

Implementing Yoga in Public Schools: Evidence from the Encinitas Union School District's Pilot Yoga Program 2012-2013

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During the 2012-2013 school year, a district-wide yoga program was introduced in the Encinitas Union School District (EUSD) in Southern California. Researchers from the Center for Education Policy and Law (CEPAL) conducted both a formative and summative evaluation of the district's yoga program during its pilot year. This report contains the formative findings related to the implementation of the EUSD pilot yoga program highlighting the experiences of EUSD personnel during the program's rollout. As future districts consider introducing yoga into their school communities, findings from this report could be useful to achieve a successful implementation.

This report was commissioned by a nonprofit foundation and conducted by CEPAL, a research entity operating under the auspices of the School of Leadership and Education Sciences and the School of Law at the University of San Diego. Established by a grant from the William D. Lynch Foundation in 2007, CEPAL's mission is to foster better linkage between educational research, policymaking, and practice. To this end, CEPAL undertakes empirical and legal research on educational policy issues, enhances communication between education leaders and state-level policymakers, and facilitates understanding among USD law students and education graduate students about the policymaking process through courses, internships, and research opportunities. Additional information about CEPAL is available at www.sandiego.edu/cepal.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Encinitas Union School District (EUSD) serves the city of Encinitas and the south Carlsbad region of North San Diego County. Nine elementary schools enroll approximately 5,500 K-6th grade students. The EUSD yoga program came to be through the support of the Sonima Foundation¹ and EUSD's intent to build its health and wellness program. The program is funded for three years. As a result of this partnership, all K-6th grade students in EUSD had the opportunity to participate regularly in yoga. EUSD partnered with the Center for Education Policy and Law (CEPAL) at the University of San Diego to capitalize on this opportunity to learn about the effects of yoga in schools.

While collecting data to study the effects of the yoga program, CEPAL's research team also collected data specifically related to the district's challenges and their resolutions. Findings related to year one program implementation are contained in this report. Findings highlighting the effects of year one of the EUSD yoga program are provided in a separate report.

Data were analyzed to generate findings that could prove helpful to other districts interested in adopting a yoga program. The following recommendations are based on the research team's work with various members of the EUSD community during year one of its yoga program.

- Establish open communication with community stakeholders prior to the implementation of the yoga program.
- Plans for the implementation of a new yoga program should be well thought-out and thoroughly reviewed.
- Adopt a district policy that sets a minimum amount of yoga time for each grade level.
- Yoga should occur in an environment that facilitates practice and avoids distractions.
- Work expectations of yoga instructors should be articulated prior to the start of their contract. Their schedules should consider the physical, emotional and temporal demands of teaching yoga to large groups of youths.
- Districts should take instructional pedagogy and available time into consideration when designing their yoga program.
- Policy on the connection between yoga and PE should be documented and communicated to school and district personnel.
- A district wide opt-out policy should be articulated.

While each represents an important issue in the implementation of a new yoga program, clear communication and a well thought-out implementation plan are foundational to the rest. By getting the yoga program instated, EUSD has provided the blueprint from which future district yoga programs can be built. This document and the year one report on program effects serve as evidence of EUSD and the Sonima Foundation's commitment to understand the effects of yoga in school communities.

¹ Formerly the Jois Foundation.

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Introduction

Background of Yoga in Schools Initiative

Just as yoga is gaining popularity among adults throughout the United States, youth yoga programs and activities are beginning to gain prevalence as well. Private organizations and extracurricular programs are introducing the practice of yoga to children of all ages, many of them in fun and engaging ways. Programs may differ in their methods and philosophy, but they are designed to support the health and wellness of children through the practice of yoga.

Prior to 2012-2013 school year, other schools and districts offered 'opt in' yoga programs outside the instructional day but Encinitas Union School District's (EUSD) program is different. It is the first instructional-day-embedded, district-led K-6th grade yoga program in the country. Year one of the three-year study was an opportunity for school, district and external personnel to maximize the effectiveness of the program's implementation and begin learning about its impact on the EUSD community. This report provides findings related to the implementation of the EUSD pilot yoga program that may prove helpful to other schools and districts interested in adopting yoga into their school communities.

Overview of EUSD's Yoga Program and Partnerships

EUSD serves the city of Encinitas and the south Carlsbad region of North San Diego County. Nine elementary schools enroll approximately 5,500 K-6th grade students. The student population is approximately 20% Hispanic, 70% Caucasian, and 10% other minorities. Three of the nine EUSD schools qualify to receive Title I funding to support their English learners and/or students from low-income families. All EUSD schools have earned the California Distinguished School Award and four schools are National Blue Ribbon Schools.

EUSD is committed to engaging all students and connecting learners through purpose, passion, and empowerment. The district's leadership has implemented a number of programs and initiatives that exemplify this commitment, including the development of their Health and Wellness Program aimed to support the physical and mental wellness of children through a variety of interconnected activities. The first health and wellness component that was systematically introduced to all nine EUSD schools was the pilot yoga program.

The EUSD yoga program came to be through the support of the Sonima Foundation² and EUSD's intent to build its health and wellness program. As a result of this partnership, all K-6th grade students in EUSD had the opportunity to participate regularly in yoga. EUSD partnered with the Center for Education Policy and Law (CEPAL) at the University of San Diego to capitalize on this opportunity to learn about the effects of yoga in schools.

Challenges arise as districts implement new programs. Despite these, EUSD reached significant programmatic milestones throughout the 2012-2013 school year:

- EUSD contracted with an external hiring agency for human resource matters related to their instructional positions;
- Ten yoga instructors were hired and integrated into the EUSD community;
- Time was allocated for the professional development of yoga instructors;
- Spaces for yoga instruction were made available at nine schools;
- An adequate number of yoga mats were supplied for all students;
- Yoga schedules were created to ensure all K-6th grade students practiced yoga;
- A K-6th grade yoga curriculum was written and implemented;
- An online template of the curriculum was created; and,
- Yoga's connection to the physical education requirements was identified and presented to the EUSD community.

Report Focus

While collecting data to study the effects of the yoga program, CEPAL's research team also collected data specifically related to the district's challenges and their resolutions. Findings related to year one program implementation are contained in this report. Findings highlighting the effects of year one of the EUSD yoga program are provided in a separate report.

Methodology

CEPAL researchers were embedded in EUSD throughout the 2012-2013 school year. This continuous presence in the district offered researchers opportunities to collect data formally and informally. Data collection included formal interviews, district and professional development meetings, conversations, and school observations. Many of the findings outlined in the subsequent section are a product of the researchers' frequent involvement with EUSD school and district personnel.

Interviews

Formal, qualitative practices outlined in the research study's design provided a wealth of data over the course of the school year. Group and individual interviews with the central office administrators, school principals, classroom teachers, parents, and yoga instructors at specified time periods throughout the school year are included in the dataset. Data gathered anecdotally through informal conversations with school and district personnel are also included.

² Formerly the Jois Foundation.

District and Professional Development Meetings

Researchers attended regular district meetings with program stakeholders including administrators, curriculum developers, and external parties. These meetings provided opportunities for researchers to observe and document challenges and their resolutions as they unfolded.

Conversations and School Observations

Researchers obtained data through observations around each school's campus and within each yoga classroom. Conversations with school personnel, yoga instructors, and students corroborated the findings that follow.

Data Analysis

Source data were compiled and analyzed using HyperRESEARCH qualitative data management software to identify common themes that surfaced across all participants. Field notes from conversations and observations provided additional evidence to support the themes that emerged from the interviews. The formal and informal data sources included in this study provided a broad point of view of EUSD's yoga implementation. The following findings are based on a process that entailed multiple readings and cross-referencing of supporting evidence.

Limitations

Although CEPAL researchers were an ongoing presence in EUSD schools, their involvement was marginal in comparison to school and district personnel. As with the involvement of any third party, important information related to the EUSD pilot yoga program may not be articulated in this report. While every attempt has been made to present findings supported by multiple data sources, this study does not include the voices of all EUSD stakeholders. All findings and recommendations in this report should be interpreted with this in mind.

Findings and Recommendations

Data gathered over the course of the 2012-2013 school year generated findings that fell within seven categories: 1) A need for thorough communication; 2) Strategic and thoughtful implementation; 3) Scheduling of yoga classes; 4) School level organizational logistics; 5) Curriculum alignment/professional development; 6) Connection to physical education; and, 7) Opt-out alternatives. Findings encompassing the challenges and best practices within each category follow, as well as recommendations from EUSD stakeholders.

A Need for Thorough Communication

District personnel and members of the EUSD community all reported that clear and up-front communication is key to a successful yoga program. Opportunities to improve district communication were at the heart of many of the EUSD yoga program's implementation issues. Limited communication was a challenge for parents, classroom teachers, yoga instructors, principals, and central office administrators. As one principal noted, "The initial communication

was limited, which had a few parents worried about what we really were up to. So [the district wasn't] very clear, and sometimes when you're not very clear in your communication it leads to people coming up with theories that something underhanded is going on."

Principals and teachers shared that the lack of information from the district to the parents caused an influx of concerns and questions aimed at the schools. One principal stated that by providing information up-front, "You're exposing everybody and no one's in the dark and it's open to all and we're not hiding anything." Another principal noted: "You have to preload them with 'This is what we're thinking'. This is who's going to be providing the services. This is how it's going to help the kids." By providing information prior to the start of the yoga program about the purpose of the program and how it would benefit students, many of the issues and concerns that emerged throughout the year could have been avoided.

Parents in focus groups reported a major lack of communication about the purpose of the yoga program. One parent shared that the first time she heard of the yoga program was when her child came home and told her that he would need to wear comfortable clothes to school the next day because he had yoga class. Classroom teachers were also frustrated at the lack of information about the yoga program and felt that much of the onus for providing information fell to them, despite the fact that they had not been communicated with either. According to participants, this lack of communication continued even as the debate over religion and yoga heated up. The district could have provided more information or guidance to the EUSD community throughout the yoga program's first year.

Recommendations. Up-front communication to community stakeholders prior to the implementation of the yoga program was recognized throughout the interviews as a key item that should be addressed in future school-based yoga programs. Clear communication allows all stakeholders to understand program context and intent, and thus likely prevent feelings of deception.

Strategic and Thoughtful Implementation

Coupled with providing thorough communication, decisions regarding the program's implementation should be given ample time and consideration before action is taken. EUSD was presented with the challenge of writing and implementing a new program in four weeks. Despite the all-around success resulting from the district's efforts, extending the implementation process could have solved a number of the challenges presented in this report. Four weeks may have been enough to get the yoga program implemented, but it was not enough to ensure substantial issues were preemptively resolved.

Considerations about hiring effective yoga instructors, generating community buy-in, and seamless school-level logistics are matters that need to be thoroughly addressed before yoga instruction starts. In EUSD, the timeline between the yoga program's approval and the start of yoga instruction was brief. Stakeholders reported feeling extremely frustrated by the rush to start yoga instruction in schools.

Interviewed teachers felt they were left in the dark as the implementation procedures were handed down to them from the district office. According to teachers, despite the district's claims for site-based decision-making, the implementation of the yoga program was mandated through complete top-down authority. While justifiable within the context of this compacted timeline, the implementation model yielded a lack of buy-in from school site personnel, which furthered their concerns. This was exemplified in the words of one yoga instructor who shared, "I think the religion issue would've bubbled up but what happened is that people felt so blindsided and that we're hiding something. Because of that, it blew up more fear." Other yoga instructors agree that a longer implementation timeline would have made both the hiring process for instructors, and the program's integration into the school community happen much more smoothly.

The central office administrators acknowledge that the rapid startup of the yoga program at the onset of the school year created technical challenges for schools. According to these administrators, the accompanying research study beginning alongside the yoga program meant that district and school leaders encountered a number of moving parts and needed to problem solve to effectively begin the yoga program while also supporting the research study. Additional struggles at the school level included locating a physical space for yoga to take place, scheduling yoga classes for students, and managing the concerns select parents and community members shared. Such matters could have been handled better with more time and collaboration.

Recommendations. Stakeholders affirm that plans for the implementation of a new yoga program should be well thought-out and thoroughly reviewed. Ample time should be dedicated to logistical matters such as the hiring of yoga instructors, generating community buy-in, and school-site administrative matters. Further, the appropriate district and school personnel should collaborate to devise and carry out these plans.

Scheduling of Yoga Classes

As school districts plan and proceed to integrate a school or district wide yoga program, particular attention should be paid to the scheduling of yoga instruction. Throughout the 2012-2013 year in EUSD, the scheduling for yoga classes was not uniform across the district. The number of yoga classes per day, the number of times that each classroom went to yoga during a week, and the number of instructional minutes per class varied tremendously across the district. Table 1 on the following page depicts the average number of minutes that yoga instructors allotted to each grade level.

Table 1: Average Weekly Instructional Minutes by School and Grade³

School	Kinder	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth	Sixth	Average Instructional Minutes
1	17.7	19.8	20.0	20.0	22.0	22.0	21.3	20.4
2	29.3	29.2	29.2	30.0	30.0	30.0	30.0	34.0
3	22.0	33.8	26.8	35.0	45.0	38.8	31.3	33.2
4	60.0	60	60.0	60.0	70.0	70.0	70.0	64.0
5	35.0	46.3	42.5	31.3	40.0	32.5	40.0	38.0
6	58.6	50.0	27.1	34.4	40.0	37.5	48.0	42.2
7	38.0	38.6	40.0	40.0	32.5	37.5	37.5	37.7
8	25.0	41.8	43.0	31.3	42.3	40.0	40.0	37.6
9	30.0	60.0	60.0	60.0	60.0	60.0	30.0	51.4

Although no literature presently exists to recommend the appropriate number of yoga instructional minutes for students at any age level, stakeholders felt that yoga class times should remain consistent within a particular grade level at each school. In EUSD, yoga schedules stemmed from the time each school allocated to yoga. According to EUSD classroom teachers and yoga instructors, the allotment of the class times for yoga varied from class to class and from school to school causing issues with consistency. Yoga minutes per week ranged from 17.7 to 70 minutes, some classes went once a week to yoga and others went twice. In some cases, the extra sessions of yoga were given to whichever teachers were able to sign up for the time slot first. This left teachers feeling as though the process for scheduling yoga classes was unfair. One teacher expressed this widely held sentiment, “I think equity in that area would be nice too. Not everyone got a second [yoga class] and that is something that concerned a lot of people.”

Both classroom teachers and yoga instructors felt that the lack of consistency was a problem in terms of the number of minutes for each class. They explained that in the shorter yoga sessions, much of the allocated time was devoted to kids taking off and putting on their shoes, whereas longer class times meant there was enough time to go through a complete yoga practice. It should be noted that teachers’ perspectives on the right number of minutes per class and number of classes per week varied greatly, and teachers pointed out positives and negatives for multiple versions of yoga scheduling. As previously noted, some of this variation across sites is attributable to the amount of time each school made available for yoga. Additional factors such as transitioning to and from yoga class, classroom teachers’ adherence to the yoga schedule, yoga class administrative procedures, and other preferences also contribute to these differences.

³ An accounting of instructional minutes were provided by yoga instructors. Although times slots ranged from 20-45 minutes, yoga instructors removed minutes taken by transitional activities.

In EUSD, all schools have a rotational enrichment schedule (rotation) during select school days that allows students to move through specialized courses with subject-specific personnel. District leaders commented that scheduling yoga into rotation offered valuable opportunities for classroom teachers to collaborate during school. However, not all yoga classes took place during rotation, and rotation varied from one school to the next. This lack of consistency left a large variance of what teachers were able to do while their students were in the yoga classroom. In some cases, teachers were able to prep or collaborate with other teachers, while in other cases they were responsible for being in the yoga room during yoga instruction. This left teachers with different experiences with – and reactions to – the yoga program.

The variation in schedules is an integral topic that warrants further consideration according to stakeholders. Despite the lack of evidence for a recommended amount of instructional time for students at specific age levels, teachers and school leaders recommend schedules stay consistent within a school's grade level. Select principals shared they would recommend younger students attend shorter, more frequent yoga classes each week. Older, more mature students, they report, could benefit from longer yoga classes. However a school or district chooses to allocate yoga minutes, EUSD stakeholders recommend consistency within each school or district's grade levels.

Recommendations. A district policy should be adopted that sets a minimum amount of yoga time for each grade level, taking into consideration the various constraints and benefits of scheduling yoga in, or independent of, its rotation schedule.

School Level Organizational Logistics

Within most EUSD schools, one yoga instructor was hired to lead the yoga program for all K-6th grade students. Weekly, all yoga instructors would collectively meet with the district's Curriculum Developer and Assistant Superintendent to prepare for upcoming lessons and undergo professional development activities. These experiences were valuable learning opportunities for yoga instructors and participating district personnel, and many logistical challenges were discussed and potentially resolved during this weekly collaboration time.

During collaboration meetings and subsequent interviews, the yoga instructors voiced concerns regarding key organizational factors related to implementing the yoga program. In particular, the yoga instructors were concerned with the rooms that were provided for yoga. These concerns included having a room that was dedicated only to yoga where they can make the room more appealing and 'yoga-friendly.' Researchers observed yoga environments where instructors conducted class in the school's multipurpose room while other activities happened simultaneously within the same space. In one case, the yoga instructor used a microphone to be heard over the other voices in the room. Having an exclusive environment for yoga would remove distractions from the school community and allow students to better focus on their yoga practice.

Yoga instructors and classroom teachers shared concerns about the number of students in yoga classrooms. Researchers observed instances where two classes of approximately forty 6th grade students combined for yoga. Although these older students seemed able to complete their yoga

practice with the instructor predominantly remaining in the front of the class, the room was not large enough for students to comfortably move from one pose to the next. Students would bump into neighbors and need to readjust spacing on their mats to properly follow the yoga instructor's directions. For the yoga instructors, these large class sizes were an obstacle hindering their ability to work effectively with individual students. One classroom teacher who had observed a yoga class of younger students shared, "it feels like there's just a lot of kids for the one teacher. And I sometimes even wonder if they are doing yoga. Like if they are just... some are rolling around and some aren't really stretching... I didn't feel like the teacher was able to go around and help."

An additional concern among the yoga instructors was that the workload was too much for them. In particular, these instructors noted too many classes to teach each day, too large of class sizes for yoga instruction, and too many other duties on campus. Teachers shared that they were 'overwhelmed' and 'exhausted' due to these issues. One teacher shared her own personal struggles with the organization of the yoga program: "Here I am with hundreds of students and just one teacher. I am exhausted. My health has suffered, and my yoga practice has suffered." Yoga instructors noted many of these concerns could have been addressed through the hiring process. Many of these instructors felt 'left out' in the sense that they were not provided expectations, descriptions, or clarity for their job up-front and thus were pushed and pulled in many directions with their schedules. In addition, these instructors struggled to find the place where they fit into the district, as one yoga instructor explained in the interview:

Some pieces fall under the district, some pieces fall under the Sonima Foundation. We don't officially work for either. So we work for [a separate hiring agency], which, I mean they do their best job, but really like a lot of times you ask them for something and they're like, 'Oh, it's the district,' or 'Well, let me ask the Sonima Foundation.

According to central office administrators, these 'human resource' concerns were an area of emphasis to consider for future implementation of yoga programs.

Recommendations. Organizational logistics at each EUSD school varied throughout year one due to the compacted implementation process. Because schools varied in structure, staffing, and student population, yoga instruction varied from one school to the next. Though many of these are uncontrollable, districts should consider and uphold the following to ensure a worthwhile student experience:

- **Yoga Space:** Yoga should be taught in dedicated spaces, away from distractions and large enough to accommodate the groups of students that will practice in them;
- **Scheduling:** The relationship between class size and the yoga space should be considered during the scheduling process;
- **Instructor Demands:** Yoga instructor schedules should consider the physical, emotional and temporal demands of teaching yoga to large groups of youths; and,
- **Instructor Accountability:** Yoga instructor accountability measures should be articulated to instructors prior to the start of their contract.

Curriculum Alignment/Professional Development

In EUSD, the creation of a yoga curriculum began during year one based on the framework of the Ashtanga yoga practice. The yoga instructors collaborated with the district's curriculum developer throughout the year to write the K-6th grade yoga curriculum. The curriculum emulates the basic flow of an Ashtanga class. EUSD yoga sessions open with a *Focus* sequence, transition to a *Move* sequence connecting breath with movement, and close with a *Relax* sequence. Aside from those three overarching principles, yoga instruction varied from one EUSD school to the next throughout the implementation year.

In EUSD, yoga instructors were the only observed stakeholders to question the consistency of their yoga instruction. Debates over the correct approach for yoga instruction took place within the focus group interviews. For some of the instructors, there was an interest in having more consistent and structured yoga practice across the district. Others were frustrated with the curriculum and felt there was a need for greater freedom and choice in what they taught in their yoga classes. The yoga instructors agreed sessions should begin with a focus on breathing and end with a focus on relaxing. However, according to the instructors, what they taught during the *Move* section differed from school to school. As one instructor explained, "I'll just make sure I do my opening and my closing and get what I can done in the middle." Other instructors echoed this sentiment. Little evidence for the articulation of instructional expectations from the district, private hiring agency, or the Sonima Foundation were disseminated to yoga instructors as the curriculum was being written. In essence, the pilot yoga curriculum was a draft framework that yoga instructors piloted in classes. Instructors would then share with the others how their teaching varied from the drafted lesson in order to produce a final lesson. In practice, beyond the draft framework, yoga instructors were free to take each session where they saw fit.

There were different opinions among the instructors about the amount of content to cover in each session. Many felt the curriculum expected them to get through too many poses in too short of a time. One instructor shared, "I gotta get all these poses because we're so behind, instead of really focusing on, let's attempt to – not master – but lightly master." Many added they had to rush through poses, which did not allow students enough time to master and truly learn the poses. The preference among instructors was for depth over breadth. They felt teaching fewer poses more deeply provided the best yoga experience for children. However, due to the speed and breadth of the curriculum, instructors were trying to implement new poses before mastering the old ones. One instructor explained her students' experience with the curriculum, "Maybe they learned it one time and then it doesn't get revisited until five weeks later. And then all of a sudden we're expecting them to know it, but they did it one class and it was a long time ago." Many of the instructors voiced an interest in more structure, fewer poses and more repetition as the "repetition proves to be really successful in their bodies and in their minds and self-mastery, and [that is] what our goal is."

Recommendations. Districts should take both instructional pedagogy and available time for yoga into consideration when designing their yoga program to assure students get the most out of their yoga experience.

Connection to Physical Education

The undefined relationship between yoga classes and Physical Education (PE) was a point of contention among study participants. Through teacher interviews, teachers expression confusion about how yoga fit into their physical education program. Many of the teachers pointed out that yoga was supposed to be a complement to PE that students normally would receive during the school day. One teacher explained her theory, "...karate was more strength, yoga was stretching, [in PE] the ball skills and then ten minutes of cardio." The teacher envisioned this was the intended health and wellness design because no guidance related to the connection of yoga and PE appeared to have been communicated to teachers. During a well-attended board meeting, yoga's connection to PE standards was communicated to the board and attending community, but teachers did not appear to have received the same information, nor did they appear to understand how to appropriately distribute PE minutes throughout the week.

The relationship between time in yoga and time allocated to PE varied across district schools and within school sites where it depended on each classroom teacher. Some teachers reported feeling that yoga counted for a portion of the state-mandated 200 minutes of PE every ten school days while others were under the impression that yoga did not count in these minutes. Among some sites, yoga was considered "supplemental" to PE, while at others it was considered PE. In some cases, teachers and students felt yoga was taking away from their PE time. As one teacher explained,

My kids have no idea that yoga is considered PE. They are like 'when are we doing PE,' well we did your yoga this morning, that is considered our PE for the day, 'well that's not PE, that's not what we like to do.' They want to play games. They don't really relate [yoga to PE].

There was a lack of clarity for teachers and principals as to what the 'right' answer was on this relationship between PE minutes and yoga. This left teachers worried about taking too much time away from academics if they didn't count yoga in the PE minutes, and yet concerned that their kids were "getting less physical time" because of yoga.

Recommendations. Although there is a clear connection between yoga and the physical education standards established in most states, EUSD school sites and teachers were not clear how to incorporate yoga into the school day, and how yoga and PE should relate. Future yoga districts should ensure a policy on the connection between yoga and PE is documented and communicated to school and district personnel.⁴

Opt-out Alternatives

The final major theme to emerge from the study was a lack of district-wide protocols for how to support students who wanted to opt-out of yoga. This was an area of great debate, confusion, and criticism for principals, classroom teachers, and parents. Although it was widely believed

⁴ Although EUSD teachers that were interviewed felt that yoga should supplement PE, that point of view could vary from one district to the next and should be contemplated by the district's leadership team.

that opt-outs took place for religious reasons, as participants shared, opt-outs occurred for other reasons such as the child not liking yoga, the child wanting to do other forms of PE, or the parent wanting the child to get more academic time. Parents expressed frustration regarding the lack of a district-wide protocol for handling student opt-out situations. Across the district and even within school sites, parents reported receiving various options and responses for opting their children out of yoga. One variation reported was that students were able to opt-out at some schools, but in other schools children and families were told they could not opt-out. For children who did opt-out, the options for other activities differed greatly, including being allowed to leave school, go to “traditional PE” classes, stay in the academic classroom with their teacher for extra academic work, or double up on other rotational activities (e.g. science, art, music, library).

According to the principals who participated in interviews, the opt-out options were left up to them or the individual classroom teacher to design. Most principals shared that when parents were concerned with yoga and wanted to opt-out, they would meet with them and try to provide more information about yoga to the parents as well as to invite them to observe the yoga classes for themselves. Some classroom teachers reported feeling uninformed about the opt-out process and were not provided information on other options for the children. In other cases, opt-out instructions were mandated to teachers making their interactions with parents difficult. Interviewed parents who had opted their children out of yoga seemed satisfied with the options they were provided, but questioned the “fairness” of allowing kids to opt-out of yoga without a district policy.

Recommendations. Determining how to handle the opt-out process is an important consideration in the establishment of a yoga program. To do this, stakeholders must consider the following:

- Districts first need to decide if permitting children and families to opt out of yoga is necessary or “fair” given the community’s attitude toward yoga.
- If a district decides to provide the option to opt-out of yoga, the process must be uniform throughout the district and communicated to parents.

Without a district-wide protocol for handling opting-out of yoga, the entire process can be left open to questions and debates over equity and equality. To counteract this occurrence, school and district leaders should adopt a policy that all schools will follow.

Conclusion

With the proper method of implementation, a yoga program may provide students with opportunities to enhance their physical and mental wellness. The Encinitas Union School District (EUSD) served the educational community by implementing its yoga program during the 2012-2013 year. During this process, EUSD reached a number of programmatic milestones that other districts could replicate and expand upon. Although challenges occurred during this first year in EUSD, this program lays the foundation for other districts interested in yoga.

During this implementation year, CEPAL researchers identified seven implementation challenges that have been articulated in this report. While each of these challenges represents an important issue in the implementation of a new program, two of them are paramount. Clear communication with all stakeholders and a well thought-out implementation plan are foundational to the rest. A number of these issues could have been minimized had EUSD openly communicated their vision and been able to slow down the implementation process. The degree to which EUSD was facing internal and external pressure to implement yoga cannot be overemphasized. By getting the yoga program instated, EUSD has provided the blueprint from which future district yoga programs can be built. This document and the year one report on program effects serve as evidence of EUSD and the Sonima Foundation's commitment to understand the effects of yoga in school communities.