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More physical activity and less sitting at school: Needs and wishes of Dutch primary school teachers and pupils.

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Age Category: Children 6-12 yrs

Subject Category: Physical activity and sedentary behavior

Purpose: A more dynamic school day that includes less sitting and more physical activity throughout the day may support health in primary school children. We assessed how Dutch primary school teachers currently use physical activities during their program, and what wishes and needs both pupils and teachers have with respect to a more dynamic school day.

Methods: We used mixed methodologies; we assessed current practice regarding a dynamic school day, wishes and needs of both teachers and pupils through an online questionnaire. Thereafter, we conducted in-depth interviews with classroom teachers and physical education teachers to assess facilitators and barriers for a more dynamic school day. The interview data were transcribed verbatim, and thematic analysis was conducted guided by the framework for innovation.

Results: 336 teachers (207 schools) and 801 pupils (9-12 years old, 10 schools) completed the questionnaire. The physical environment of Dutch primary schools does not stimulate children to be physically active during the school day. Children prefer to be physically active together with classmates and also as an energizer between lessons in the classroom.

Results from the interviews with 24 teachers showed that the facilitators and barriers of teachers to implement a dynamic school day could be categorized into four themes: the teacher, the school, the class/pupils and practical restrictions. If we focus on the barriers the teachers themselves perceived, the main barriers for a more dynamic school day were insufficient knowledge and skills.

Conclusion: Although children like to be more physically active during their school day, teachers report many barriers for the implementation of a more dynamic school day that includes more physical activity and less sitting time. For the implementation of a more dynamic school day, it is probably not enough to only make the environment more stimulating for the pupils. In order to support the implementation of a more dynamic school day, we are currently working on a set of implementation strategies that are tailored to the reported barriers by teachers.