



Physical Activity vs. Screen Time: Who's Doing What and How Much?

(Source: Toronto District School Board 2006 Student Census)

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The Toronto District School Board (TDSB) is one of many partners across the City of Toronto contributing local data for inclusion in an annual *Get Active Toronto Report on Physical Activity*. The purpose of that report is to compile a snapshot of what physical activity or inactivity looks like in Toronto and also to identify any variation in activity levels among sub-groups of the population. As cited in the 2010 report, “*Get Active Toronto is dedicated to mobilizing groups in Toronto that want to build a healthier city ... (with the) goal to provide these groups with information that will help them dismantle the barriers to physical activity*”. For children and youth specifically, the 2010 Get Active report identified lower activity levels for children of immigrants, low-income families, and girls across the city.

To follow-up on those findings for the 2011 Get Active report, data from the TDSB 2006 Student Census was re-examined for a closer look at the relationships between demographic factors and middle-level and secondary school students' participation patterns in the areas of:

- Extra Curricular Sports Activities in School (including house leagues, sports teams)
- Sports Activities Outside of School (including swimming lessons, community sports teams)
- Time Spent on Activities after School (such as TV, computer/video games, Internet, and sports and recreation)

This *Research Today* article highlights some of the key findings and variations between groups.

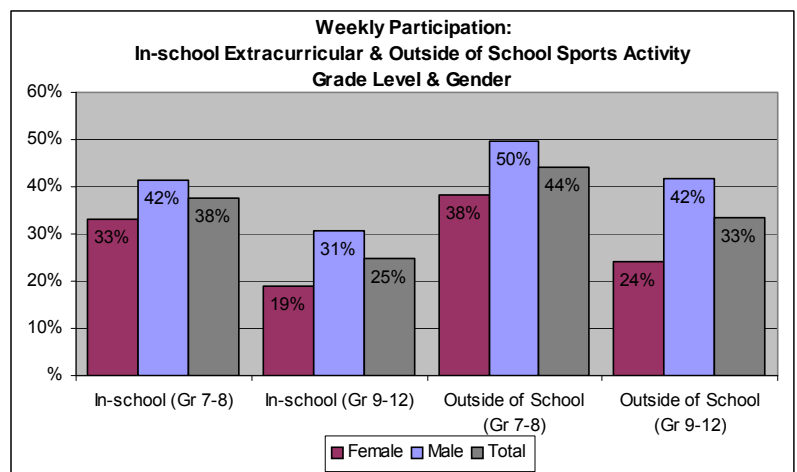
Physical Activity Participation: In-school Extra Curricular Sports and Sports Activities Outside of School

Middle level students are more active than high school students

Regular “weekly” participation rates for both in-school extra-curricular sports and sports activities outside of school were higher for intermediate students in Grades 7-8 and declined for students in Grades 9-12. Weekly participation figures ranged from a high of 44% of Grade 7-8 students involved in sports outside of school to a low of 25% of Grade 9-12 students participating in in-school extracurricular sports.

An additional 10-15% of students reported that they participated in sports activities on a “monthly” basis.

Male students are more active than females

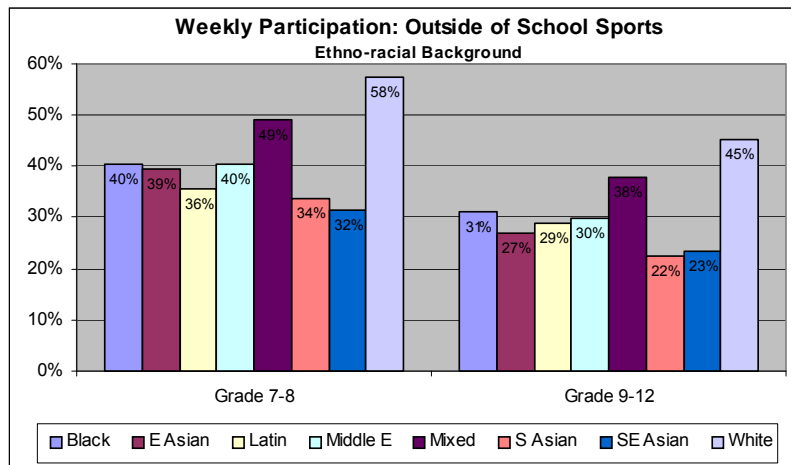
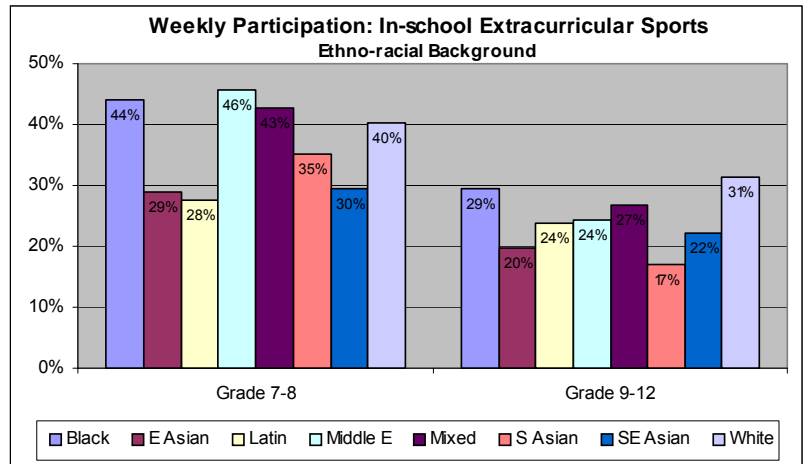


Weekly participation rates were lower for females than for males, particularly at the secondary school level. According to the TDSB 2006 Student Census results for “non-participation” rates, 53% of females never participated in extra-curricular school sports activities and 46% of females said they never participated in sports activities outside of school, compared to 35% and 29% of males.

Students from Asian backgrounds (South, East, Southeast) are less likely to be involved in physical sports activities than other ethno-racial groups

Students of East Asian, South Asian, Southeast Asian, and Latin American backgrounds had lower “weekly” participation rates for in-school sports than other ethno-racial groups.

The TDSB 2006 Student Census data revealed that in Grades 7-8, at least one third or more of the students in these sub-groups “never” participated in extra-curricular school sports, while in Grades 9-12 almost half of them never participated.



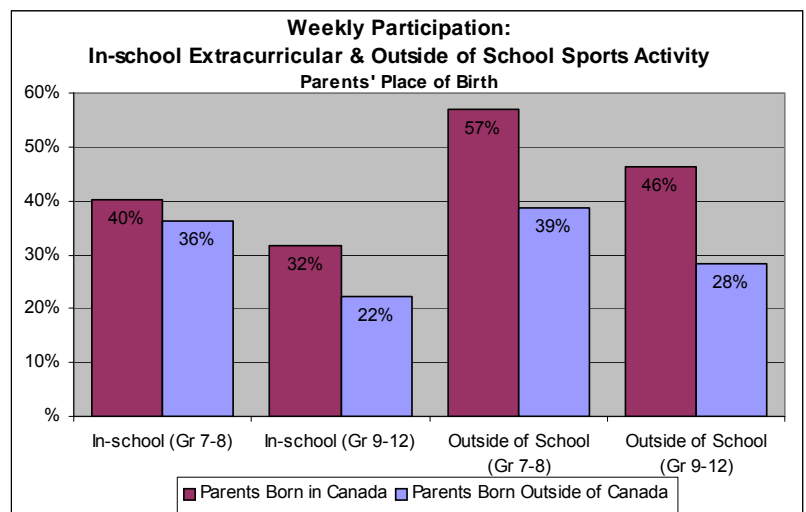
White students recorded the highest levels of weekly participation in outside of school sports activities (58% by Grade 7-8 students and 45% by secondary school students).

In comparison, students of South Asian and Southeast Asian backgrounds reported the lowest participation rates (i.e., one third of Grade 7-8 students and fewer than one in four secondary school students in these groups participated in weekly sports).

Students with Canadian-born parents are more likely to participate in sports activities both in and outside of school

Students with two parents born in Canada were slightly more likely to participate in extra-curricular sports activities in school compared to students with parents born outside of Canada (i.e., 32% versus 22% in Grades 9-12).

Children with Canadian-born parents were *much* more likely to participate in weekly sports activities outside of school (i.e., 57% of Grade 7-8 students with Canadian-born parents participated weekly compared to 39% of Grade 7-8 students with non-Canadian born parents, and 46% versus 28% respectively for students in Grades 9-12).

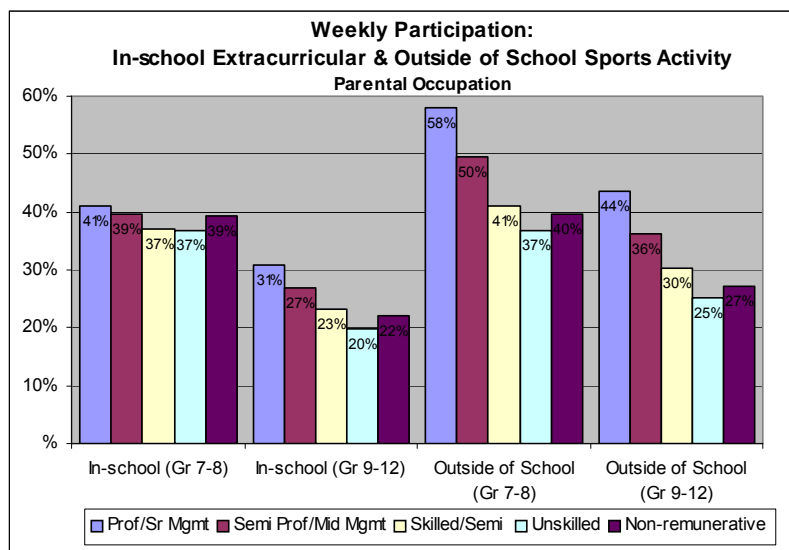


Students from families with higher income occupations are more likely to participate in sports activities, especially those offered outside of school

Although there was less variation in the middle grades, Grade 9-12 students with at least one parent working in the professional/senior management sector were more likely to participate regularly in school-based extracurricular sports activities (31% weekly) compared to those with parents in unskilled clerical/trades or non-remunerative sectors (\leq 22%).

Those differences became more evident for sports activities offered outside of school – these were accessed on a weekly basis most regularly by families with at least one parent working in the professional/senior management sector (58% in Grades 7-8 and 44% in Grades 9-12).

By comparison, weekly rates are lower for Grade 7-8 students from families in the skilled or semi-skilled clerical/trades (41%), unskilled clerical/trades (37%) or non-remunerative (40%) categories. For secondary school students in these last two categories, only one in four participate in weekly sports activities outside of school, and more than 40% of them never do.



The same trends emerged for actual time spent on after school sports and recreation

Consistent with the sports participation patterns already identified, the reported numbers of hours spent each day on after school sports and recreation was also higher for Grade 7-8 students, males, and for students whose parents are Canadian-born or in occupations of higher socio-economic status (SES).

Gender remained an important factor, with twice as many males (24%) spending more than 2 hours a day on sports and recreation compared to females (12%). One-third of secondary school females (35%) do not spend any time on a regular weekday doing these types of activities.

Students of East Asian origin spend the least amount of time on after school sports and recreation (e.g., at the secondary level, almost two-thirds of East Asian high school students spent either no time or less than an hour a day on sports and recreation).

Amount of Time Spent on Other Activities after School (TV, computer/video games, Internet)

As the 2010 Get Active Report points out, “screen time” is an important correlate of activity levels. Rather than engaging in more physically active pursuits, many teens spend a significant amount of their free time on “screen” activities like watching TV, playing computer and video games, surfing the Internet, downloading music and video clips, chatting via on-line social networks like Facebook, etc. On the TDSB 2006 Student Census survey, respondents were asked to estimate how much time they typically spent on various activities after school on a regular weekday (e.g., none, less than 1 hour, 1-2 hours, more than 2 hours).

Two-thirds of students watch at least one hour or more of TV per day after school

Overall, 40% of TDSB intermediate and secondary school students reported watching 1-2 hours of TV on weekdays; about one-quarter watch *less than one hour*, another 25-30% watch *more than 2 hours*. There were no major variations in the daily TV watching habits of these teens either by grade level, gender, parental country of birth, or SES.

Black, Southeast Asian, and Latin American students watch the most TV, while East Asian students watch the least

Some differences in TV viewing patterns were apparent according to the ethno-racial background of students. The proportion of Black students watching more than 2 hours of TV per day was about 15% higher than the system average. Southeast Asian and Latin American students had the next highest viewing rates (between 5-10% higher).

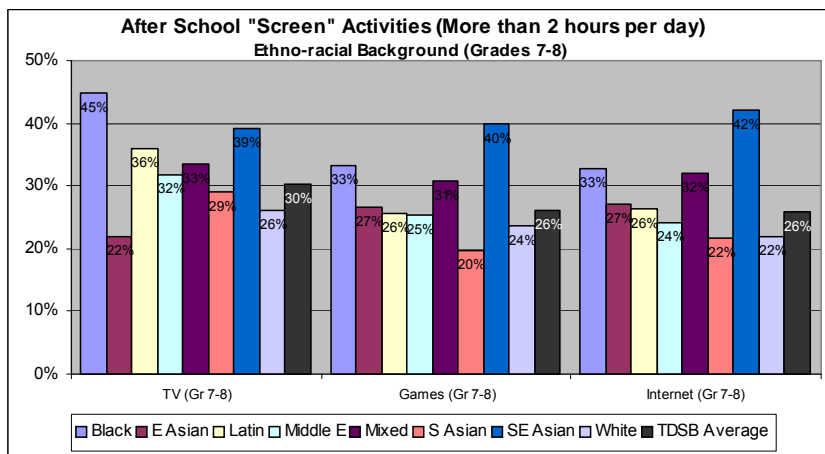
By contrast, East Asian students recorded the lowest TV viewing rates, with 38% of Grade 7-8 East Asian students and 45% of Grade 9-12 East Asian students watching either none or less than 1 hour of TV per day.

Twice as many secondary school males than females play computer or video games

The most notable differences in computer and video (screen) game playing patterns were by gender, and were more pronounced at the secondary level. Twice as many males than females in Grades 9-12 (61% versus 31%) reported spending from 1-2 or more than 2 hours a day on game-playing. Conversely, almost half of the Grade 9-12 females (46%) said they *never* play computer/video games on a school weekday compared to 17% of their male peers.

The majority of students spend 1 or more hours daily connected to the Internet outside of school time

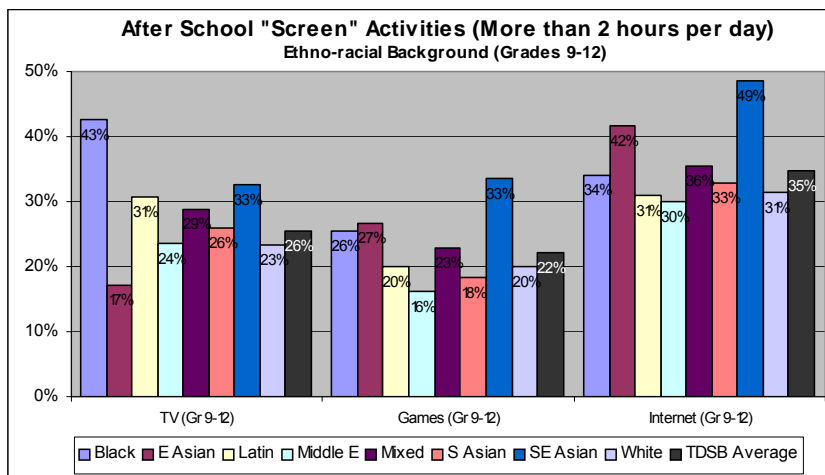
Reported rates of daily Internet usage of either 1-2 hours or more than 2 hours per day were higher for Grade 9-12 students (69%) than Grade 7-8 students (57%). Unlike the game-playing statistics cited above, there was essentially no difference between males and females in the frequency of their use of the Internet.



There are some variations in daily gaming and Internet usage between ethno-racial groups

Students of Southeast Asian background were the highest daily users of both computer/video games and the Internet (e.g. for Southeast Asians, usage for two or more hours per day was about 15% higher than the TDSB average at all grade levels).

In Grade 7-8, higher than average rates for screen games and Internet use were also evident for Black students.



At the Grade 9-12 level, the second most frequent Internet users were the East Asian students.

Questions or comments?
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