts in enabling some to participate, while excluding others.