

First study to measure effectiveness of NFL PLAY 60 program shows positive results on youth fitness

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A participant in the NFL's PLAY 60 program prepares to take off at the start of a running event. Credit: The Cooper Institute

The National Football League (NFL) Foundation has invested heavily in

its NFL PLAY 60 initiative to promote fitness and health among youth over the past decade. Its impact on childhood fitness and obesity levels, however, has lacked scientific evaluation - until now.

A new study in the *American Journal of Preventative Medicine* found that NFL PLAY 60 programming significantly improved both aerobic capacity and [body mass index](#) among a large percentage of the approximately 100,000 students who participated in the program between 2011 and 2015. The study, funded by the NFL, was conducted by The Cooper Institute and led by lead author Yang Bai, assistant professor in rehabilitation and movement sciences at the University of Vermont.

The study focused on the impact of the two most popular NFL PLAY 60 programs: Fuel Up to PLAY 60 coordinated by the National Dairy Council; and NFL PLAY 60 Challenge developed with the American Heart Association. Among the 95 programming schools, researchers found larger gains in the percentage of youth that achieved national health standards for aerobic fitness between 2012 and 2015. The percentage of youth classified as overweight or obese also declined during the same time period.

Overall, schools that implemented the programs had better health and fitness profiles than schools that chose not to implement them or only did so partially. Students from the schools that did not implement the programs remained at almost the same level of [aerobic capacity](#) and weight status. The study also showed that schools that implemented the programming for four years tended to have greater fitness improvements compared to schools that participated for just two or three years. Approximately 500 schools were involved in the study at varying levels.

"Our research shows that NFL PLAY 60 programs actually work in reality based on data collected over the past four-to-five years," says Bai,

adding that the NFL plans to provide additional funding for five schools in each of the its 32 host cities that agree to fully implement the program. "It's rare to see such a large-scale program involving around 1,000 schools over multiple years. It's different from conventional intervention programs in that teachers and staff along with parents and community members are the key players in promoting healthy eating and a physically active environment for kids. The program cannot be sustained over time without those motivated and hardworking teachers. We are eager to see how this additional funding and support might help local teachers and their students."

The Fuel Up program focuses on how students can fuel up properly by eating healthy, local, nutritious foods. The PLAY 60 Challenge is focused more on how to get 60 minutes of activity every day including interactive games, dancing, running, biking and other activities. Most of the programs offer a variety of options and are easy to modify by local schools and communities.

The NFL PLAY 60 FitnessGram Partnership Project was used to evaluate student progress as recorded by teachers at participating schools who received training on how to use of the FitnessGram program by staff from The Cooper Institute, a non-profit agency that coordinated the study, and study author Greg Welk, professor at Iowa State University and Scientific Director of FitnessGram. Teachers were trained to assess their student's fitness each year and to enter it through the web-based software. Welk, professor at Iowa State University and

Launched in 2007, NFL PLAY 60 was designed to increase the wellness of young fans, including the 33 million children who are obese or overweight by encouraging them to be active for at least 60 minutes a day. NFL stars such as Tom Brady of the New England Patriots, Tony Romo of the Dallas Cowboys and Reggie Bush of the Buffalo Bills have promoted the program that is prominently publicized during the NFL's

Super Bowl, Pro Bowl, draft, season kickoff and Thanksgiving.

Provided by University of Vermont

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