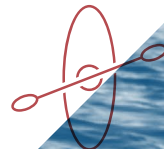




# STATE OF PLAY

## Seattle-King County

ANALYSIS AND  
RECOMMENDATIONS



THE ASPEN INSTITUTE  
**PROJECT PLAY**





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The Aspen Institute thanks our partners for their support of this report.

# WELCOME

This report offers an assessment of the state of play for youth sports, physical activity and outdoor recreation in King County. People in Seattle, King County, and Washington state are generally healthier than in other regions of the country. Seattle ranked second in the 2019 American Fitness Index of healthiest cities,<sup>1</sup> and Washington state was recently rated the most livable state by *U.S. News & World Report*.<sup>2</sup> The region is unique in its proximity to mountains and water that encourage outdoor recreation and active lifestyles. However, recent growth welcoming 300,000 new residents since 2010 has put pressure on infrastructure, raising concerns about equitable access to physical activity for youth.<sup>3</sup>

## THE VISION

*A King County in which all children have the opportunity to be active through sports, play and outdoor recreation.*

This report aims to uncover those inequities and recommend a path forward for access to high-quality youth sports and recreation for all communities in the region. It is anchored in the notion that all stakeholders will benefit if all children in King County are provided access to opportunities to be physically active. 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 Aspen Institute Sports & Society Program, supported by research from the University of Washington, produced this *State of Play* report, analyzing sport and recreation programming for youth in King County through the eight strategic filters ("plays") highlighted in the Aspen Institute's seminal 2015 report, *Sport for All, Play for Life: A Playbook to Get Every Kid in the Game*. Supporting Aspen is the State of Play Seattle-King County Advisory Board, which consists of local leaders across several key sectors.

We hope the report informs community strategies to bolster sport and recreation opportunities for youth (through age 18). Should stakeholders create the conditions to get and keep all county youth physically active, the projected downstream benefits are huge for community health outcomes — 64,000 fewer overweight and obese citizens, 70,000 years of life saved, and \$2.03 billion in direct medical costs saved and economic productivity losses averted, according to the Global Obesity Prevention Center at Johns Hopkins University (see Appendix E on page 45).

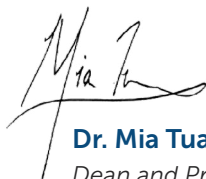
We applaud the desire of King County stakeholders to improve the lives of youth through sports, physical activity and outdoor recreation. By working together, public entities, nonprofit organizations, and community and business partners can make a substantial impact on the availability of recreational opportunities in this region. Let's seize the opportunity to be a national model by taking collective, sustained action guided by these findings.

Sincerely,



**Tom Farrey**

Executive Director  
Sports & Society Program



**Dr. Mia Tuan**

Dean and Professor  
University of Washington  
College of Education



**Christie True**

Director  
King County Department of  
Natural Resources and Parks





- More King County youth play organized flag football (7%) than tackle (5%), and they are almost three times more likely to try flag than to try tackle. Nationally, flag has also surpassed tackle among kids ages 6 to 12.<sup>8</sup>

Our recommendations — located in the Call for Leadership, Game Changer, and Ideas sections starting on page 34 — offer ideas based on the unique characteristics of King County and the recommendations of the community advisory board. Several key recommendations are related to ongoing regional debates about policies and priorities, including transportation, land use, and education. Our major recommendation focuses on establishing schools as a hub for physical activity. As access to sport and recreation becomes more inequitable, schools offer a space where all youth can be served and participate.

Other solutions include creating an equity toolkit for sport and recreation providers; integrating access to parks and playfields into conversations about regional transportation improvements; creating

a youth sports and recreation portal with a rating system; and launching a public health campaign aimed at increasing youth physical activity.

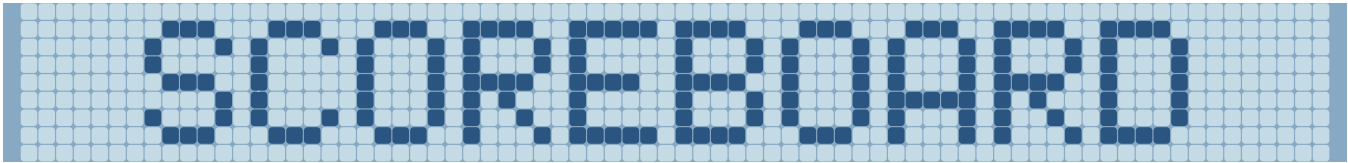
The University of Washington's youth survey drives much of the analysis in this report. The survey was distributed to fifth- through 12th-grade students across the county — in public schools, private schools and after-school programs — and was taken by 1,038 youth.

Children, as the consumers of youth sports, carry a valuable voice that too often is not reflected in coaching and programming. When children have some measure of control over physical activity, they are more inclined to enjoy themselves and thus continue to move their bodies, becoming athletes for life. In King County, what youth most like about organized sports and recreation is having fun and playing with friends. Winning was not in the top five.

*State of Play Seattle-King County* is the Aspen Institute's eighth overall community report. There is a county report on Mobile County, Alabama; a state report on Hawai'i; regional reports on Southeast Michigan, Western New York, and Greater Rochester and the Finger Lakes; and hyperlocal reports on Harlem and Baltimore. Stakeholders in those communities have taken actions based on the recommendations and are seeing results.

With a passionate sports culture and love of the outdoors, King County has the opportunity to take action and provide more equitable access to and higher quality of sport, physical activity and recreation opportunities for all children. This can be accomplished through a joint commitment — by schools, local government agencies, nonprofits and the business community — to the health and well-being of our next generation.

# THE STATE OF PLAY IN KING COUNTY



## ON THE WHOLE, FEW YOUTH ARE ACTIVE ENOUGH

- Only **22% of boys** and **16% of girls** meet the CDC's recommendation of 60 minutes of physical activity daily.

*Nationally, 35% of boys and 18% of girls meet the CDC recommendation for physical activity.*



- Youth who meet the CDC's recommendation of 60 minutes of physical activity daily spend less time on screens and have better mental health.

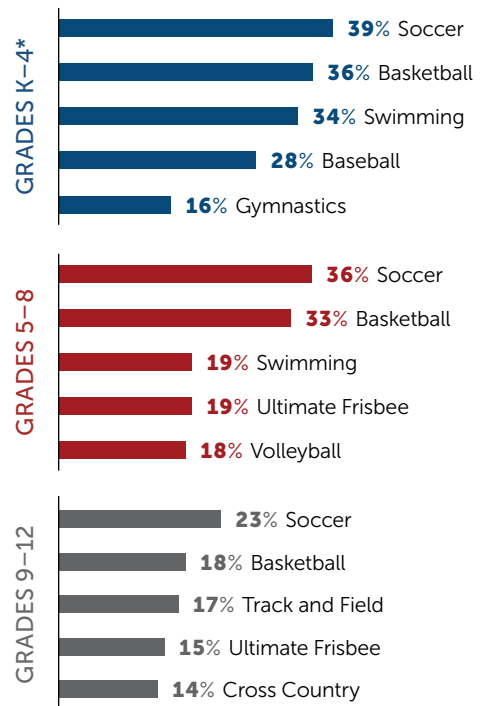
*Statistically significant finding controlling for grade*

## Top 5 Organized Sports/Physical Activities in King County

Results from the University of Washington's survey of 1,038 youth. Percentages add to greater than 100 because youth could choose more than one answer.

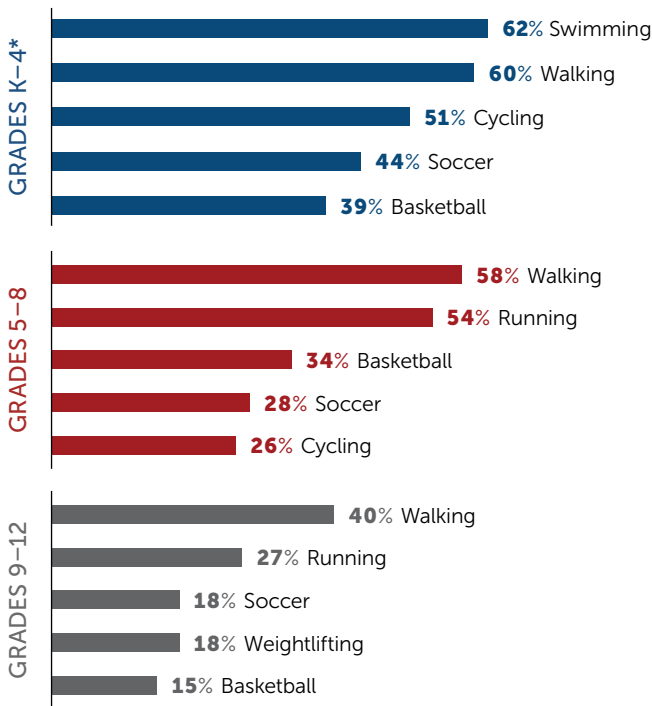
Rank	Girls	Boys
1	Soccer <b>25%</b>	Soccer <b>35%</b>
2	Basketball <b>25%</b>	Basketball <b>30%</b>
3	Volleyball <b>19%</b>	Ultimate Frisbee <b>25%</b>
4	Dance <b>19%</b>	Flag Football <b>14%</b>
5	Swimming <b>18%</b>	Baseball (tie) <b>13%</b>
		Track and Field (tie) <b>13%</b>

## Top Organized Sports/Physical Activities by Grade



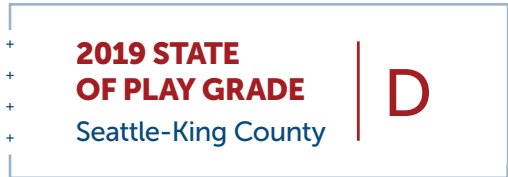
*\* Grades K-4 results come from youth focus groups and parent surveys; all other results come from youth survey.*

## Top Physical Activities Participating in Regularly



\* Grades K-4 results come from youth focus groups and parent surveys; all other results come from youth survey.

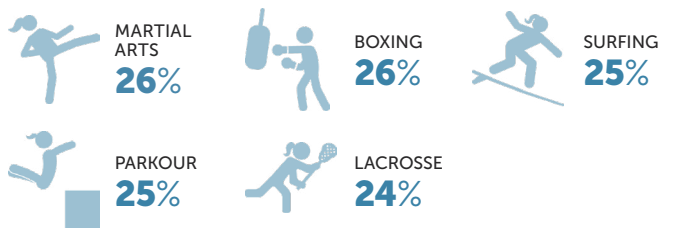
**What grade would you give stakeholders in Seattle-King County in getting kids active through sports, play and outdoor recreation?**



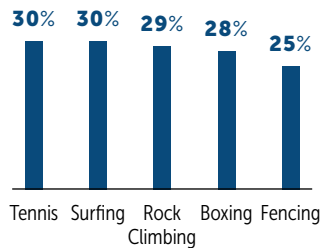
The advisory board that assisted on this project provided this, and other, grades in the report based on study data and expertise in their respective sectors.

## TOP SPORTS YOUTH WANT TO TRY

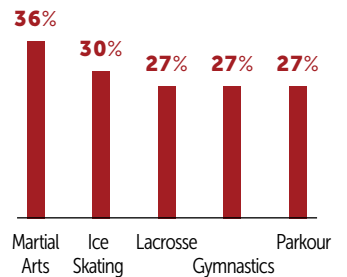
### Overall



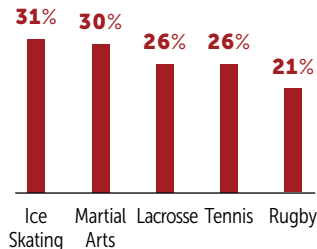
### White/Caucasian



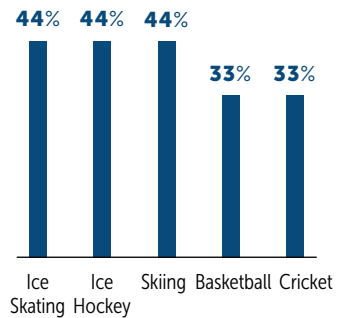
### Hispanic or Latino/Latina



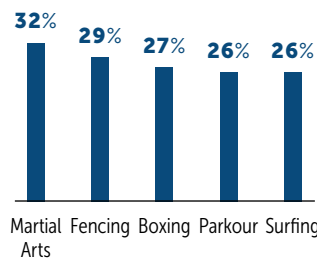
### Black/African American



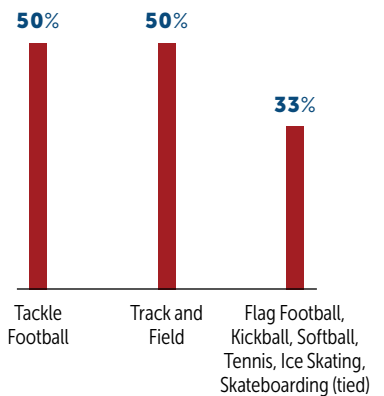
### American Indian/ Alaska Native\*



### Asian/Asian American



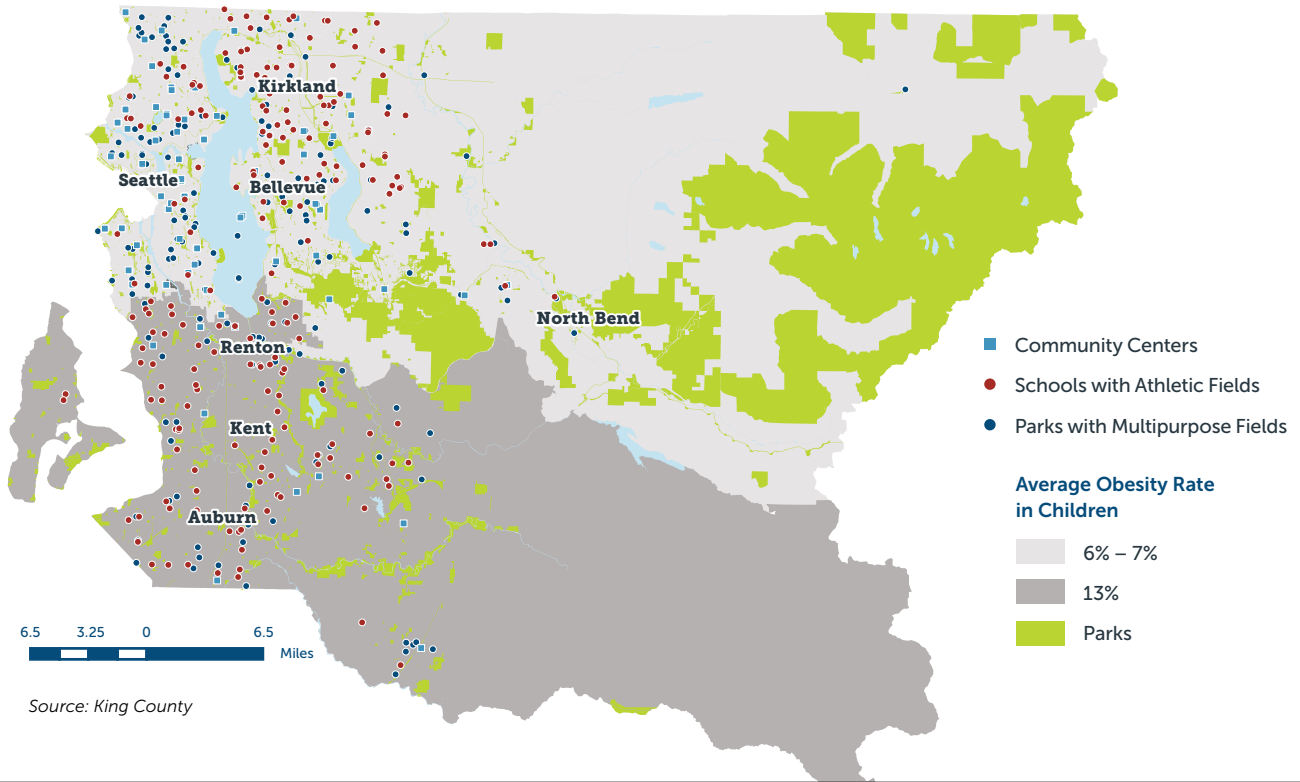
### Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander\*\*



\* Only 1% of respondents identify as American Indian/Alaska Native

\*\* Only 1% of respondents identify as Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

## Multipurpose Fields with Youth Obesity Rates



## Transit Access to Parks, Saturday Mornings

Saturday, October 13, 2018, 7 a.m. – 11 a.m.

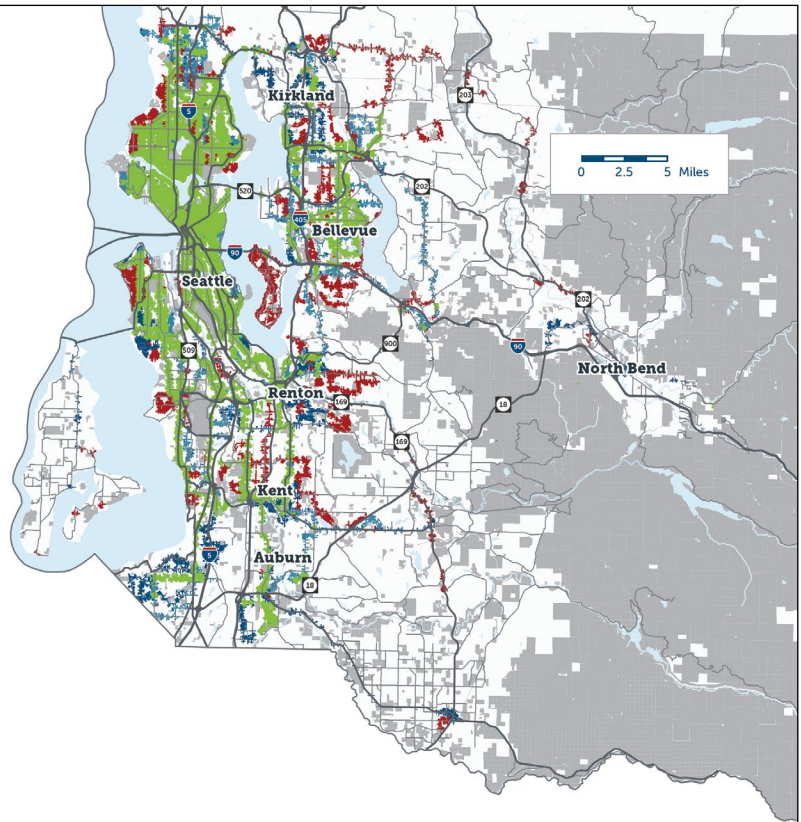
- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><span style="color: red;">■</span> None</li> <li><span style="color: blue;">■</span> Poor</li> <li><span style="color: teal;">■</span> Fair</li> <li><span style="color: green;">■</span> Good</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><span style="background-color: #cccccc; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 10px;"></span> Other Public Land</li> <li><span style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; width: 15px; display: inline-block;"></span> Highways</li> <li><span style="background-color: #add8e6; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 10px;"></span> Rivers and Lakes</li> </ul> |
|--|---|

### Measuring Transit Access

The four categories of transit access are defined as follows:

- None: No transit trips leave from the stops within the four-hour window.
- Poor: Trip frequency is 30 minutes or more.
- Fair: Trip frequency is between 15 – 30 minutes.
- Good: Trip frequency is less than 15 minutes.

Sources: The Wilderness Society, US Census, CDC, King County Metro, Public Health – Seattle & King County, PSRC, WSDOT, Forterra, US EPA



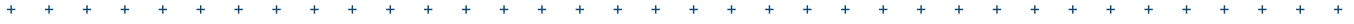




# 1

Challenge: Youth sport is organized by adults

## The Play: Ask Kids What They Want



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

*To get and keep kids involved in sports, build the voice of children into the design of activities.*

### FIVE FINDINGS IN SEATTLE-KING COUNTY:

**Youth are concerned about how much their sports and activities cost.**

Many youth and their families feel left out of organized sports and activities because of cost. Thirteen percent of youth say they have never participated in organized sports or physical activities because they are too expensive; another 11% of those who have dropped out did so due to cost. New research suggests that the average King County family spends \$825 per child for 12 months of participation in one sport; the national average is \$693.<sup>9</sup> While fees for club sports are the most exclusionary, almost any fee seems like too much. According to one student, “For school sports, we have to pay \$38 (in athletic fees) for the year. For dance/cheer, you have to pay \$500 for the year for all the uniforms. I couldn’t do it because it cost too much.” Another explains that his family could only afford for one child to play high-level sports. His sister played “because we couldn’t afford it, and so only she could play and I couldn’t. I had to work.” A 2012 *Seattle Times* report detailed the dramatic decline in school-sports participation as fees increased postrecession.<sup>10</sup> A bill in the Washington state legislature’s 2019 session tried to address the cost barriers in school sports and other

extracurriculars.<sup>11</sup> The bill called for \$5 limits on fees for student IDs and extracurricular participation for low-income high school students. After the bill stalled in the Senate, money was allocated to study the issue. All high schools now have to report athletic fees, discounted athletic fees for students receiving free or reduced-price lunch, and the number of such students participating in athletics.

**Coaches need programmatic support and training to use youth voice in their coaching.**

Research shows that autonomy-supportive coaching — coaching that is athlete-centered as opposed to coach-controlled — leads to positive outcomes for youth, increasing intrinsic motivation, self-esteem and prosocial behavior.<sup>12</sup> The majority of coaches in our survey place a lower value on youth-centric coaching than on other elements of coaching for positive youth development, such as mastery, fun and safety. Some regional programs — The Service Board, Kent Youth and Family Services, and Skate Like a Girl, for example — prioritize youth voice. However, focusing intentionally on that would be a substantial change for most youth sports organizations, as winning games is often seen as the primary objective. One sports program leader explains that youth voice is “just not something most people see as a solution. Even though customer voice creates better products and better corporations, in sports leagues, adults have a position of power, so (they) get to make the decisions” — contrary to what might be best practice.

## Young people describe being physically active as “joyful” and “stress relieving.”

In focus groups, younger kids detail the elaborate, imaginary chase games they play at recess. Monkey bars and climbing structures play a central role in their descriptions of their favorite activities. Older youth describe physical play as good for their mental health. One teen says, “When I dance or run, I feel good. I am not mad anymore; it puts me in a better mood.” Another says, “If I don’t play outside, I get upset.” Youth know and feel inherently what research tells us about the benefits of physical activity on mental health.<sup>13</sup>

## Fifty-three percent of youth would use public transportation, if provided, to experience outdoor recreation.

However, for youth, and low-income youth in particular, finding ways to get to the mountains is a challenge. Fifty-four percent of families making more than \$50,000 spent at least three days in nature with their kids during the previous month, while 44% of parents making under \$50,000 did so. Aware of this gap, King County is investing in ways to expand access to popular regional hiking destinations. Trailhead Direct is a pilot project co-led by King County Metro and King County Parks with funding support from the Seattle Department of Transportation and REI.<sup>14</sup> More than 20,000 passengers<sup>15</sup> use the service, which in 2019 expanded to the nation’s most racially diverse communities – SeaTac and Renton.

## Fifty-six percent of youth say that physical education (PE) class helps them be active.

Washington state law requires 100 minutes of PE per week in grades one through eight. However, since “there are no PE police,” as one educational leader notes, evaluating whether this law is followed is a challenge. In our survey, 4% of youth reported

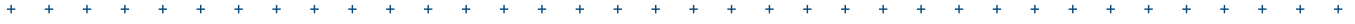
never having taken a PE class. Further, only 29% of schools in Washington have developed a comprehensive school physical activity program providing opportunities for students to be active before, during and after school.<sup>16</sup> Many King County districts allow students to waive PE by substituting extracurricular athletics for a PE class, against national best-practice recommendations.<sup>17</sup> In 2019, state officials are implementing a new policy that requires an annual review of PE programs in order to begin addressing some of these issues. Schools will be required to report the amount of recorded PE time, number of waivers given, and the number of PE-certified teachers.<sup>18</sup> Early data collection suggests that among King County school districts, 58% of elementary schools and 25% of middle schools do not provide at least 100 minutes of PE per week.



# 2

## Challenge: Overstructured experiences

# The Play: Reintroduce Free Play



**From the *Sport for All, Play for Life* report:**  
*Make sure there's room for not just organized play but experiences that children can own.*

### FIVE FINDINGS IN SEATTLE-KING COUNTY:

#### Parents value outdoor time.

Ninety-nine percent of parents surveyed say that time outdoors is very important to them, compared to 59% who say physical activity at school is very important and 54% who say participation in organized sports is very important. Fifty-three percent of youth report going to a park near their house at least once a week. Of those youth who don't go to their nearby parks as much as they would like, 20% say it is because they don't have anyone to go with them. Many youth say their parents won't let them go to parks; it seems parents' decisions not to let kids play outside influence other parents. Parents, in focus groups, explain that if they saw more kids in parks or riding bikes in their neighborhood, they would be more likely to allow their children to do the same. The benefits of nature contact for children are similar to those identified for physical activity and organized sports: positive outcomes in physical health, cognitive functioning, self-control, psychological well-being and imaginative play.<sup>19</sup> The University of Washington's new Nature for Health initiative supports research on nature contact as a means to address critical health issues.

#### Concerns about personal safety at parks — and traveling there — are barriers to letting kids play outside.

With 260,000 acres of public land in King County, there is abundant green space. However, while many Seattleites (87%) have walkable access to parks, only 56% of the rest of the county does.<sup>20</sup> As one municipal leader explains, geographic proximity does not necessarily mean accessibility. In many parts of the county, there's a park, she says, "but no parent in their right mind would allow their kid to go there, or maybe they would allow their kid to play at the park but not to walk there." Parents across socioeconomic groups and neighborhoods expressed similar safety concerns in focus groups. Seventy-two percent have seen behavior or elements that seemed "unsafe" at nearby parks, including used syringes, intoxicated individuals and broken equipment. Parents and community leaders also have concerns about allowing activities in wooded areas with homeless encampments. A recent survey of Seattle households with children found that "concerns about unfamiliar people, including people experiencing homelessness, commonly influence the decision for students to walk/bike to school."<sup>21</sup> These concerns — coupled with traffic safety concerns, like inadequate walking or biking paths — are barriers to free play at schools or parks. Similarly, in rural King County, leaders speak about the need for trails or sidewalks to connect neighborhoods to abundant green space.



### Recess is valued but hard for schools to prioritize.

Active recess increases students' physical activity and improves educational performance.<sup>22</sup> In 2015, Seattle teachers included recess equity in their bargaining agreement, asking for 45 minutes per day for all elementary school students, because the schools receiving the least recess time also had the highest rates of low-income youth.<sup>23</sup> National guidelines suggest that schools should offer at least 20 minutes of recess per day.<sup>24</sup>

Some King County school district wellness policies do not address recess at all, and many do not explicitly state recess must be at least 20 minutes a day. Seventy-eight percent of parents of elementary-school-aged youth say physical activity at school is very important to them.



Elementary school principals agree, but one notes, "Achievement scores have been more and more important to funding, and focus on physical activity has gone away." Meanwhile, parents of older youth express more dissatisfaction with the amount of physical activity at middle and high schools. One parent says, "There is so much emphasis on high-stakes test preparation that middle schoolers are deprived of time to move their bodies, which, ironically, could help them focus better in classes."

### **Busy playfields provide little space for spontaneous activity.**

Youth, parents and community leaders say it is difficult to find space for free, unscheduled play. Fields are in high demand for paid programming. If they are not occupied, many grass fields are unusable for much of the year given weather conditions and maintenance issues. Across the county, people cite difficulties using fields "under water in the winter" or with "huge, dangerous potholes"<sup>25</sup> in the summer. There is growing interest among regional policymakers in addressing this need. The new Steve Cox fields in White Center will be open one hour per day for free play. Carving out this kind of time on playfields is a challenge. A municipal leader in Seattle says a "culture change" is needed to make the case for opening up revenue-generating fields for drop-in play.

### **Screen time is a concern and a potential competitor to free play.**

Video games and personal devices often shoulder blame for rising youth inactivity; one principal suggests, "things like Minecraft have really done a disservice to kids being active ... instead of going out and playing, they are sitting down and playing." Research is less clear about the relationship between physical activity and screen time.<sup>26 27</sup> Parents, in focus groups, grapple with screen time. Some parents are concerned that allowing too



much free-play time will turn into screen time. This leads some parents to overstructure youth downtime, which both parents and community leaders agree is contributing to youth "losing that sense of designing their own creative play."<sup>28</sup> Other parents struggle with not having safe, low-cost options that aren't screens: "Instead of paying \$1,500 to \$2,000 for one (sport) season, I can buy a \$300 to \$400 X-Box and a PlayStation, and my kid will be at home safe," says one parent. Our youth survey suggests that youth who report going to parks more frequently spend less time on screens.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, youth who are more physically active and those who do organized sports report spending less time on screens.<sup>30</sup>

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**2019 STATE  
OF PLAY GRADE**  
Seattle-King County

| C-



## Jessica Clark, 17

Jessica is the lead programmer for her suburban high school's state-qualifying robotics team. As a senior, she's received scholarship offers to play tuba at top universities. She is the technical director and lighting designer for her school's theater company.

And until last year, Jessica competed as an elite trampolinist.

Jessica transitioned to female upon entering high school. She felt somewhat uncomfortable continuing to compete in trampoline in the men's division, but competition rules stipulated that she could not compete in the women's division. "It's such a high-caliber sport that I couldn't fairly compete as a female," she says. "In a lot of sports that is not as much the case; co-ed leagues are acceptable and easier to implement."

Jessica, whose photo was not included in this report, stopped competing in 2018. While she still attended practices, it was difficult to stay motivated without the high level of competition.

She's excited to find a possible solution for transgender athlete participation when faced with strict gender-based rules. Jessica suggests that leagues could implement less-competitive, inclusive

brackets in more youth sports. These would have a set of rules that don't include separating competitors by gender, unlike rules created by governing bodies such as USA Gymnastics that are intended for elite competitors. She thinks that programs could benefit more athletes by providing a place to compete for the sake of competing — not to advance to higher levels of competition.

Jessica is inspired by the approach taken by Ultimate frisbee — a sport she says is already one of the most inclusive. Her mom is the executive director of a Seattle-based Ultimate program that creates opportunities for less-competitive play for all ages.

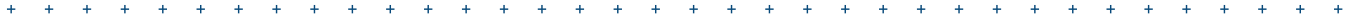
Even without competition, Jessica still remains very physically active. She spends a lot of time working on projects in the backyards of her family and a neighbor. Jessica's top career choice is computer programming and software development. She's planning to continue playing tuba in college. And, if you want, she'll still impress you with her best tricks on your backyard trampoline.



# 3

## Challenge: Sameness and specialization

# The Play: Encourage Sport Sampling



**From the *Sport for All, Play for Life* report:**  
*Resist early sport specialization that limits overall development. Grow the menu of sport options, create better connections to vulnerable populations, and more athletes-for-life will emerge.*

### FIVE FINDINGS IN SEATTLE-KING COUNTY:

#### Parents and community leaders express doubt about early specialization and the business of youth sports.

While many parents speak to positive experiences in club/select programming, they also express ambivalence, confusion and frustration about the system. A parent whose son was in a select program describes an environment where parents “have so much invested in this (that) they get frustrated and they’re screaming at the coach and the refs, and where the coaches feel this responsibility, like this team has to win because all these parents are paying all this money. ... It’s not a super healthy environment.” Another mother describes how her family is trying to back out of the club sports “vortex, because it just takes over your entire life.” Despite reservations, many of these parents suggest kids themselves drive select-level participation because they want to play with higher-level players and improve their skills. However, parents also note that moving to club sports does not guarantee high quality. One parent explains that she feels like playing a sport at the club level “means something

very different now than it probably did 10 years ago. ... It’s become a pay-to-play scenario across the board, and so anyone can pay the money to play.” Another municipal leader explains that the “economics of youth sports” is driving the system, with another adding, “the system is built for the .001%, but there’s no trickle-down in youth sports.”

#### Some programs are working to help youth see more people who look like them participating in a range of sports.

Program leaders say it’s important for youth to see people of their race, gender and abilities playing a sport for the activity to feel accessible. Seattle Public Schools tries to address this by using PE to introduce activities such as golf, rowing and biking, so youth can have the skills to try them on their own. Program leaders, however, find an introduction is not enough to overcome the perception of some sports as unwelcoming for youth of color. One program leader notes, in his sport, “implicit bias among coaches and players and communities (makes it) really hard to create an inclusive, inviting experience for players of color, coaches of color.” Implicit bias includes underlying attitudes or stereotypes about who can be a good athlete or play certain sports and unspoken rules of sport cultures that might be exclusive to certain communities. Community leaders believe that more programming targeting youth of color has a role to play. The Nature Project, founded by former Seattle Seahawks football player Cooper Helfet, leverages mainstream professional athletes as role models to diversify representation in





**African American and Hispanic youth are participating in fewer types of organized sports and activities than white youth.**

Our survey suggests that while black or African American and Hispanic or Latino/a youth have tried the same sports as white youth at least one time, they are not accessing as many of them on a regular basis. Our survey asks youth about 49 potential organized sports and physical activities; 48 of the activities are selected by at least one white respondent, while 17 sports and activities are not selected by a single African American or Hispanic respondent in our sample. These include ice skating, ice hockey, rowing and lacrosse.



**King County has too few swimming pools.**

In Seattle, the only city in the county for which there is publicly available data of this type, there are 1.4 swimming pools per 10,000 people — well below the national average of about three pools per 10,000 people.<sup>31</sup> Numerous program leaders say pools in King County are programmed to capacity. One aquatics leader says, “As soon as a new pool opens, it will be full.” Many existing pools, such as those at Green Lake in north Seattle, the Enumclaw Aquatic Center and Si View, need major capital improvements to stay functional. The last major infusion of funding for pools in the county was in 1968.<sup>32</sup>

For a county in which over half of its citizens live within a half mile of shoreline, King County’s lack of access to swim instruction is a safety and public health issue. Ten percent of King County 12th grade students do not know how to swim<sup>33</sup>, and nationally, African American youth are more likely to die from drowning than their white counterparts.<sup>34</sup> The new King County Parks, Recreation, Trails, and Open Space Levy will help address the shortage with \$44 million for renovations and new pool construction.

outdoor recreation. Another program that does this is Cascade Bike Club’s Major Taylor Project (MTP). Named after African American world-champion cyclist Marshall “Major” Taylor, the MTP empowers youth through bicycling.

## Parents and community leaders say schools offer the best access point for physical-activity programming.

Many program leaders say a closer connection with schools would mean they could reach a lot more of the youth who might need their services.<sup>35</sup> A pro sports executive says schools have the “process and strategy and tactics”<sup>36</sup> of inclusion built into them in a way that many sport and recreation groups do not. One local policymaker says that a better connection between school districts and parks departments could be a “huge resource for all of us,” because there is a “tremendous amount of opportunity” to support kids through a unified approach. The Washington Youth Soccer Foundation Soccer for Success program is an example of the high demand for this type of programming. At one elementary school in Auburn, the after-school program serves 60 kids with 127 on the waitlist.

However, schools are not necessarily well-positioned to fund or facilitate after-school programming for sports or other activities.<sup>37</sup> One state legislator says of his peers in Olympia, “People don’t truly understand or appreciate ... that participation (in extracurriculars) drives academic success.”

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## Virginia Wade, 18

The title of Virginia Wade's paper speaks volumes: *I am an athlete*. Virginia competes internationally, has won countless medals in gymnastics and skiing, swims at the pool, and has hiked 1,600 miles on the Appalachian Trail.

So yes, Virginia is very much an athlete.

She also has Down syndrome. It's a genetic disorder that can cause children to develop physically and intellectually at a slower rate than peers. Each year at school, Virginia writes an article about herself for every teacher, including PE instructors. The goal: show teachers and classmates how similar she is to her peers.

"My favorite part of gym is friends cheer me on," says Virginia, who was born and raised in Seattle and attended Roosevelt High School before recently moving to Buffalo, New York. "I feel independent."

Amy Martin, Virginia's mom, initially encountered roadblocks locating a Seattle gym that would accept Virginia. They found a home at Cascade Elite Gymnastics in Mountlake Terrace. Virginia trained six to 12 hours a week in gymnastics — her favorite sport — and joined a ski team at age 8.

"People were very surprised that Virginia at 5 years old knew how to ski," Amy says. "Part of it is a cultural bias. We assume kids of special needs are not capable of doing certain things, and people lower their expectations."

Virginia is competitive. But she doesn't view medals as her greatest sports accomplishments. Instead, she says, it's "how to do hard stuff if I don't quit. People like me, and I can say I'm strong."

Research shows that youth who have disabilities are 4.5 times less active and have obesity rates that are 38 percent higher than other youth.

Virginia says Seattle can improve sports experiences for kids by embracing Unified Sports, a Special Olympics concept joining people with and without intellectual disabilities on the same team to promote social inclusion.

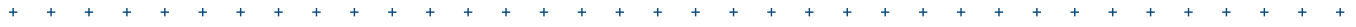
"Let everyone play so different kids can do things in sports, even if they've never tried," Virginia says. "More Unified. Have more fun."



# 4

## Challenge: Rising costs and commitment

# The Play: Revitalize In-Town Leagues



**From the *Sport for All, Play for Life* report:**  
*Provide community-based, low-cost leagues and programs that are accessible to all kids – not just youth with the resources and ambition to participate on travel teams.*

### FIVE FINDINGS IN SEATTLE-KING COUNTY:

#### **Inequity in access to sports programming is impacting high school sports and shutting out low-income youth.**

Families told us their kids are being shut out because they can't afford the camps and clinics other kids can. One mother says her daughter didn't want to play volleyball anymore because she couldn't keep up with her friends and teammates who "go to those summer camps or those other special trainings." Another parent describes the problem this way: "Most of the major high schools around here, in order for these kids to play at a JV or varsity level, they have to play club ball and ... so they feel forced into that system even if they can't afford it. ... But without that, there's no chance they're going to make those teams." Our survey of King County parents suggests that kids of parents making \$75,000 or more are more likely than those making less than \$75,000 to have ever participated in organized sports.<sup>38</sup> This trend impacts not just who participates in high school sports but also who sees competitive success. *The Seattle Times* found that over the past decade, four of every five

public schools that won state titles were schools whose population of free and reduced-price lunch students was well below the state average of 43%.<sup>39</sup>

#### **Parks and recreation programs grapple with how best to meet resident needs and react to sports trends.**

Urban, suburban and rural parks and recreation leaders constantly monitor local resident needs and programming trends. For example, Si View Metro Parks does not offer baseball, because it would compete with Little League. Similarly, Bellevue focuses primarily on introductory programming for popular sports and activities. While the intention is to be cost effective and avoid duplicating services, it can unintentionally make parks and recreation departments reactive, not proactive.

One Seattle municipal leader explains that there's a need to proactively shape the youth sports culture by providing consistent, developmentally appropriate physical activity for youth. This is not to compete with club programs, but to provide a safe, healthy and accessible alternative. Further, the lack of a low-cost rec team means that kids who can't afford club teams are left out. Select programming no longer means more competitive; it just means more costly, many parents and leaders say. As one parent explains, "The E team is no better than a rec league, but they're paying the same prices as the A team. ... Now there's not enough kids to create a rec-level team that's only \$100 for the season versus \$2,000 for the season."



### **Ultimate frisbee is a popular and accessible sport with a unique and inclusive culture.**

Ultimate is currently the third-most-played organized youth sport in the region, behind soccer and basketball. Participation in its league-based play (among both youth and adults) has increased by 145% over the last 10 years, with more than 325 youth teams participating each year in league-based play in King County.<sup>40</sup> Total youth participation

has increased 61% over the last three years.<sup>41</sup> Not only does King County typically have high levels of representation on various youth national teams, but it has bucked trends by having high participation rates across racial, ethnic and socioeconomic groups. Ultimate is also unique in its rules and approach to play. Games are self-officiated, and participants strive to compete within the Spirit of the Game, an honor code that creates a communal approach to safety, developmentally appropriate play, and social and emotional skill development. For example, if a player commits a foul, the opposing player stops the game and the athletes must come to an agreement about how to apply the rules and continue play. Another routine part of each game is the spirit circle. At the end of each game, teams celebrate with positive interaction such as skits and songs meant to foster inclusion and celebrate the communal spirit of competition.

### **Pro sports teams are generally viewed as assets.**

One business leader says Seattle sports team leaders are “some of the most civically minded, morally driven, socially responsible executives in sports.” Seattle pro teams are in a position to leverage this sentiment, as well as their visibility and resources, for youth who are most disenfranchised from sport. Currently, all Seattle teams invest in ways to address issues covered in this report, including providing free programming in some communities. The Mariners’ On BASE program introduces youth to baseball and softball in PE, provides free after-school baseball programming, and supports Challenger Baseball (a Little League program for youth with disabilities). The Seahawks offer free summer camp programs throughout the county and advocate for youth physical activity through the NFL’s PLAY 60 program. Still, there is room for teams to do more.

The pro teams have some history of uniting for common cause, including joint investment in the Positive Coaching Alliance and It Gets Better (a project to empower LGBTQ+ youth). As one pro sports executive says, “Creating a joint vision” of youth sports would benefit all pro teams because “our future is kids.”

**Recreational programs are widely available but seem less popular, especially among younger kids.**

Our preliminary analysis of all available youth sports/activity programs in King County (approximately 1,000) shows that 46% of offered programs are recreational in nature, 45% are club/travel programs, and 9% offer both rec and club/travel programs. Among surveyed youth, most who participate in an organized sport or activity play through school (41%), ahead of club/travel teams (30%) and rec programs (20%). Club sports are more popular than recreational, especially among younger kids. Youth who do not speak any English at home are less likely to be participating in a club sport than those who do speak English at home.<sup>42</sup>



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### **Scott Karanja, 18**

Scott's introduction to the beauty of the Pacific Northwest outdoors came in sixth grade, when he first tried rock climbing through the Nature Adventure Program at Nexus Enumclaw. Nexus provides social services in Enumclaw School District and unincorporated areas of King County.

The program gave Scott the opportunity to try river rafting, hiking, trail running and camping. Perhaps more importantly, rock climbing and river rafting allowed Scott to learn to regulate his emotions and gain confidence to persevere through challenges. He originally connected with Nexus for tutoring.

Scott, who recently graduated from Enumclaw High School, was happy to find the outlet of outdoor recreation. He played basketball for a season in middle school but was put off by the level of competition. Rock climbing provided an activity he needed in his life, which he knew the first time he tried it.

"It felt awesome, like my body could do anything," Scott says. "It was challenging. I didn't know my fingers and hands could hold me like that." His instructors were supportive and taught him climbing techniques, of which breathing is a critical part. And his confidence grew. "I liked working up through the levels to the hardest one when you only use the rock crevices," he says.

But as he moves into college, he finds he doesn't have as much time as he'd like to be outdoors. Without a car and with his bike broken and no money to fix it, Scott struggles to get to the mountains. He says local buses aren't reliable, especially to the outdoor areas where he wants to visit. He wishes there would be safer bike paths.

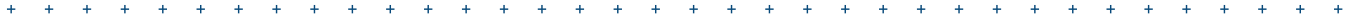
There's still a constant in Scott's athletic life: Nexus. He volunteers there to help lead hikes and rock climbing with younger students, who may now gain the same behavioral benefits that Scott once received.



# 5

Challenge: Not enough spaces to play

## The Play: Think Small



**From the Sport for All, Play for Life report:**  
*Large sport centers are great — but people living within a mile of a park are four times more likely to use it than those who live farther away. Be creative in the use and development of play spaces.*

### FIVE FINDINGS IN SEATTLE-KING COUNTY:

#### Finding and securing fields for organized sports is a challenge.

Data from the Trust for Public Lands shows that in Seattle, there are 6.8 park units per 10,000 people; the national average is 4.4.<sup>43</sup> However, data on playfield use shows dramatic increases in field-usage hours over the last decade commensurate with population growth. Usage hours of multipurpose, lit fields in Seattle has increased significantly over the past couple of decades. Scheduled field time for rectangular-field sports has almost doubled in the last decade, from approximately 26,500 hours in 2006 to over 50,000 in 2018 (not including hours on school fields).

Throughout King County, a lack of fields is a major issue, compounded by quirks of field-scheduling policies and procedures that might be barriers to entry for new organizations. For example, program leaders say that field-usage policies and request forms are not user-friendly. Points of contact are difficult to find, most forms are only in English, and systems are confusing to navigate. According to

one community leader, the field reservation system “locks underserved populations out of the mix of getting access to the field.” A policy used by many municipalities, called historic use — when groups are given the same fields they had the year prior — has pros and cons. Benefits include easier planning and preventing groups with the most money or players from monopolizing fields simply because they have more resources. However, for new programs, historic use can be a barrier to field use.

#### Finding and securing indoor facilities for sport and physical activity are also challenges.

The region averages 161 days of rain per year<sup>44</sup>, and indoor sports like basketball and volleyball are popular, so indoor space is paramount. Despite existing joint-use agreements, many leaders and parents express dismay at unused space in schools.

### Top Reasons Why Youth Don't Go To Park As Often As They Want

I don't have time to go as much as I want to	64%
I have no one to go with	44%
There is not enough to do there	24%
Weather makes the fields and surrounding area hard to play on	18%
I don't have a way to get there	14%





One leader suggests there needs to be “a real strong, critical look at what is best for the community,” because in the summer, for example, recreation facilities are “double-booking and getting real creative” while school spaces are underutilized. Another pressure on gym space is the proliferation of club teams. As one program leader notes, “You can make as many teams as there are players, but you can’t physically create more gyms.” These same shortages apply to other types of indoor facilities, including tennis courts, skateparks and hockey rinks. With Seattle’s new NHL team arriving in 2021, a new indoor skating facility is scheduled to be built at Northgate.

Lastly, Americans with Disabilities Act-compliant spaces are extremely difficult to find, and programs for youth with physical disabilities struggle to secure safe and accessible gyms.

### **Partnerships are emerging as central to managing increased need for play spaces.**

According to one Seattle municipal leader, “if people want to continue to get on fields and play sports ... and if we’re not building any more fields, we’ve got to be innovative ... and it’s going to be challenging.” The Seattle Sounders’ RAVE Foundation and the Washington Youth Soccer Foundation take a novel approach, building small fields for free play around the region. Six fields built so far are in parts of the county where play space for kids is scarce (four in Auburn and one each in Burien and Seattle). These popular mini-pitches are built through extensive public-private collaboration and offer a guide for the type of innovation needed to provide play access. Another approach is joint-use agreements between schools and parks. Of the 19 school districts in King County, 74% have joint-use agreements for fields and facilities. Some municipal leaders, however, suggest that those agreements could be strengthened.



Another leader says that in order to solve the shortages, all parties need to “see everything as communal,” so people “don’t think that this is their field — they think it’s a community field.”

**Transportation is one of the most significant barriers to more physical activity.**

Along with cost, families and community leaders describe transportation as the most significant challenge to accessing physical activity for youth. According to our youth survey, almost 80% of youth who participate in organized sports or recreation report driving or being driven as their main mode of transportation. This transportation issue is linked with field and facility shortages: If fields are not available in a child’s neighborhood, transportation to other parts of the region becomes a bigger burden. Says one community leader: “Auburn Parks and Recreation does a great job, but because of the lack of space, it tends to be centrally located, and so how do we get the kids from the south end into downtown Auburn to go to the rec center?” This inability to transport kids to places to play is, like cost, leaving certain families out. One parent, through a translator, explains that she “doesn’t have time or the means of transportation to get (my son) from school and take him to practices.” Even youth are aware of this limitation. When asked what would best support their participation in sports, a group of young women emphatically reply, “A car!”

**As one of the fastest-growing regions in the nation, King County is balancing preserving natural open space with development of recreation facilities.**

In 2017, King County’s population increased by 48,600<sup>45</sup>, with another 180,000 people expected in the next 10 years.<sup>46</sup> The state’s Growth Management Act (GMA) of 1990, requiring counties to develop a comprehensive plan to manage population growth, is the centerpiece of local planning, articulating

goals, policies and actions to guide decision-making in the face of increasing need.<sup>47</sup> The GMA established 13 goals for the comprehensive plans, including concentrating urban growth while retaining open space and enhancing recreational opportunities by developing parks and recreation facilities. Stakeholders point to the need to balance these goals — preserving open space and constructing parks and facilities — and to ensure consistent strategies and a clear vision across regional agencies. As one policymaker notes, “Recreation is something that you hear all of the park directors talking about being the biggest need, and you see less interest on the state level and the regional level” to acquire land for recreation purposes. Aware of this tension and inequities of access to both parks and fields, King County’s Land Conservation Initiative and Parks Levy are designed to address these concerns by focusing on disparities of access with flexible funds targeting equitable access to parks and recreation. Though balancing preservation and development of facilities within the region’s growth is challenging, stakeholders agree that with a both/and approach — and attention to community need — historical inequities of access to both can be eliminated.

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### **Mudan Abdi, 11**

Farrow and Mudan, sisters who live in Kent, started playing soccer when they were each 3 years old. “My dad said, ‘play’; he put us in because he said sports are good for us,” Mudan says. Adds Farrow: “He says we’re kids and kids are supposed to be active.”

The sisters haven’t looked back. Today, they play on club soccer teams — Farrow is a defender on the Valor Soccer premier team, and Mudan is a forward with the Kent City FC select team. Club soccer means playing the sport nine months out of the year; Farrow’s team practices three days a week and Mudan practices twice a week.

While they both prefer soccer over other sports, they feel differently during tryouts. “It’s stressful,” Mudan says. “They have clipboards and are staring at you, writing stuff down.” Farrow quickly interjects, “It’s easy.” Yes, Farrow says, the coaches are jotting down notes about players’ skills, and yes, you might get cut. “But you might make the team!” she says.

### **Farrow Abdi, 9**

Mudan initially didn’t like soccer because of the mud and a fall she experienced her first season. She stopped playing for a season but found she missed soccer.

Both sisters have tried other sports, including basketball and swimming. But they enjoy soccer the most, taking after their three older brothers who also play soccer. Their father played college basketball for two years before an injury impacted his ability to play. He says he encourages his children to play sports in order to make friends, learn time management and become disciplined.

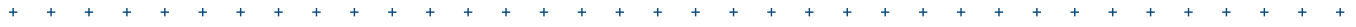
Farrow and Mudan both learned to swim at nearby Covington Aquatic Center, where they have taken lessons for several years. Farrow continues to do swim lessons and plays basketball during the soccer offseason. She aspires to become a professional women’s soccer player. Mudan doesn’t play other sports.

Farrow says she never tires from all the sports. It’s fun, she says, and she enjoys making friends.

# 6

Challenge: Too much, too soon

## The Play: Design For Development



**From the *Sport for All, Play for Life* report:**  
*Six is not 16. Offer programming that is age and developmentally appropriate, while tailored to the population served and needs of the individual child.*

### FIVE FINDINGS IN SEATTLE-KING COUNTY:

#### **Language and cultural barriers prevent youth from immigrant families from participating in sport and recreation programs.**

A far higher proportion of youth who don't speak English at home report having never participated in organized sports or recreation (43%), compared to those who do speak English at home (14%).<sup>48</sup> Since 2010, King County has had the third-largest increase in foreign-born residents among all U.S. counties. Now, nearly 1 in 4 King County residents (24%) were born outside the U.S., much higher than the national average (14%).<sup>49</sup>

Programming has not kept up with this growth. Navigating school, club and recreational sports and activity systems is a challenge for many immigrant families. "It's a cultural and language system barrier," says one program leader, who contends that lack of trust and concern about filling out many forms can turn away new families. Further, the registration systems and scholarship information are often only in English. One program leader notes that "even if (programs) do have scholarships, the signs are

in English. The communications are in English, so families aren't able to read and understand. ... We don't understand that we have to go to softball evaluations in order to be able to play on the team; like, we just want to sign up."

#### **Nonmainstream sports and outdoor activities lead the way in designing programming around positive youth development.**

A number of community-based fitness, sport and recreation programs are using a positive developmental approach to their physical-activity programming. The goal: Use sports and activity to enhance youth well-being physically, academically, socially and emotionally. Many of these programs are for nonmainstream or noncompetitive sports, which makes a balance slightly easier to strike.

For example, SOS Outreach is a youth-development program that combines outdoor adventure experiences, mentorship, and character and leadership development. Another unique program is a partnership between the International Rescue Committee, the nonprofit Vertical Generation, and the Tukwila School District that leverages rock climbing to teach social and emotional skills.<sup>50</sup> There are also competitive programs focused on sports as a means to positive youth development. One example is AGE UP, which uses the sport of Ultimate to connect south Seattle youth with social justice education and to strengthen their communities. Baseball Beyond Borders uses baseball, volleyball



and softball to expand youth participants' financial, geographical and social boundaries.

### **The region's philanthropies have not invested in sport as a youth development opportunity.**

King County is a philanthropic hub, rich with headquarters of major foundations and socially conscious companies. Many have made major commitments to address systemic inequities in the Puget Sound region, and there are many public-private collaborative efforts focused on educational attainment and youth well-being. Yet, few funders have recognized inequities in access to physical activity and sport programming as a public health and social justice concern. A 2017 analysis of out-of-school-time programs in King County found that a "lack of dedicated funding streams means that programs are often patching together several small funding opportunities ... to make ends meet."<sup>51</sup> As a subset of out-of-school-time providers, youth sports and recreation programs are even more squeezed by funders measuring only academic outcomes or refusing to fund sports.

Many program leaders say they are frustrated that funders are missing opportunities to support youth where they are. Our survey indicates that almost 80% of King County youth in grades five through 12 have participated in organized sports or physical activity programming. This means that sports and recreation programs are potential sites for positive youth development — if the programs are well-designed and coaches are trained.

Without those pieces, sports can become a missed opportunity for investment in youth development. Two King County-funded programs — Youth and Amateur Sports Grants and Best Starts for Kids — recognize the importance of youth physical activity in community health.

### **Youth with disabilities are not being adequately connected with opportunities.**

Focus groups of youth with physical disabilities and their families reveal a lack of programming to suit their needs and little community support to encourage physical activity. Parents say doctors and therapists lack knowledge about physical activity opportunities for their children. Instead, parents learn about programs via word of mouth, people "walking up to them in the grocery store"<sup>52</sup>, or seeing something on social media.

They also describe exclusion from school PE. One girl says: "In PE, they try to let me participate, but usually I'm just playing tag and I get tagged first so then I have to sit out." Her mother continues: "They've tried to let her dribble a ball, but (as) a wheelchair user ... people are very hesitant to let her participate in programs because they're afraid that other children are going to be hurt." PE teachers often lack training on how to instruct youth with disabilities. According to SHAPE America, students with disabilities are not receiving equitable access to physical education and physical activity, even though federal law requires they receive it.<sup>53</sup>

PE professionals are currently lobbying Washington state to offer and recognize specific training in adapted physical education teaching. The Outdoors for All Foundation offers a range of programs for youth with disabilities to access recreation, while Seattle Adaptive Sports offers organized sports teams.

**Girls are involved in organized sports and recreation but are less physically active than boys.**

Equal numbers of boys and girls surveyed report participating in organized sport at some point in their lives, and both genders do approximately three activities per year. Soccer and basketball are the most-played sports for both genders; volleyball and dance are the next-most popular for girls. Despite high levels of participation in organized physical activity, girls report fewer days per week of 60 minutes of physical activity.<sup>54</sup> Sixteen percent of girls and 22% of boys report getting the

recommended amount of 60 minutes per day. Both boys' and girls' participation in organized activity drops off as they age: Seventy-six percent of girls and 73% of boys ages 15 and over participate in organized physical activity, compared with 85% of girls and 83% of boys under 15. In a focus group, girls suggest that one of the reasons girls may be less inclined toward sports as they get older is that there are not as many pro teams to look forward to as there are for boys. The region does have two professional women's teams — the Reign (soccer) and Storm (basketball).

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## Rishin Tandon, 10

Rishin started playing soccer at age 3 and joined a premier team at 7. He loves playing with his friends, many of whom began soccer as early as he did.

The differences in premier soccer are noticeable to Rishin, a fifth-grader at Open Window School. He plays for 11 months out of the year (three practices per week), taking a break from the sport only in May. Rishin recognizes that some kids are cut after tryouts — a change from recreational sports. He says that kids who participated in the premier league previously have a better chance of making the team again. This incentivizes parents to start their children in the league young.

Since Rishin's brother also plays premier soccer, the family's activities are often scheduled around games

and practices while juggling meals, homework and other activities. "But we enjoy cheering him on and like the fact that Rishin is getting lots of physical activity, learning about teamwork and sportsmanship, and spending time doing something he loves," says Pooja, Rishin's mom.

Rishin says he's lucky to have the same premier coach in order to build a relationship. The coach makes practice fun and lets Rishin play some different positions when needed.

Through the years, Rishin has played recreational baseball, track and field, tennis, flag football and ice hockey. He has taken lessons for swimming, skiing, parkour and martial arts. Rishin rides bikes, hikes, participates in stand-up paddleboarding with his family, and plays basketball with his brother and neighborhood friends.

Rishin wants to keep playing soccer for a while. He has thought about trying tackle football but is concerned about getting hurt (as is his mom), so he has stuck with flag. He also enjoyed running track — especially for the individual, direct competition.

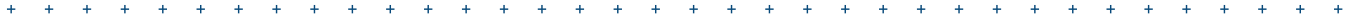
Though he's regularly playing soccer, Rishin says his early commitment to one sport doesn't prevent him from trying other physical activities. "I like playing sports because I enjoy the competition," he says. "Even though it's more fun to win, I've learned that it's OK to lose sometimes."



# 7

Challenge: Well-meaning but untrained volunteers

## The Play: Train All Coaches



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

*Coaches can create athletes for life — or wreck their enthusiasm for sport altogether. Get them trained in key competencies, including safety, sport skills and general coaching philosophy.*

### FIVE FINDINGS IN SEATTLE-KING COUNTY:

#### Parents want positive coaching and culture-building from coaches, and coaches agree.

Among parents, 86% say that training on positive coaching is very important to them, compared with 59% who say training in sports skills and tactics is very important. Coaches rank positive athlete motivation and culture-building as their first priorities for training. Effective communication ranks second and sports-specific skills third. Coach and parent agreement around this approach matches what research says about how the creation of a positive, mastery-based environment is a predictor of enjoyment and positive development from a sports program.<sup>55</sup>

However, only 4% of coaches are required to be trained on positive coaching prior to starting to coach. Still, youth seem to generally feel that their coaches are positive contributors to their sport and recreation experiences: Seventy percent say their coach makes them “enjoy their sport more,” while only 9% say the coach makes them “enjoy their sport less.”

#### Coach shortages and high turnover are challenges.

The low (or no) pay of coaching, combined with its high demands, means that it is a role with relatively high turnover; 85% of surveyed coaches are either volunteer or paid part time. Program leaders and athletic directors grapple with this challenge every season. One high school athletic director estimates a 40% turnover of coaches annually, meaning every year he must hire and train 50 to 60 new coaches. This makes raising the bar on coach training a challenge. Some fear that requiring too much training will scare away potential coaches. As one municipal leader says, “We have people who are saying, ‘We’ll take him whether they’re certified or not. I mean, if this guy doesn’t do it, we’re not gonna have a coach, right?’” The level of volunteerism in the region could be an asset in addressing coach shortages. The Corporation for National and Community Service ranks the Seattle-Bellevue-Tacoma area eighth in the nation, with 31% of the population volunteering for some nonprofit. Within that group, only 7% volunteer as coaches, referees or sports instructors, compared with 22% for food service and fundraising.<sup>56</sup>

#### Volunteer vs. Paid Coaches by Age Coached

	Ages 6–10	Ages 11–14	Ages 15–18
Volunteer	70%	37%	17%
Paid	30%	63%	83%



This suggests the region has room to grow in attracting new coaches, which is vital because in the 6-to-10 age group, per our survey, 70% of coaches are volunteers.

### **Women, teens and college students are untapped populations of coaches.**

About 28% of respondents to the King County coach survey are women, similar to the national figures (27%).<sup>57</sup> These numbers are striking when considering the coaching shortage reported by schools and programs. One outdoor recreation program leader says she is interested in “finding ways to facilitate getting more women into roles of instructors” because of the imbalance she sees in her organization. Having more women coaches may do more than just address the coaching shortage; it may help build sport participation for girls. As another coach says, the perception that girls don’t play sports “starts really early,” and by coaching her son, she feels she’s “getting it out there that sports are for everybody.” Another byproduct of having more women coaches may be more attention to youth development. In our coach survey, women report themselves as focusing their practices on mastery, fun, injury prevention and autonomy to a greater degree than men.<sup>58</sup> The other potential untapped groups of coaches are older teens and college students. The average age of all coach respondents in our survey is 42, with the youngest being 18 and the oldest 76. Just 3% of respondents are between the ages of 17 and 22. Programs such as Skate Like a Girl and The Service Board offer youth leadership training and employment programs in order to help young people become both community leaders and trained coaches.

### **Forty percent of surveyed King County coaches coach more than one sport.**

According to our survey, the average number of sports coached is 1.64. Of the coaches who

coach more than one sport, 64% of them coach or have coached their own child and 47% of them are volunteers. While the prevalence of multisport coaching is partially attributable to volunteer parents, other factors at play might be the seasonal nature of coaching and the low pay. Regardless of the cause, knowing that almost half of King County youth coaches are coaching more than one sport speaks to the importance of training coaches not just on sport-specific skills, but on the constructs and ideas — youth development, communication and leadership — that are transferable across sports. Programs might do well to partner with each other to provide training for efficiency of time and funding — both of which are barriers to coach training.

### **Ninety-four percent of surveyed coaches report having some coach training.**

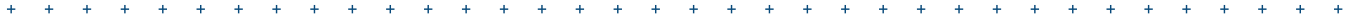
Sixty-five percent of those were required by their organization to have training prior to starting in their position. The majority of required coach trainings are on first aid/CPR and concussions; school-based coaches in Washington are also required to do a Washington Interscholastic Athletic Association rules training at the beginning of each season. Thirty-eight percent of coaches say they are required to have some training from their national governing body; some of those identified by coaches include USA Soccer, USA Hockey, and USA Track and Field.



# 8

## Challenge: Safety concerns among parents

# The Play: Emphasize Prevention



**From the *Sport for All, Play for Life* report:**  
*Children deserve environments that limit injuries and offer protections against emotional, physical and other forms of abuse. And today, many parents demand as much.*

## FIVE FINDINGS IN SEATTLE-KING COUNTY:

### **Seattle-King County is an innovative region for concussion safety.**

In 2009, Washington was the first state in the nation to pass a concussion law. The Zackery Lystedt Law “requires any youth showing signs of a concussion to be examined and cleared by a licensed health care provider before being allowed to return to play,”<sup>59</sup> and has become a model for every other state. Seattle’s national leadership on concussion and sports injury has spawned local research and development on products and approaches to sports safety. Seattle is home to VICIS, which makes football helmets highly rated for reducing impact forces<sup>60</sup>, and Atavus, developer of a safer-tackling technique.

While King County leads in innovation, it still struggles with how to scale equitable access to those innovations. Equipment and access to coach training are costly. The VICIS Zero1 youth helmet, for example, costs about \$500. These products are not necessarily making it into the hands of most youth, especially low-income youth.

### **Local research will examine if pre-game safety huddles can prevent kids playing with concussion symptoms.**

Emphasizing prevention happens not just through policy and equipment changes but also education. Researchers at Seattle Children’s Hospital (Dr. Emily Kroshus and Dr. Sara Chrisman), in partnership with several local youth football and soccer leagues, are developing and testing an innovative approach to concussion education involving pre-game safety huddles.<sup>61</sup> Pre-game safety huddles gather athletes and coaches from both teams before games to affirm the importance of speaking up if anyone has a suspected concussion and the importance of sportsmanship. So far, research indicates pre-game safety huddles are well received by teams and can be customized to meet the concussion-safety-related message of a given sport or setting.

### **Years of experience plays a role in coach confidence related to handling concussions.**

Based on our coach survey results, having 10 or fewer years of experience is a significant predictor of being less confident about handling injury. Coaches with more experience have more confidence in their ability to recognize concussion symptoms<sup>62</sup>, understand the requirements of the Lystedt Law<sup>63</sup>, and manage the return-to-play process.<sup>64</sup> A number of coaches noted that it was not their job to handle return to play, suggesting some potential confusion about how a coach is supposed to interact with medical providers, families and athletes regarding return-to-play protocols.

## Safety in youth sports and recreation programming also includes feeling emotionally safe.

Rates of youth depression and anxiety are on the rise nationally.<sup>65</sup> In King County, adolescents similarly struggle with mental health challenges: Thirty-six percent of 10th and 12th graders report depressive feelings, and 20% have considered attempting suicide.<sup>66</sup> Five percent of King County youth report that their family cannot afford stable housing.<sup>67</sup> While sport, physical activity and outdoor recreation programming have the capacity to help youth mitigate and mediate these risk factors,<sup>68</sup> few coaches have training to make sports and recreation programs welcoming and supportive to kids who might be struggling with their mental health or facing other adverse childhood experiences (ACE). And, few sports programs identify this as a priority. Recent research suggests that team sports help lower rates of depression and anxiety in youth experiencing ACEs, especially boys.<sup>70</sup> An innovative King County program called Upower attempts to make sports a more welcoming and supportive place for socioeconomically disadvantaged youth by bringing coaches trained in trauma-informed practices to settings where physical-activity opportunities are limited. While programs such as Upower are making a difference for some youth in King County, there are many whose needs are not yet being met. Critically, about 22% of King County youth in our survey report not participating in organized sports because they do not feel welcome on teams.

## Concussion education is common, but not so with other types of adolescent injury prevention.

While concussions are common in sports that involve contact and collision, they are not the only injury experienced by youth sport participants. The majority of youth sports injuries are overuse



(or chronic) injuries<sup>71</sup> — many of which are preventable.<sup>72</sup> However, very little coach training is focused on prevention of overuse injuries and on increasing knowledge of the evidence-based recommendations for youth sports participants from the sports medicine community. Injury-prevention approaches — and knowledge translation to coaches — should be tailored for the developmental and sports-specific needs of youth athletes. Growth-plate injuries are unique to youth athletes and may account for up to 10% of their injuries.<sup>73</sup> In sports such as figure skating, running and gymnastics, Relative Energy Deficiency Syndrome (REDS) is an important but under-discussed issue, particularly for girls.<sup>74</sup> REDS can impact menstruation, bone health and cardiovascular functioning. One track and cross-country coach says, “Eating disorders, stress fractures, overtraining and perfectionism are rampant in my sport, but there is very little training on how to help support nutrition of growing athletes, and what is the healthy volume of training.”



# Call For Leadership

Based on our analysis of the region’s unique characteristics, here are four recommendations of systems-level interventions to help committed leaders grow access to quality sports, physical activity and outdoor-recreation options for children.

## Develop transportation solutions providing youth with access to parks and playfields

Youth sports and recreation programs put thousands of cars on the road every day during peak commute times; 80% of youth survey respondents say cars are their main means of transport to practices and competitions. Along with increased congestion and pollution, a car-driven society creates equity issues: Families without cars are limited in engagement in physical activity and other extracurricular programs.<sup>75</sup> While King County regional transit goals include equity as a critical priority, neither youth access nor access to parks and playfields receive sufficient attention in current regional transportation planning and strategies.<sup>76</sup> This should become a regional priority; some potential solutions include:

- Expand free access to public transportation — through a program like Seattle’s new ORCA Opportunity — to all youth in King County.
- Include measurements of green-space access in King County’s Regional Transit Strategic Plan, such as the number of parks and playfields within one-quarter mile of a transit stop or a list of parks accessible via frequent transit routes. Seventy-one percent of the region’s larger parks

are insufficiently accessible due to infrequent transit on Saturday mornings.<sup>77</sup>

- Increase safety measures on public transit that help parents feel more comfortable to have their children riding. Provide a training course on safe use of public transit for kids, including kid-friendly apps, so youth can learn how to access neighborhood facilities.
- Focus future transportation infrastructure projects on a Safe Routes to Parks program by creating safe biking lanes and walking routes. This could resemble or expand the successful Safe Routes to Schools program, which promotes walking and bicycling to school through infrastructure improvements, safety education and incentives.

While the region is a hub for emerging mobility solutions, there’s some evidence that rideshare-type solutions will face challenges. There may be some parent reluctance to relinquish afternoon driving. One entrepreneur found, while doing local research on parent driving trends for a transportation start-up, that many mothers from affluent communities identify strongly with their role as a driver and would hesitate to part from that identity. Many sports and recreation programs don’t see transportation as within their purview.

While many provide scholarships, transportation isn't always addressed. Programs could expand scholarship offerings, if available, to include transportation subsidies or partner with emerging youth-focused rideshare organizations.

## Create a public health campaign on the importance of youth physical activity

Municipal leaders need to create a counter-narrative to the pay-for-play youth sports model. Youth sports programs are “constructing the narrative to parents of what they should want in the interest of their own bottom line,” says one pro sports executive. “We need to get a different message out.” Local and regional policymakers have the power to execute such an information campaign in partnership with public health organizations, pro sports teams, local businesses, community recreation groups and more. This campaign, translated in multiple languages, would contain messages resting on the following pillars:

- **Declining youth physical activity is a public health issue.** Physical activity provides a foundation for educational growth, can protect against chronic health issues, and is linked to improved mental health and quality of life. However, in King County — as in the rest of the country — rates of youth physical activity have declined from about 23% meeting CDC guidelines in 2014 to about 19% meeting guidelines in 2018.<sup>78</sup>
- **Free play, especially outdoors, is important for kids.** It is essential to healthy development, contributing to cognitive, physical, social and emotional well-being. It is an ideal way for parents to engage with children and serves as a primary opportunity for physical activity.

- **Sport is for everyone.** Help youth and families see sport as less exclusive and more inviting to a range of races, genders, abilities and ethnicities. Help the community see access to sport and recreation as a right, not a privilege.

Parents have the capacity to reshape youth sports by demanding developmentally appropriate physical-activity programming for their children. However, parents are not currently armed with sufficient information to make choices and lobby for aligned programming; this campaign would provide them with that knowledge. Further, policymakers and funders do not currently prioritize improving equity in physical-activity access. This campaign would help inform lawmakers and philanthropists about the important ways youth physical activity contributes to a healthy and well-educated community.

## Develop an equity toolkit for youth sports/recreation programs and policymakers

Both Seattle and King County have race and social justice tools used for policy decisions. Just as in other policy areas, institutionalized racism and socioeconomic inequity play roles in access to physical activity, sports, and outdoor recreation and related health outcomes. An equity tool could provide similar value and give community-recreation providers the chance to audit their own policies and offerings while creating programs inclusive of the communities they serve. The toolkit would ask guiding questions around the following issues and provide suggestions for ways to address identified challenges:

- **Coaching and leadership:** To what extent does the coaching staff and program leadership, including the board of directors, reflect the population being served?

- **Culturally responsive programming:** Are forms and program information accessible to non-English-speaking families? Do scholarships take into account the full cost of participation, including equipment, uniforms and transportation? Are facilities accessible to all abilities and comfortable for people of all gender identities?
- **Demographics:** Are programs serving the youth that live within their programming area? If not, what outreach strategies and adjustments are being made?
- **Facilities policy and access:** Are playfields and recreation centers serving the neighborhood population, or are non-neighborhood groups monopolizing access?

Holding programs accountable for a self-audit could be challenging. Potentially, funders like King County's Youth and Amateur Sports Grant (YASG) might require an audit as part of the grant application process. YASG, the primary municipal grant program funding youth sports facilities and programs, prioritizes increased access to physical activity for low-income youth, youth of color, immigrant and refugee youth, limited-English-speaking youth, and youth with disabilities. This could be a powerful incentive for community recreation groups to take responsibility for serving youth who are disenfranchised from sports and physical activity.

## Develop an informational, quality-rating portal for youth sports and recreation

The current youth sports and recreation landscape is decentralized. No one resource exists for families to find information about the over 1,000 available youth sport and physical-activity programs in King

County. Making good decisions for youth or finding affordable, high-quality local programming is challenging without this centralized portal, which would increase information, access and quality of decision-making.

The portal would be structured around evidence-based guidelines using a star rating system to evaluate programs based on safety, coach training, diversity and inclusion, similar to one in Tennessee, where youth sports programs receive one to three stars based on specified safety guidelines.<sup>79</sup> King County or Washington state could help regulate this new platform, or the portal could be integrated with an existing platform, such as the King County Youth Program registry, a database that supports youth after-school programs with the goals of unifying the field and improving quality.

The quality ratings would be based on medically informed best practices, including:

- Hours spent in organized sport/exercise per week should be equivalent to a child's age.<sup>80</sup>
- Youth under 12 should follow a ratio of 2:1 for free play to structured play.<sup>81</sup>
- Youth should have three months a year off of organized sports.<sup>82</sup>
- Long-term athlete-development models — those that focus on participation over competition at young ages — show the best evidence of both athletic success and athlete well-being.

The rating system would also address diversity and inclusion, coach training and positive youth-development orientation, and could also serve as a clearinghouse for schools looking for partners for extracurricular physical-activity programming.

# Game Changer

## Empower Schools to Be a Community Hub for Physical Activity



Stakeholders in King County agree that empowering and equipping schools to embrace their role as a catalyst and hub for youth physical activity would profoundly impact the state of play in this region. Doing so would help increase access to and participation in health-enhancing physical activity. We suggest the region invest in school-based people, programs, policies and places as a systemic approach to improving youth physical activity.

Even as researchers learn more about the positive educational benefits of physical activity and sport on cognition and academic outcomes, physical activity in schools has declined over the past 20 years.<sup>83</sup> When children move regularly, they have better attention and behavior, higher cognitive function and academic achievement, better attendance, and a more positive school environment.<sup>84 85 86</sup> Despite this evidence, rates of youth physical activity are declining in King County, and inequities in physical-activity outcomes and access to sports are increasing. Youth who do not speak English at home are much less likely than youth who do speak English at home to meet the CDC's recommendations for daily physical activity. They are also less likely to participate in organized sport. The same is true of less affluent youth, who get one full day less of physical activity than their more affluent counterparts and are less likely to participate in organized sports and activities.

Given these inequitable outcomes, schools provide an equitable space for regular physical activity before, during and after classes. Schools have a

unique opportunity to connect students to youth-serving programs, introduce new activities in a controlled, established environment, and encourage participation.

We recognize, however, that for the past decade, school funding in Washington has been a statewide flash point as the state courts and legislature have grappled with what it means to adequately fund basic education. As of the 2017 Annual Survey of School Finances, Washington state ranked 23rd in the country in K-12 public-school spending.<sup>87</sup> Given this context, while stakeholders see schools as an important site for physical-activity equity, unfunded mandates or more pressure on schools are neither realistic nor empowering. PE and recess are federally required components of each school district's wellness policies, but with pressure to meet academic standards, many educational leaders feel the need to de-prioritize time for physical activity — regardless of how strongly they believe in its benefits.

Investments from regional partners and local and state policy support are vital to make these large-scale changes. So too is an ideological transformation about the benefits of physical activity on academic success and emotional and physical well-being. Below, we sketch out game-changing tactics across four categories that tap into existing enthusiasm and expertise to foster symbiotic relationships between schools, local government and youth-serving organizations.

## People

**Pilot a school-based physical-activity coordinator (PA coordinator).** This new role, which would be piloted in elementary schools, would have a single goal: ensure that all students meet the CDC recommendation of 60 minutes of physical activity each day. This coordinator's role would be similar to an AmeriCorps position, possibly through Up2Us Coach: Young adults would be placed as PA coordinators in schools for two-year stints and work collaboratively with administrators, teachers, physical-education specialists and the school community. As advocates for youth physical activity, they would support teachers to incorporate physical activity into the classroom using evidence-based practice; organize physical-activity fairs for families; arrange physical-activity opportunities on late-start or early-dismissal days; and coordinate physical activity in after-school programming.

**Support more teachers to be coaches.** Community leaders in King County suspect that the number of teachers serving as coaches has declined; a national athletic directors industry report notes this as a national concern.<sup>88</sup> According to one municipal leader, this loss has led to a gap in the "professional knowledge and understanding of youth development"<sup>89</sup> in coaching. Bringing more teachers back into coaching could help improve the quality of coaching and keep youth more actively engaged. Incentives might include a stipend boost for teachers who coach in their district.

## Programs

**Consider linking more community organizations to PE classes.** Seattle Public Schools uses an innovative model to introduce youth to a broad range of physical activities in PE, including rowing, golf, cycling and ballet. Other districts might look to adopt this approach.

**Look toward programs like the Daily Mile for inspiration.** The Sports Institute at UW Medicine partnered with Highline School District to pilot this low-cost intervention that was started in the UK; students leave the classroom to jog or run at their own pace for 15 minutes a day. The Sports Institute will continue assessing program feasibility and learning and behavior outcomes with other school districts next year.

## Policies

**Require statewide standards on recess.** Springboard to Active Schools, which promotes active school environments nationwide, recommends that schools provide all K-12 students with at least 20 minutes of recess or similar activity per day. Other recommendations: Ensure safety of equipment, support staff professional development, and prohibit exclusion of students from recess for academic or disciplinary reasons.

**Report nonacademic measures of success.** Washington state's Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Plan sets benchmarks for school quality in the state. A recent analysis of the plan suggests that youth physical activity is a missing component.<sup>90</sup> The analysis suggests including health indicators as part of school-improvement planning and specifically calling out "health and physical education as part of a well-rounded education."<sup>91</sup>

**Require PE teachers to have a PE credential.** Only high school PE teachers in Washington state are required to be certified physical educators. This should be expanded to elementary and middle school teachers.

**Require schools to meet state standards for minutes of physical education.** Once results of the statewide PE audit are in,<sup>92</sup> consider ways to ensure schools have the support and incentives to offer 100 minutes of PE a week.



**Support schools to offer low-cost or no-cost interscholastic sports participation.** In light of the findings of this report, re-examine House Bill 2311,<sup>93</sup> which seeks to reduce the cost of school extracurricular activities. Support youth receiving free or reduced-priced school lunch to participate at no cost.

## Places

**Strengthen joint-use agreements to make schools a gathering place for youth and community physical activity.** While studies have shown that expanding communal recreation spaces through joint-use agreements has “positive effects on increasing physical activity among children,” little information is available about best practices for municipalities and school districts working together to do so.<sup>94</sup> Many local leaders feel confused about how to create mutually beneficial shared-use arrangements. In certain parts of King County, mostly in the south but also in rural areas, schools offer the only available recreation spaces for youth. Ideally, concern about declining youth physical

activity and an interest in addressing the field and facility squeeze experienced by a growing county will drive bold revision of the agreements to support youth-serving programs of all kinds.

**Build green schoolyards for youth and community well-being.** Green schoolyards are “multi-functional school grounds designed for and by the entire school community that include places for students, teachers, parents, and community members to play, learn, explore and grow.”<sup>95</sup> Research shows that green schoolyards improve student behavior, attention and engagement.<sup>96 97 98</sup> In a region where concerns about personal safety and lack of transportation access are limiting play at parks, building a park-like setting in schools brings nature and outdoor play directly to children.

For all youth to experience the health- and education-enhancing benefits of physical activity in our region, we must collectively prioritize addressing inequities to access. Once we have that belief, schools offer the best entry point for whole-scale change to the youth sports and activity ecosystem.



# Ideas



The ideas below can help reimagine youth sports, physical activity and outdoor recreation through the core values of equity and inclusion. They were developed through interviews and focus groups, meetings with the State of Play Seattle-King County Community Advisory Board, and conversations with community stakeholders.

## Community Recreation Groups

**Develop creative field-scheduling solutions:** Parks departments could reduce fees to encourage practices during less desirable times and provide real-time, online schedule access with payment options.

**Offer youth and teen pickup games on the weekends and in the summer:** Emphasize free play, not intense practice or winning. Allow community members who cannot afford programming to participate for free at least once weekly.

**Develop beginner-oriented programming for outdoor recreation:** Be open to nontraditional sports. Host a lesson in multiple languages on hiking basics; provide a list of nearby trails and how to get there inexpensively and safely.

## National Sport Organizations/ Pro Teams

**Offer free coach-training for issues important in all sports:** Provide training in trauma-informed coaching or youth development. Promote this event early and often, especially in underserved communities. Include vouchers for free transportation, parking and/or game tickets to incentivize participation.

**Connect with other pro teams to invest in youth sports and physical activity jointly:** Leverage visibility and credibility for one long-term solution to get more kids active. Devote 1% of annual revenue toward youth sports initiatives, including low-cost community leagues.

**Host multisport camps to promote sport and recreation sampling:** Imagine a Russell Wilson baseball/football camp, or a Sue Bird-Megan Rapinoe basketball/soccer camp.

## Education

**Support professional development for teachers to incorporate physical activity:** Programs like Active Classrooms and Action for Healthy Kids offer great resources for helping students take brain breaks and energy boosters.

**Offer intramural sports in middle and high schools:** Physical activity declines during the teen years, especially for girls. Find volunteers to offer nontraditional or emerging sports and activities.

**Support teacher wellness and physical-activity programs:** As role models for kids, teachers who are active can inspire youth.

## Civic Leaders & Policymakers

**Keep State of Play Seattle-King County data on file and accessible to the community:** Facilitate sharing this resource to help tell the story of recreational and organized play in this region, and use the data to help make decisions that benefit all youth. Evaluate how parks and facilities are used and by whom.

**Require apartment and townhome developers to carve out play spaces:** Compel developers to build play spaces in developments intended for families, especially where access to green space is limited.

**Invest in innovative efforts to connect urban youth to nature:** Promote strategic partnerships such as the Children & Nature Network and Outdoor Alliance for Kids.

## Tech & Media

**Create youth-centered games and apps that incentivize physical activity:** Pokemon Go, developed locally, is an example of integrating video-game play with physical activity. Develop similar apps and mobile games that encourage youth to be active.

**Report on the challenges and opportunities in youth sports and recreation:** Tell more stories about the almost 80% of the youth population who have ever been involved in organized sports and activity.

**Develop rideshare programs for youth, or invest in existing ones:** Make these free or subsidized, especially for low-income youth. Prioritize safety and cultural sensitivity.

## Business & Industry

**Donate overstock equipment to a centralized group for distribution:** Give last season's gear to schools and let them teach kids nontraditional sports that your business might focus on.

**Acknowledge the role of working parents:** Give all parents, no matter their employment status, a few hours of paid time per month to help their kid get to practice or otherwise support their physical activity.

**Allow vanpool shuttle buses (and drivers) to transport youth after work hours:** The use of corporate vans would take thousands of drivers

off the road and help families without cars access parks, playfields and recreation centers.

## Public Health

**Create a coaching class similar to classes that teach babysitting or CPR:** Publicize this to the community and make it free or low cost. Use researched coach-training practices and enlist research institutions to conduct training.

**Offer youth sport training for parents as a health and wellness class:** Teach parents how to help children participate in developmentally appropriate sports and support them in nontraditional physical activities.

**Have community health clinics screen swim ability during wellness checks:** Clinics would use a standard tool system to assess the swim ability of 5- to 6-year-olds and identify barriers families face to accessing swim lessons.

## Parents/Guardians

**Put your child in programs with trained coaches:** Ask questions about the training background of your child's coaches. Prioritize first aid/CPR and concussion training and lean toward programs that have training in positive youth development.

**Make time for outdoor free play with your child:** Being physically active does not always require money or fancy equipment. Walk with your child or go outside to look at the clouds. Encourage your child to put down their device for just 20 extra minutes a day.

**Consider how your school's PTA could support increased physical activity:** Create a green schoolyard, or run a floor-hockey club or yoga class before or after school.

## APPENDIX A | What King County Youth Like Most About Sports

Having fun	57%
Playing with my friends	55%
Improving my skills	48%
Exercising	40%
Challenging myself	33%
Competing	25%
Supporting my teammates/friends	24%
Winning	21%

## APPENDIX B | Reasons Why Youth Have Never Played or Quit Organized Sports

<b>OVERALL</b>	
I am not interested in sports	44%
I don't have time to play sports due to schoolwork	41%
I'm not good enough to play	36%
I don't want to get hurt	20%
I don't feel welcome on sports teams	17%
<b>Hispanic and/or Latino/Latina Youth</b>	
I'm not good enough to play	39%
I don't have time to play sports due to schoolwork	36%
I don't want to get hurt	25%
I don't have time to play sports due to family responsibilities	21%
I don't feel welcome on sports teams	21%
<b>White/Caucasian Youth</b>	
I'm not interested in sports	54%
I don't have time to play sports due to schoolwork	43%
I'm not good enough to play	36%
I think that sports are too serious	24%
I don't have time to play sports because I participate in other non-sports activities	20%
<b>Girls</b>	
I don't have time to play sports due to schoolwork	50%
I am not interested in sports	43%
I'm not good enough to play	42%
I don't want to get hurt	20%
I don't feel welcome on sports teams	17%
<b>Boys</b>	
I am not interested in sports	46%
I don't have time to play sports due to schoolwork	31%
I'm not good enough to play	28%
I think that sports are too serious	20%
I don't want to get hurt	16%

## APPENDIX C | Factors Influencing Youth Enjoyment in Sports

	Made Me Enjoy It Less	No Influence	Made Me Enjoy It More
My coach	9%	20%	70%
My parents	7%	48%	45%
How much my team won or lost	7%	53%	41%
How often my team practiced	10%	38%	52%
How much time I spent traveling to practices/competitions	11%	55%	34%
My teammates	7%	13%	80%

## APPENDIX D | Average Days Per Week Youth Get 60 Minutes of Physical Activity







CATEGORY	# OF DAYS
All King County Youth Surveyed	4.18
Girls	3.97
Boys	4.41
Speaks Any English at Home	4.26
Does Not Speak Any English at Home	3.65
Race	
American Indian/Alaska Native	4.57
Asian/Asian American	3.95
Black/African American	3.83
Hispanic	4.05
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	4.9
White/Caucasian	4.24
Other	4.89
Two or More Races	4.5
Affluence Scale: High*	4.51
Affluence Scale: Low*	3.68

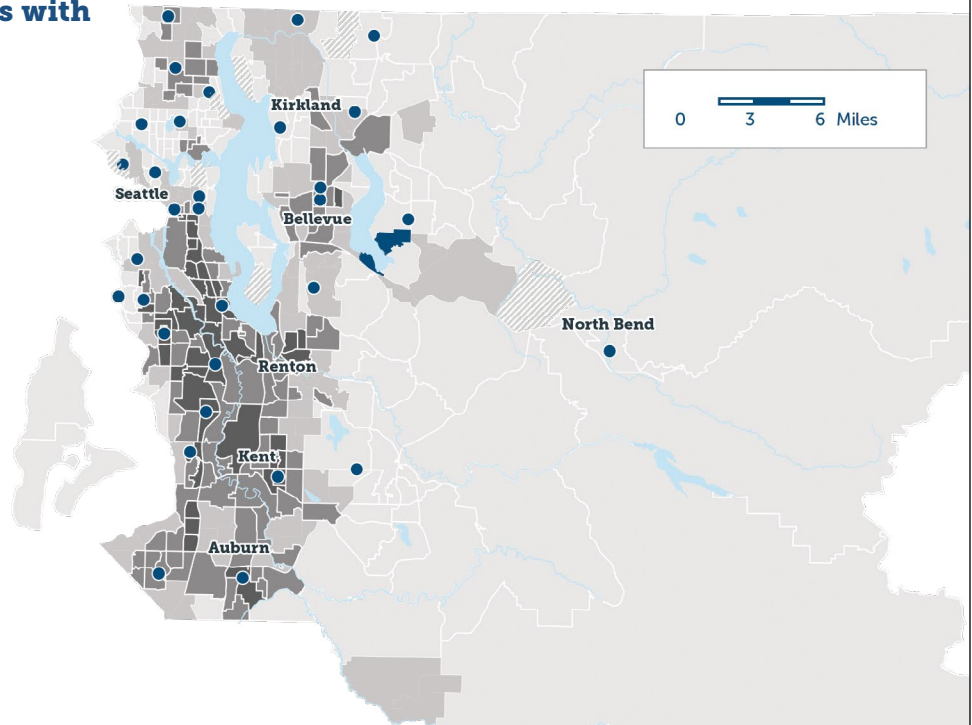
\* Affluence is determined using validated questions in the youth survey.

## Public & YMCA Pools with Demographic Index

### Demographic Index

Median income, English proficiency, race/ethnicity score









-  ≤1.0 More wealthy, more English proficiency, less diverse
-  ≤2.0
-  ≤3.0
-  ≤4.0
-  ≤5.0 Less wealthy, less English proficiency, more diverse
-  Pools

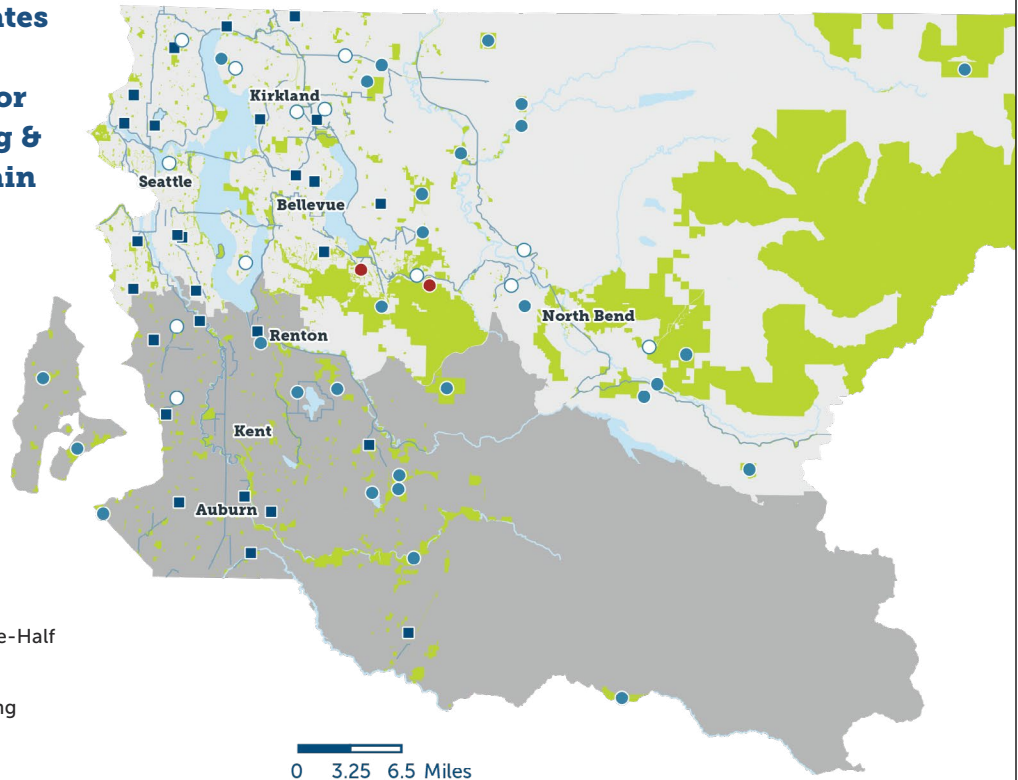


Source: King County

## Youth Obesity Rates and Location of Regional Trails for Cycling, Running & Walking; Mountain Bike Areas; & Skateparks

### Average Obesity Rate in Children

-  6% – 7%
-  13%
-  Parks
-  Regional Trails
-  Trailhead Direct
-  Mountain Bike Areas
-  Mountain Bike Area One-Half Mile from Bus Stops
-  Parks with Skateboarding



Source: King County

## APPENDIX E | 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 lifetime benefits in King County 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% of King County Youth Are Currently Active Daily

If ...	Fewer Overweight and Obese Youths	Direct Medical Costs Averted (millions)	Productivity Losses Averted (millions)	Years of Life Saved
<b>25% of Youth</b> Get and Stay Active Until They Are 18	16,039	\$241.9	\$265.6	17,666
<b>50% of Youth</b> Get and Stay Active Until They Are 18	32,045	\$483.4	\$530.7	35,298
<b>75% of Youth</b> Get and Stay Active Until They Are 18	48,080	\$725.1	\$796.1	52,932
<b>100% of Youth</b> Get and Stay Active Until They Are 18	64,103	\$966.7	\$1,060.0	70,566

#### Fewer Overweight and Obese Youths:

Number of additional youth dropping below the 85th BMI (Body Mass Index) percentile, which is the CDC's definition of overweight. Currently, 11% of King County females and 13% of males are overweight; another 7% of females and 9% of males are obese (at or above the 95th 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 85th 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, [bruceleemdmba@gmail.com](mailto:bruceleemdmba@gmail.com)

## ENDNOTES

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## PHOTOS

Alec Miller/Disc NW, Amy Martin, Austin Foundation, Baseball Beyond Borders, Cascade Bicycle Club, Colleen Colley, Dee Torres, Eli Brownell (King County Parks), Eric Pontius, Geoff Vicek, International Rescue Committee, Nexus, George Pocock Rowing Foundation, Rob Veal, Ry Soeu, Seattle Adaptive Sports, Seattle Parks and Recreation, SOS Outreach, and Talia Walton.

## CREDITS

The principal investigator was Dr. Julie McCleery. She was assisted by Katharine Olsen, Dylan Kartchner, Sarah Margeson, Dr. Pooja Tandon, Dr. Emily Kroshus, JD Hennessey, Abby Taylor, Ariella Wagonfeld and Sheharbano Jafry. The report was written by Dr. Julie McCleery and edited by Jon Solomon, Aspen Institute Sports & Society Program editorial director. The report was designed by The Hatcher Group and proofread by Catherine Lutz.

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King County Parks' mission is to steward, enhance, and acquire parks to inspire healthy communities. The Youth Sports Grants support fit and healthy communities by investing in programs and capital projects that increase youth access to physical activity. The goal of the funding is to reduce barriers to accessing a range of high quality physical activity programs, especially for under-resourced communities, including low-income youth, youth of color, and limited English speaking youth.

[www.kingcounty.gov/parks/sportsgrants](http://www.kingcounty.gov/parks/sportsgrants)

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**Facebook:** /AspenInstSports  
**Website:** ProjectPlay.us  
**Email:** sportsandsociety@aspeninstitute.org

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### REPORT METHODOLOGY

Throughout the report, "sport" refers to all forms of health-enhancing physical activity which, through organized or casual play, aims to express or improve physical fitness and mental well-being. The term "youth" refers to 6- to 18-year-olds. The youth survey data reported in the scoreboard and throughout the report comes from youth in grades five through 12, except where explicitly noted. The term "parent" is used to refer to the caregivers with whom youth reside. The term "coach" is used broadly to include those who instruct youth in physical-activity programming, including martial arts, mountain biking, rock climbing, dance, and individual and team sports.

Quantitative data was derived through three methods:

**Youth Survey:** Youth participants were in grades five through 12. From February through May 2019, 1,038 youth across seven demographically and geographically diverse, public and private schools and 20 after-school programs (representing about 50 youth) completed a survey about their experiences and perceptions of sport, physical activity and outdoor recreation. The survey is representative of youth in King County as affirmed by comparing responses to questions about physical activity, after-school activities and demographics that were similar to the 2018 Washington Healthy Youth Survey. Family affluence was assessed using a scale validated for use in youth populations. Sports and activity statistics for youth in grades K-4 use results of the parent survey as well as focus groups with K-4 students.

**Parent Survey:** Parents with youth in grades K-12 attending the same schools as those in the youth survey were surveyed by the University of Washington. Parent response rates to the surveys (339 respondents) were much lower than youth response rates, and respondents skewed more affluent and less racially diverse than the school populations in general. Parent-survey results are used sparingly and are less descriptive of the parent/youth population in general. The parent surveys were translated into four languages: Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese and Somali.

**Coach Survey:** A convenience sample of 288 coaches completed the coach survey. The coach survey was distributed to school- and youth-program coaches throughout King County using purposive sampling. We cannot determine definitively whether the sample is generalizable given the lack of data on coaches in King County. However, a number of measurements, including the percentage of women coaches in youth sports, correspond to other estimates of that population nationally.

Other insights in this report were developed by the research team over the course of six months in 2019. Researchers conducted group and individual semi-structured interviews with program/organizational leaders and policymakers, hosted focus groups with parents and youth, toured recreation facilities and outdoor play spaces, conducted a literature search, transcribed and coded advisory board meetings, created an inventory of community programs and facilities, created and analyzed GIS maps of parks and recreation facilities, and analyzed school district and parks and recreation policies. Findings were reviewed and prioritized in partnership with the advisory board.

