Results From Japan's 2018 Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth

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Introduction

In 2015, the Japan Sports Agency (JSA) was established to advance policies such as promoting regional sports, school physical education; promoting the Olympic and Paralympic movement.¹ The momentum to promote physical activity (PA) by various agencies, including the JSA is increasing. The goal of Japan's 2018 Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth is to assess, and track levels of health behavior related to PA in Japanese children and youth, facilitators and barriers for PA, and related health outcomes.

Methods

The 2018 Japanese Report Card consists of 11 indicators: Health Behaviors (5 indicators); Outcomes (2 indicators); Influences on Health Behaviors (4 indicators). Nationally representative data were used to score the indicators. We used mainly 2 surveys (published 2016 and 2017): 1) National Survey on Physical Fitness, Athletic Performance, and Exercise Habits of the JSA using a questionnaire for a million students²; 2) the Physical Fitness Survey of JSA using a questionnaire and measuring physical fitness in 2000 students.³

Results and Discussion

Figure 1 shows the 2018 Report Card cover. Two key health behaviors (Organized Sport Participation: B⁻; Active Transportation: A⁻) and two outcomes (Physical fitness: A, Weight status: A) were favorable (Table 1). Sedentary Behavior received a C- grade, while 2 indicators (Overall Physical Activity, and Active Play) could not be graded. In the Influences domain, Family Influence and Community was graded as C⁻, while School (B⁺), Community and Environment (B⁻), and Government Strategies and Investments were favorable (B). The grades for Organized Sport Participation, Active Transportation, Physical fitness, Family and Peer Influence and Community and the Built Environment improved in 2018, compared to the previous Report Card in 2016.⁴ However, grades for Sedentary Behavior, Weight Status, School, and Government Strategies and Investments were similar. Two indicators (Overall Physical Activity, and Active Play) could not be graded in both 2016 and 2018. The target age was changed from preschool children to high school children in 2016 to only school aged children and adolescents in

Figure 1 — Japan's 2018 Report Card cover.

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Table 1 Grades and rationales for Japan's 2018 Report Card

Indicator	Grade	Rationale
Overall Physical Activity	INC	There are no representative data for overall physical activity for Japanese children.
Organized Sport Participation	B-	Participation in organized sport was reported at 64% in 6-17 years olds.
Active Play	INC	There are no representative data for active play for Japanese children.
Active Transportation	A-	86% of students used active transportation to commute from home to school.
Sedentary Behaviors	C-	43% of students spent less than 2 hours per day watching TV and/or DVDs, using portable electronic devices having game functions, smartphones, PCs etc. after school on weekdays and on weekends.
Physical Fitness	A	We evaluated the cardiorespiratory endurance of children and youth according to twenty-meters shuttle run (speed (km/h) at the last complete stage) percentiles by age and sex in children and youth aged 9–17 years per Tomkinson et al. The mean value was the 90th percentile.
Weight Status	A	10% of Japanese students were overweight/obese or underweight.
Family and Peers	C-	In fifth grade Japanese primary school students, the reported percentage of participation in sport or exercise with a guardian once or more per week was 31%. 53% of 5th grade primary school students and 2nd year junior high school students reported that their guardians encourage them often or sometimes to exercise or do sports. The prevalence of obesity (BMI ≥ 25.0 kg/m ²) and underweight in Japanese adults was 34%. Participation in exercise or physical activity in Japanese adults was reported at 21% and 36%, respectively.
School	B+	The Japanese government sets primary school, junior high school, and high school curricula including the content of PE classes and the number of PE classes provided. All schools have recess time in primary school, junior high school, and high school. However, PE in primary schools isn't taught by specialized course teachers who have studied PE (only 5% in primary schools). The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology produces guidelines for school infrastructure and equipment for PE or active play in primary schools, junior high schools, and high schools, such as the area of the school playground and the existence of a gymnasium and relevant equipment according to education guidelines (eg, sports mat, horizontal bars, hurdles, etc). Although health education classes past the 3rd grade use text books, there are no specialized physical education text books for practical exercise and sports in Japanese primary schools.
Community and Environment	B-	Health Japan 21 (second term) by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare reported that the number of local governments which addressed the need to improve the physical environment where residents can easily exercise and be physically active stood at 64% prefectures.
Government	B	There are many relevant laws and ordinances such as The Basic Act on Sport, the Health Promotion Law, the Basic Act on Food Education, and so on. There are also strategies and policies in place like the Sport Basic Plan and Health Japan 21 (second term). Physical activity guidelines exist for preschool children, adults, and the elderly. However, national physical activity guidelines for children and adolescents (6-17 years) have not been established.

2018 in line with Active Healthy Kids Global Alliance standards. The grading scheme in the 2018 report card is also more detailed than in 2016.⁴ The major strength of the 2018 Report Card includes the use of nationally representative data to inform the grades and a quantitative grading rubric in both 2016 and 2018. However, there are surveillance gaps, as 2 of the 11 indicators (Overall Physical Activity, and Active Play) could not be graded.

Conclusion

Japanese children and youth have favorable levels of organized sport participation, active transportation to and from school, and physical fitness and weight status. Future nationally representative surveys on overall PA and active play are needed.

References

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