



# STATE OF PLAY HARLEM

ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

THE ASPEN INSTITUTE  
**PROJECT PLAY**  
REIMAGINING YOUTH SPORTS IN AMERICA



# STATE OF PLAY HARLEM

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**Mount  
Sinai**



**HARRIS FAMILY  
CHARITABLE FOUNDATION**

*The Aspen Institute thanks Mount Sinai Health System, Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund, and the Harris Family Charitable Foundation for their support of this report and Project Play: Harlem*

## THE VISION

An East Harlem in which all children have the opportunity to be active through sports

## WELCOME

East Harlem is a historic community, rooted in a culture of strong collaboration and action, ranging from innovation in youth development through sports and family engagement to confronting disparate public health barriers associated with dense urban areas faced with historical disinvestment and inequity.

Working with local leaders, the Aspen Institute aims to help stakeholders build healthier children and neighborhoods through sports. The specific focus of Project Play: Harlem is a three-square mile area in East Harlem (see map on page 4), where the Mount Sinai Health System, Harris Family Charitable Foundation, and Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund have partnered with the Aspen Institute in an effort to improve youth wellness through increased access to and participation in quality sport programs.

This report offers an assessment of the current state of play for kids and sports in the area. Our work is anchored in the notion that all stakeholders will benefit if all youth are provided access to a quality sport experience. We know this from the body of research that has emerged over the past decade establishing the myriad benefits of physical activity. It's associated with greater cognitive function, positive mental health, better educational outcomes, and lower health-care costs in adulthood. A virtuous cycle gets unleashed, especially if children can be engaged in regular sport and physical activity before age 12.

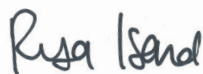
The Sports & Society Program of the Aspen Institute produced this State of Play report, analyzing sport programs and facilities in East Harlem through the eight strategic filters (“plays”) highlighted in our seminal 2015 report, *Sport for All, Play for Life: A Playbook to Get Every Kid in the Game*. Guiding our findings and work are the Project Play: Harlem Youth Leadership Council and an Advisory Group consisting of local leaders across several key sectors.

We hope the report informs short- and long-term community strategies related to the broad spectrum of sport opportunities for youth (through age 17), and serves as a tool for organizations to develop new partnerships and programs. New York City has a long history of pioneering in this area, having introduced the school sports model and Playground Movement more than a century ago. We celebrate the drive of East Harlem stakeholders to mobilize and improve the lives of youth. We encourage you to seize the opportunity to continue this tradition through the power of sports.

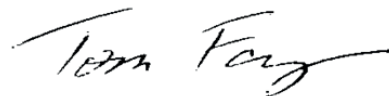
Sincerely,



Ranya Bautista  
Project Play: Harlem, Sports & Society  
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Risa Isard  
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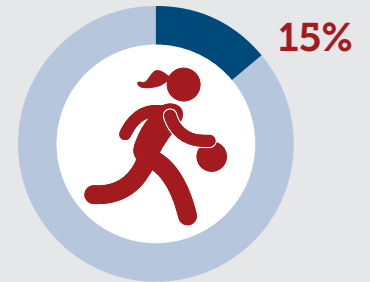
# THE STATE OF PLAY IN EAST HARLEM

# SCOREBOARD

Among high school students, according to the New York City Department of Health's Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Study (2015): East and Central Harlem Neighborhood Health Action Centers

## ON THE WHOLE, FEW YOUTH ARE ACTIVE ENOUGH

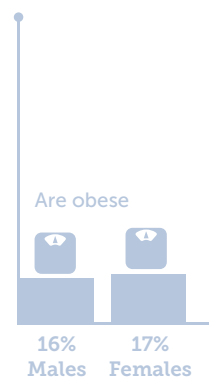
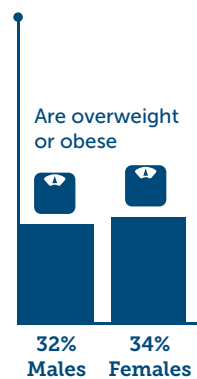
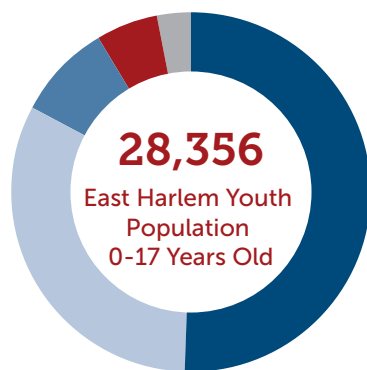
Only **24% of males** and **15% of females** met the CDC's recommendation of 60 minutes of physical activity daily\*



\*As compared to citywide (26% of males and 16% of females) and national (36% of males and 17% of females) rates of youth who meet the CDC recommendation for physical activity.

## THE STATE OF YOUTH

The need for positive sport activity is great, as many of the area's youth face challenges

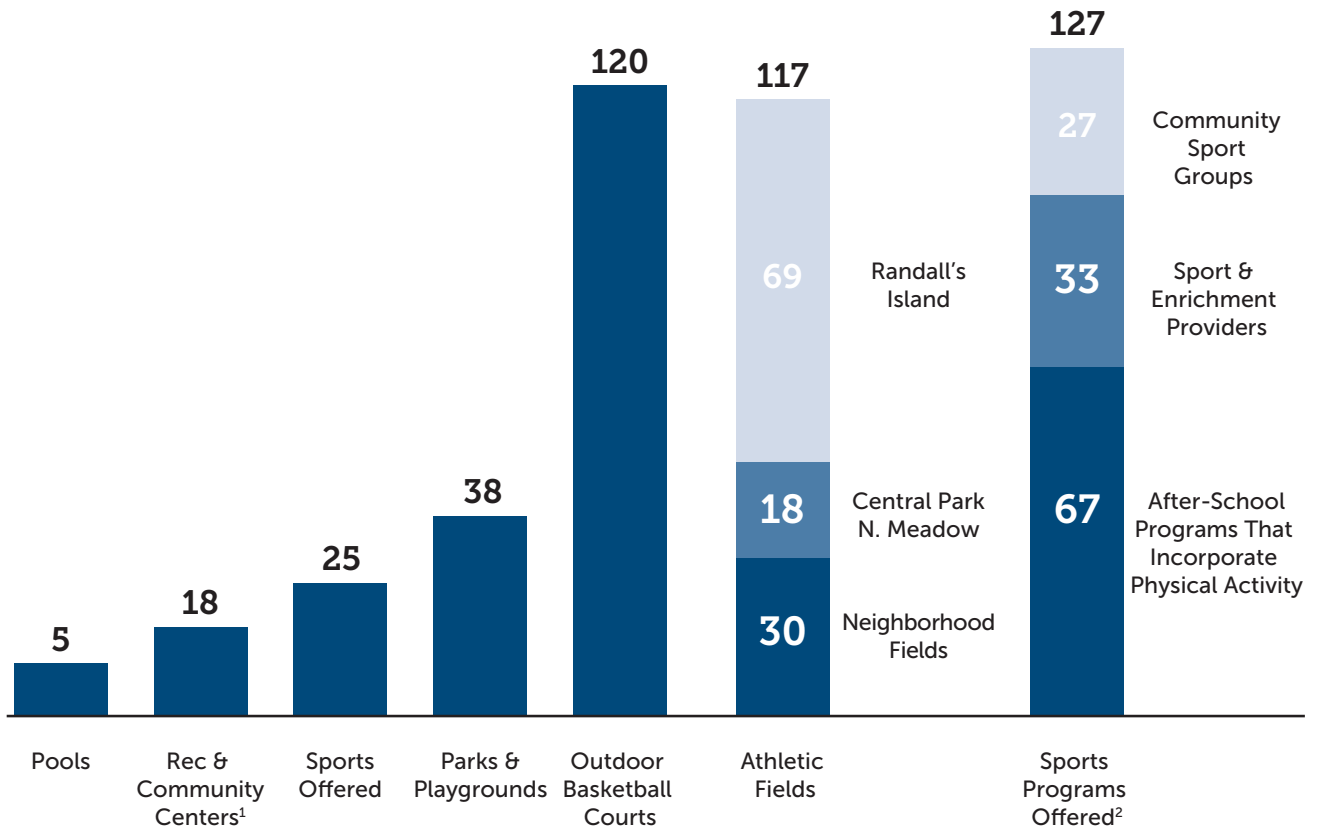


\*As reported by the U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, Fact Finder 2016.

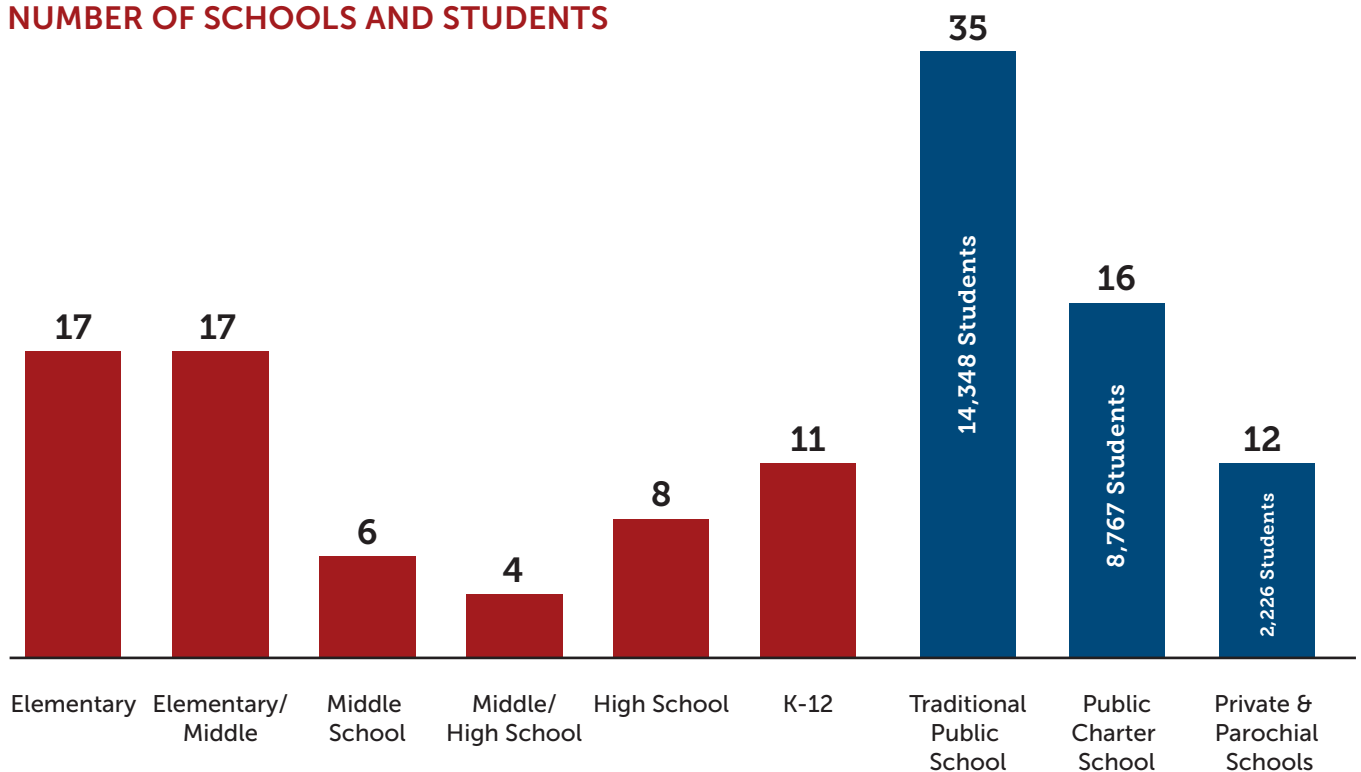
# OUR FOCUS AREA: EAST HARLEM

Specifically, the roughly three-square-mile area of East Harlem in Community District 11

## TOTAL NUMBER OF FACILITIES, SPORTS, AND PROGRAMS OFFERED

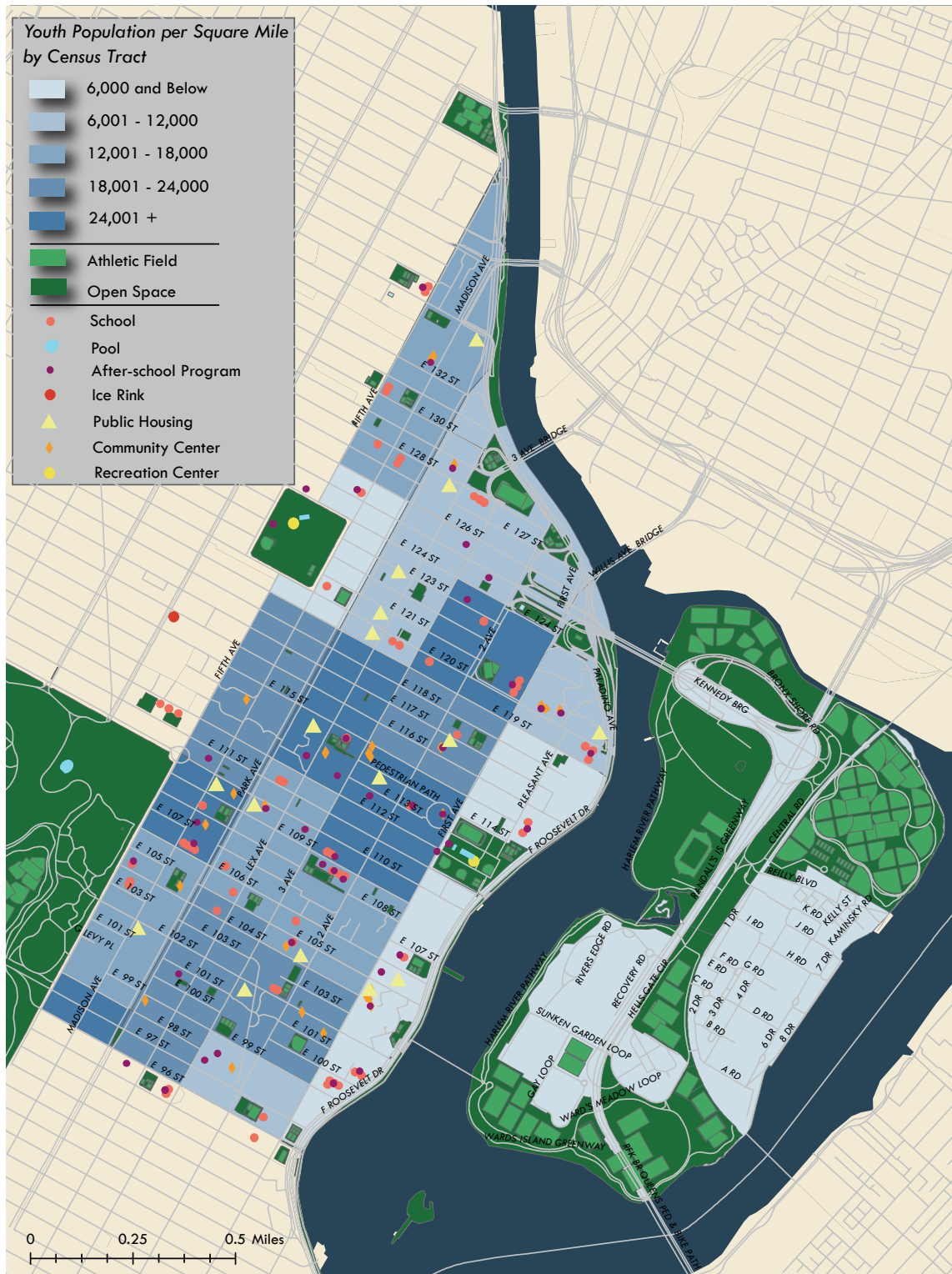


## NUMBER OF SCHOOLS AND STUDENTS



# SCOREBOARD

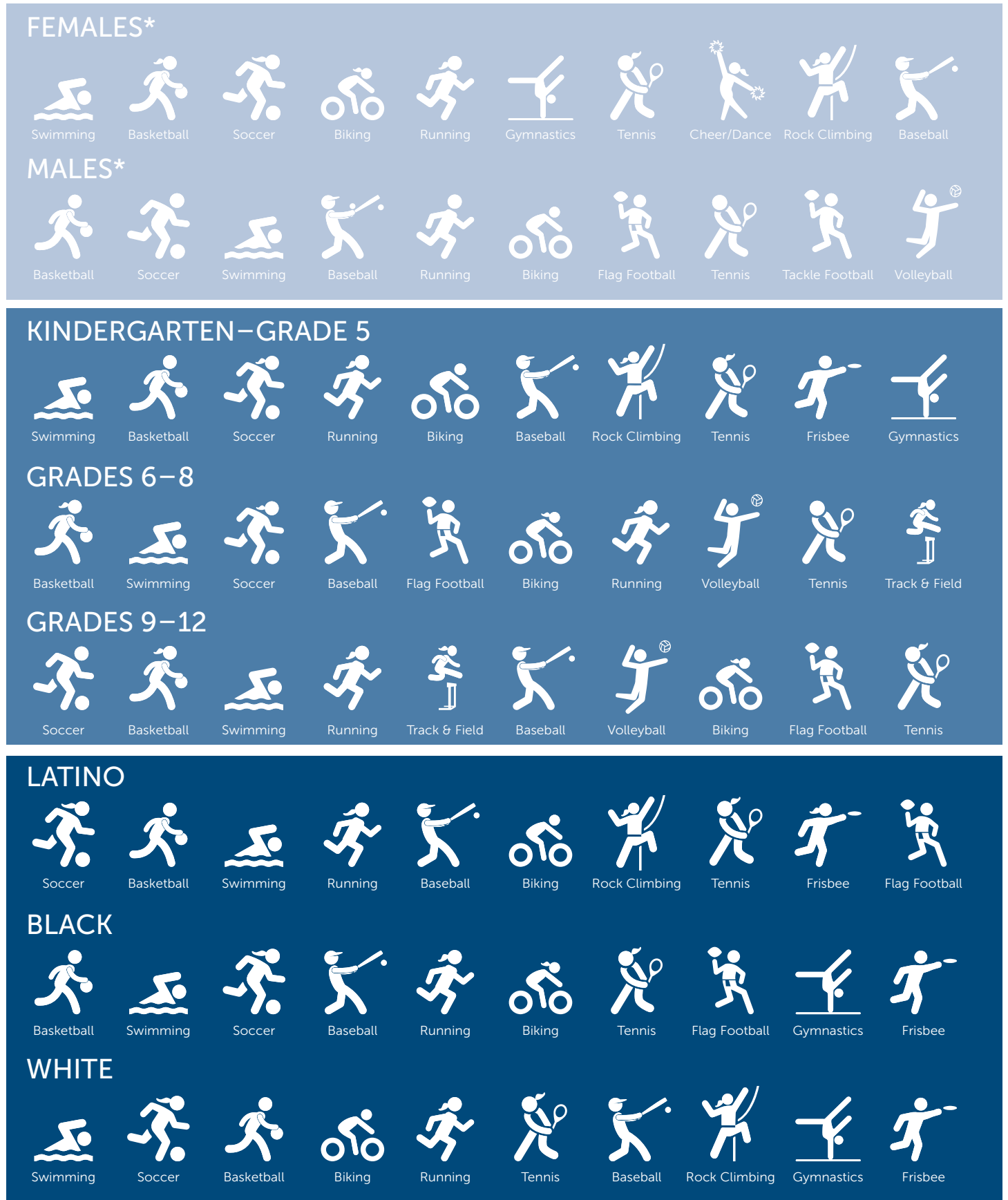
## KEY COMMUNITY ASSETS AND WHERE YOUTH LIVE IN EAST HARLEM



See Appendix D for full list of facilities

# TOP 10 SPORTS IN EAST HARLEM

Results from Aspen Institute's survey of 1,520 youth when asked what sports they have ever played, in order of popularity



\*Does not include the less than 8.5% of youth surveyed who answered "other/prefer not to answer" when asked about gender

# TOP 5 SPORTS YOUTH WANT TO TRY

From our survey of East Harlem kids and teens

## FEMALES



1. Gymnastics
2. Figure Skating
3. Fencing
4. Ice Hockey
5. Tennis

## MALES



1. Fencing
2. Skateboarding
3. Golf
4. Ice Hockey
5. Tennis

## K-GRADE 5



1. Skateboarding
2. Ice Hockey
3. Golf
4. Tennis
5. Fencing

## GRADES 6-8\*



1. Fencing
2. Skateboarding
3. Ice Hockey
4. Tackle Football
5. Parkour

\*Response rates for grades 6-8 are 25% or less

## GRADES 9-12\*



1. Swimming
2. Tennis
3. Lacrosse
4. Basketball
5. Rock Climbing

\*Response rates for grades 9-12 are 25% or less

## LATINO



1. Fencing
2. Skateboarding
3. Ice Hockey
4. Tennis
5. Golf / Parkour

## BLACK



1. Skateboarding
2. Fencing
3. Golf
4. Ice Hockey
5. Swimming

## WHITE



1. Skateboarding
2. Biking
3. Swimming
4. Gymnastics
5. Frisbee

When asked the question,

## What grade would you give stakeholders in East Harlem in getting kids active through sports?

50 local youth sport providers and other stakeholders in a survey conducted by the Aspen Institute gave themselves collectively an average grade of:

2018 State of PlayGrade: **C**

### Report Methodology

Data on sport activity patterns of youth in East Harlem were derived from youth surveys conducted by the Aspen Institute. During May through November 2017, a total of 1,520 youth from kindergarten to grade 12, across four public and charter schools, five community programs and three local parks, completed a paper-based survey about their interest and participation in sports. The surveys allowed us to understand the current landscape of youth sports in our focus area.

Other insights in this report were developed by Aspen's research team over the course of 11 months in 2017-18. Researchers conducted group and individual interviews, hosted focus groups with community program providers and youth, toured recreation facilities and outdoor play spaces, hosted a public community night and Huddle to capture thoughts from leaders, conducted a literature search, and created an inventory of community programs and facilities, among other efforts. Throughout the report, "sport" refers to all forms of physical activity which, through organized or casual play, aim to express or improve physical fitness and mental well-being.



# THE 8 PLAYS

*The Aspen Institute's seminal 2015 report, **Sport for All, Play for Life: A Playbook to Get Every Kid in the Game**, identifies eight strategies ("plays") that can get and keep all kids active through sport—regardless of zip code or ability. On the pages that follow are five findings from East Harlem related to each "play."*

1. ASK KIDS WHAT THEY WANT
2. REINTRODUCE FREE PLAY
3. ENCOURAGE SPORT SAMPLING
4. REVITALIZE IN-TOWN LEAGUES
5. THINK SMALL
6. DESIGN FOR DEVELOPMENT
7. TRAIN ALL COACHES
8. EMPHASIZE PREVENTION

*For more on the framework and each play, see the Project Play report at <http://youthreport.projectplay.us>.*



## Challenge: Youth sport is organized by adults

### 1 | THE PLAY: ASK KIDS WHAT THEY WANT

#### From the *Sport for All, Play for Life* report:

*It's Rule No. 1 in business: know your customer. Video games (and the technology industry more broadly) often get blamed for our kids' sedentary habits, yet they provide much of what children want out of a sport experience, including: lots of action, freedom to experiment, competition without exclusion, social connection with friends as co-players, customization, and a measure of control over the activity—plus, no parents critiquing their every move. Simply put, the child is at the center of the video game experience, all made possible by research and feedback loops that seek input from its young customers. Now imagine if youth sport providers worked half as hard to understand the needs of kids, especially those who are left out or who opt out of sports.*

#### Five findings in East Harlem:

**Youth play sports to be with friends.** Of the 1,520 local youth surveyed by the Aspen Institute, more than two-thirds said that's their primary motivation. Other highly ranked reasons included having fun (58 percent) and learning new skills (41 percent), highlighting the priorities youth have for their sport experiences. Sport is also a way for youth to make new friends, as 12-year-old Ibrahim Cisse does when he takes his ball to the park. "Sometimes people don't have a ball. They say, 'Can I join?' and I'm like 'I am glad for you to join!'" Winning was the fourth-most frequent response. (See Appendix B.)

**The top three sports youth want to try are still not widely available to them.** In our survey, skateboarding, fencing and ice hockey emerged as the sports youth most want to try. With a new skate park erected in Thomas Jefferson Park in summer 2017, access to free skate is growing, but the park is not as conveniently located for youth in the northern part of the neighborhood. Fencing and ice hockey are offered but remain similarly limited. Olympian Tim Morehouse offers free afterschool fencing instruction (and equipment) at Storefront Academy.<sup>3</sup> And Ice Hockey in Harlem, serving Harlem youth since 1987, practices in the Lasker Ice Rink on the northern edge of Central Park, which is most easily accessed from Central Harlem. Nearly 20 percent of youth surveyed by the Aspen Institute also expressed interest in trying tennis, golf and gymnastics, all of which have seen some programs introduced in recent years — but not enough to meet the demand.

**Youth say academic demands keep them out of the game.** Twenty-nine percent of youth in Project Play's survey indicated they did not play more sports because of schoolwork. It's the result of an increased emphasis on test scores, given that District 4's averages on 2014 statewide exams were 2.51 in English language arts and 2.79 in math (out of 4.0).<sup>4</sup> In response, many community-based sports organizations added academic enrichment to their programs. Today, the percentage of youth passing the exams with a 3.0 or higher is up 14.2 and 8.1 points, respectively.<sup>5</sup> Graduation rates have also increased, with 79 percent of District 4 students graduating on time, up from 68 percent in 2012.<sup>6</sup> These are positive developments which should encourage the introduction of more after-school programs that offer academic enrichment with sport and physical activity.

**Most East Harlem youth have minimal input in designing their sport activities.** Just twenty-three percent of youth surveyed say they are often asked by P.E. teachers or sport coaches about what they want to do — and more than 40 percent say they are rarely or never solicited for input. Select youth, however, have found themselves with seats at the table with organizations that have added youth leadership councils. Notably, New York City Football Club's City in the Community youth leadership council is advising on street soccer festivals and events to take place on the 50 mini-pitches the team has committed to developing throughout New York City. Elsewhere, Union Settlement revised its offerings after hearing from youth via focus groups and surveys that they wanted to try cheerleading. In other instances, the organization has partnered with outside organizations to offer new sports in which youth expressed interest.

**Girls want more sports and leadership opportunities.** To date, many offerings have been framed as interventions and geared towards boys. Youth leaders from the Supportive Children's Advocacy Network (SCAN NY) say that programming available for girls is insufficient. According to SCAN NY Executive Director Lewis Zuchman, it is "a citywide problem, but is prominent in East Harlem." Of the youth surveyed by the Aspen Institute, 23 percent of girls answered "no" or "I don't know" when asked if they felt encouraged to play sports, compared to 17 percent of boys. Gymnastics, skateboarding and fencing are the top three sports girls say they want to try. The challenge, of course, is funding. Programs have limited budgets to address many needs, putting program directors in a tight spot. As Zuchman asked, "If we try to add a female hoops team or baseball team, do we drop a male team? At what cost to the young men? If we want to add the girls team, where does the funding come from to do so?" It's a challenge schools are facing, too. An October 2016 *DNAinfo* report documented that at least two East Harlem schools allocate more funding for boys' sports than girls'.<sup>7</sup>



## YOUTH VOICE

### Ibrahim Cisse, 12

Ibrahim Cisse is a vibrant, confident sixth-grader. But when he moved to East Harlem from the Ivory Coast three years ago and enrolled in P.S. 72 Lexington Academy, he was a wide-eyed 8-year-old boy who knew no one and spoke little English.

It was Ibrahim's passion for soccer that pushed him to play at his local park and join the after-school sports program. Although his new friends spoke different languages, Ibrahim saw cultural and linguistic differences as opportunities, not barriers. "I like to talk to people and learn from them," he said. "You can learn a lot from people who are different from you. When I went to the park, I took a ball. We made friendly games versus each other." As he played with park playmates and school teammates, they bonded, and his social confidence grew.

Soccer opened multiple doors. In 2016, Ibrahim regularly joined the New York District Attorney's Office's Saturday Night Lights initiative — run in partnership with New York City Football Club's

City in the Community program. The city program, which meets three times a week, provides him and hundreds of other kids with a safe place to meet and play and offers academic tutoring and mentoring opportunities as well. Ibrahim plays in the Saturday Night Lights league and in City in the Community's wider programming. He has also participated in community activities like the UNICEF Kid Power program and the City's School Cup tournament, in which his team were crowned champions.

Ibrahim's transformation from isolated outsider to child athlete, peer mentor and community ambassador has made him wise beyond his years. "People need to start realizing that there is no difference between us — white or any other color," he said. "We are all the same. We need to listen to each other and respect each other. And don't let what people say stop you. Face the challenge. Show them your positive side. Because you can be whatever you want to be."

## Challenge: Overstructured experiences

### 2 | THE PLAY: REINTRODUCE FREE PLAY

#### From the *Sport for All, Play for Life* report:

Today, many parents are reluctant to let children ride bikes across the neighborhood to play games with friends. Fear of child abductions, while extremely rare, is a psychological barrier, and crime and traffic concerns are real issues in some neighborhoods. But experts recognize the need to reintroduce free play where possible, given the science. “To promote lifelong, intrinsically motivated sport participation, it is imperative to build a foundation during childhood,” sports psychologist Jean Coté writes. “Inclusion of high amounts of deliberate play activities early in development provides that motivational foundation.”

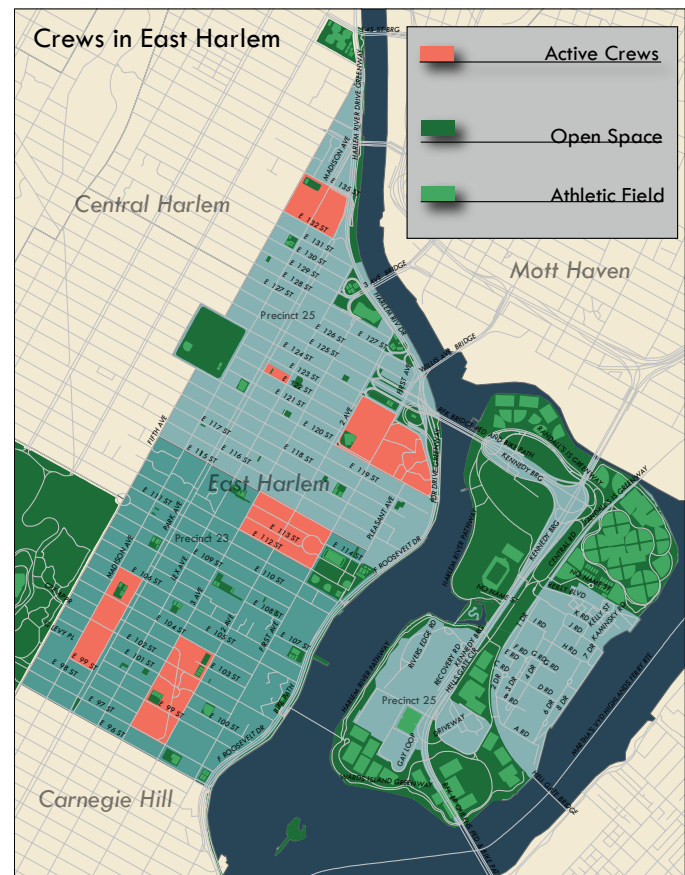
#### Five findings in East Harlem:

**Two-thirds of youth surveyed say parks or playgrounds are among the top places they like to play sports.** That’s potentially good news for youth and the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation (NYCDPR) and its Community Parks Initiative, which has identified East Harlem as a priority for investment. The plan calls for capital improvements to smaller, local parks — which can be used for pick-up games — and enhanced public programming. Since 2014, three park renovations have been completed, including James Weldon Johnson Playground, White Playground and Playground 103.<sup>8</sup> Abraham Lincoln Playground is currently in the design phase of a capital project for 2017 (design is 80% complete as of February 2018).<sup>9</sup> Infrastructure is just part of the solution, though, as adult leagues crowd out free play (and organized sports) for neighborhood youth, particularly in those most played in East Harlem: soccer, basketball and baseball. In an effort to engage youth in a park setting and honor East Harlem’s historic street sports, the annual NYC Street Games hosts activities like stickball, which has its Hall of Fame in East Harlem.

**Creative approaches have expanded access to free play activities not typical in East Harlem.** Concrete Safaris, an organization based in the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene’s East Harlem Neighborhood Health Action Center, combines biking, hiking and community gardening to encourage neighborhood exploration and physical activity. Concrete Safaris also connects youth with government officials to transform nontraditional spaces — like city streets — into play spaces. “Most students in Concrete Safaris’ programs have limited exposure to any of our outdoor activities prior to joining,” Executive Director Mac Levine told the Aspen Institute.<sup>10</sup> Predominantly working with children in East Harlem’s public housing complexes since 2008, Concrete Safaris has redefined play for more than 2,400 youth ages 7 to 12 and more than 65 interns ages 14 to 24.<sup>11</sup> As 10-year-old Weng Rui Tong explained, “I’d rather be outdoors than be stuck inside. I like [afterschool programs] because otherwise I might not have a lot of time outdoors.” The result: Children and their families can find play in places they previously may not have thought possible.

**East Harlem’s public housing contains open spaces and playgrounds for residents to exercise and play, but territorial disputes and crime limit free-play opportunities.**<sup>12</sup> East Harlem has eight known “crews” — gang-like groups organized around where members live, such as a building or block — leaving many East Harlem youth living in New York City Housing Authority-owned public housing complexes without safe play spaces. Community officers from Precinct 23 explained youth “will play in their own developments but won’t venture to others in the community.” Youth who participated in Project Play’s focus group emphasized the prevalence of drugs, alcohol and police activity on the playgrounds.

#### CREW ACTIVITY IN EAST HARLEM LIMITS FREE PLAY



This pinch is exacerbated in the weeks around Halloween — known for gang initiations — and during the out-of-school summer months, when idle time — and crew activity — abound. Said one community officer: “We had an incident last summer at Thomas Jefferson Pool, where some kids from another neighborhood came in for the day. That caused a problem. So now we have officers there during the summer months.” In response to high crime rates, community-based organizations and city agencies have developed initiatives that use sport to provide havens for neighborhood youth. One of East Harlem’s two police precincts (Precinct 23) has seen a more than 11 percent decline in reported incidences since 2015, while Precinct 25 has experienced close to a 1 percent decline as of November 2017.<sup>13</sup> (See map on opposite page for a list of the active, documented crews in East Harlem.)

**Family responsibility is a major reason youth say they don’t play sports.** Sixteen percent of youth in our survey indicated such a barrier — split evenly between boys and girls. “A lot of my students become heads of households very young and they’re tasked with taking care of their younger siblings,” said Heather Mitchell, New York program director for After-School All-Stars.<sup>14</sup> With 47% of youth living below the poverty line (as compared with the city’s 27%), these family expectations make recess even more important.<sup>15</sup> The school-day break may be the only free-play opportunity for youth. Indeed, recess is the second-most popular place youth like to play, with 57 percent of youth surveyed saying so.

**For more than a century, Play Streets have provided a promising model for out-of-school-time free play, but the initiative’s future is uncertain.** In a coordinated effort among local community-based organizations, community boards, police precincts and the Departments of Transportation, Education, and Parks and Recreation, select streets, known as “Play Streets,” are closed to cars for seven weeks during the summer to provide supervised free-play opportunities for youth ages 6 to 18. Equipment is made available for free play and structured activities, with pick-up soccer, basketball, jump rope, hula-hoop, and hopscotch among the most popular activities. Play Streets also give older youth and teens the opportunity to lead activities or provide support. Sixty-four percent of participants said that Play Streets kept them from being sedentary, and 84 percent of participants said they felt the neighborhood is safer with a Play Street, according to a 2014 study of Play Streets in East Harlem.<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately, the Police Athletic League, a Play Streets provider since 1914 and a local presence in East Harlem in 2017, is facing a \$325,000 cut to the initiative’s budget — or nearly 50 percent.<sup>17</sup> Other Play Streets providers have not experienced the same pinch, nor has the NYCDPR’s Kids in Motion program, which offers an alternative supervised free play model that is focused on enhancing play and providing enrichment experiences in parks.



## YOUTH VOICE

### Weng Rui Tong, 10

By her own admission, 10-year-old Weng Rui Tong is an accidental athlete. Until recently, the fourth-grader focused her creative energy on drawing and ballet. Her mom shuttles her to classes on Saturdays. “When I grow up,” she proclaimed, “I want to be an artist.”

But an introduction to soccer in P.E. last year, at P.S. 83 Luis Munoz Rivera, has expanded Weng Rui’s horizons. “It takes a lot of practice, but it’s fun to play, and I’m learning how to dribble and pass,” she said.

Weng Rui approaches sports with a healthy mix of competition and compassion. “In games, I find out who the best player is and figure out how to stop him,” she said. “I didn’t play with boys before. But I like to now because some of them are really good. They teach me.” But it’s a two-way process. “When they win and yell at the losers, I teach them how to be calm and kind. I tell them they wouldn’t feel good if other kids shouted at them when they lost.”

Weng Rui, who lives in a small two-bedroom apartment in East Harlem, said she loves all outdoor activities. She’s a member of the Concrete Safaris after-school program at P.S. 83. They do homework and take field trips, like group bike rides to Randall’s Island.

As with all kids her age, Weng Rui also craves family connection. Ever since she started learning soccer, she goes on Sundays with her dad and brother to Central Park, where they practice on a grass field. “It’s great fun because I get to have time with my family and teach moves to my little brother,” she said.

It’s clear that art and sport have merged for Weng Rui, who is working on Supergirl sketches with a group of female classmates in art class. Weng Rui’s favorite hero is, of course, Wonder Woman. “I like that she has the braveness to do what she wants to do,” she said. Which stands to reason, since little Weng Rui is, herself, a role model of courage, curiosity, and determination.

## Challenge: Sameness and specialization

### 3 | THE PLAY: ENCOURAGE SPORT SAMPLING

#### From the *Sport for All, Play for Life* report:

Most children flow into only a handful of the more than 120 sports played in the United States. And, as early as the grade school years, those identified as having the most promise get the message from coaches and others that they must specialize in one sport at the exclusion of others in order to fully develop their talents and play at a college, pro, or other elite level. It's a myth. ... Grow the menu of sport options, create better connections to vulnerable populations, and more athletes-for-life will emerge.

#### Five findings in East Harlem:

**East Harlem schools are not accessing the NYC Public School Athletic League's (PSAL) diverse sport options like cricket, fencing, and rugby.** Of East Harlem's eight public high schools, two field PSAL teams on their own. The other six combine athletes to compete in the PSAL collectively under East Harlem Pride and in select cases compete individually in the PSAL's Small School Athletic League (SSAL). Members of the SSAL are limited to participating in just seven sports, which includes table tennis but no other nontraditional sport. Through the PSAL, East Harlem Pride offers a wider array of sports, including co-ed bowling, girls' track, golf, and flag football. For the 2017-18 school year, only one of the East Harlem Pride schools received additional funding. After meeting the criteria for staff capacity, programming and designated facility spaces, the PSAL approved the Young Women's Leadership School, for three sports.<sup>18</sup> Reasons cited by the PSAL for denying other schools' applications included lack of sustainable non-PSAL funding, low student interest, and a league preference for "allowing schools with low numbers of teams to expand their reach."<sup>19</sup> The result: Many East Harlem schools must identify grants, sponsorships, private donors, or external partnerships to provide adequate athletic offerings.

**Capital improvement projects are underway at 11 of East Harlem's 38 public parks and playgrounds.** Approximately \$2.225 million has been allocated to the Manhattan Basketball Project through NYCDPR, to refurbish five basketball and tennis courts citywide between 2014 and 2018.<sup>20</sup> Thomas Jefferson Park, the lone East Harlem facility included and recent beneficiary of a newly constructed skate park, is now revamping its basketball courts. As part of a separate initiative, eight additional East Harlem parks will benefit from improvements over the next five years, ranging from comfort station upgrades to synthetic turf installation.<sup>21</sup> The distribution of the improvements means that most youth in East Harlem will benefit, but the most prominent impact will be for those closest to the largest, most accessible parks (Thomas Jefferson and Marcus Garvey). Throughout East Harlem, these projects will improve existing structures or develop new infrastructure that will increase sport offerings.

#### BETTER FACILITIES, MORE SPORTS



initiative in partnership with the New York City Department of Education that aims to improve P.E. instruction and available facilities. The initiative served as a launching pad for the 2017 dedication of \$385 million in capital funding to provide space for physical education in all schools by 2021. On the agenda: building new gymnasiums, renovating school yards, converting or enhancing existing rooms into fitness areas, converting auditoriums into “gymatoriums” and leasing spaces from community-based organizations.<sup>24</sup> East Harlem schools are not included in the first phase of investment, which spans 76 schools.<sup>25</sup>

**New programs have introduced youth to sports not traditional in dense urban areas, but exposure is still limited.**

Given the facilities available, basketball, soccer and baseball have historically been the area’s most popular sports. However, as East Harlem has drawn interest for an array of programming interventions, youth have been exposed to nontraditional sports, including golf, the third most-asked-for sport by boys in the Project Play survey. Organizations like Bridge Golf Foundation, Ice Hockey in Harlem, Play Rugby USA, Beat the Streets (wrestling), Fencing in the Schools, Harlem Street Squash, and Harlem Lacrosse are among those introducing new sport experiences. The programs provide support to youth, through high school and beyond, with opportunities in skill development, extracurricular enrichment and academic achievement programming. But while nontraditional opportunities are being introduced, youth are often still playing just one sport. “Children are not given the opportunity to play other sports, isolating their abilities and potential to excel in other facets of athletic experiences,” said Lewis Zuchman of SCAN NY.

**East Harlem’s history of community organizing is growing access to diverse physical activity opportunities.**

Long-standing hyperlocal community coalitions put East Harlem’s needs on the map, often with a focus on improving youth health. In more recent years, city agencies and organizations have identified East Harlem as a priority neighborhood, pushing the number of programs aiming to improve health and wellness of local youth above 60.<sup>26</sup> However, a collective approach has been slow to emerge, something that Building Healthy Communities (BHC) aims to change. A city initiative, BHC brings best practices in community health and wellness from all city agencies under one umbrella. Specific to East Harlem, in 2017 the Manhattan District Attorney’s Office awarded a Union Settlement-led coalition of community-based groups up to \$10.3 million, including \$4 million in capital investment to create a Youth Opportunities Hub in the neighborhood.<sup>27</sup> Beginning in October 2017, the hub annually will serve 500 youth ages 10 to 24 with programming that includes exposing participants to a variety of sport experiences. It is an effort to better meet the social and emotional needs of youth, given the number of high-risk youth in the criminal justice system.<sup>28</sup>



**YOUTH VOICE**

**Ishan Burra, 7**

Ishan Burra is the quintessential multisport kid: a fun-loving second-grader who plays soccer, cricket, basketball, baseball, tennis, and volleyball whenever and wherever he can. He’s had some exposure to organized baseball and tennis, but the one structured sport he enjoys most these days is soccer. His New York Soccer Stars team practices on Fridays and plays games on Saturdays.

Like most kids his age, Ishan’s number one priority is to have fun. “I like to practice and learn,” he said. “But I like playing better. I just love running around and playing games.” The loosely structured play he and his schoolmates engage in at recess and after school — they play soccer and basketball — on River East Elementary School’s turf field and in the school’s concrete yard, is what he relishes most.

Space issues in East Harlem have tempered Ishan’s athletic explorations. “Space is the biggest problem,” he said. But he has found ways to adapt to his constricted surroundings. In fact, Ishan — whose favorite school subjects are science and math (which he works on with his mathematician/engineer dad) — has a knack for problem-solving. “We don’t have a volleyball court near where I live. So we use the monkey bars in the exercise space at Thomas Jefferson Park playground as our net. There’s no wicket to play cricket either. But I practice with the ball and bat in my apartment and play for real when we go to India to visit family. With my friends, we play rugby with a football next to the benches in our community garden.”

Ishan hopes more play space can be created in his neighborhood for sports activities. “Maybe a construction worker could build another soccer field,” he said. “And they could take out part of the exercise space and use it to make a volleyball court.” Until then, he’ll adapt and have fun wherever the next game breaks out.

## 4 | THE PLAY: REVITALIZE IN-TOWN LEAGUES

### From the *Sport for All, Play for Life* report:

*It's been a setting where kids of all skill levels and backgrounds play at the same local field or gym, rarely roaming beyond the neighborhood borders. But today, house leagues can be stigmatized as inferior, a casualty of tryout-based, early-forming travel teams that cater to the "best" child athletes ... Revitalizing recreational leagues depends on improving both the quality of the offering and the quantity of available kids. Sport providers need to develop business models that wring less money out of more participants. And organizers must look in new places to grow the pool of players.*

### Five findings in East Harlem:

**Space is one of the largest barriers for local leagues, made more challenging by outside leagues that also rely on East Harlem's parks and fields.** Obtaining a permit for park or gym space is a prerequisite to offering organized sports. Among the parties involved — the Department of Parks and Recreation, schools, the Department of Education, and community-based organizations — the process can become complex. With no guarantee of success, many new community organizations are left with low morale when applying. Though youth recreation is a priority, proximity of participants is not a factor, leaving many East Harlem fields occupied by programs that are not serving local residents, youth included. In November 2017, 57 percent of field and track reservations at Thomas Jefferson Park, one of the largest in the area, was reserved for non-East Harlem leagues (including adult leagues).<sup>29</sup> (See Call for Leadership.)

**Keeping community centers open into the evening has increased sport opportunities.** East Harlem is home to two large public recreation centers. Though free for children under 18, the centers are closed after 4 pm on Saturdays and all of Sundays — when youth have the most idle time. In 2011, the Manhattan District Attorney's Office launched Saturday Night Lights (SNL) to fill high-crime Friday and Saturday evening hours with organized sports and physical activity for youth ages 11 to 18. Since 2015, the DA's office has invested \$1.8 million in the program, with an additional \$1.5 million anticipated through 2019. Currently operating at five sites in East Harlem, SNL partners with local organizations to host free, drop-in soccer and basketball. SNL teams compete against teams from other local leagues, like NYFilsa, and against one another in tournaments. More than 2,600 East Harlem youth have benefitted from SNL programs since 2015.<sup>30</sup>

**East Harlem's shifting demographics have created a community of sport haves and have-nots.** The once predominantly Latino population fell from 52.1 percent in 2010 to 46 percent in 2016 (of all residents).<sup>31</sup> An influx of young professionals and families who have far more resources than East Harlem's historic community has created a new sport culture that is often defined by participation in elite leagues outside of the neighborhood. Notably, the average income of non-Hispanic white residents in East Harlem is \$60,619, in contrast to their Hispanic neighbors' reported average earnings of \$14,491.<sup>32</sup> "Even if we do have the opportunities to play, limited resources prevent us from remaining committed to the sport,"

said Darlene De La Cruz, a Project Play's youth leader who plays in DREAM's softball program. Even as new investments enter the community, large disparities in health and activity remain.

**East Harlem's high school team embodies community spirit.** Part of the PSAL, East Harlem Pride is a collection of six small public high schools that combine athletes to field 16 boys' and girls' teams, playing 11 sports from the fall through spring seasons. This community partnership provides sport opportunities not traditionally offered in Manhattan high schools, such as golf — of interest to nearly 20 percent of youth in our survey — and girls' flag football, which 12 percent of girls told us they want to try. Intramural-style clubs also provide an outlet for students who may not make or be interested in the community team. Given the popularity of sports like basketball, where more than 70 boys try out for the available 18 roster spots, the recreational option keeps students active.

#### SCHOOLS IN EAST HARLEM PRIDE

1.	Central Park East High School
2.	Coalition School for Social Change
3.	Frederick Douglass Academy II Secondary School
4.	Park East High School
5.	The Heritage School
6.	Young Women's Leadership Academy

**Linking community-based leagues to accessible spaces has led to increasingly sustainable programs.** Many local youth are finding nurturing environments in leagues like NYFilsa. A predominantly Latino soccer league in East Harlem since 1998, NYFilsa's teams for youth ages 6 through 18 play among other community recreational leagues on weekends. The teams practice and compete in community spaces that are walkable for many participants, which is key, given that more than half of the youth surveyed by the Aspen Institute said walking was one of the top two modes of transportation they use to get to sports (subway was second, at 45 percent). Taking a different but equally accessible approach, DREAM (formerly Harlem RBI) has hosted free youth programming for more than 25 years; its playground, field, community and school spaces are open to the public.





## Challenge: Not enough places to play

### 5 | THE PLAY: THINK SMALL

#### From the *Sport for All, Play for Life* report:

*Growing access to play spaces for most children starts with the small – simple, smart moves that hold great promise. In urban areas, this may mean finding small spaces to develop quarter-sized courts for small-sided play ... When schools agree to share their playing fields and facilities, it gives families and kids, especially those in underserved communities, more places to play in the evenings, on weekends, and during summer. Funding enables, but so do small gestures of other types of support. Which is another way of saying: be creative.*

#### Five findings in East Harlem:

**Space constraints in schools have led to creative models to deliver physical activity during the school day.** When community leaders at Project Play: Harlem Community Night were asked about the barriers to sport, more than half of the responses mentioned accessibility or quality of space in East Harlem. It's particularly true for public schools, more than one-third of which are co-located and have no dedicated physical fitness space.<sup>33</sup> Schools have responded with creativity. Programs such as Playworks and Wellness In The Schools, each in two local elementary schools, teach students how to organize themselves to lead sports and games, creating positive recess experiences. P.E. classes face similar challenges, with 21 of the 35 public elementary, middle, and high schools in East Harlem sharing P.E. space with another school.<sup>34</sup> These spaces include multipurpose rooms, unused classrooms, dance rooms, and outdoor yards.<sup>35</sup>

**Inadequate transport to the largest parks in the area limits access to many play spaces.** The Randall's Island sports complex boasts 60 new athletic facilities, including baseball, soccer and football fields, a running track, basketball courts, a state-of-the-art tennis facility, and bike paths.<sup>36</sup> The challenge: Its location across the Harlem River limits frequent visits. Growing demand for youth programming has led to increased shuttle transport to improve accessibility to the island through citywide and community-based programs, and PSAL provides shuttles and metro cards for students who participate in its programs on Randall's Island, including the many tournaments hosted there. For students outside of PSAL, Community Board 11 aims to push policy increasing the time and ride limits of student metro cards to adequately meet the transportation needs of youth. While there are two access points from East Harlem, footbridges to access the island are underutilized. The 2016 East Harlem Neighborhood Plan calls it "critical" to identify strategies that can eliminate the "physical and psychological barriers" to using Randall's Island, Central Park, Harlem River Park, and the waterfront esplanade.<sup>37</sup> (See Game Changer.)

**Public parks and other open space for recreation make up 44.4 percent of East Harlem — a larger percentage of open space than most of Manhattan.**<sup>38</sup> More good news: A 2012 study found that there are 2.1 athletic fields and 8.4 courts for every 10,000 residents, and an additional 5.4 play areas for every 1,250 children — well above Open Space Index standards.<sup>39</sup> But the largest parks (Randall's Island and Central Park) are on the far edges of the

neighborhood, making them virtually inaccessible for many youth. Without them, East Harlem does not meet the recommended Open Space benchmark, with only .77 acres of open space per 1,000 residents.<sup>40</sup> The neighborhood's proliferating smaller play spaces could provide relief, but their conditions are often lacking. As Darlene De La Cruz notes: "When we do take [the] sport seriously, we can't go outside and practice, because where will we practice? So we just stay home and watch college softball on TV." It's a situation the Community Parks Initiative hopes to rectify through capital improvement projects. So far, six of 38 parks have benefited from renovations.<sup>41</sup> Key will be ensuring that local youth benefit from new facilities and open spaces, given community members' concerns.

**Mini-pitches are coming to East Harlem.** In 2015, New York City Football Club (NYCFC), in partnership with the US Soccer Foundation and Adidas, announced the building of 50 mini soccer pitches in areas of most need in New York City. In a collaboration with the Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City, Etihad Airways, the Department of Education, and Department of Parks and Recreation, the first mini-pitch opened in October 2017, on 109th Street in East Harlem. NYCFC is working with the Departments of Education and Parks and Recreation to determine the next sites. The NYCFC youth leadership council will also be involved.

**East Harlem schools can better integrate physical activity into the classroom, a proven strategy to build healthy habits and improve academic achievement.** Free programs offered through the Department of Education, such as Move-to-Improve, encourage physical activity breaks in the classroom and during moments of transition throughout the day.<sup>42</sup> The initiative trains staff on creating positive activity experiences in the classroom as a break from — and complement to — the academic curriculum. Schools with a comprehensive P.E. program led by a certified or designated P.E. teacher can become Move-to-Improve All-Stars by training 85 percent of eligible academic teachers and maintaining that percentage each year. Currently, no East Harlem school has achieved this designation.<sup>43</sup>

2018 State of Play Grade  
East Harlem:

C



## Challenge: Too much, too soon

### 6 | THE PLAY: DESIGN FOR DEVELOPMENT

#### From the *Sport for All, Play for Life* report:

*If a local facility is the hardware in a child's sport experience, then a developmentally appropriate program is the software. Leading sport governing bodies recognize it as the organizing framework to deliver what kids need to grow as both athletes and people. Adoption of it is seen as a tool to stem attrition, advance physical literacy, and debunk misperceptions that parents and coaches have about athletic development.*

#### Five findings in East Harlem:

**NYC Department of Education school clubs design competitive and recreational out-of-school-time activities for elementary and middle school students.** CHAMPS (Cooperative Healthy Active Motivated and Positive Students), a program sponsored by six community organizations, provides resources for schools to offer sports and fitness programs outside of school hours.<sup>44</sup> Since launching in 2004, the program has grown to encompass 513 middle school clubs and weekend leagues citywide and has new programming for elementary schools. In 2016-17, 11 elementary and middle schools in East Harlem hosted CHAMPS programs, up from five when they launched locally in 2007, ranging from fitness club to flag football. To meet kids where they are, CHAMPS offers developmental activities that are noncompetitive or noncontact, adapting the curriculum to be age appropriate.

**Some parks offer developmentally-appropriate fields and adaptive play spaces.** East Harlem boasts 30 athletic fields (baseball and long) and 120 courts (omitting Central Park, Randall's and Wards Island).<sup>45</sup> Among them are four baseball diamonds suitable for Little League play and eight playgrounds with universally accessible swings, ground-level play structures and/or transfer platforms that help youth with disabilities move onto slides and bridges. Randall's and Wards Island offer an additional 14 small-sided soccer fields and 40 Little League baseball fields.<sup>46</sup> It's a start, but many play spaces are still inaccessible to youth with disabilities or younger children.

**The 23 percent of East Harlem's public school students with disabilities have limited access to sport programming.**<sup>47</sup> Youth who have disabilities are 4.5 times less active and have obesity rates that are 38 percent higher than other youth.<sup>48</sup> Youth with disabilities are among the most frequently left-behind youth in sport. Some out-of-school providers in East Harlem are serving these needs, like the Children's Aid Society's Deaf and Hard of Hearing initiative that offers free recreational and social activities. Similarly, CHAMPS provides developmental basketball, yoga, and fitness club at P.S. M079 Horan School. The NYC Autism Charter partners with DREAM to offer students (through age 21) adaptive baseball. Additional programming is necessary to meet the needs of all local youth who have disabilities. Unified Sports — an initiative run by the Special Olympics — offers programs south of East Harlem, on the Upper East Side.

**Programs that prioritize age-appropriate instruction provide safe spaces for development — and see success.** The Harlem Junior Tennis and Education Program (HJTEP) features eight levels of play for youth ages 7 through 18, each with specified equipment sizes and skills of focus. Currently reaching 10,000 youth, the program evaluates participants on skills to ensure they are starting at the right level. Grassroots and Munchkins tennis focus on basic skill development and use larger, slower, and softer balls that make it easier for 7- to 10-year-olds to follow the play. Those athletes graduate to Grassroots I, which further develops agility, balance, and coordination.<sup>49</sup> Balancing developmentally appropriate play with character building and academic enrichment has led to 25 percent of participants earning college tennis scholarships and an additional 65 percent receiving nonathletic financial aid.<sup>50</sup> The process is as important as the outcome, noted Simone Spigner, mother of an HJTEP participant. "Between the lifelong friends he's amassed, the bond with the coaching staff and the constant support to stay above his academic curve, Donovan has enjoyed every minute of it," she said.

**The New York City Department of Education mandates inclusive policies for transgender and gender nonconforming youth.**<sup>51</sup> The Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Student Guidelines introduced in 2017 mandates that students have access to bathrooms and locker rooms consistent with their gender identity, though participation in athletic and other contact activities are evaluated on a case-by-case basis.<sup>52</sup> Outside of school, community programs like SCAN NY's Gay Lesbian and Straight Supporters and Union Settlement's LGBTQ Task Force provide safe spaces.<sup>53</sup> In East Harlem, there are no LGBTQ-only sports programs.



HOME		GUEST
PERIOD		
BONUS		BONUS
FOULS	PLAYER	FOULS
WON	GAME	WON

East  
Park East  
High School

## Challenge: Well-meaning but untrained volunteers

### 7 | THE PLAY: TRAIN ALL COACHES

#### From the *Sport for All, Play for Life* report:

*Coaches are the delivery mechanism for quality sport programming. They determine how much exercise occurs during practice. Research aggregated by the President's Council on Fitness, Sports & Nutrition shows that good coaches also lower kids' anxiety levels and lift their self-esteem. They help boys and girls enjoy the sport. They can make an athlete for life – or wreck enthusiasm for sport altogether ... Trained coaches do best. One study found that only 5 percent of kids who played for trained coaches quit the sport the next year; the attrition rate was 26 percent otherwise.*

#### Five findings in East Harlem:

**Despite legislative gains, nearly half of East Harlem's public schools still lack even one full-time, licensed physical education instructor.** In 2015, 54 percent of public elementary and middle schools in East Harlem were without certified P.E. teachers, prompting the City Council to mandate that the New York City Department of Education submit an annual report outlining the conditions of physical education in city school districts.<sup>54</sup> For the 2016-17 school year, 17 of the 35 public schools in East Harlem's School District 4 reported having at least one full-time, licensed P.E. teacher — each responsible for between 170 and 700 students school wide.<sup>55</sup> The result: 63 percent to 83 percent of K-6 students, depending on the grade level, are not receiving the state-required amount of physical education, a number drastically higher than just the 13 percent of seventh graders and 7 percent of eighth graders not receiving adequate physical education.<sup>56</sup>

**Train-the-trainer models are helping implement P.E. and after-school programs.** Increased academic rigor and demands have posed barriers for schools to prioritize free-time activities that support physical health and social-emotional development. That's now changing with a trend to partner with outside organizations to provide strong extracurricular programming, including training for staff in how to facilitate the initiatives. New York Road Runners (NYRR) supports 16 school-based programs in East Harlem, with NYRR's athletic coordinators guiding school staff through implementation. NYRR delivers resources during on-site training and provides online instruction and databases for continuing education for staff, including adaptive P.E., ensuring teachers and coaches are supported throughout the process. "I have been consistently impressed with the support, staff and computer platforms provided by NYRR to aid the teacher in lesson planning and student tracking," River East Elementary P.E. teacher Tim Dimick said.

**Professional development for coaches is of growing importance.** All coaches of New York City public school sports teams must be trained in first aid, CPR/AED, and concussion management. Swimming coaches have additional requirements, including lifeguard certification and CPR certification.<sup>57</sup> Still, many coaches underperform in one of the most important competencies: working with kids. It's a frustration that came up in Project Play's

focus group with local youth, as one lamented inconsistent communication: "Sometimes the rules aren't made clear to us." In response, resources for coaches are being shared locally. Saturday Night Lights hosts a monthly "Coaches' Corner" to facilitate peer-sharing of best practices. And national nonprofit Up2Us, which offers fee-based coach trainings, is a popular provider for organizations in East and Central Harlem, with its focus on developing life skills in at-risk youth and adapting coaching to community-specific contexts.

**Culturally competent and bi- or multilingual coaches make physical activity most accessible to East Harlem's diverse community.** ShapeUp offers free drop-in fitness classes for high school students and adults, providing families with fitness opportunities they can experience together. Importantly, with a 23 percent foreign-born population and 12 percent limited-English-speaking households, the program's bilingual approach makes physical activity inclusive and accessible across generations.<sup>58</sup> Fitness coaches are recruited locally and trained in providing appropriate instruction. The program is run out of park and recreation sites, community centers in NYC Housing Authority complexes, and the East Harlem Family Health Center, offering 12 to 15 classes per week at four community-based sites.

**Consistent training for recess coaches has proven to be key to overcoming space constraints and meeting the social-emotional needs of students.** Schools often face challenges to provide a productive, safe, fun and active environment for students. Scheduling adequate recess time and providing sufficient space for kids to play are frequent challenges, with 21 of East Harlem's schools being co-located. This barrier is highlighted when recess is held indoors during poor weather conditions. Through Asphalt Green's Recess Enhancement Program, offered in seven schools for students in kindergarten through fifth grade, trained Play Coaches use a curriculum of more than 150 age-appropriate games and activities that adapt to spaces indoors and outside. Coaches receive a two-week intensive training before the school year begins and continue training with weekly workshops.



## YOUTH VOICE

### Darlene De La Cruz, 15

Early exposure to baseball ignited a lifelong passion and focus for Darlene De La Cruz, who started playing at age 7 in Central Park in DREAM (formerly Harlem RBI). "I loved it," she said. "Then I switched to softball because it's what girls do."

Softball has become central to Darlene's life. "I want to be a serious athlete," she said. In the spring, the high school sophomore plays on the varsity squad at Manhattan Center for Science and Mathematics. She lifts weights religiously in the winter offseason and plays on club league teams in the fall. "This sport just keeps me motivated with everything," she added. "And it makes me a better student."

Her biggest challenge? Finding coaches and teammates in the offseason who are as dedicated as she is. "I haven't really found any coaches who would really put the time in to help us to get better," she said. "And a lot of girls call themselves athletes but then they don't perform as serious as they say."

Space to train is another major hurdle. "There aren't many places that we can go," said Darlene. "But you've got to take advantage of what you can find. Like gyms. We practice in gyms. But there is only so much you can do inside. Sometimes we just go to the batting cages in the Bronx."

Still, no obstacle is likely to derail Darlene, who knows exactly what she wants to do in life. "I want to be an obstetrician," she said. "The way they help women bring new life onto the planet? It's just amazing."

And she believes softball is her ticket. "This sport can take me so many places," she said. "And even though I am kind of restricted in New York because I'm not really exposed to really good softball, I want to go places."

## Challenge: Safety concerns among parents

### 8 | THE PLAY: EMPHASIZE PREVENTION

#### From the *Sport for All, Play for Life* report:

*Among the many issues facing youth sports, injury risks trouble parents the most. The espnW/Aspen Institute Project Play survey showed that nine out of ten parents have safety concerns—and half of those describe safety as a major concern. Both mothers and fathers said that concussions are the most worrisome and one-quarter of parents have considered keeping a child from playing because of that. Football, by far, gave parents the most cause for concern ... Youth sport organizations should err on the side of caution—and ultimately participation—and embrace policies that eliminate or greatly reduce head contact at the 12-and-under level.*

#### Five findings in East Harlem:

##### **Learn-to-swim programs are growing, with more needed.**

Across New York City, between 1980 and 2015, black youth accounted for 30 percent of drownings among those younger than 15 years old, compared to Latino youth (19 percent) and white youth (8 percent), as reported by the New York City Department of Health.<sup>59</sup> In response, in 2015 the Department of Health launched Making Waves, a program for safe swim instruction in partnership with the Department for Youth and Community Development. More than 1,400 children learned to swim in 2017, up from 524 in its inaugural season. In 2018, the city anticipates serving 9,000 youth across 20 schools.<sup>60</sup> In East Harlem, home to five pools and where swimming is among the top five sports youth told us they have participated or are currently participating in, with nearly 35 percent reporting they swim, access to swim lessons takes winning a lottery — literally. Those who don't may still find lessons through Asphalt Green's Water Proofing, a free program that delivers water safety and swim lessons to public school students during school hours from late September to early June. Seventeen East Harlem schools partnered with Asphalt Green in 2016-17 to take advantage of the program, for which schools pay just 25 percent of the cost.

**More than one in five youth said risk of injury is a reason they don't play sports more often.** It was the second-most frequently given answer among girls, with 26 percent saying it's a concern (schoolwork was the most-given answer for girls, at 30 percent). Fifth grader Amber Bros emphasized the point, stating, "I really don't like to play a lot, because I'm afraid I'm going to get hit. I wear glasses, and when you get hit in the face it hurts even more."

**The quality of East Harlem's parks and open spaces are below the city's average, posing a safety concern for youth who play sports in the neighborhood.** As measured by the city's Park Inspection Program (PIP), East Harlem's parks were rated 79 percent in overall quality, measuring cleanliness, landscape and structural features (see text box) — in contrast to Manhattan's 89 percent.<sup>61</sup> New capital projects over the coming years hold the promise of improving sport safety in East Harlem, but maintenance and safety remain a concern.<sup>62</sup> To maintain field quality, Randall's Island Park Alliance (RIPA) makes daily visits to its spaces to assess if fields

are playable. If they are not, fields are marked with a red flag to warn against playing, and live updates are tweeted out to notify the public about conditions.<sup>63</sup>

**Cleanliness:** Glass, litter, graffiti, weeds, ice

**Landscape:** Lawns, bodies of water, trees, trails, athletic fields, horticultural areas

**Structural:** Play equipment, paved surfaces, benches, fences, sidewalks, safety surfacing

**In meeting demand for ice hockey, safe instruction starts early.** Programs like Ice Hockey in Harlem are popular among youth in East Harlem, with 20 percent of youth surveyed reporting that they are interested in trying the sport, including a strong contingent of elementary school-aged youth. The program mitigates safety concerns by limiting contact at the start. Offering programs to youth starting at age 5, Learn to Skate/Learn to Play instruction focuses on skill development, providing the appropriate equipment for all participants. For skateboarding, the sport kids most want to try according to the Project Play survey, there is no formal programming for safe instruction offered in East Harlem. Informal instruction was introduced during East Harlem's annual Street Games in spring 2017.<sup>64</sup>

**East Harlem football programs practice and compete under the watch of athletic trainers.** In 2014, Stephen Tisch, co-owner of the New York Giants, announced a donation of \$1.2 million to the New York City Fund for Public Schools to have certified trainers and emergency medical technicians present at varsity and junior varsity practices and games.<sup>65</sup> As a result, 3,500 high school football players have access to certified trainers to help avoid injury and provide swift response for on-field injuries. East Harlem Pride, one of three public school football teams in Manhattan, is among those that has a certified, full-time athletic trainer present during practices with tackling and at all games.





## YOUTH VOICE

### Amber Bros, 11

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Sports don't have much allure for Amber Bros, who is a self-proclaimed homebody. That makes sense, given the fifth-grader's past experience with games. "Every time we play in gym, everybody ends up yelling, 'You're a cheater!' They argue and the game is over."

During recess at PS/MS7 in East Harlem, Amber navigates the pickup soccer and basketball games that break out around her warily. "I don't like playing much," she proclaimed. "I'm scared I'll get hit by a ball. Even when I'm not playing I get hit. Me and my friend, we walk on the track instead. We call it our 'walk and talk.'"

Amber's exposure to sports has been minimal. She's played a little kickball. "I'm not that good at kicking," she confessed. "People said I do baby kicks. But I had these boots with heels on, and when I kicked it wouldn't work."

She is happiest at home, where she plays with her 3-year-old brother, draws and plays video

games. "I'm a really good drawer," she said. "My friend taught me how to draw the Powerpuff Girls. Bubbles is my favorite." Amber also likes to watch television. If she's with her dad, she may watch a little sports. "Baseball with my dad," she said. But drawing and crafts are her favorite activities.

The one form of physical activity Amber loves is dance. At home she plays Nintendo Wii's Just Dance game with her sister. And at school she participates in the National Dance Institute's weekly dance program. "That's my kind of exercise!" she exclaimed.

Asked what she would do if she could choose any activity at all for gym, Amber smiles mischievously. "I'd have a little dome to be inside where I could draw and not get hit."

That makes perfect sense, since Amber wants to be a designer when she grows up.



## CALL FOR LEADERSHIP

Based on our analysis of the unique characteristics of East Harlem, here are five recommendations of systems-level interventions that can support committed leaders to grow access to quality sport options for children. Legislation to institutionalize policies that support the below is only additive.

### Access community spaces and programs at the touch of a button

The technology that kids are plugged into can bring their play spaces to them. As East Harlem's youth compete against non-local adults and youth for access to neighborhood recreation spaces, community members need greater access to information. A portal that reaches all involved in youth sports, from program directors and coaches to kids and their families, can help. Information about permits is available through the NYC DPR website, but the process can be cumbersome to navigate.<sup>66</sup> Aggregating instructions, field schedules, contact information, and an inventory of spaces on a user-friendly platform that also makes reserving space easy will unlock the area's infrastructure. Think: OpenTable for parks. Additional features should include notifications for permit deadlines, updates on applications and when desired spaces open, and a waitlist and fees portal.

A clean-cut process will help, and so would permitting guidelines that prioritize East Harlem-based groups' use of neighborhood fields. In the 2017-18 winter season, only 20 percent of permits for East Harlem spaces, excluding Randall's Island and Central Park, were given to local organizations.<sup>67</sup> But what if it flipped and 80 percent of the permits for local space was allocated for neighborhood-based groups? What if outside organizations paid a fee that would fund the maintenance and improvement of community parks or youth sports programming? The key is to make East Harlem's spaces work for residents — especially youth.

Awareness of free or low-cost programming is also important. Online program inventories currently promote some options, though many don't yet know about these resources and many programs are not included. These platforms should grow to include smaller organizations, bringing the full array of options to families' fingertips. For greatest impact, platforms should be bilingual and promote their resources through community listservs and institutions. Local computer labs in public libraries and community and recreation centers can provide access to the online portals and staff support to help navigate the platform. As a free WiFi and information hub citywide, LinkNYC could host these online inventories, bringing program lists to passing pedestrians and the 40 percent of residents who do not have ready access to smart technology.<sup>68</sup> Expand East Harlem's 22 current Link locations to reach above 125th Street so all of the community has access.<sup>69</sup>

### Connect kids with (more) existing sport options

East Harlem's history of community organizing has led to an influx in youth development, including the growth of sport options. At least 25 sports are offered within the community. But many youth are not reaping the benefits of the myriad options.

Collaboration among existing programs can expose local youth to a variety of sports. A coalition of local sports-based youth development (SBYD) organizations could pool a defined amount of resources to develop partnerships with schools and each other, offering sport sampling to elementary and middle school students. Three possible models:

## 5 recommendations for stakeholders in East Harlem



- Use existing school partnerships to offer a thrice weekly sport sampling after-school program. Each semester, survey students about the sports they want to try. Three organizations that represent students' top choices take turns providing programming.
- Through the SBYD coalition, coordinate season start/end dates and create a youth sports "ClassPass" that offers families a discount for participating in more than one program.
- Adopt a "homeroom" model, in which youth register to participate in one sport program and programs partner to share content. Imagine: Once weekly, soccer players are led in activities by a baseball coach, while that coach's athletes play soccer.

### Equip schools to build healthy bodies and minds

Schools are facing mounting pressure to achieve results based solely on academic metrics. The emphasis is partially responsible for the decline of physical activity throughout the day. But active kids do better in school and in life. The NYC Department of Education (DOE) recognizes this and in 2017 released a new wellness policy. The key features are School Wellness Councils, a portal with step-by-step instructions for implementation and standards that guide public schools toward quality physical education and recess. To fully unleash the promise of this new policy, previous guidelines for co-located schools, and the DOE's Move-to-Improve initiative, East Harlem schools need professional development and training workshops that focus on creating and adapting quality sport activities to available spaces. Doing so will help East Harlem schools, more than a third of which are co-located and face space-related obstacles, to deliver on the state standards for P.E. and recommendations for recess — and help youth reach their potential. Start with offering NYCDOE Office of School Wellness workshop, Make It Work: Mastering P.E. in Creative Spaces for Elementary Physical Education, in Harlem schools. (It is currently offered in Brooklyn, Staten Island and Queens).

East Harlem's eight community schools are also uniquely positioned to play a role as existing hubs that bridge academic success, social service resources, and community congregation. A vital connection between families and local resources, community schools can pilot these guidelines and out-of-school-time sport sampling initiatives. P.E. teachers at these schools could serve as connectors to out-of-school activities. Evening and weekend programming could feature multilingual, intergenerational sports opportunities. In the afternoon, community schools could host the above-mentioned "ClassPass" collaboration among a variety of providers. Collectively, local community schools can learn from the East Harlem Pride model to create a weekly programming rotation, exposing students to a wider menu of extracurricular resources. Activities would prioritize safe environments for sports, not competition.





## Leverage local government, community health funding

Government agencies and local organizations that fund youth development and healthy communities should leverage resources to support quality sports programming. Via the crowdfunding platform In Our Backyard (IOBY), the New York State Health Foundation has committed to matching successful health-focused campaigns in East Harlem, up to \$10,000. The Foundation also supports Building Healthy Communities (BHC), which uses a Collective Impact model to catalyze collaboration across city agencies. Notably, BHC has funded community-led, health-focused organizations and launched ShapeUp to bring community-led fitness classes to residents of all ages. That success opens the door for BHC to support youth sports as a tool for building healthy kids in East Harlem, one of its key priority neighborhoods. And for other organizations to follow suit.

The collective has two levers: 1) The credibility of the group helps BHC-created or -supported materials to become adopted, and 2) As a grant-giving body, BHC can support community-identified priorities. Leveraging its credibility, BHC could create a simple set of standards to help local sport organizations know what good looks like. To incentivize action, BHC should align its grant giving with the standards. If collaboration is a priority, BHC could support organizations in the above-mentioned sport sampling coalition with additional funding or prioritize similar models in selection.

Institutionalizing youth voice in the decision-making process is important. BHC should create a cross-agency youth council to complement its adult coalition. NYC Service's Youth Leadership Council program may be able to support this effort, which should feature youth from East Harlem and BHC's other priority communities. The representatives from East Harlem might come from involved city agencies' existing youth leadership groups, including the youth subcommittee Community Board 11 is revamping.

## Keep community needs at center of new development

East Harlem is facing a pivotal moment in development. Given the neighborhood's history of disparate development, residents are concerned that new investment will threaten their use of public space. In a show of community support — always a good business move — investors must include the community in decision-making and ensure public access does not become unaffordable. The community has secured an early win: Through a series of conversations with community and city officials, the neighborhood's rezoning plan now includes the East Harlem Points of Agreement — standards the community expects city officials and developers to meet.<sup>70</sup> As noted in the Points, the Community Board will hold parties accountable. The conversation should continue with regular town halls, informing residents about newly proposed developments and incorporating their input in how spaces are used.

Development projects like Sendero Verde present the opportunity to build anew while honoring the community's past. Proposed to occupy the full block on 111th and 112th between Park and Madison avenues, Sendero Verde will be built atop the space formerly known as the Field of Dreams. Developers have heralded the new site as a mixed-use project that includes affordable housing, a supermarket, community gardens, and a courtyard. Youth- and family-focused community groups — YMCA, DREAM, Union Settlement, and Mount Sinai — will run four of the development's promised public spaces. Delivering on that promise — especially given the space's history as a ball field — is crucial. East Harlem groups should have priority in using the public indoor spaces. Community programs not already offering free programming should consider doing so for youth under 18, much like how public rec centers operate. Affordability of indoor play spaces is particularly important during winter.

The bottom line: Keep public spaces public.





## GAME CHANGER: *Randall's Island*

Just across the Harlem River, Randall's Island boasts one of the largest open space opportunities in proximity to East Harlem. With 60-plus playing fields, the SportimeNY Tennis Center, a golf complex, batting cages, and Icahn Stadium, the island is one of New York City's athletic crown jewels. Yet just 4 percent of all youth permits reserved between March and November 2017 were East Harlem based.<sup>71</sup>

While improvements have been made to accessing the island's plethora of athletic spaces (see Appendix E), the question remains: How can youth better take advantage of these nearby assets?

### Meet community needs, level the permit playing field

The sheer competition to obtain permits for field use in East Harlem poses a seasonal challenge for many community leagues and youth. With no geographic priorities for renting park spaces, all New York City groups and programs submit permit requests at the same time, often overwhelming the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation permitting office. If groups are hosting a tournament or event, the process also includes coordinating with other city departments, meeting their criteria, filling out the associated paperwork, paying the necessary fees, and meeting additional deadlines. These steps are a nonstarter for groups already spread thin, including those interested in fields at Randall's Island, which with the exception of Premier Field (Field 10) at Icahn Stadium are publicly available.

Recognizing these challenges, RIPA's staff is growing community outreach. Transparency and guidance are key to making Randall's Island more accessible to youth, so staff contact information is readily available online. RIPA also keeps permit holders accountable, checking the fields and contacting permit holders if an assigned field is vacant. No-shows reflect poorly during the next application round. Interested parties can call on the day of desired use to inquire about spaces that have opened up at the last minute.

Community groups can also find support from groups like Partnerships for Parks. This public-private partnership between the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation and City Parks Foundation guides local organizations through the permit application process. Participating community groups receive free permits for open spaces.

Unleashing the promise of Randall's Island will require continued efforts to make the space accessible to youth-serving East Harlem organizations and local families. Randall's Island should have a designated feature in the city-wide app for field spaces (see Call for Leadership) that includes advance reservations and notifications about weekly and last-minute field availability. In the meantime, RIPA's e-subscription feature can expand to include alerts about fields that become available. Leveraging social media apps like Twitter and Snapchat to distribute information about field availability will reach and empower youth, specifically. So would teen and adult workshops on the permitting process, with accompanying information on working with youth for those who are interested.

### Increase island access with improvements to wayfinding and the built environment

Knowledge of how to get to Randall's Island is growing but still lacking. The most accessible route requires walking through Thomas Jefferson Park. Behind the pool, fields, track, skate park,



playground, basketball courts, and BBQ picnic area, there's a ramp. It goes to an overpass above FDR Drive that leads to the East River Esplanade that leads to the 103rd Street footbridge that leads to East Harlem's green oasis. The footbridge, which reopened in 2012 and is newly accessible 24 hours, year round, is the park's most popular access point.<sup>72</sup> Nearly 40 percent (a plurality) of respondents to a 2017 RIPA program survey said the 103rd Street footbridge is the easiest route to the island and the most convenient location for programming.<sup>73</sup>

Other means of access for East Harlem residents include a walkway through East River Houses to the 103rd Street footbridge, the RFK bridge at 125th Street, the M35 bus, and a bike lane along the East River Esplanade. The seven-block gap between the Harlem River Park greenway and the East River Esplanade deters foot and bike traffic to the 125th Street access point. A \$10 million project to expand the Esplanade is underway and, as of March 2018, is 5 percent complete. In the meantime, construction and heavy traffic on the greenway are barriers.<sup>74</sup> In 2017, \$101 million was dedicated to connecting the RFK bridge with the northern tip of the neighborhood, expanding the Esplanade from 132nd Street down to the bridge.<sup>75</sup> The only safe bike lane to the island is on the 103rd Street footbridge. And residents say the M35 bus, which has a history of being unsafe, is inconvenient and to be avoided. Private schools often bus students to the island. Private transport is not feasible for many East Harlem programs.

Getting youth and families to the island is the first step to leveraging its sports spaces. In 2018, RIPA is partnering with NYC Department of Transportation to launch Eco-Counter technology to track pedestrian and cycling traffic and understand who is accessing the island, from which entry points, and through what means. The study suggests that officials are actively seeking opportunities to close the access gap. Some paths forward to consider:

- Active transportation increases health outcomes, and East Harlem is growing the infrastructure. Learn from CitiBike's model for NYC Housing Authority residents and subsidize youth memberships to CitiBike. Funding could come from adult users who opt in to donate a dollar per month as part of their subscription. Students could receive a membership card, similar to the student MetroCard. Community groups can organize "bike pools" to ride together to the island. Teens and adults trained by El Barrio Bikes partners to be bike marshals can serve as peer resources for others. Similarly, community organizations can work with Harlem Runs and NYRR to organize group runs to and from the island.
- Residents should feel comfortable on the island. Encourage use of the island's paths with creative signage near access points, along the route to the island, and around its perimeter. Clear information in English, Spanish and Mandarin about what Randall's Island offers and how to get there, coupled with elements that promote playability, can help the island feel welcoming to East Harlem's youth and other residents. The island is robust

with long fields that cater to sports like ultimate frisbee and lacrosse, which 25 percent of youth told us they want to try.

- Regular ferry service departing from 107th Street Pier, a transportation option to major events, can open an access point between 125th and 103rd. The East Harlem Neighborhood Plan highlighted such a prospective pilot, calling for reconstruction of the pier (projected completion is December 2018) and a feasibility study for more frequent ferry transport. Start there and work with health-focused entities to develop funding streams to support the initiative.
- Engage the public — including youth — in bringing these and other ideas to life. In tandem with Partnership for Parks, NYC Department of Parks and Recreation is holding town halls to solicit community insights on Thomas Jefferson Playground. Bring the East River Esplanade access point leading to the 103rd Street footbridge into the conversation. The 125th Street access point should follow suit.

The gates to Randall's Island never close, and there are no entrance or program fees, but for too long barriers have kept East Harlem residents from taking full advantage of their neighborhood public land.

### Bring Randall's Island to East Harlem

For as long as physical barriers limit youth access to Randall's Island, taking programs available on the island to East Harlem's residential neighborhoods will be key. A pilot program launching in spring 2018 with SCAN's cornerstone programs will bring youth to Randall's Island to plant bulbs and return in the summer to assess growth. Similarly, RIPA has begun organizing field trips to the island for intergenerational community groups like tenant organizations, educating on access points and transportation options. These initiatives are particularly important for community members west of the Park Avenue Aqueduct who are hesitant to venture east under the overpass, given safety concerns, and potentially for residents living just south of the RFK pedestrian walkway, an area with recorded crew activity (see page 10).

New partnerships to bring sports programming off the island, with a built-in component that introduces the island's physical resources, should be next. Examples include a culminating final tournament, field day, or exchange with youth from other community programs, simultaneously encouraging cross collaboration. RIPA can activate its volunteer initiatives, which last year hosted 2,500 volunteers from around the city, alleviating the burden on small community groups to bring this programming to the neighborhood. In the process, youth and families will be exposed to Randall's Island programming, overcoming the barrier of unfamiliarity.

**Randall's Island is part of East Harlem. Now let's make East Harlem part of Randall's Island.**



## IDEAS

The ideas below can help reimagine youth sports through the core values of community collaboration, health and inclusion. They were developed at the Project Play: Harlem Huddle in January 2018 with the input of community leaders.

### Community Recreation Groups

**Peer-sharing:** Host a regular “coaches’ corner” for team leaders and program administrators to share best practices and discuss arising challenges. Semiannually, coordinate with other local organizations to host these discussions, swapping successful strategies and tactics.

**Out of school:** Include youth in the process of developing small, nontraditional sport spaces.

**Family engagement:** Connect with families at school parent nights and develop toolkits that empower guardians to support their youth’s athletic and personal development. Distribute the Project Play Parent Checklists that provide 10 questions that parents can ask themselves, their child and local sport providers.<sup>76</sup> Suggested activities to do with kids are good to include.

### National Sport Organizations

**Narrative:** Collaborate locally with other national sport organizations to promote multisport play in community programs. An NSO working group could partner with local SBYD groups to offer training in the general principles of coaching kids, grant funding and/or in-kind donations, programs that promote multisport play, pro-athlete visits to East Harlem programs, and field trips to professional teams’ games or events.

**Funding:** Focus on the specific needs of community groups when making local investments. In East Harlem, that’s often facilities and maintenance of those spaces.

**Pilots:** Prioritize community sport initiatives in schools to meet kids where they are, adapting programs based on the available resources. Demonstrate how to use spaces in creative ways, for example, turning volleyball courts into tennis space and a basketball court into a soccer pitch.

### Education

**Student engagement:** Empower youth to be leaders in presenting and running new initiatives. Offer mixed-age recess opportunities for older kids to coach recess for younger grades. Mentor students to run quality physical activity programs as models for their peers. And encourage students to consider sport and physical activity when budgeting for school needs, via the mayor’s recently announced civic education initiative that awards funds to each school for students to allocate.

**School-based workshops:** Engage parents and guardians to help them understand the importance of sport for health, academic performance, and personal development. Host workshops just for these family members, ending with an opportunity to participate in sports programming with their kids.

**Solicit youth voices:** Provide opportunities for youth to share their experiences through listening sessions, surveys, service learning and civic engagement projects. Work with youth to identify challenges and possible solutions to collectively launch new recreation and sport activities.



## Civic Leaders & Policymakers

**Local leaders:** Align collaboration and coordination with commitments to action from policymakers. Create partnerships among city agencies and direct-service youth providers.

**Transparency:** Make information about permits and school construction more readily available to the public, including what are the next steps and what opportunities are available.

**Elected officials:** Draw attention at the city level to the need for access to and inclusion in sport for all youth. Harness the power of sport to achieve community goals — from academic results to crime rates and health outcomes. Sponsor legislation that can create more equitable access to recreation options.

## Tech & Media

**News coverage:** Showcase stories of youth and their experiences, including those who lack ready access to sport activity. Run with the momentum created by the national media's coverage of East Harlem programs in 2017.<sup>77</sup>

**Crowdfunding:** Ensure that East Harlem programs are given consideration in platforms such as Sports Matter, in which Dick's Sporting Goods helps meet the funding needs of underserved organizations.

**Tools for collaboration:** Facilitate conversation and sharing of best practices and resources among youth sport providers through professional working group platforms such as Slack, LinkedIn or Google Docs. Create an app to facilitate open space permits and program accessibility.

## Business & Industry

**Mobilize:** Build on movement created by the Uptown Grand Central coalition to sponsor youth field days or street fairs specifically for youth program sampling, similar to Party on Park 2017.

**Volunteering:** Partner with community organizations to provide volunteers during company philanthropy days. There is no better cause marketing effort than supporting the health and activity of local youth.

**Micro-support:** Collaborate with local organizations to address a relevant, specific area of need. For example, a transportation company can support organizations that identify transportation barriers as a priority project.

## Public Health

**Medical professionals:** Offer free pre-participation physicals at middle and high schools that serve low-income families. Offer a clinic one day per week to serve all youth athletes with injuries.

**Policy integration:** Provide research support to policy leaders and encourage evidence-based action on policy decisions related to youth sports and physical activity.

**Commit to action:** Fund initiatives that promote quality sport participation and physical activity. They are tools of public health.

## Parents/Guardians

**Governing:** Coordinate a parent committee within community sport organizations. Work with other families to achieve common goals. Advise the proposed National Governing Body and Sports-Based Youth Development collaborative to ensure activities are aligned with the community's needs.

**Safe transport:** Work with community program providers to organize drop-off and pickup from activities to ensure safe transportation and escorts for youth.

**Parent recreation:** Bring kids to the community's popular adult pickup games. Organize mini-games for youth in a space nearby. Reserve field space at Randall's Island for neighborhood families to play together in games of soccer — or nontraditional sports like ultimate Frisbee that promote mixed gender play at low cost.

# APPENDIX A

## EAST HARLEM SCHOOLS

62 East Harlem Schools in District 4, 5 and 75

DBN	TRADITIONAL PUBLIC SCHOOL NAME
04M007	P.S. 007 Samuel Stern*
04M012	Tag Young Scholars*
04M037	River East Elementary*
04M038	P.S. 38 Roberto Clemente*
<b>04M050</b>	<b>P.S. 050 Vito Marcantonio*</b>
04M057	James Weldon Johnson
04M072	The Lexington Academy
<b>04M083</b>	<b>P.S. 083 Luis Munoz Rivera*</b>
<b>04M096</b>	<b>P.S. 096 Joseph Lanzetta</b>
04M102	P.S. 102 Jacques Cartier*
<b>04M108</b>	<b>P.S. 108 Asm. Angelo Del Toro Educational Complex</b>
04M112	P.S. 112 Jose Celso Barbosa*
04M146	P.S. 146 Ann M. Short*
04M155	P.S. 155 William Paca*
04M171	P.S. 171 Patrick Henry*
04M182	The Bilingual Bicultural School*
04M206	P.S. 206 Jose Celso Barbosa*
04M224	M.S. 224 Manhattan East School for Arts & Academics*
<b>04M372</b>	<b>Esperanza Preparatory Academy*</b>
04M375	Mosaic Preparatory Academy*
<b>04M377</b>	<b>Renaissance School of the Arts</b>
04M406	Global Technology Preparatory*
<b>04M409</b>	<b>Coalition School for Social Change*</b>
04M435	Manhattan Center for Science and Mathematics*
04M495	Park East High School
04M497	Central Park East I*
04M555	Central Park East High School*
04M610	Young Women's Leadership School
<b>04M680</b>	<b>The Heritage School</b>
04M825	Isaac Newton Middle School for Math & Science*
04M964	Central Park East II*
05M157	The Urban Assembly School for Global Commerce
05M133	P.S.133 Fred R Moore
75M079	P.S. M079 — Horan School
75M138	P.S. 138*

DBN	PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL NAME
84M705	Amber Charter School
84M204	Capital Preparatory Harlem Charter School
84M065	Democracy Prep Endurance Charter School
84M481	Democracy Prep Harlem Charter School
84M065	DREAM Charter School
84M518	East Harlem Scholars Academy Charter School
84M168	East Harlem Scholars Academy Charter School II
84M085	Global Community Charter School
84M704	Harbor Science and Arts Charter School
84M341	Harlem Children's Zone Promise Academy II Charter School
84M708	Harlem Prep Charter School
84M335	Harlem Village Academy Leadership Charter School
84M337	New York Center for Autism Charter School
84M433	Renaissance Charter High School for Innovation
84M385	Success Academy Charter School — Harlem 3
84M384	Success Academy Charter School — Harlem 2
PRIVATE/PAROCHIAL SCHOOL NAME	
	Agile Learning Center (Ungraded)
	Children's Storefront
	Cristo Rey NY High School
	East Harlem School at Exodus House
	Islamic Cultural Center School
	Kings Academy
	Mount Carmel-Holy Rosary School
	Our Lady Queen of Angels School
	Reece School
	St. Ann School
	St. Bernard's
	St. Paul School

\*Public schools reported co-located as listed in NYC DOE Colocation Reporting 2014-15. Schools in bold are community schools.

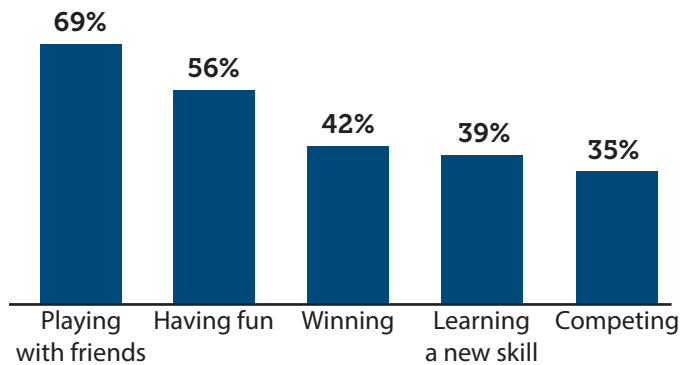
# APPENDIX B

## ASPEN INSTITUTE YOUTH SURVEY DATA

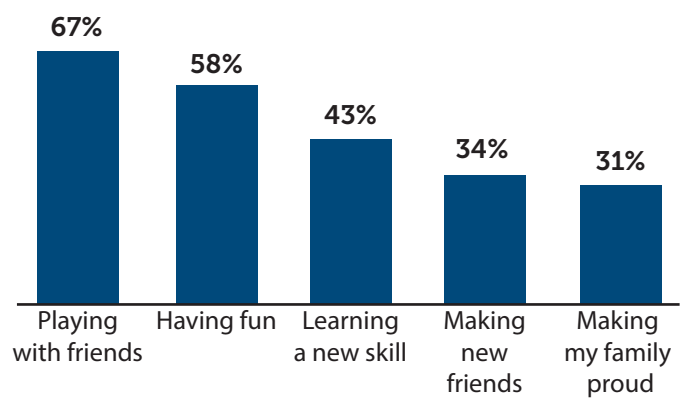
1,520 East Harlem youth (K-12) surveyed across four public and charter schools, five community programs and three local parks

### What East Harlem Kids Like Most About Sports

Top 5 Reasons Among Boys

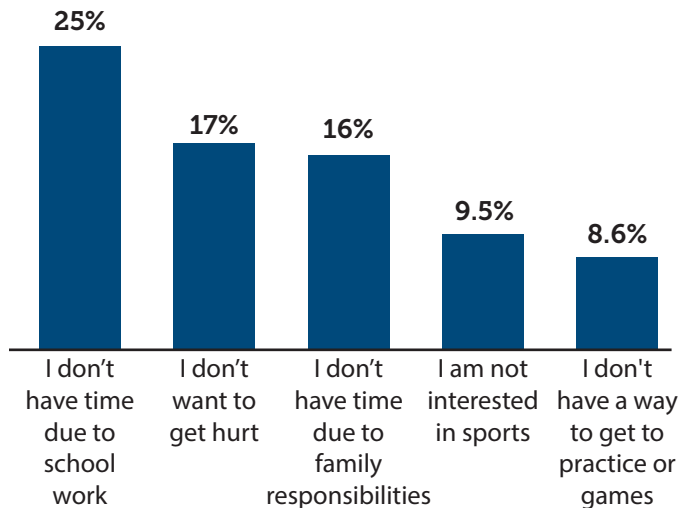


Top 5 Reasons Among Girls

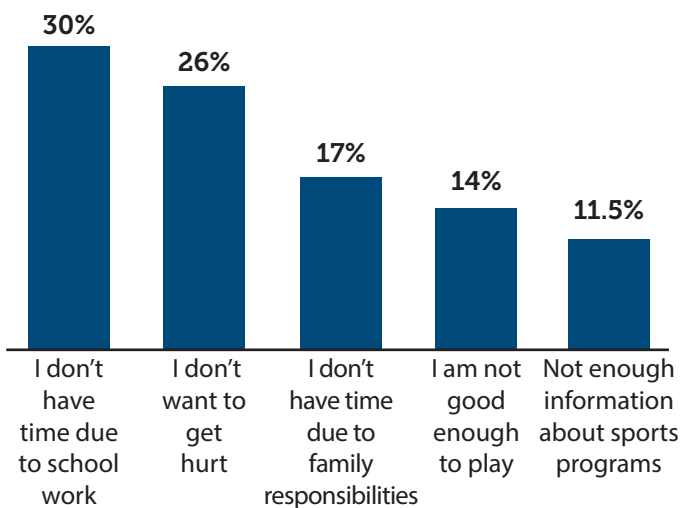


### Why East Harlem Kids Say They Don't Play

Top 5 Reasons Among Boys

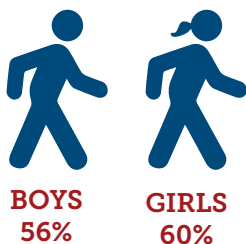


Top 5 Reasons Among Girls

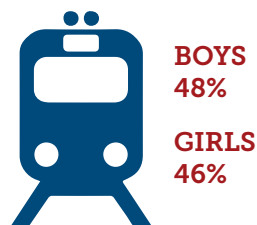


### How Youth Get to Practices, Games and Play Spaces

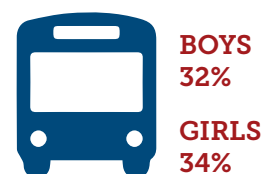
#### WALK



#### NYC SUBWAY



#### NYC PUBLIC BUS



# APPENDIX C

## HEALTH AND ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF PROGRESS

The Global Obesity Prevention Center (GOPC) at Johns Hopkins University specializes in projecting outcomes of health-related interventions, with the aid of big data and supercomputers. The Aspen Institute asked the GOPC research team to calculate the benefits to East Harlem if stakeholders can get more youth active at least 60 minutes a day, as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. GOPC projections:

### 19.3% OF EAST HARLEM YOUTH CURRENTLY ACTIVE DAILY

IF...	Fewer Overweight and Obese Youths	Direct Medical Costs Averted	Productivity Losses Averted	Years of Life Saved
<b>25% of Youth</b> GET AND STAY ACTIVE UNTIL THEY ARE 18 YEARS OF AGE	364	\$6 Million	\$6.4 Million	471
<b>50% of Youth</b> GET AND STAY ACTIVE UNTIL THEY ARE 18 YEARS OF AGE	2,187	\$36.1 Million	\$38.5 Million	2,793
<b>75% of Youth</b> GET AND STAY ACTIVE UNTIL THEY ARE 18 YEARS OF AGE	3,992	\$65.7 Million	\$70.1 Million	5,074
<b>100% of Youth</b> GET AND STAY ACTIVE UNTIL THEY ARE 18 YEARS OF AGE	5,818	\$95.7 Million	\$102.3 Million	7,394

#### Fewer Overweight and Obese Youths:

Number of additional youth dropping below the 85<sup>th</sup> BMI percentile, which is the CDC's definition of overweight. Currently, 16.7 percent of East Harlem youth fall into this category; another 16.2 percent are obese (at or above the 95<sup>th</sup> BMI percentile).

#### Direct Medical Costs Averted:

By reducing youth's BMI, they will be less likely to develop obesity-related health conditions later in life (e.g., stroke, cancer, heart disease, and diabetes). Avoiding such conditions will save medical costs such as hospitalizations, medications, and doctors' visits.

#### Productivity Losses Averted:

Avoiding obesity-related conditions will make people more productive (e.g., less sick days and longer lives), which will provide savings for businesses and society.

#### Years of Life Saved:

Avoiding obesity-related health conditions will also lengthen people's lives. Youth who move from above the 85<sup>th</sup> BMI percentile (overweight) to below that bar will on average lengthen their lives by approximately two years.

Source: Global Obesity Prevention Center, Johns Hopkins University, [www.globalobesity.org](http://www.globalobesity.org)

GOPC executive director: Bruce Y. Lee, MD, MBA, [brucelee@jhu.edu](mailto:brucelee@jhu.edu)

# APPENDIX D

## EAST HARLEM RECREATION CENTERS (PUBLIC/PRIVATE)

### BOYS' CLUB OF NEW YORK: GERRY CLUBHOUSE

321 East 111th St., New York, NY 10029

**TYPE:** Building/Institution, Community-Based Organization Recreation Center

**ACCESS:** Only services for boys, community partners; \$5 membership

**DEPARTMENT / OVERSIGHT:** BCNY

**FACILITIES:** Six floors, an indoor pool, outdoor play areas, and a large gymnasium

**HOURS:** Monday–Friday; 2:30–9 PM

### DWIGHT SCHOOL ATHLETIC CENTER

2116 First Ave., New York, NY 10029

**TYPE:** Building/Institution, Athletic/Recreation Facility

**ACCESS:** Private with tuition for summer camp activities

**DEPARTMENT / OVERSIGHT:** Dwight School (private)

**FACILITIES:** Regulation-size high school gym, seating 200 people; a six-lane, 25-yard indoor swimming pool; exercise and dance rooms; learning spaces; locker rooms and two rooftop, turf tennis courts

**HOURS:** Not available

### PELHAM FRITZ RECREATION CENTER

18 Mount Morris Park West, New York, NY 10027

**TYPE:** Building/Institution, Athletic/Recreation Facility NYC

**ACCESS:** NYC Parks and Recreation Center; free for youth under 18 years (annual); 18–24 years, \$25 (annual); 25–61 years w/pool, \$150 (annual), \$75 (6 months); 25–61 years w/o pool, \$100 (annual), \$50 (6 months)

**DEPARTMENT / OVERSIGHT:** NYC Department of Parks and Recreation

**FACILITIES:** Amphitheater (outdoor); lobby; athletic field; locker room; billiard room; meeting space; cardio room; multipurpose room; computer resource center; picnic area; dance room; playground (2); fitness room (2); pool (outdoor); kitchen; pool table.

**HOURS:** Monday–Friday: 8:30 AM–8:30 PM; Saturday: 9:00 AM–3:30 PM (This facility shuts its doors at closing time. Some activities may shut down 15 minutes early.)

### THOMAS JEFFERSON RECREATION CENTER

2180 First Avenue & E. 112 St., New York, NY 10029

**TYPE:** Building/Institution, Athletic/Recreation Facility

**ACCESS:** NYC Parks and Recreation Center; free for youth under 18 years (annual); 18–24 years, \$25 (annual); 25–61 years w/pool, \$150 (annual), \$75 (6 months); 25–61 years w/o pool, \$100 (annual), \$50 (6 months)

**DEPARTMENT / OVERSIGHT:** NYC Department of Parks and Recreation

**FACILITIES:** Accessible fitness equipment; locker room (2); afterschool room; multipurpose room (2); artificial turf field; picnic area (4); athletic field (3); playground; basketball court (outdoor) (8); pool (outdoor) (2); computer resource center; pool table (2); exercise equipment (outdoor); soccer field (outdoor); fitness room; sprinkler; handball court (outdoor) (4); track (outdoor); lobby.

**HOURS:** Monday–Friday: 9 AM–9 PM; Saturday: 9 AM–3 PM (This facility shuts its doors at closing time. Some activities may shut down 15 minutes early.)

# APPENDIX D (CONTINUED)

## EAST HARLEM COMMUNITY CENTERS (PUBLIC)

### DEWITT CLINTON HOUSES COMMUNITY CENTER

1505 Park Ave., New York, NY 10029

### EAST RIVER COMMUNITY CENTER

410 E 105th St., New York, NY 10029

### EL FARO BEACON (PUBLIC SCHOOL - JHS 45)

2351 1st Ave., New York, NY 10035

### GAYLORD WHITE COMMUNITY CENTER

2029 2nd Ave., New York, NY 10029

### JACKIE ROBINSON HOUSE COMMUNITY CENTER

112 E 128th St., New York, NY 10035

### JAMES WELDON JOHNSON COMMUNITY CENTER

1844 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10029

### JEFFERSON COMMUNITY CENTER

228 E 115th St., New York, NY 10029

### KING TOWERS COMMUNITY CENTER

70 W 115th St., New York, NY 10026 (west side of 5th Ave)

### LA ISLA BEACON

410 E 100th St., New York, NY 10029

### LEHMAN COMMUNITY CENTER

1641 Madison Ave., New York, NY 10029

### LINCOLN COMMUNITY CENTER

60 E 135th St., New York, NY 10037

### TAFT COMMUNITY CENTER

5th Ave., New York, NY 10029 / 1694 Madison Ave., NY, NY 10029

### WAGNER COMMUNITY CENTER

90 Paladino Ave., New York, NY 10035

### WASHINGTON HOUSES COMMUNITY CENTER

210 E 102nd St., New York, NY 10029

## EAST HARLEM POOLS

### NYC WAGNER HOUSES POOL

E. 124th St. between 1st & 2nd Aves.

**TYPE:** Community Park

Park Acreage: 1.64; Dimensions: 75'x60'x3.5'

**ACCESS:** Wheelchair Accessible

**DEPARTMENT / OVERSIGHT:** NYCHA/NYCDPR

**FACILITIES:** Outdoor Intermediate Pool, Wading Pool

### ABE LINCOLN POOL

5th Ave. & E. 135th St.

**TYPE:** Community Park

Park Acreage: 0.99; Dimensions: 40'x20'x3'

**ACCESS:** Non-Wheelchair Accessible

**DEPARTMENT / OVERSIGHT:** NYCDPR

**FACILITIES:** Outdoor Mini-Pool

### MARCUS GARVEY POOL

E. 124th St. & 5th Ave.

**TYPE:** Community Park

Park Acreage: 20.16; Dimensions: 165'x75'x4'

**ACCESS:** Wheelchair Accessible

**DEPARTMENT / OVERSIGHT:** NYCDPR

**FACILITIES:** Outdoor Intermediate Pool

### THOMAS JEFFERSON POOL

E. 112th St. and 1st Ave.

**TYPE:** Community Park

Park Acreage: 15.52; Dimensions: 239'x97'x4'

**ACCESS:** Wheelchair Accessible

**DEPARTMENT / OVERSIGHT:** NYCDPR

**FACILITIES:** Outdoor Olympic Pool

### HANSBOROUGH REC CENTER POOL

134th St. between 5th & Lenox Aves.

**TYPE:** Building/Institution-Recreation Center

Building Acreage: 0.29; Dimensions: 75'x35'x9'

**ACCESS:** Wheelchair Accessible

**DEPARTMENT / OVERSIGHT:** NYCDPR

**FACILITIES:** Indoor Intermediate Pool

# APPENDIX E

## RANDALL'S ISLAND



# ENDNOTES

- Recreation Centers** refer to large spaces, typically run by public or private entities, charging a fee for use or membership. These spaces are often fully equipped with athletic equipment for use. NYC Department of Parks and Recreation facilities also function as centers for community gatherings and services. **Community Centers** offer free entry and use for all community members and are often programmed by community-based organizations. The Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) funds Cornerstone Community Centers that provide year-round activities for youth and adults in NYCHA complexes. DYCD's collaborative school-based Beacons are included in this list. Community centers may not have regulation size facilities, often using multipurpose rooms for play spaces. (See Appendix D for list of rec and community centers in East Harlem.)
- Community Sport Groups** refers to programs providing organized sport for youth as their primary focus, often encouraging league play for participants. **Sport & Enrichment Providers** includes groups that pair sporting activities and leagues with character or academic enrichment activities. **After-School Programs That Incorporate Physical Activity** are extracurricular activities that may host physical activity components but may not have the sole focus of providing sport training.
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## CREDITS

The principal investigator for this report was Ranya Bautista, project coordinator of the Aspen Institute Sports & Society Program. It was written by Bautista and edited by Risa Isard, program manager, and Tom Farrey, executive director of the Sports & Society Program, respectively. Luis Fernando Llosa, Kamal Walker, the Global Obesity Prevention Center at Johns Hopkins University, and George Washington University researcher Edward Painter assisted the Sports & Society Program on the report. The State of Play Harlem report was designed by Merry Alderman and proofread by Catherine Lutz.

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## PHOTOS

Cover: East Harlem Pride, Asphalt Green/Poby

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The mission of the Sports & Society Program is to convene leaders, facilitate dialogue and inspire solutions that help sports serve the public interest. The program provides a venue for thought leadership where knowledge can be deepened and breakthrough strategies explored on a range of issues.

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## ABOUT PROJECT PLAY: HARLEM

Project Play: Harlem (PPH) is a multiyear initiative based on the Sports & Society Program's flagship initiative Project Play. PPH is designed to help stakeholders grow the quality and quantity of sport options for local youth. Organized by the Aspen Institute with support from Mount Sinai Health System, Harris Family Charitable Foundation and Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund, it is based on the simple idea that only through teamwork can leaders and caregivers provide every child an opportunity to play.

[harlem.projectplay.us](http://harlem.projectplay.us)

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## ABOUT HARRIS FAMILY CHARITABLE FOUNDATION

The Harris Family Charitable Foundation strives to improve people's lives and unlock their potential by inspiring youth, strengthening communities, and promoting wellness and healthy living. Their differentiated approach combines outcomes-based funding, targeted organizational support, and a network of like-minded donors and strategic sponsors, which amplifies the impact of contributions.

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