Purpose, Place and Possibility: Elevating Physical Education Through Alternative Environments

MTS PD Day

October 24th, 2025

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Brock University

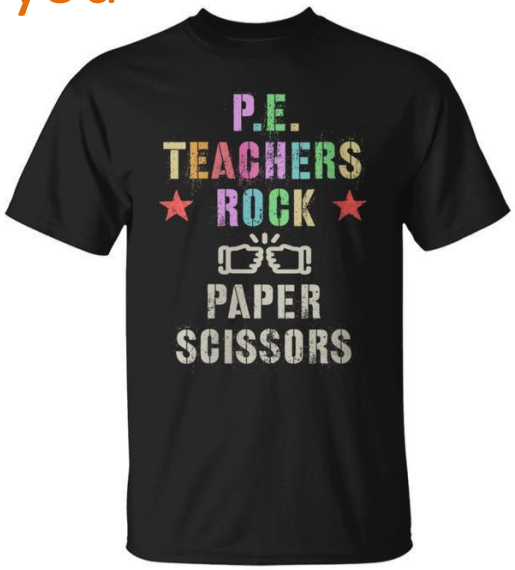
Acknowledging Where I Work

Brock University is located on the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe peoples. This territory remains the home to numerous First Nations, Metis, and Inuit peoples, many of whom continue to live and work there today and acknowledging this reminds us that our standard of living is directly related to the resources and friendship of Indigenous people.

Brock University

Strategies for a Successful Keynote?

- Lots of preparation…
- Start with something to engage and grab the audience's attention (its coming)
- Know your audience and make sure you cater to their interests
- Have a clear point and take-home message



Arithmatic & Jets Fun – Perfect for PE Teachers

- Pick a jersey number of any Winnipeg Jets player
- Add to your number the Jets Player # who holds Team Record for most assists in a single season?
  - **#26** Blake Wheeler (71 assists in 2018-2019)
- Add the Jets player # who had most assists last season?
  - **#81** Kyle Connor (56)
- Subtract the number of wins Jets had in first year these players were on roster together (2016-2017) (**40** wins)
- Subtract your original number - Answer is?

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Who Am I?

- **Place, Name, Intention**
  - **Place = Canadian**
    - Completed BEd and Masters degree in Southern Ontario and taught PE there
    - PhD – Secondary Physical Education (University of Alberta)
    - University of Winnipeg (10 years)
    - Presently at Brock University (5 years)
  - **Names = Nathan, Nate, Dr.NateDawg, Dad**
  - **Intention = Share perspective; Encourage thought**

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Purpose, Place, & Possibility

- Purpose – to reflect on current PE practices and trends
- Place – consider the places/spaces PE experiences are currently provided
- Possibility – encourage contemplation of what is realistic with respect to including Alternative Environment Activities (AEAs) in PE and what this could lead to

P S I A

What are AEAs?

Alternative Environment Activities (AEAs) are physical activities in a PE program done outside typical gymnasium, fitness facility, or playing field settings

Not Outdoor Education!

P S I A

What are AEAs?

Some Commonly Known Examples of AEAs Canadians Participate In

- Ice Hockey
- Skating
- Swimming
- Walking/Hiking
- Snow shoeing
- Rock Climbing/Rappelling
- Canoeing/Kayaking
- Biking (Mountain/Road)
- Sailing/Boating
- Stand Up Paddle Board
- Skiing (X-country / Downhill)
- Snow Boarding
- Golf
- Horseback Riding
- Beach V-Ball
- Fishing

P S I A

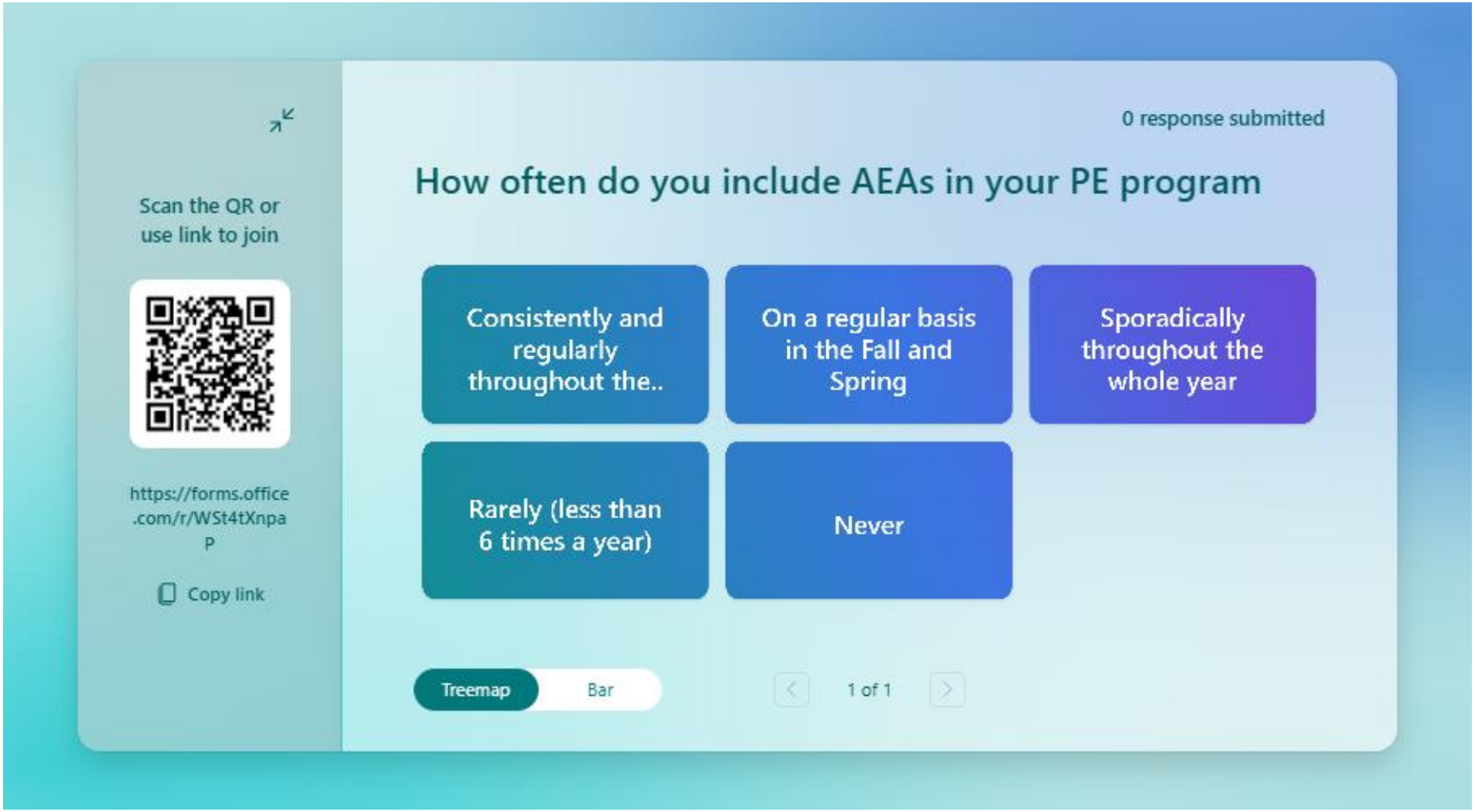
What are AEAs?

Some Lesser Known Examples of AEAs Canadians Participate In

- Animal Watching
- Rappelling
- Skydiving/Bungee Jumping
- ATV/Dirt Bike
- Sledding & Dog Sledding
- Spelunking/Caving
- Water Skiing/Wake Board
- Rowing/Dragon boating
- Disc Golf
- Slacklining
- Surfing
- Orienteering
- Geo-caching
- Archery
- Wind surfing & Kite Surfing
- Snorkeling and Scuba

P S I A A

Tally the Audience



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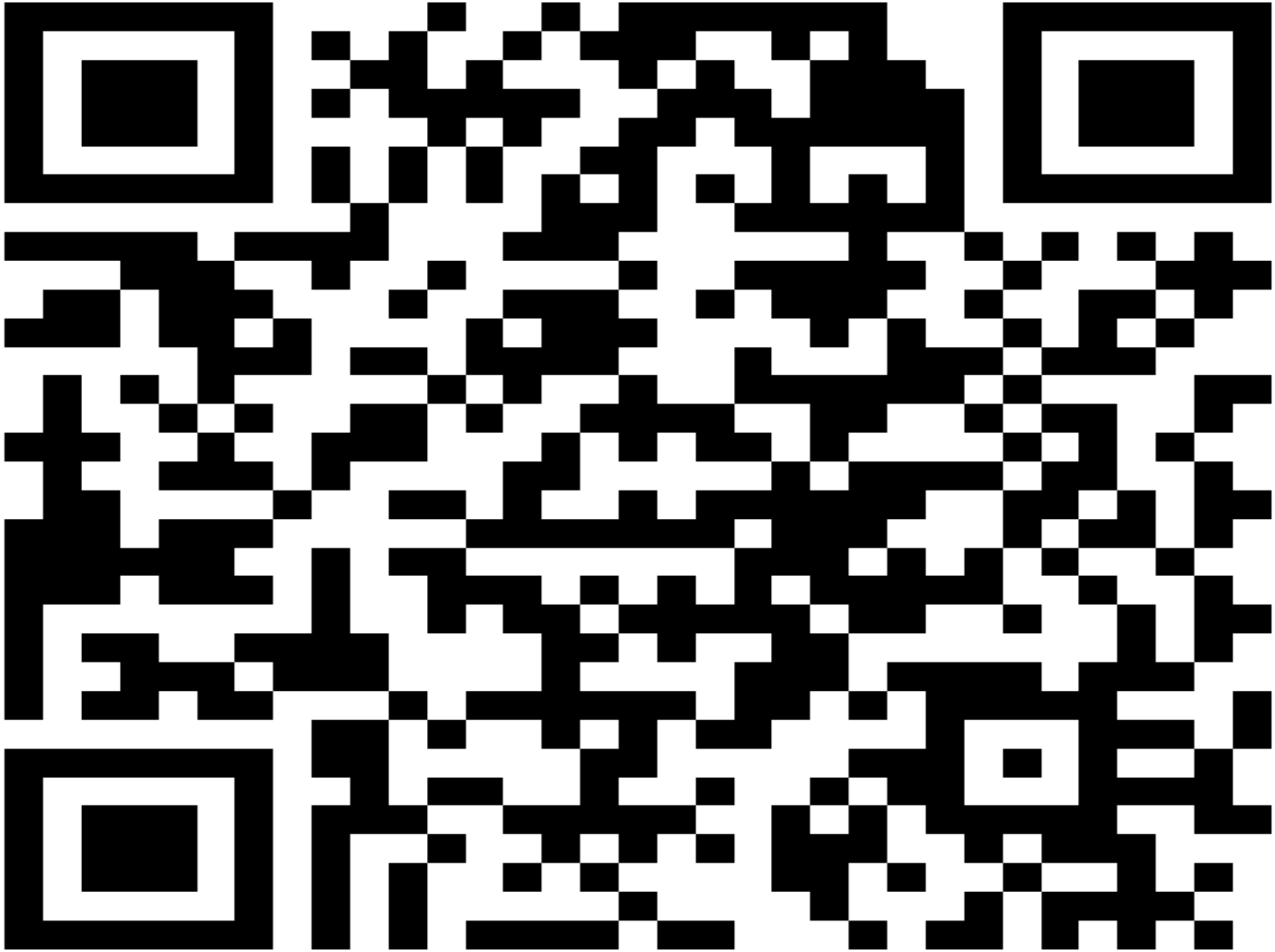

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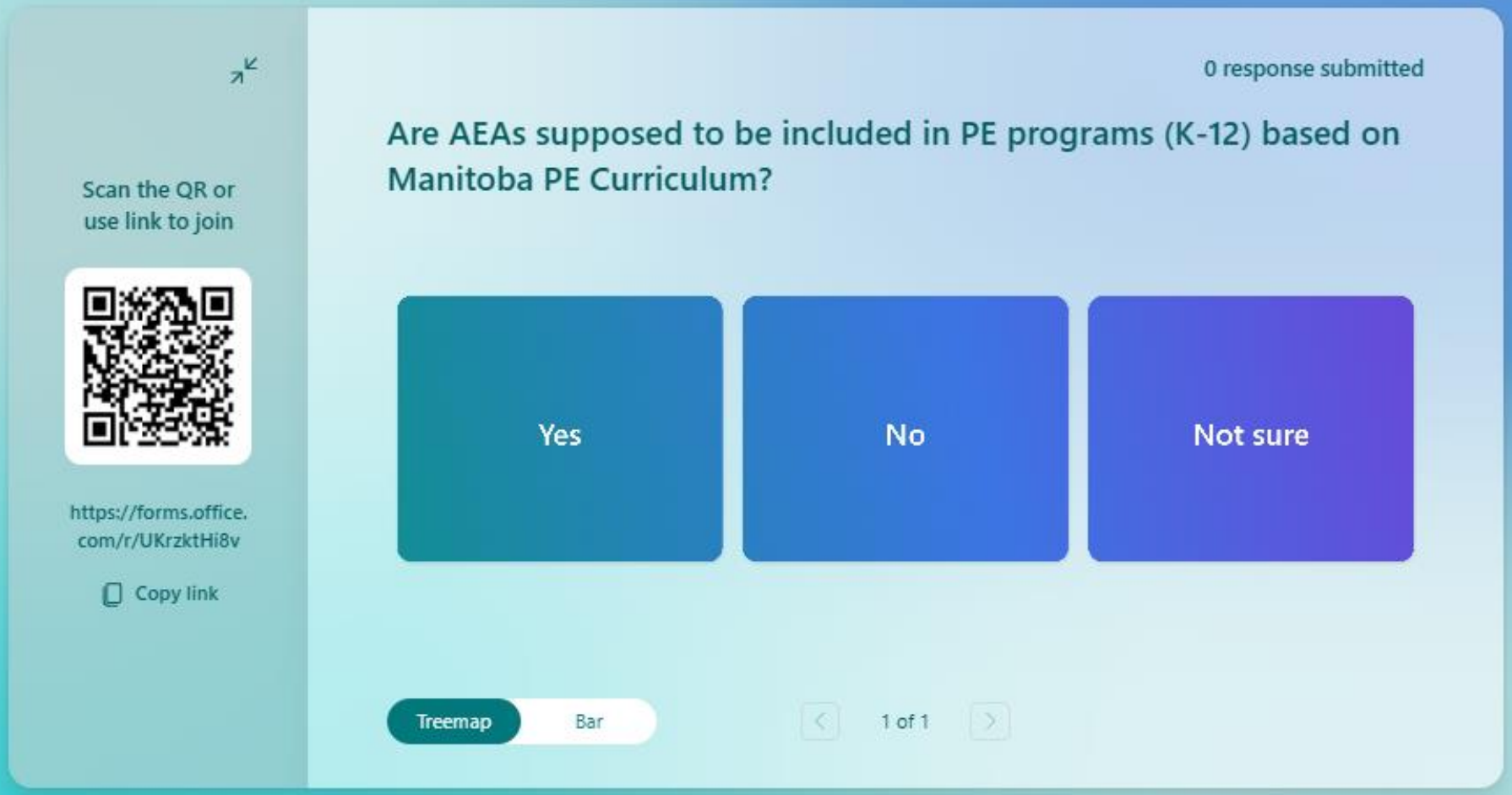
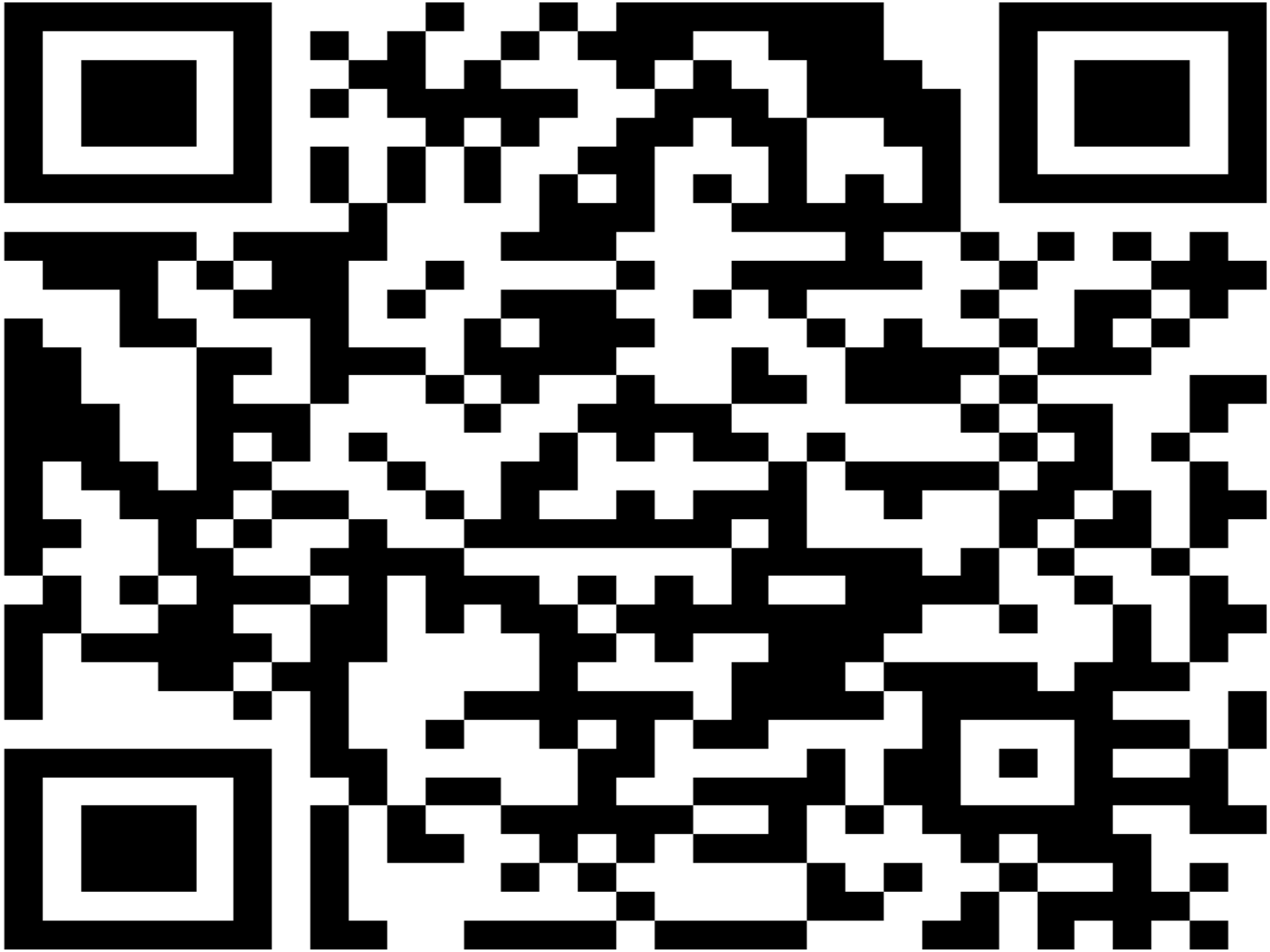


P S I A A T



Curriculum & AEAs

- Recommendations and/or requirements for including AEAs in all PHE curriculum documents in Canada (Kilborn et al., 2016)

Manitoba PE Curriculum

	Strand Letter	Strand	Sub-Strands
Knowledge	*A*	Basic Movement	1. Basic Movement Skills
	B	Movement Development	1. Skill Development Process 2. Mechanical Principles of Human Movement 3. Movement Concepts
	C	Activity-Specific Movement	1. Rules 2. Terminology 3. Game Strategies 4. Teamwork and Fair Play
Skills	*A*	Acquisition of Movement Skills	1. Transport 2. Manipulation 3. Balance
	B	Application of Movement Skills to Sport/Games	1. Individual/Dual Activities 2. Group/Team Activities 3. Officiating Skills
	C	Application of Movement Skills to Alternative Pursuits	1. Alternative Pursuits
	D	Application of Movement Skills to Rhythmic/Gymnastic Activities	1. Rhythmic Activities 2. Gymnastic-type Activities

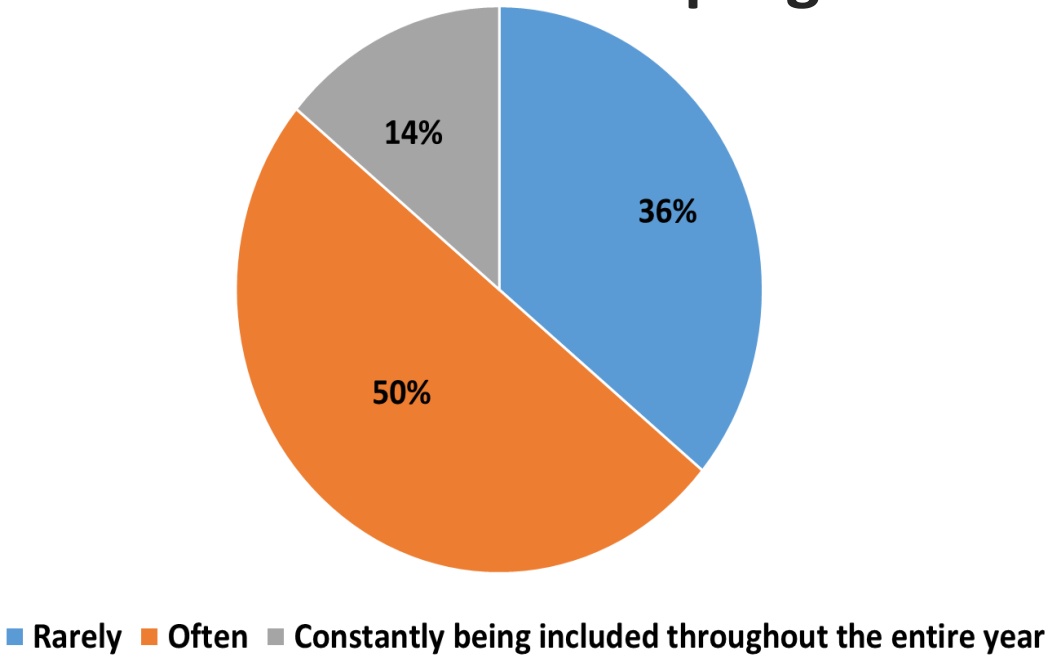
P S I A C A T

Teacher Embracement of AEAs

- On-line survey of 225 PHE teachers from AB & MB

(Hall et al., 2021)

Inclusion of AEAs in PE programs



*** 25% of the participants were unware of curricular requirements to include AEAs**

P S I A E C A T

Narrative Foundation

STORY

TIME

Recognize what <u>is</u> possible…
Acknowledge what <u>is</u> realistic…

P S I A E C A T N

Recognize what is possible…

- PE Teachers in MB work incredibly hard, have vast support from admin, lots of funding, great access to facilities, and they have time to know and deliver on all aspects of the curriculum.

Acknowledge what is realistic…

- PE Teachers in MB work incredibly hard, but have minimal admin support & funding, are stretched thin and therefore deliver a program that works within their capabilities and comfort zones while satisfying personal beliefs regarding required outcomes of PE (e.g., students participate; students are physically active).

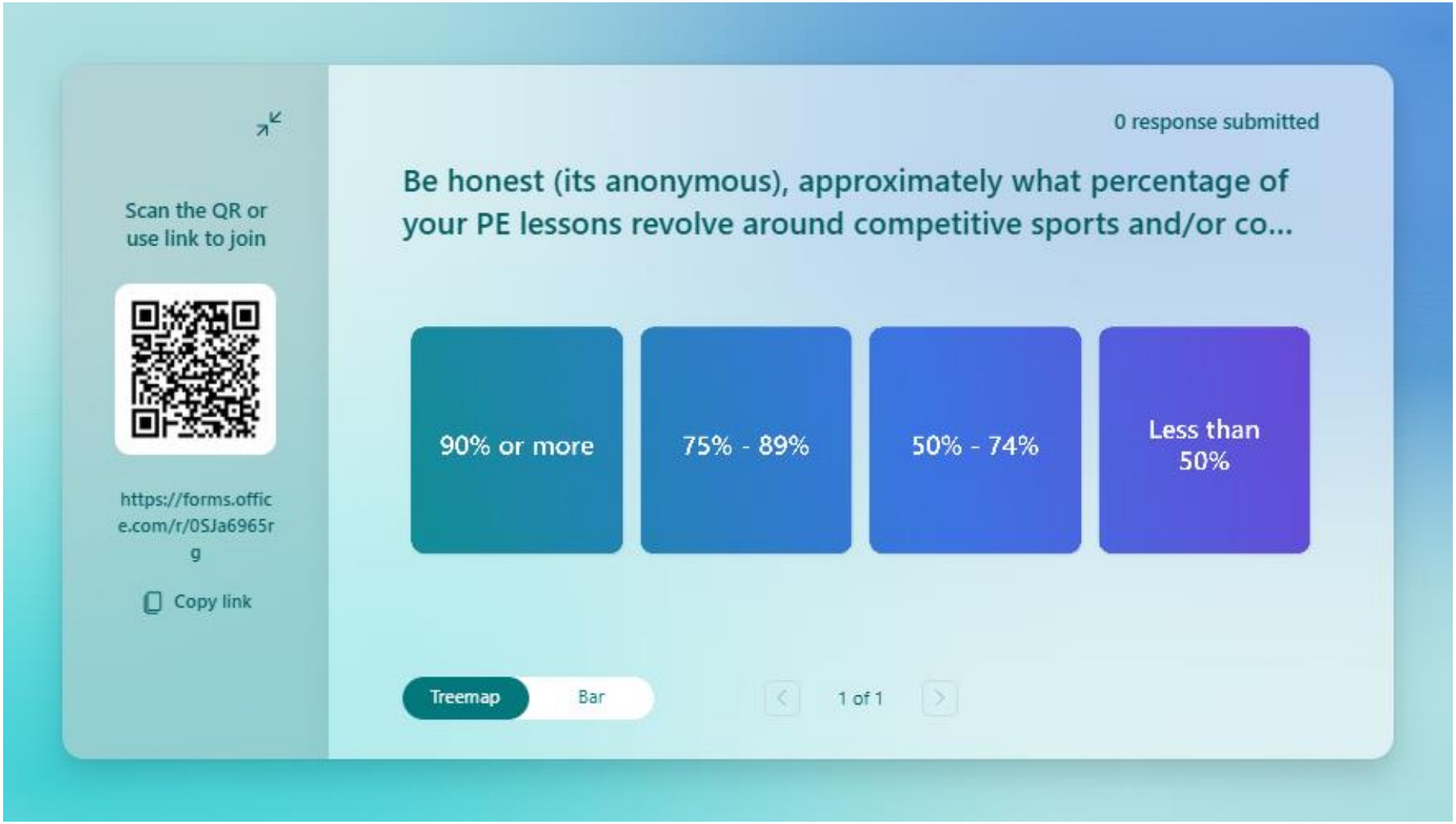
Current Reality of PE in North America

- As grade levels increase, student enrollment in PE decreases (Hobin et al., 2010)
  - Students express reluctance to enroll in PE (Barney et al., 2015)
  - Experiencing failure in a physical activity can deter students' continued participation in PE (Bernstein et al., 2011)
- Negative social dynamics (e.g., bullying or aggressive behavior) can emerge in an overly competitive environment, impacting overall atmosphere of PE (Wei et al., 2023)

Current Reality of PE in North America

- Excessive sport focus in PE has resulted in decline in enjoyment and participation levels (Banville et al., 2021)
- *When sports dominate PE, students who may not excel in traditional athletic settings or who have physical limitations risk being excluded (O'Connor et al., 2024)*
- Overemphasizing competitive sports can sometimes overshadow PE's core purpose: to develop movement competence, educate, and establish a foundation for lifelong physical activity (Piggins, 2020)

Tally the Audience



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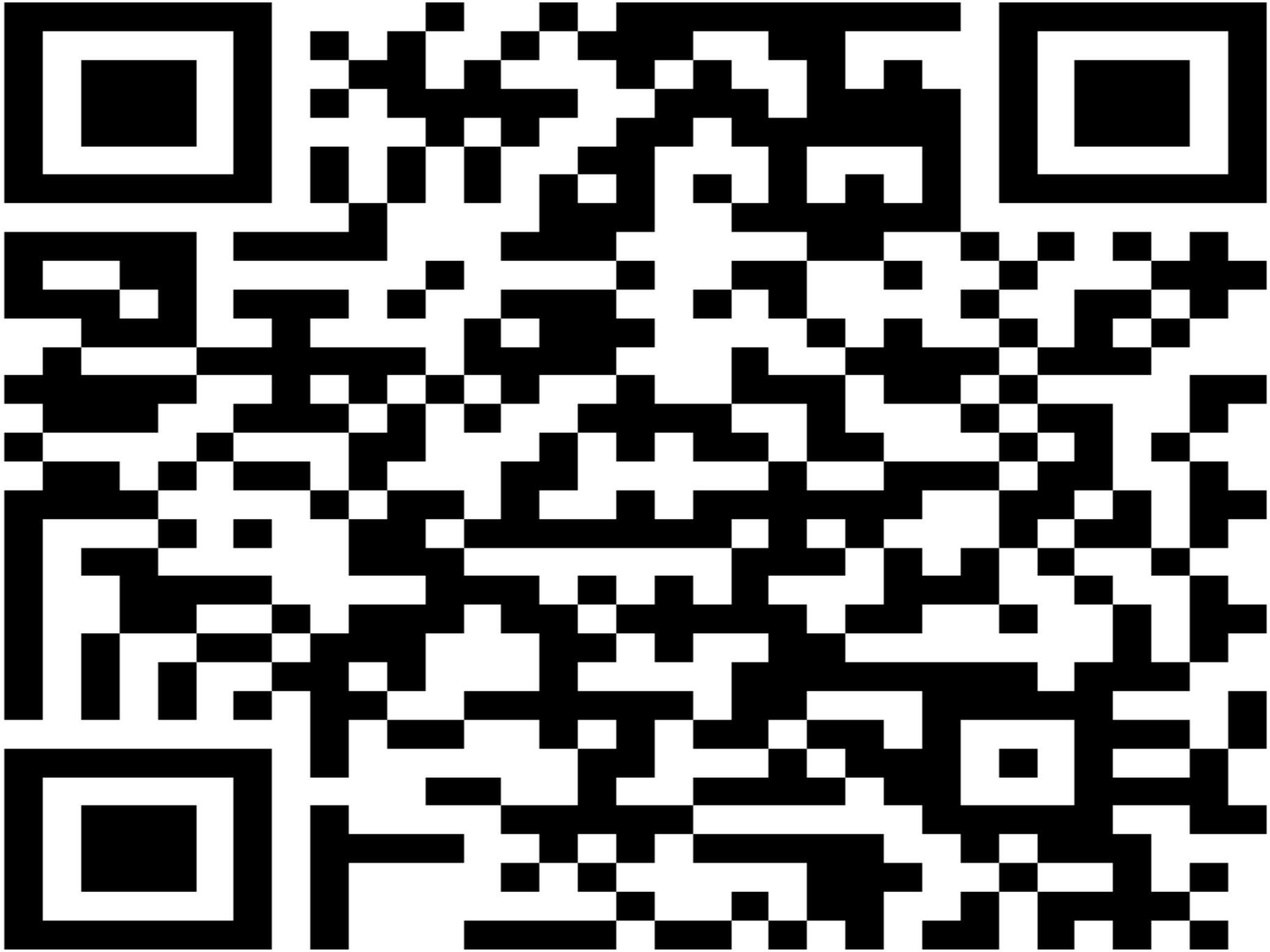

Recognize what is possible…

- Students could learn all desired outcomes through playing sport, and be motivated to be active for life
- Majority of students will enjoy competitive activities

Acknowledge what is realistic…

- Very difficult to reach all curriculum outcomes using competitive sport and competitive games
- Majority of students either will not enjoy competitive sports and games, or have done these so often in previous years that they struggle to find value
- Many students will lose confidence and motivation to participate in physical activities beyond PE

Addressing the Issue

- Aligning with adult activity habits makes sense (Ham et al, 2009)
  - Less opportunities, ability, & access to competitive sports (especially team sports) as we age
  - Adults drawn to individual physical activities and those in easily accessible environments (e.g., cycling; hiking; fitness; gardening; golf; yoga) (Dai et al., 2015)
  - Less likely to hinder long-term PA participation (Bernstein et al., 2011)
- More balance is needed
- AEAs can help address the issue

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Logic to Support Increased Inclusion of AEAs in PE

- Common part of our day to day lives
- Easily accessible (all ages)
- Health benefits to being outdoors
- Teaches comfort in these settings
- Educational (beyond PHE)

(Hall et al., 2022)

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Data to Support Increased Inclusion of AEAs in PE

- 35% more steps when PE is outdoors
- Kuehnen & Hall (in-press)
  - Interviewed 13 University students who experienced AEAs across their elementary and secondary PE
  - All felt AEAs are positive (fun; new experiences)
  - Prefer AEAs done outside and “escaping the gymnasium”
  - See value in AEAs because they introduce and promote PA outside of PE, and connect to outdoors/nature

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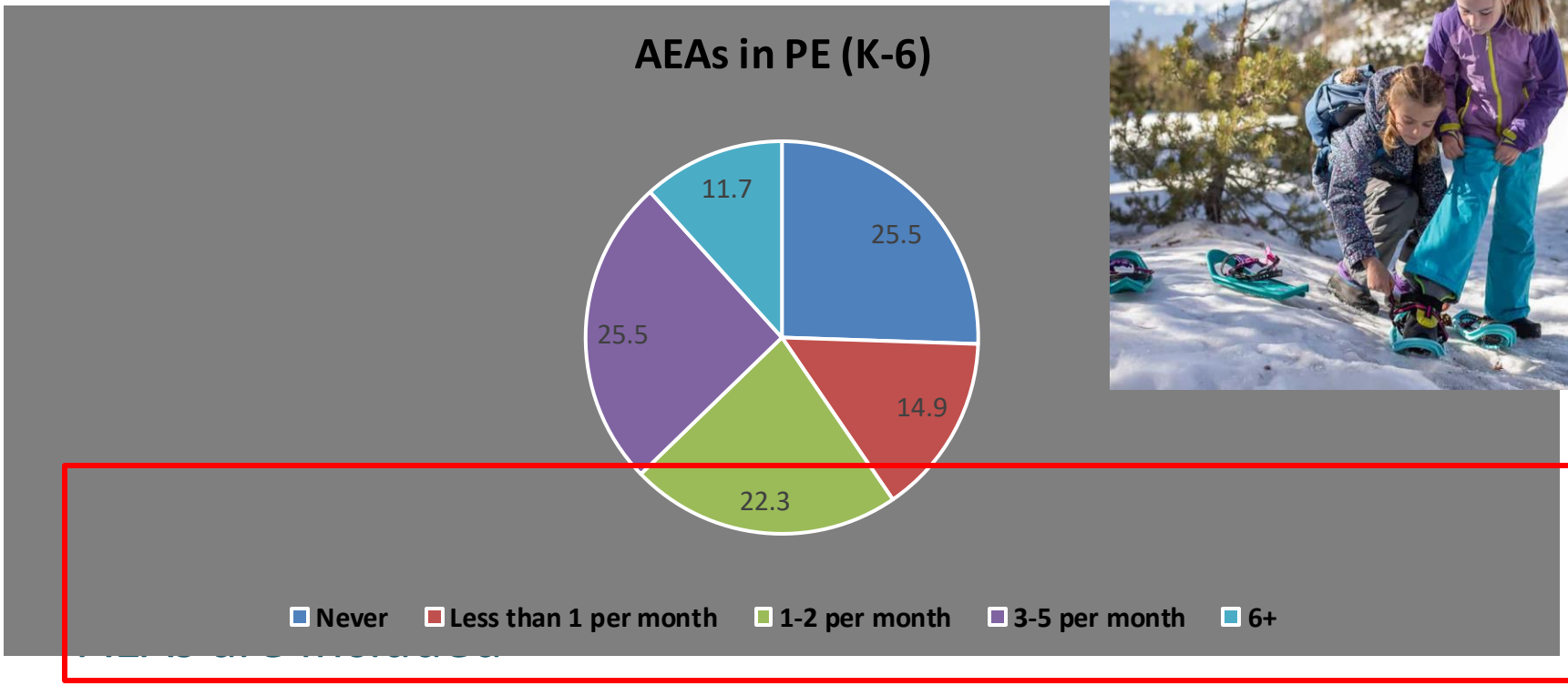
Data to Support Increased Inclusion of AEAs in PE

- Rohr & Hall (sneak peek) (Thesis data)



Recognize what is possible…

- Create total balance to your PE program with respect to sports, fitness, rhythmic activities, and AEAs.

Acknowledge what is realistic…

- Elevating your PE program by making a conscious effort to avoid or reduce (even if just a little) overemphasis on competitive sport
- Find ways to escape the gym a bit more often

P S I C A L E D C A T I N

Tally the Audience

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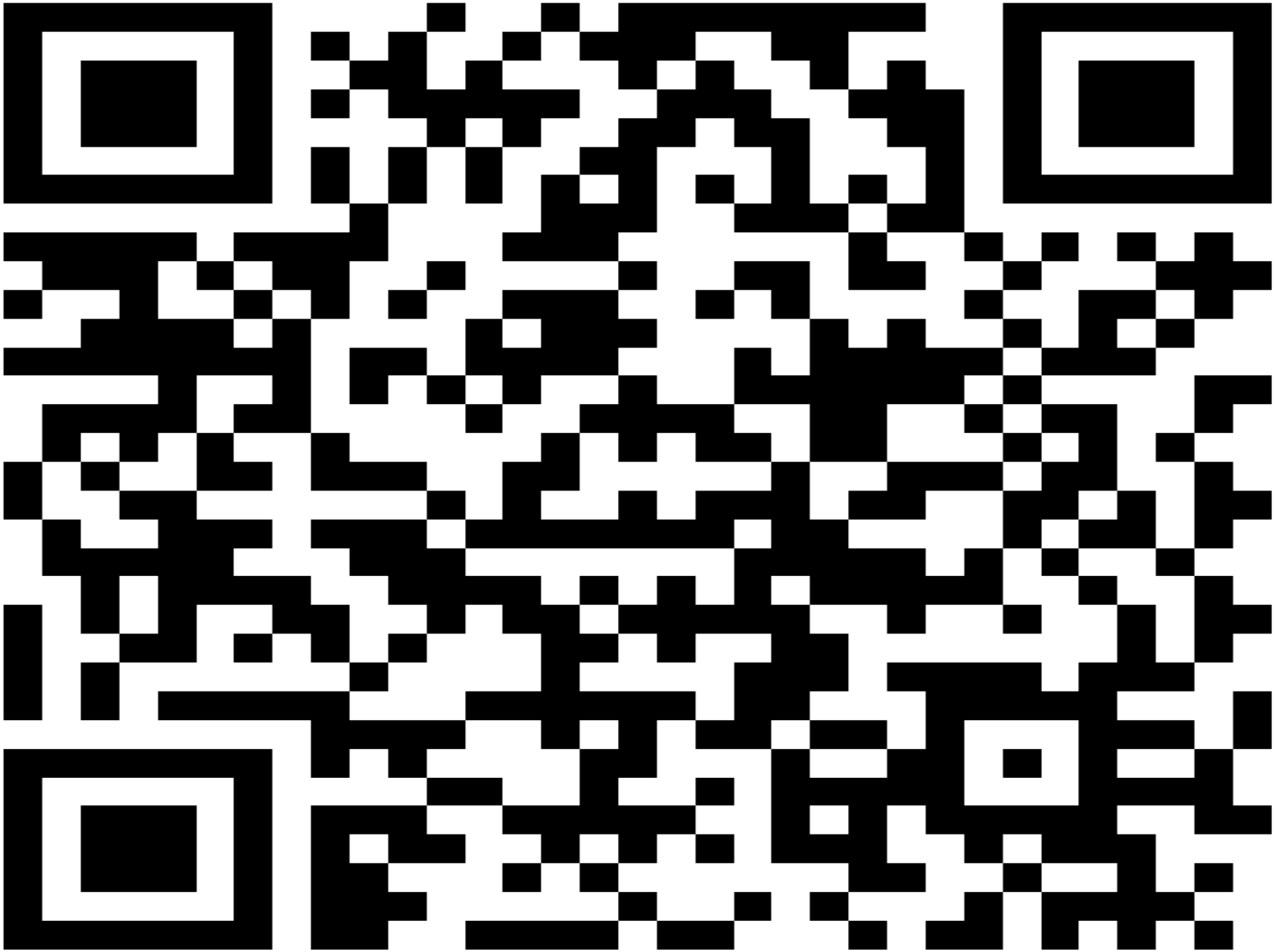
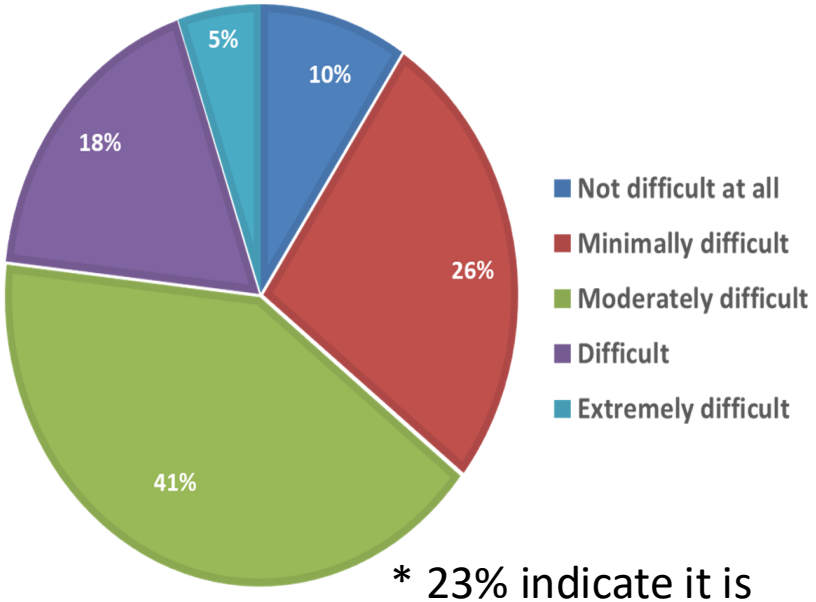


Overcoming Obstacles

General Strategies to Make Inclusion of AEAs Easier

- search for AEAs that require minimal or no associated costs, transportation requirements, and/or special equipment, and are low risk (e.g., hiking, disc golf, gardening, string orienteering)
- discover ways to share related costs for AEA 'specialized' equipment between schools (e.g., archery sets, snow shoes)

Perceived Difficulty of Including AEAs in a PE Program



* 23% indicate it is difficult or extremely difficult

Overcoming Obstacles

General Strategies to Make Inclusion of AEAs Easier

- develop relationships with external organizations (e.g., paddling organizations, curling associations) that can deliver equipment to schools dissolving any transportation costs (e.g., inline skating, skateboarding)
- work with admin and other teachers to create longer periods (e.g., double periods, into breaks, cross curricular classes)

History & Humble Beginnings

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You Got This!

- It is possible to entirely rebuild a PE program to achieve balance, provide meaningful experiences & consequently benefit all students.
- It is also possible you already have such a program. Well done! Keep it up!
- Reality is… even small adjustments towards more balance will elevate your PE program.
- Research shows embracing AEAs = a great start!

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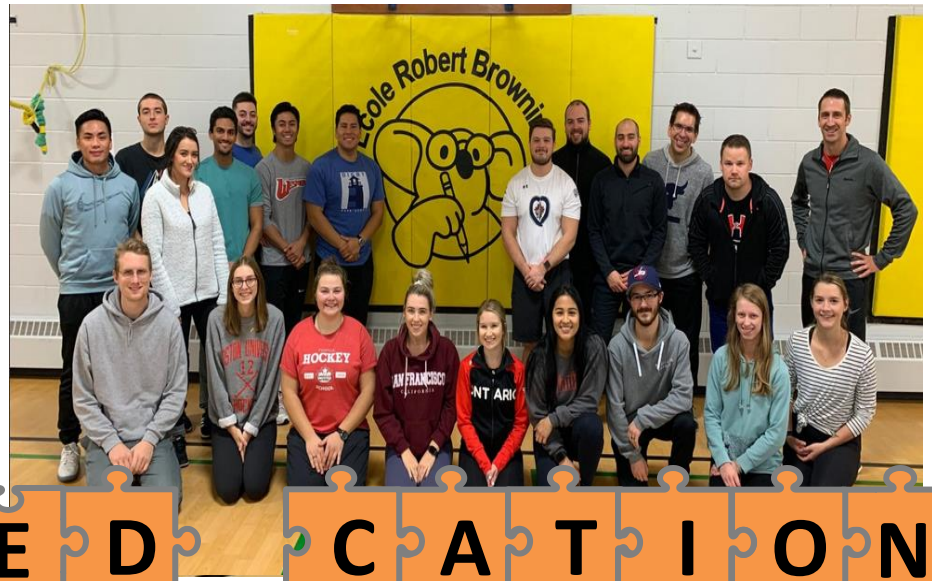
Acknowledgements:

- My students from when I was there!



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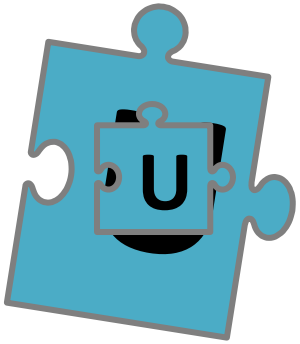

for Listening & PHE MB for this Honor!

PHYSICAL ED CATION

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