



# STATE OF PLAY

## Hawai'i

ANALYSIS AND  
RECOMMENDATIONS





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# WELCOME

The state of Hawai'i has played a central role in the development of sports in the United States and around the world. Ancient wave riders invented surfing, the ultimate expression of free play and the first so-called action sport. The co-author of Title IX federal legislation that greatly expanded organized sport opportunities for girls and women was from Hawai'i, then-congresswoman Patsy Mink. So was the pioneering physical educator Luther Gulick Jr., whose students invented basketball and volleyball, two of the state's most formative sports.

Today, Hawai'i can claim some of the most successful high school sports programs in the United States, the Punahou School perhaps being the most visible example. The University of Hawai'i volleyball programs are among the best in college sports. The state's football talent is coveted by NCAA powerhouses. Its Little League teams have won three World Series in the past 13 years.

At the same time, sport mirrors the income inequality present in the state, with Native Hawaiians often having the least access to an affordable, quality sport experience. Challenges abound across each of the islands, limiting the ability of sport to transform the lives of children and their communities.

In partnership with the Lili'uokalani Trust, this report assesses the sports landscape for kamali'i (youth) across the state, with a particular eye to Native Hawaiian youth. Our work is anchored in the notion that all stakeholders will benefit if all youth are provided access to a quality sports experience, regardless of their zip code or ability. Physical activity is associated with greater cognitive function, positive mental health, better educational outcomes, and lower health care costs in adulthood.

The Sports & Society Program of the Aspen Institute produced this State of Play report by analyzing sports programs and facilities in each of the counties through our eight strategic filters or "plays" highlighted in our seminal 2015 report, *Sport for All, Play for Life: A Playbook to Get Every Kid in the Game*. Our findings were informed by interviews with stakeholders who have a hand in shaping the sports landscape of Hawai'i, and were guided by a task force comprised of local leaders.

*State of Play Hawai'i* is the Aspen Institute's first assessment of an entire U.S. state and its eighth overall community report. Since 2017, the Institute has produced regional reports on King County (Seattle), Washington; Mobile County, Alabama; Southeast Michigan; Western New York; Greater Rochester and the Finger Lakes; and hyperlocal reports on Harlem and Baltimore.

We hope this report informs community strategies related to the broad spectrum of sports opportunities for youth in Hawai'i and serves as a tool for organizations to develop new partnerships and programs. We applaud the efforts of stakeholders to improve the lives of Hawaiian children through sports, and we hope our findings will guide and inspire sustained action.

Sincerely,



**Tom Farrey**  
Executive Director, Sports & Society Program,  
The Aspen Institute

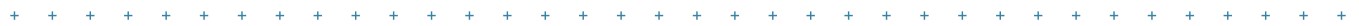


**Robert H. Ozaki**  
President and CEO,  
Lili'uokalani Trust

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Aspen Institute Sports & Society Program analyzed the landscape of youth sports in Hawai'i from December 2018 to June 2019. *State of Play Hawai'i* is a snapshot of how well adults are serving youth through sports, including sections describing the sport ecosystem in each of the four counties.

The findings for this report were guided by a task force of local leaders with deep experience with both sports and youth, and were obtained through interviews with a broad variety of stakeholders, focus group discussions, youth and adult surveys, existing studies and data, and media reports.



## FIVE STATEWIDE FINDINGS

**The variety of sport activities enjoyed by children is unique and shaped by Hawaiian culture.** The people of Hawai'i define their sports broadly and pursue them passionately, in some cases not just as sports but as cultural activities, as they do with paddling, surfing and hula. Like its food, music and language, sports in Hawai'i reflect its multiculturalism, with sports that were born here and others that landed from other places. So do the state's athletes. The "mixed-plate" lunch, created by immigrant laborers of different lands sharing their food, is a perfect metaphor to describe the sports landscape, in which the average youth who plays sports participates in 2.93 of them -- well above the U.S. average of 2.01.<sup>1</sup>

**Hawai'i is blessed with tremendous assets in building physically active lifestyles.** Its citizens have a tropical climate and access to one of the world's great playgrounds, the Pacific Ocean. State law maintains public access to every beach. However, these can also present barriers to participation. The midday heat creates need for cover during the day, or lights for programs after the sun sets. Making full use of the ocean mandates that swimming, a lifesaving skill, be taught and mastered. The inability to swim

has become a marker of poverty, with too few programs offering swim lessons. Too few lifeguards at beaches and pools, limit access to an array of water sports.

**The divide between private- and public-school athletics is very pronounced.** The state's private schools are models of excellence, especially in sports. For many families, getting their children into private school is the ultimate goal. The teams in those schools are filled with top athletes, which grows pressure on children to specialize in one sport early, often before age 10 and often through private clubs. That can boost costs: The average Hawaiian family pays \$732 per child, per season, per sport, higher than the national average. Many kids just don't last long in sports, barely two years on average.<sup>2</sup> The focus on private schools leaves public schools with fewer advocates and fewer parents with a stake in making the public school system better.

**The culture of football dominates, bringing opportunities and challenges.** Lately, Hawai'i has produced some of the country's best football quarterbacks, among them Marcus Mariota, Tua Tagovailoa, and McKenzie Milton, stoking the fever for football and, indirectly, other sports

where college athletic scholarships are in play. The common refrain, “sports or military,” speaks to the view that sports, like enlistment, can be the only way out of a challenging home or neighborhood. This aspiration is both a blessing and a curse, as academic scholarships are far more plentiful than athletic aid. Questions have been raised as well about equitable distribution of school resources across genders and sports, along with safety concerns.

**Transportation is a major challenge for sport programs on all islands.** Just the prospect of getting youth to practices and games can discourage sign-ups. Kids are ditching local leagues at young ages to play year-round for teams farther from home, relying almost solely on parents and cars for transportation. About 89% of kids surveyed reported that a family member drives them to practice or games. School and city buses aren’t great options—our data show that Hawaiian youth playing sports use them at half the national average. Rarely do kids walk or bike to practice, either.<sup>3</sup> The urban-rural divide often dictates access to programs and facilities, and favors those who live in or around Honolulu, Hilo, Wailuku and Lihue. The rural islands of Moloka’i, Lāna’i and Kaua’i perennially cope with the challenges of relative isolation.

Underlying each sport ecosystem are communities of great need. Data show that Native Hawaiians, who have experienced a long history of physical and cultural subjugation, consistently experience the highest health risks of any other group in the state, stemming from economic and cultural stress, lifestyle and lack of, or late access to health care.<sup>4</sup> Native Hawaiians have among the lowest mean household incomes and the highest rates of poverty among ethnic groups in the state.<sup>5</sup> Because Native Hawaiians also have larger families on average, their per capita incomes are lower,<sup>6</sup> a hardship magnified because Hawai’i has the highest cost of living of any state in the country.<sup>7</sup> That’s one reason, in our report, we explore the potential of expanding access to sports and activities tied to Native Hawaiian culture.

Sports tend to thrive when there is a strong sense of community. The state’s greatest strength is its culture and a growing desire of its kamali’i to reconnect with tradition and language. That reconnection can lead naturally to improving physical and sports literacy in the state. The future lies in the recovery of what was forgotten, suppressed and lost to the past.



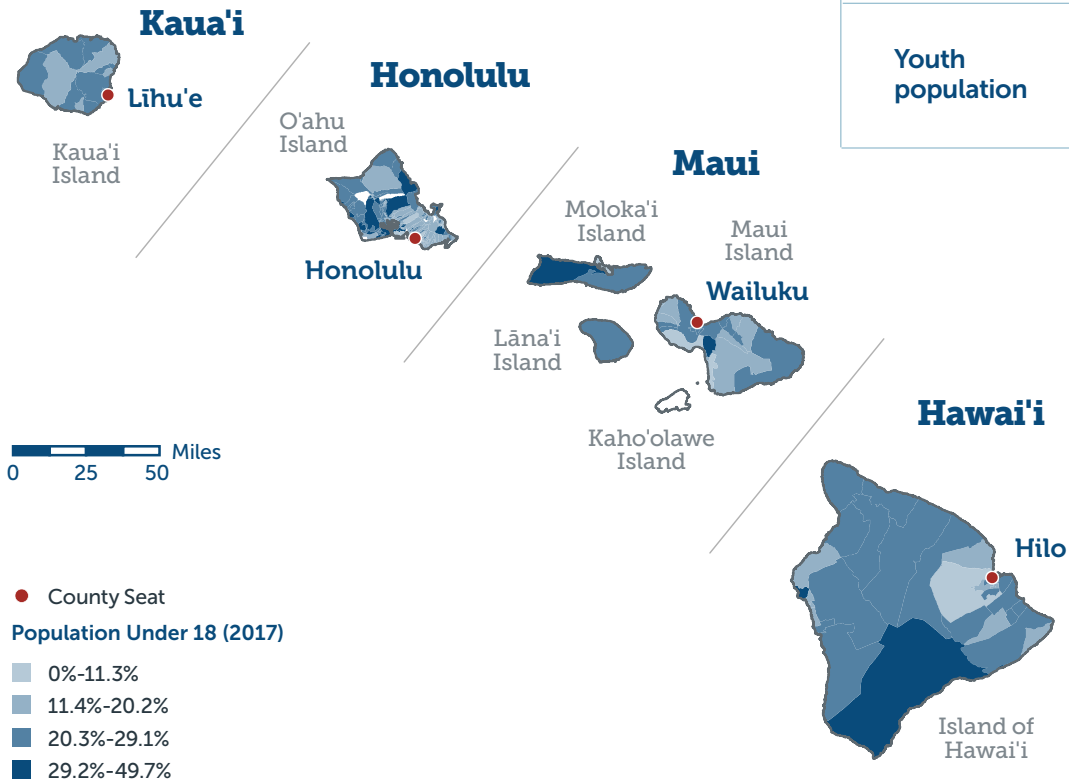
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# THE STATE OF PLAY IN HAWAI'I

## OVERVIEW



Overall number of sports offered **26**

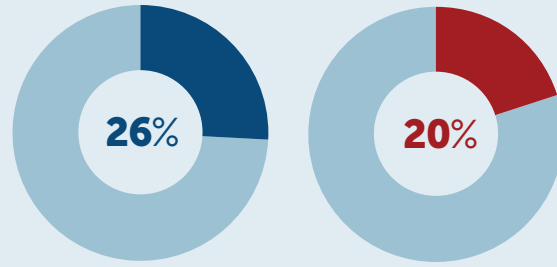
Youth population **307,581**

COUNTY	TOTAL POPULATION	POPULATION UNDER 18	MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME
Kaua'i	71,093	15,812	\$72,330
Honolulu	990,060	212,210	\$80,078
Maui	164,094	36,445	\$72,762
Hawai'i	196,325	43,114	\$56,395
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,421,572</b>	<b>307,581</b>	<b>\$70,391</b>

Source: 2017 American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau

### On the whole, few youth are active enough

26 percent of Native Hawaiian youth met the CDC’s recommendation of 60 minutes of physical activity daily.\*



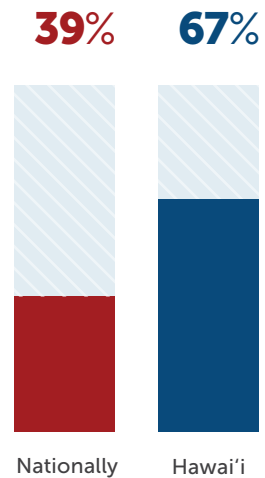
■ Native Hawaiian Youth ■ Youth Statewide

\* 26% of kids across the U.S. met the CDC recommendation for physical activity daily, as reported in the CDC Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance: United States, 2017

### Percentage of Native Hawaiian youth facing challenges

Percentage of foster care population who are Native Hawaiian	48%
Victims of abuse and neglect	46%
Live with two married parents	21%
Public high school students who report they will definitely graduate	61%
Public high school students who report feeling sad and hopeless	31%
Public high school students who seriously considered attempting suicide	20%
Percentage of youth correctional facility who are Native Hawaiian	69%

### Residents who live within a half mile of a park (2010)



Poverty, a driver of homelessness, is higher among Native Hawaiians than other groups in the state. 14% of Native Hawaiian children (under 18) are living below the federal poverty line.\*

\* As reported by the 2019 U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey.

### Hawai'i has the highest rate of homelessness in the country, tied with New York state.

- **46 per 10,000** people are homeless in Hawai'i.<sup>8</sup>
- **53%** of the homeless are **unsheltered**, among the highest in the nation.

**Percent of Native Hawaiian public middle school students who are:**

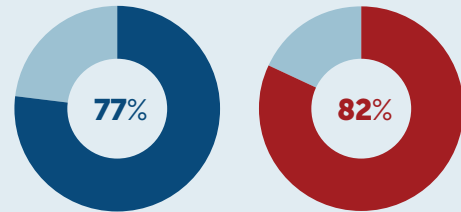
Obese or overweight	31%
Met the CDC's recommendation of 60 minutes of physical activity daily* <i>* Compared to 27% statewide</i>	31%

**Percent of Native Hawaiian public high school students who are:**

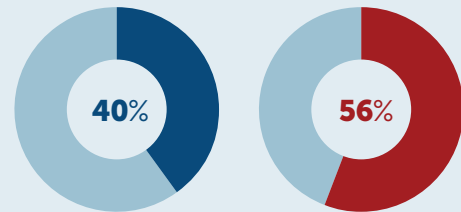
Obese or overweight	34%
Ate fruits or vegetables at least five times a day during the past seven days	19%
Eat breakfast every day of the week	27%
Feel hungry most or all of the time because there's not enough food in their home	7%

**Percent of Hawaiian students who:**

Graduated high school within four years of starting<sup>9</sup>



Entered college in 2015<sup>10</sup>



■ Native Hawaiian public school students  
■ All public school students statewide

**In Hawai'i, number of:**

Sports facilities

**276**

Public / charter schools

**292**

Private schools

**145**

Sports programs offered

**343**

Students enrolled in public/charter schools (2018-2019)

**179,698**

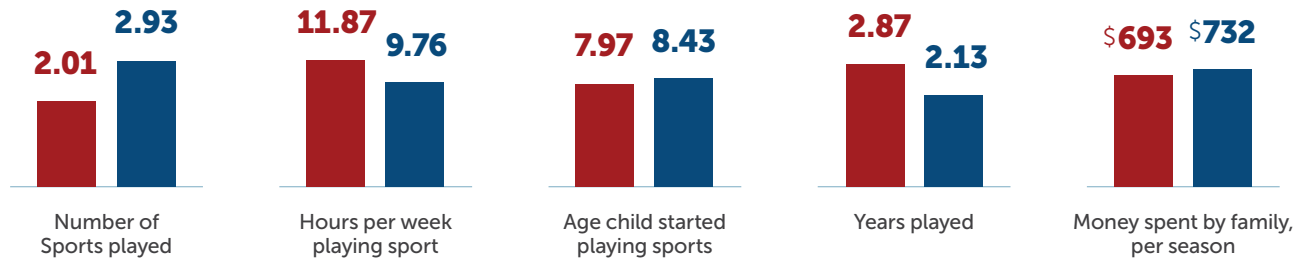
Students enrolled in private school (2018-2019)

**43,184**



## National vs. Hawai'i averages, per child

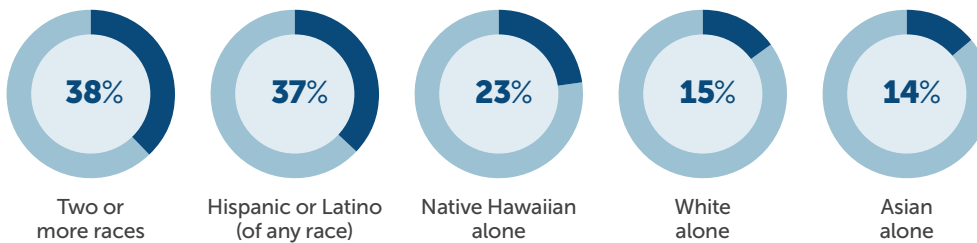
■ National ■ Hawai'i



Data collected as a part of a pilot survey of sports parents conducted by the Aspen Institute and the Utah State University Families in Sport Lab. The national data is representative, while the Hawai'i data is not due to the small pilot sample (52) surveyed in state.

## YOUTH SURVEY DATA\*

### Youth population under age 18 in state of Hawai'i

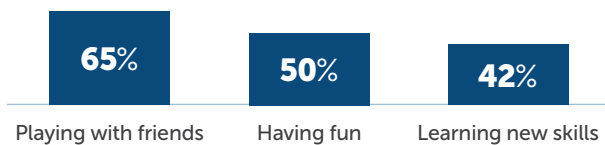


As reported by the U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2017. Data for Black/African American and American Indian/Alaska Native are suppressed due to low counts.

### How kids travel to games and practices

MODE OF TRANSPORTATION	%
Driven by parent or someone at home	89%
Walk	32%
Driven by someone else	31%
Bus	24%
Bike	9%

### What kids like most about playing sports

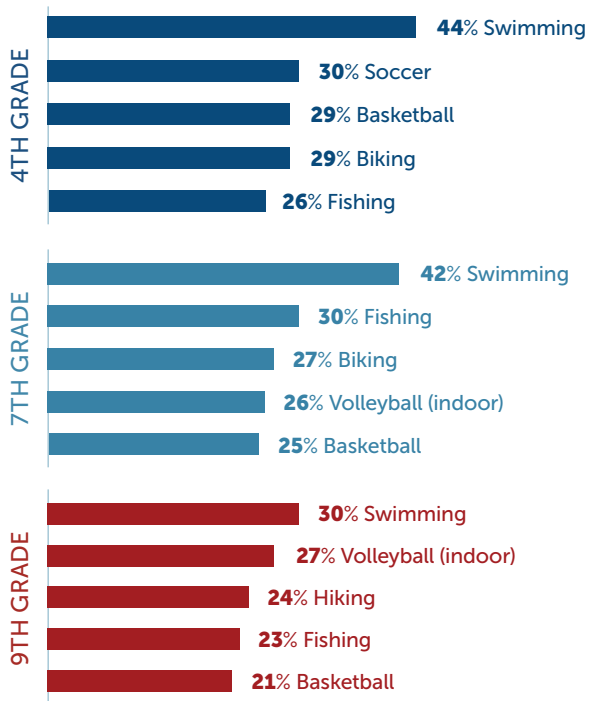


### Reasons kids say they don't play

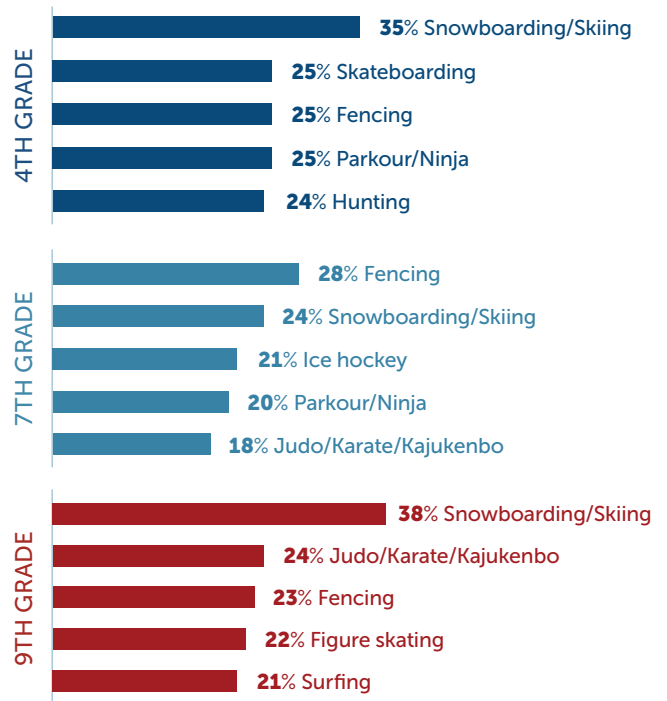


\* Results from Aspen Institute youth surveys and focus groups of 502 youth across the four Hawaiian counties.
















## Top physical activities youth are participating in regularly



## Top physical activities youth would like to try

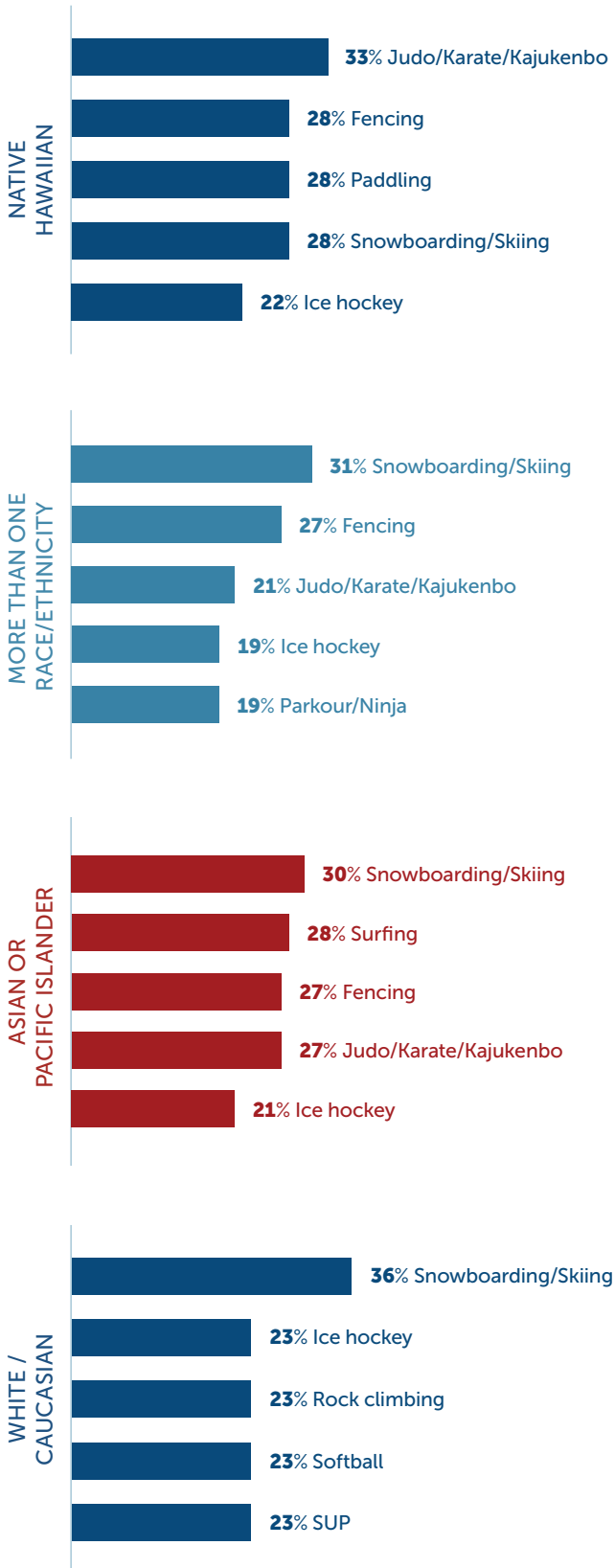


## Top 5 sports youth want to try

Overall	Girls	Boys
 Snowboarding/Skiing <b>31%</b>	 Snowboarding/Skiing <b>35%</b>	 Fencing <b>35%</b>
 Fencing <b>26%</b>	 Figure Skating <b>30%</b>	 Snowboarding/Skiing <b>30%</b>
 Judo/Karate/Kajukenbo <b>21%</b>	 Fencing <b>25%</b>	 Ice Hockey <b>25%</b>
 Ice Hockey <b>20%</b>	 Surfing <b>14%</b>	 Parkour/Ninja <b>14%</b>
 Surfing <b>19%</b>	 Judo/Karate/Kajukenbo <b>13%</b>	 Judo/Karate/Kajukenbo <b>13%</b>

\*1.8% of survey respondents identified their gender Other.

## Top 5 sports youth want to try by race/ethnicity



## What grade would you give stakeholders in Hawai'i in getting kids active through sport?

2019 Overall State of Play Grade	C+
Ask Kids What They Want	C
Reintroduce Free Play	C
Encourage Sport Sampling	B
Revitalize In-Town Leagues	B-
Think Small	C
Design for Development	B-
Train All Coaches	B
Emphasize Prevention	C

Grades for The Overall State of Play and the eight plays were collected through a widely distributed survey developed by The Aspen Institute and shared by the Lili'uokalani Trust, principal investigator, advisory group and community leaders

# The 8 Plays

Project Play's *Sport for All, Play for Life* framework and how Hawai'i fares



## Ask Kids What They Want

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

About 53% of the youth surveyed statewide say they are rarely or never asked by a teacher or coach what they want to do in class or practice. This percentage is consistent with other areas of the country where the Aspen Institute has conducted surveys of youth.



## Reintroduce Free Play

*Make sure there's room for not just organized play, but experiences that children can own.*

Few states in America have more of its citizens living near beaches and oceans, but too few children in Hawai'i can swim with confidence. Most park space consists of large parks optimized for organized competition. Youth on the urban and suburban islands of O'ahu and Maui reported high levels of participation in free play, while those from Moloka'i and Kaua'i reported lower levels, suggesting that density of population and infrastructure can create more opportunities. Two-thirds of youth live near a park partly because of the state's small size and its large number of public beaches and parks.



## Encourage Sport Sampling

*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.*

Youth who participate in sports play an average of 2.93 sports annually, far higher than the national average of 2.01. Basketball, soccer, volleyball and baseball draw the biggest numbers. Increasingly, children are pressured to specialize before age 10 in the hopes of playing for an elite club team or earning college scholarships. Sports that are more participation-friendly and include more skill levels, like rugby and martial arts, are growing in popularity.



## Revitalize In-Town Leagues

*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.*

Little League Baseball is the ultimate expression of local rec leagues, in which children from the same neighborhood can play one another and develop lifelong bonds. Top players are aggregated only in the post-season. Hawai'i is the only state that has produced teams that won three Little League World Series championships (Ewa Beach, 2005; Waipio, 2008; Honolulu, 2018).

Club ball has become dominant on O'ahu, where the most talented kids and best resources are consolidated at ever-earlier ages. Participation-based programs, such as the Police Athletic League, are viewed as second class. In rural communities, it can be a challenge to fill rosters with enough players to operate a local league and recruit enough qualified coaches. Youth who play club ball are more stressed than the national average, with parents and coaches often applying the pressure, according to our research.



## Think Small

*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.*

The value of a usable park within walking distance is no more apparent than at Honolulu's tiny Papakolea Park, where families and neighborhood kids fill the shaded, covered playcourt. While organized teams need the larger district and regional parks that abound, neighborhood spaces are getting more recognition. In Lihue, Kaua'i County funded an overhaul of 10,000-square-foot Kalena Park, near the large county park and Vidinha Stadium, in a nod to local kids who depend on Kalena for casual play.



## Design for Development

*Six is not 16. Offer programming that is age and developmentally appropriate, while tailored to the population served and needs of the individual child.*

Sport-based youth-development organizations such as the YMCA offer valuable programming but have a limited footprint in the state's sport ecosystem. The average Hawaiian child starts playing sports at 8.43 years old, about a half year later than the national average.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, many children under age 10 play one sport year-round. P.E. or intramural sports are not offered in public schools at recommended levels. Youth with disabilities are especially limited. Although adaptive physical education is designed into the public school system, only two adaptive-resource teachers serve in the state.



## **Train All Coaches**

*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.*

Like elsewhere in the U.S., Hawai'i is largely a landscape of well-meaning volunteer coaches winging it – this is especially true in soccer programs for younger ages, and potentially hazardous in contact sports like tackle football. One upside of the proliferation of club sports is that most coaches receive training and must submit to a certification process designed by national governing bodies. Trained coaches are consistently mentioned as the resource most needed in rural communities.



## **Emphasize Prevention**

*Children deserve environments that limit injuries and offer protections against emotional, physical and other forms of abuse. And today, many parents demand as much.*

Nationally in 2017, flag football surpassed tackle as the most commonly played form of the game through age 12. That trend is slow to take hold in Hawai'i, where the dream of college and professional playing opportunities drives the decision-making process of many parents. Other sports with concussion risks deserve the same scrutiny. For example, the sport with the highest risk of concussion in Hawai'i is girls' judo.<sup>12</sup>

There is strong demand among parents for more coaches to get trained in concussion management. Perhaps the area with the highest potential payoff is ocean safety and prevention of drownings. The state's drowning rate is more than twice the national average. For Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders, it was about four times as high as the overall state rate.<sup>13</sup>

### **In This Report:**

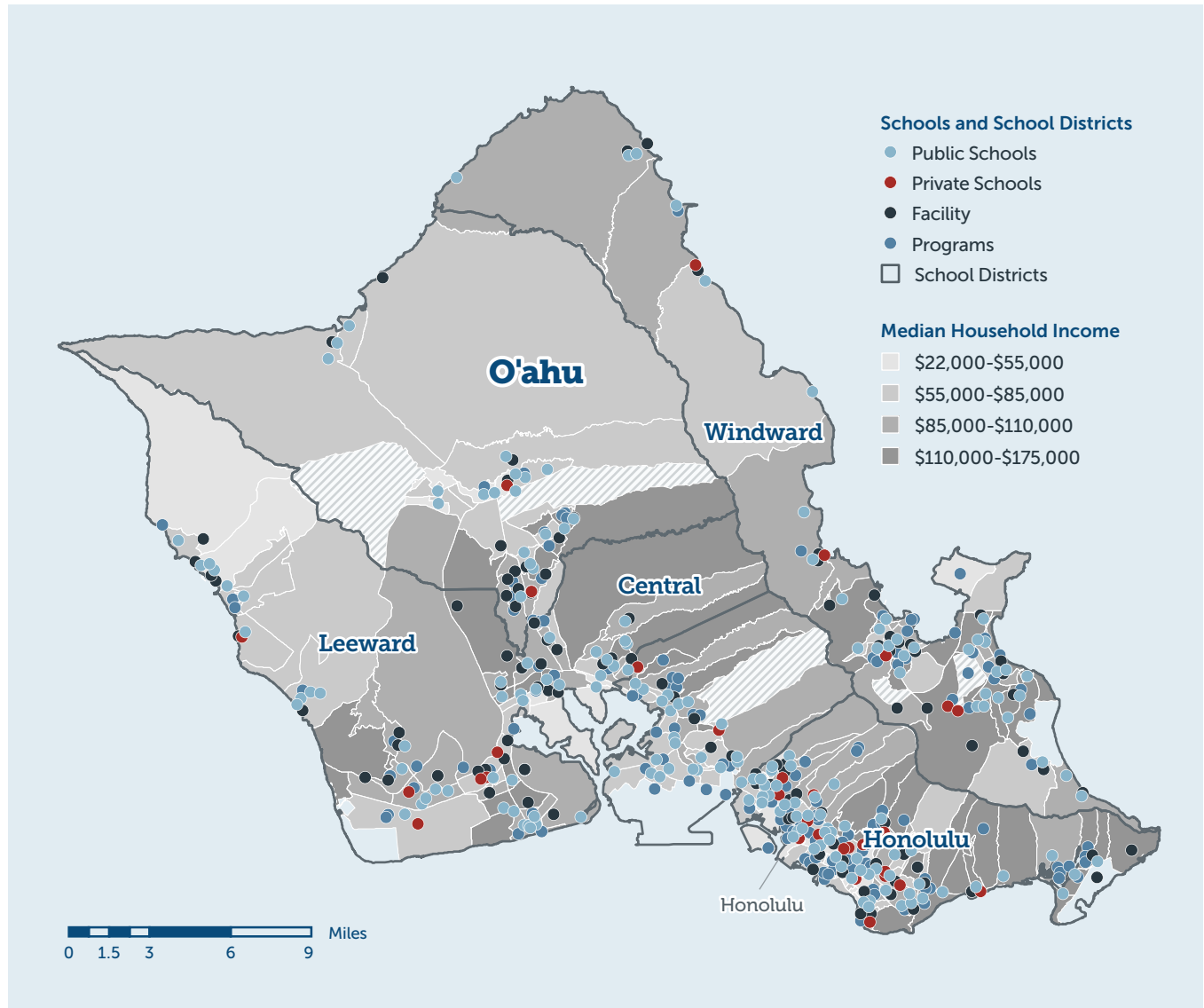
The 8 Plays will be indicated with number markers noting where the plays are relevant to each county's youth sports ecosystem.

*Now, let's talk story through the eyes of youth – with data and reported insights.*

# Youth Sport Ecosystems by County

And the themes that most enable and limit access

## HONOLULU COUNTY



The youth sport ecosystem in Hawai'i's largest county is one of extremes, shaped by which side of the island a child lives on, the resources of the family, and the access they have – or gain – to private schools. Indeed,

the prominence of sport programs in those schools creates an architecture for how many sport opportunities are dispensed from the earliest ages, especially for children in the Honolulu metropolitan area.

## City of Honolulu

Punahou, a private, K-12 school and alma mater of President Obama, is perhaps the best-known school in the state. Even with 3,700 students, entrance is competitive, and tuition runs about \$26,000 a year. Teams in its athletic program have won hundreds of state championships, most notably in swimming, volleyball, tennis and track. Its athletic facilities are on par with some college campuses, able to accommodate 120 teams in 22 sports. Punahou has an eight-lane track, a field house, gymnasium, eight tennis courts, and a 50-meter pool that holds one million gallons of water, more than the pool at the University of Hawai'i.<sup>14</sup>



**Lokana Enos, 18**  
*football player*

Lokana Enos, 18, a senior at Kahuku High School (public), attended Punahou as a freshman, playing football and basketball. He commuted to Honolulu in a parent-driven carpool, leaving home at 5 a.m. and arriving back home at 8 p.m. every school day.

"When you see what kids (at Punahou) have," Lokana says, "actual gyms, pools ... and then you come back here ..." At Punahou he saw his classmates involved in bowling, fencing and lacrosse — "the types of sports you see in movies."

Lokana loved the school and planned to be there four years, but the expense (he received some need-based aid) and the commute became too big a sacrifice to attend. According to census data, enrollment in private schools in Hawai'i is among the highest in the nation, with only Washington, D.C., and Louisiana having comparable percentages.

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**In Honolulu, 20.7% of students are enrolled in private schools, higher than in any metro area except New Orleans.<sup>15</sup>**

**O'ahu is home to 94 of the state's 145 private schools.<sup>16</sup>**

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"It was a hard decision, for him and for us," says his father, Kahau Enos. "Financially it was hard, but the real cost was the quality of life."

Study habits he picked up at Punahou seemed to serve Lokana well. He is currently at the top of his class and is fielding offers of athletic scholarships from colleges. He still commutes to Honolulu for club sports, but not every day as he did to attend Punahou.

Kids may start in recreational, community-based programs, but the pipeline that leads to becoming a recruited athlete in many sports runs through private, club programs.



Private schools and early access to club teams are not the only pathway to athletic advancement. Take Kamalei Krug, a freshman on the University of Hawai'i volleyball team who played at a small,





public Hawaiian-immersion school. The Ānuenue school in the Pālolo neighborhood has 420 students in pre-kindergarten through 12th grade, with an average graduating class of about 20 students.<sup>17</sup> Kamalei, who grew up in Waiʻanae, only started playing volleyball her freshman year there. A testament to the power of sports sampling, Kamalei had competed in wrestling, hula, judo and swimming before trying volleyball. Because she attended a small school, she was obliged to play other sports, so she went out for track and paddling.



But Kamalei’s story is increasingly rare. And in high school, she played club volleyball, with access to private coaching, camps and tournaments

on the continental U.S. Joining a club costs around \$10,000 annually, a cost that is out of reach for many Native Hawaiian families.

## Windward O’ahu

Distance from Honolulu matters, as well. Take the case of Chalei Reid, 13, who is from Lāʻie. Her parents both work two jobs to make ends meet and pay for the cost of training with a volleyball club in the city. Chalei and her mother, Jamie, drive an hour to 90 minutes three times a week to Manoa Valley, where the club is based. The commitment means sometimes eating dinner or doing homework in the car. It can



also mean getting to bed late and spending less time with her younger siblings (two sisters and a brother), whom she helps look after. Time with her siblings is the sacrifice Chalei most feels.



**Chalei Reid, 13**  
*volleyball player*

For Chalei, it's worth it. "It's a neat experience to get to know all these other girls," she says. She would like to try water polo and basketball, but "right now," she says, "it would be hard to do another sport."

Chalei got into volleyball at the local park with a program her mother and another parent (both played college volleyball) started in Lā'ie Park for kids ages 7 to 11. They briefly tried to practice in the town's only indoor gym at Kahuku High School, but they could reserve court space only between 7-9 p.m., past the bedtimes of most of the children, so they returned to the park.



For the kids of Lā'ie, recreational resources are limited. The Police Athletics League runs a basketball program, and American Youth Soccer Organization (AYSO) soccer is available. Brigham Young University's swimming pool is open to the community, but for only narrow slivers of time in order to serve BYU students and staff. (The Kahuku High championship water polo team recently lost use of the BYU pool over scheduling conflicts.) The nearest public pool is the nonregulation-size pool in Pūpūkea on the North Shore.

Indoor sports are a challenge with only one gym, especially when that gym is in disrepair and in need of renovation. The Kahuku High gym floor is compromised by a termite infestation. One set



of bleachers cannot be retracted. Two of the six basketball rims are not operable.<sup>18</sup> School teams get priority use of the gym after school, tying it up until at least 7 p.m. during the school week.

## Leeward O’ahu

Up the coast of the leeward side of O’ahu, there are resorts, golf courses, beach parks, playfields and gymnasiums — but not a single public pool. The closest pool is at the Kroc Center in Kapolei, well to the south, privately run by the Salvation Army. The Wai’anae High School swimming pool was closed in 2007 for reasons of upkeep. For decades, the pool was the only public option on the working-class west side of the island.

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**Wai’anae and Nānākuli have among the lowest annual per capita incomes in the state, less than \$14,000.<sup>19</sup>**

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**Natalia Gonzalez, 6**

*swimmer*

Natalia Gonzalez’s mother, Jennifer Kelleher, grew up on the west side, and this is where she and her husband began raising their kids. Jennifer

knew many classmates and friends growing up in Wai’anae who did not know how to swim, and she was not going to allow this deficit for her kids.

Before Natalia, 6, was old enough to attend grade school, the family moved to Honolulu, close to a district park with a gym and a swimming pool. At Booth District Park, the handful of spots in each swim class filled up quickly and included kids from outside the neighborhood. Indeed, Keolani Keola, the swim instructor who runs the program, says that for each class of six children there is typically a waiting list of about 10 who do not get in.

The unmet demand highlights another key feature of the sport ecosystem in O’ahu: Kids who cannot swim are denied the ability to enjoy the ocean, Hawai’i’s most distinct recreational asset.

Surfer and waterman Duane DeSoto wants to change that. His Nā Kama Kai foundation teaches children how to swim and surf in the protected waters of Pokai Bay. The program intends to restore a connection between Hawaiian children and the ocean, one that DeSoto feels has been lost and replaced by fear and misunderstanding. DeSoto, who grew up on the legendary waves of Mākaha, thinks the state’s oceans are underutilized and that it should be producing far more high-quality, water-based athletes.



All of DeSoto’s eight children were gently introduced to the ocean as toddlers, and all have become avid water athletes. They swim, surf, paddle, kayak and play water polo. His daughter Puamakamae, 13, an eighth-grader at ‘Iolani School, is already participating in World Surf League junior events and wants to surf professionally some day. Her fluency in the water opened up worlds to her.

“I was 11, surfing in an amateur contest, when I really fell in love with surfing,” Puamakamae says. “It was at this one competition at Waikiki. I won, and I

was excited and happy about it. That night I went to my parents and told them this is what I wanted to do, and how I want to be.”



**Puamakamae DeSoto, 13**  
*surfer*

Puamakamae knows plenty of kids who do not know how to swim or would rather be at home than in the ocean. She is doing her part to reverse the trend, taking kids as young as 5 out into the ocean with Nā Kama Kai, demonstrating the impact of trained teens becoming part of the state’s coaching corps.



Ben Komer, the owner of the largest private swim school on O’ahu, estimates about half of the kids on the island know how to swim. (In the inland community of Wahiawā, the principal of Wahiawā Elementary School estimated that 80% of his students cannot swim.) Access to pools and instruction is a barrier, but so is the lure of other sports and the pursuit of scholarships, he says.

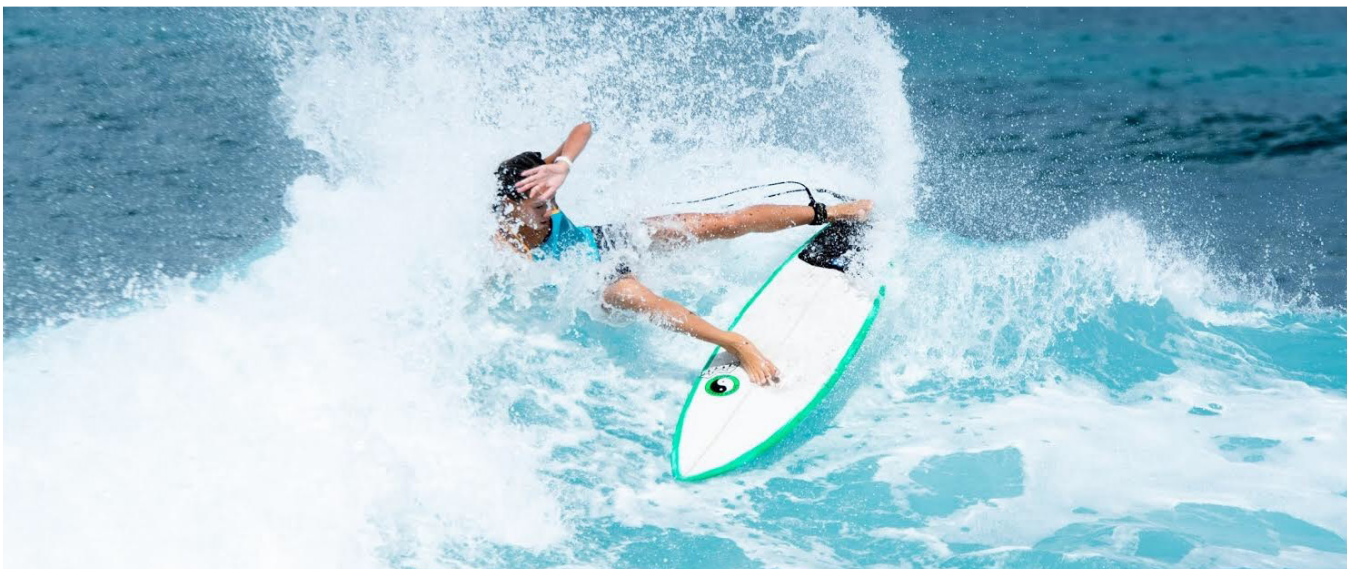


**Why don’t we have the best paddlers, sailors, divers, swimmers, surfers? Any water sport, Hawai’i should be the best. Our biggest competition is baseball, football, volleyball.”**

**BEN KOMER**

*Owner of the largest private swim school on O’ahu*

For Natalia, Puamakamae, Kamalei, and many other leeward Oahu youth, pursuing an adequate sports experience means



commuting or leaving the west side to find a pool or another school for a club or coaching.

Free play—despite a commendable number of local parks—is hampered by the perception of some parents that letting kids go off and play on their own in the park without supervision might be dangerous.



Football culture prevails on the west side, where year-round practices, in full uniform and padding, are a common sight. Wai'anae is also something of a hotbed of boxing, where the famed Wai'anae Boxing Club trains countless boys and girls, and where mixed martial arts superstar Max Holloway, who grew up in Wai'anae, is considered a hero and mentor. Toughness is a valued quality on the west side, paired with the reality that access to resources and options are scarce.



## Central O'ahu

Just as a parent with means can elevate their child's athletic experience, a parent with limits can hamper it — something that Matthew Levi understands well. His Lawakua Kanjukenbo Club teaches martial arts to at-risk youth in three public housing projects, including the state's largest, Kuhio Park Terrace in Honolulu. By bringing the program to kids instead of the other way around, Lawakua eliminates the transportation barrier and minimizes the need to engage parents.

The challenge is even greater for parents of youth with disabilities.

Jaycie Anderson, 12, lives in the prosperous central suburb of Mililani, whose residents have access to a rich variety of neighborhood and county parks, and programs for almost any sport. Her twin brother Luke has participated in sports since preschool, but her parents had trouble finding even one sport for



Jaycie, who has a severe developmental disorder that doctors have been unable to diagnose. Her disability is physical and intellectual.

The only option they found was an AYSO soccer program called VIP, in which Jaycie played alongside a "buddy" who assisted her on the field. She wore a uniform, attended practices and played in games.



**Jaycie Anderson, 12**

*Honolulu Ducks Special Olympics team*

A flyer distributed at her school led them to Special Olympics, although it required a long drive into Honolulu. For Jaycie, joining the Special Olympics program involved free play and developing basic pre-sports skills like throwing. She joined the Honolulu Ducks Special Olympics team, participating in a softball skills competition and track and field. Because she cannot run, she raced in a 100-meter walk. Next year, she might try bocce and extend her throwing skills.



Special Olympics Hawai'i serves about 3,800 adults and children with intellectual disabilities, running at least three sports per season with three seasons in a year. "The one resource that I wish were available

is some sort of mixed-ability sports she can participate in with other students at school,” says Jaycie’s father, Kimo.

“

**She likes to hear the cheering; she likes the attention and the people.”**

**KIMO ANDERSON**

*Jaycei’s father*

Hawai’i’s State Department of Education is an outreach partner, although Special Olympics has a presence in only about 60 (about 40 of which are on O’ahu) of the state’s approximately 300 public schools.<sup>20</sup>

Although adaptive P.E. is part of the DOE’s programming, there are only a few adaptive-resource teachers in the entire state.<sup>21</sup> And for children with disabilities, sports opportunities are concentrated in Honolulu. The University of Hawai’i’s College of Education started the Friday Night Lights basketball program to help fill the void in interscholastic sports for students with disabilities, approximating the experience of varsity



basketball for them. This is the mixed-ability experience that Kimo wishes for Jaycie.

In 2015, the kinesiology department’s rehabilitation science program partnered with four public high schools in Honolulu (McKinley, Moanalua, Roosevelt and Kalani) to create mixed-gender basketball teams comprised of students with disabilities and at-risk students who represented their schools in competition, complete with refs, uniforms and bands. The project now includes eight schools,<sup>22</sup> demonstrating that interscholastic sports for students with disabilities can work and provide the social and physical benefits of participation, regardless of the level of competition.

“

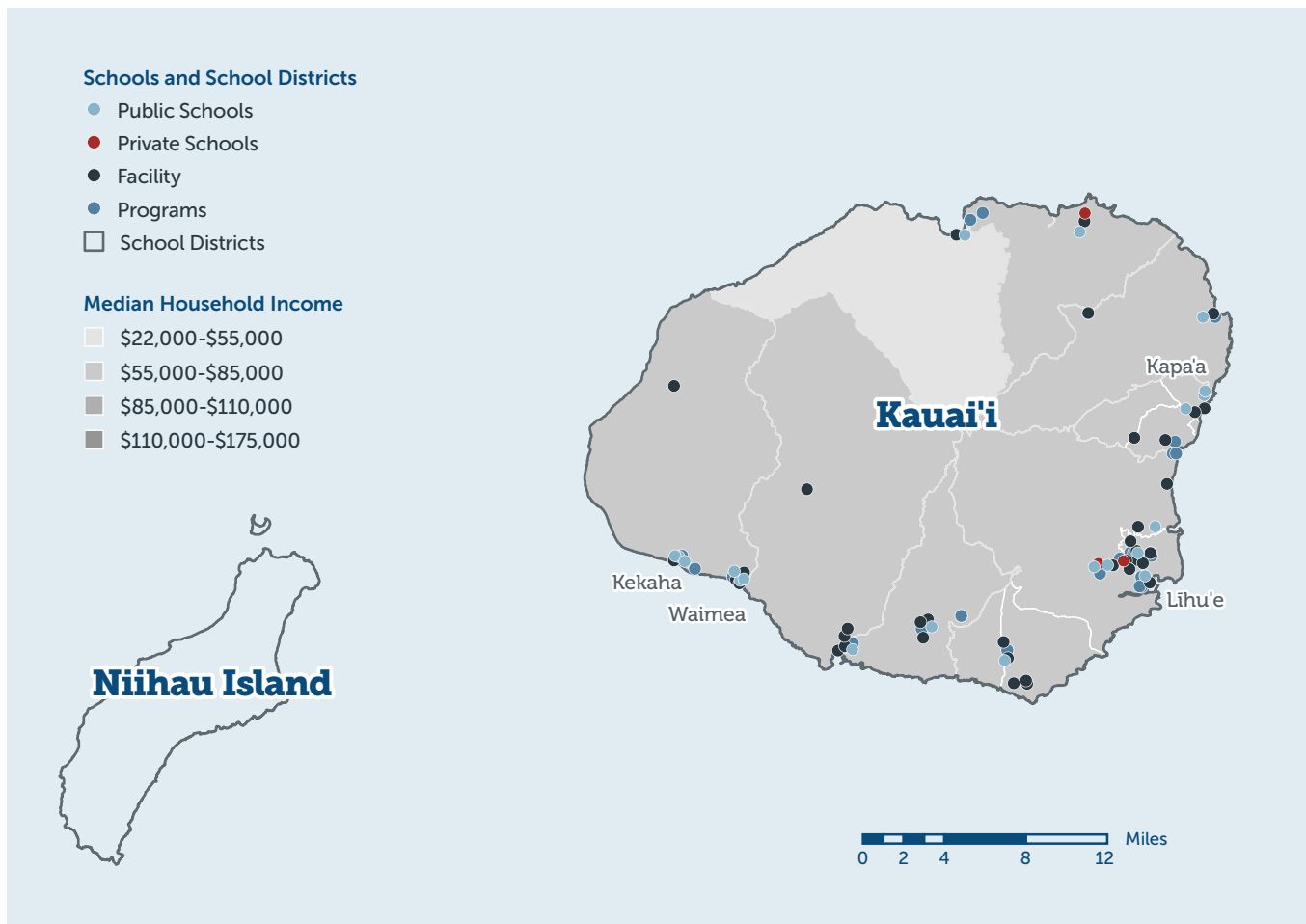
**I do think there is a gap, and in Hawai’i it is more pronounced. We have not really seen a prominent grassroots sports program for kids with disabilities.”**

**DAN EPSTEIN**

*COO of Special Olympics*



# KAUAI COUNTY



Kauai is the least populated of the four major islands, with about 70,000 people, a quarter of whom reside in Lihue in the south and Kapa'a in the east. The rest live in small communities scattered along the shore, with one perimeter highway that connects them — and no bypass roads. To get to practices, youth often must resort to \$1-a-ride county buses, which stitch together its sport ecosystem.

Athletic facilities are concentrated mostly in four towns. There are 23 baseball fields, 28 soccer fields, 28 tennis courts and 30 outdoor basketball courts in Kapa'a, Lihue, Hanapepe and Waimea. Neighborhood parks are in short supply.

Only 26% of Kauai's population live within a half-mile of a park, compared to 54% who do so statewide.<sup>23</sup>

That's what makes Kalena Park, in the center of Lihue, special. Small, in disrepair, littered with trash, and frequented by homeless adults, the park is getting a needed facelift thanks to a group of students from Chiefess Kamakahelei



Middle School. They took photos of the problems and appealed to the county council for help. Their 10-minute presentation in 2018 resulted in the disbursement of \$80,000 for improvements.<sup>24</sup>



**Isabelle Crippin, 13**

*seventh-grader at Kamakahahei*

Isabelle Crippin, 13, a seventh-grader at Kamakahahei, was one of those students. She lives near the park.



Every time I went to the park, I'd play tag, do some basketball, or just swing on the swings. I know what's wrong with the park, so I know how to make it better."

**ISABELLE CRIPPIN**

*Seventh-grader at Kamakahahei*

Kids like Isabelle, who are not inclined to organized sports, often get left out when formal play takes priority over casual play. For them, neighborhood

playgrounds, walkable neighborhoods, and bicycle-friendly streets are important.

Another recognized deficit on the island: Gymnasium space is in low supply. There are only two full-size gyms on Kaua'i, a shortage keenly felt on the wet east side where it rains an average of 49 inches a year.<sup>25</sup>



So, nonprofits try to find workarounds. The Keala Foundation, which offers free fitness programs for youth as a way of thwarting substance abuse, runs CrossFit gyms in Anahola, Po'ipū and Kekaha. The Anahola gym is run out of a garage. The Po'ipū gym is rented from a church. Keala constantly fundraises and solicits donations to provide kids training, mentorship, food and transportation at no cost. Because it operates as a CrossFit franchise for paying adults, it also has a regular source of external income. The owners of the nearby Koloa Landing Resort in Po'ipū are benefactors, providing rooms and event space at cost for the foundation's annual fundraiser, the Ultimate Hawaiian Trail Run.





Kahua and Ku'ulei Akeo send all five of their children, three boys and two girls, to the CrossFit program. They started three years ago when their youngest, Himeni, was four years old.

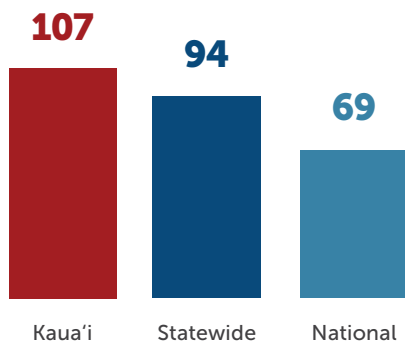


**Himeni Akeo, 7**

*CrossFit*

Raising children on Kaua'i, rural as it is, offers modern challenges. According to census data, Kaua'i has higher premature death rates due to cancer, heart disease, stroke and suicide than the state as a whole.

Fast food restaurants per  
100,000 people<sup>26</sup>



"I see lots of families wasting away, dying, on dialysis," says Ku'ulei, a school worker. "I decided our family was going to be healthy."

So, for the Akeo family, "sport" is more about fitness, diet and overall health than competition. Their most valued trophies are sound health and togetherness, activities the entire family can pursue together. Ku'ulei and Kahua took up CrossFit with their kids. Having an all-ages, mixed-gender sports activity acts as a "home base," Ku'ulei says.



Home has a different meaning for youth like Jaben Lagmay, 17, who face a deeper set of challenges. From Waimea, he grew up in a family that was homeless for much of his life. They had a tent, blankets and food stamps. Jaben and his seven siblings ate meals of fish caught in the ocean and rice cooked in a pot over a wood fire.



**Jaben Lagmay, 17**

*multisport player*

He attended school when he could and sometimes played sports when a sympathetic coach took him on. A football coach with Kaua'i Youth Football gave him shoes and put him on the team without charging a fee. Jaben also

connected with boxing, which he first tried when he was 8 with a Police Activities League program at the Hanapepe gym.

“It’s a good way to channel anger,” he says. “As soon as I get out, I want to box again.”

At a time when most kids would be finishing high school, Jaben is serving time at the Hawai’i Youth Correctional Facility on O’ahu, for breaking into a car. It was not the first time Jaben has been incarcerated. Nor will it be the last time that sport organizations in Kaua’i will be asked to help young

people who grew up like Jaben. In 2019, the homeless population on the island increased by 51% to a total of 443 homeless people, 348 of them unsheltered, according to Bridging the Gap, a coalition of agencies working to end homelessness.<sup>27</sup>

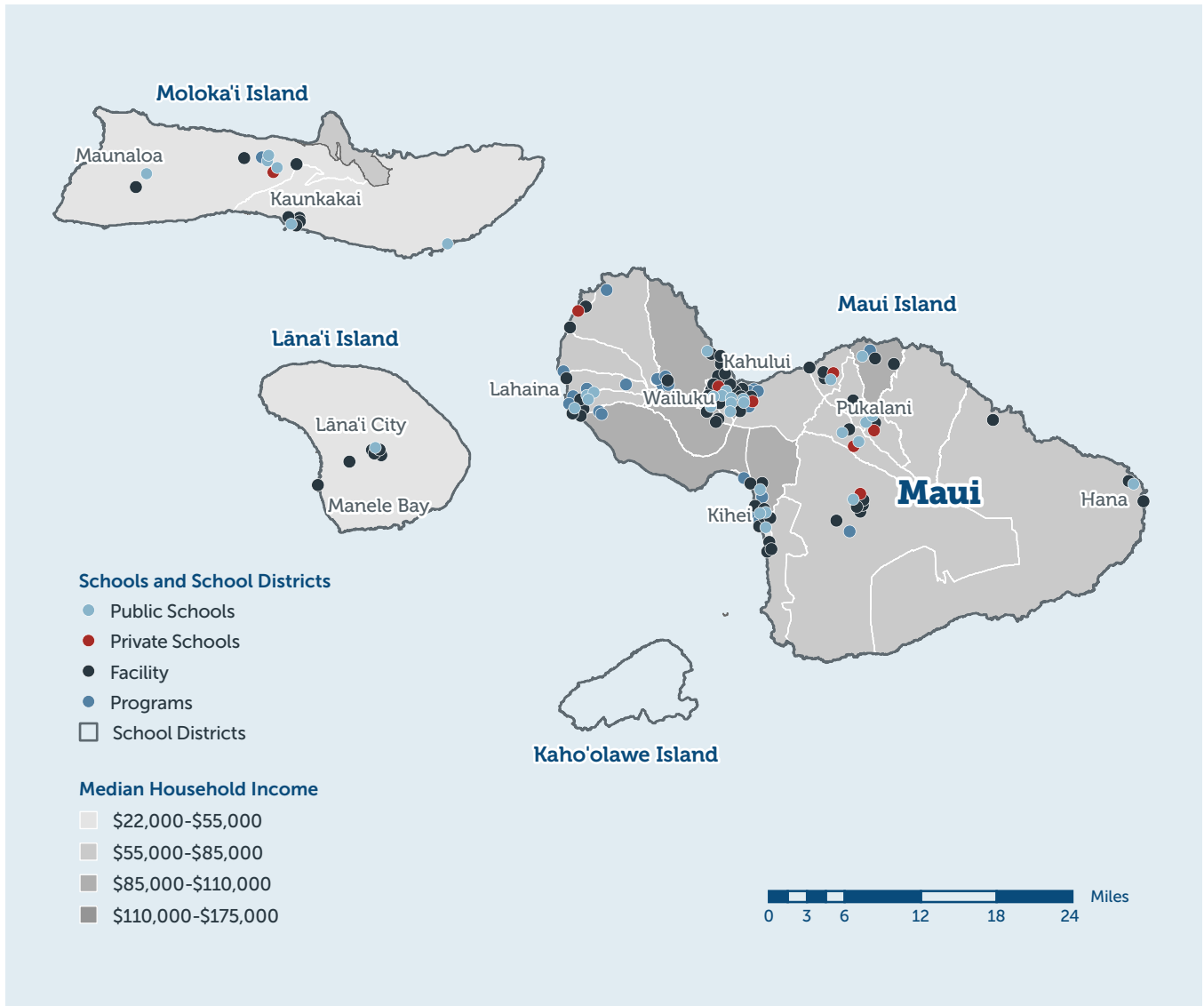
Jaben just wishes he could have had more of a sustained experience in sports.

“My (football) coach told me, ‘You have potential,’” he says. “He was the only person who said that to me.”



The Akeo family

# MAUI COUNTY



Although three islands comprise Maui County, the two rural islands of Lāna'i and Moloka'i are very different than the largely suburban island of Maui. Lāna'i is more connected to Maui, thanks to a reliable ferry to Lahaina. Children who live on Moloka'i face some challenges of living on a rural, isolated island, where options for sports and physical activity are more directly affected by a small population, fewer resources, and a sometimes struggling local economy.

## Moloka'i

A former pineapple plantation town on the western end of Moloka'i, Maunaloa is now a ghost town with shuttered stores and restaurants and a derelict hotel, abandoned when the owners of Moloka'i Ranch, which comprises 55,000 acres or about 35% of the island, closed it in 2008.<sup>28</sup>

Before the hotel closed, families and community sports thrived in Maunaloa. Coaches were easy to find. Maunaloa ran programs for football, basketball, soccer and baseball teams. Maunaloa Elementary School was the hub of the community. The PTA had 100% involvement. Then the exodus began.

Today, the school's enrollment is about 35 students. Teachers come and go, sticking around for usually a few years. There is no money in the budget for a physical education teacher.<sup>29</sup> By comparison, the Kualapu'u Charter School, near the center of the island, employs two P.E. teachers with grants from the Office of Hawaiian Affairs.<sup>30</sup>

Any meaningful sports experience for kids in Maunaloa means a trip to Kaunakakai, the island's biggest town on the south shore, where almost all of the island's recreational facilities are located. Maui Economic Opportunity Inc. (MEO), a private nonprofit, operates a bus that picks up kids at school and take them to Kaunakakai for sports practices.



## **Waimoku Pale, 12**

*multisport player*

Waimoku Pale, 12, lives in the east end of the island and plays in a flag football program run by Maui County, catching the MEO bus to practice. The

county runs most programs, with AYSO providing soccer. Waimoku paddles with the Wa'aka'aemua Canoe Club, one of four on the island, which is host to the Super Bowl of paddling, the Moloka'i Hoe, a race across the Kaiwi Channel from Hale O Lono Harbor to Waikiki.

He plans to play tackle football in high school like his father Peter, who played for the University of Hawai'i. He has tried baseball, wrestling, soccer and basketball, supplemented with a healthy diet of water sports: swimming (which he learned in the local public pool and the ocean), paddling, diving, fishing, surfing and bodyboarding.



Waimoku, like most of the school kids on Moloka'i, has competed in Makahiki. The traditional Hawaiian Makahiki games, reminiscent of the Olympics, are held during four lunar months in fall and winter to honor the Hawaiian god Lono. They are staged in some form everywhere in the state, but in no grander fashion than on Moloka'i, where the ancient celebration of the new year and harvest was revived in 1981, about a decade into the second Hawaiian renaissance.



The competition, held on Kaunakakai Ball Park, requires no special fields and features swimming and running races, spear and rock throwing, arm wrestling, 'ulu maika (similar to bowling), haka moa (one-legged wrestling), and a tug-of-war called hukihuki. There are no scholarships to chase, although there are medals to earn and pride and rivalries on the line. Makahiki succeeds in removing much of the unsavory incentives that pollute modern, organized sports, leaving behind mostly the wholesome ones.

Waimoku has competed in Makahiki since elementary school. "I want to keep doing it," he says. "It was fun. Kids take it seriously, but it is mostly for fun. We like beating schools from the other islands."

The statewide After-School Plus (A+) Program is working to add Makahiki into its sports programming,<sup>31</sup> creating more competition from more islands and building a replacement for intramural sports, which have all but disappeared from public schools.

## Lānaʻi

The smallest of the state’s publicly accessible islands is Lānaʻi, population 3,000. Unlike on Molokaʻi, the youth sport ecosystem in Lānaʻi is more closely tied to tourism and outside investment — specifically from one investor, tech billionaire Larry Ellison, who owns 98% of the island and its one operating resort.<sup>32</sup> The Four Seasons on Hulopoʻe Bay contributes to sports programming for Lānaʻi’s children, providing, among other things, free golf lessons, equipment and time on its Manele Golf Course.



**Kylie Yumol, 9**

*golfer*

Among the beneficiaries, Kylie Yumol, 9, received free lessons for years at Manele.

“I remember playing when I was in kindergarten,” Kylie says. “At first it was kind of hard, but now I can hit the ball 150 yards.”



Although she still likes to play basketball, and started softball this year, she spends more time golfing. It helps that the local town course, Cavendish Golf Course, is free for residents. Golf is great, she says, because “you don’t have to run.”



All children in Lānaʻi City also have access to privately managed play courts, fields and a swimming pool in the town center, run by the ownership company, Pūlama Lānaʻi. They supplement the county’s modest facilities: an aging community center, an undersized gymnasium and a park in the center of town with no playfields. Pūlama Lānaʻi and the resort run a golf and tennis program, and provide organizational support for other sports (flag football, baseball, softball, volleyball and basketball). Community volunteers do the coaching and officiating. Paddling is offered by a local club. As it is everywhere, reliable and consistent coaching is the biggest challenge to running teams.<sup>33</sup>



## Maui

Cultural and mainstream sport cultures in Maui County merge visibly on its third island, Maui, where the investment in — and ambition around — baseball runs deepest.

The communities of Wailuku and adjacent Kahului, the most urban part of Maui, have a concentration of ballfields. There is a trio in Keopuolani Park and another three in the War Memorial Sports Complex, plus the Iron Maehara Stadium, formerly the home field of the Maui Stingrays of the now-defunct Hawai'i Winter Baseball League. A few miles away, there are eight new fields at the Central Maui Regional Sports Complex.

Wailuku produced two Major League Baseball All-Stars, Kurt Suzuki and recently retired Shane Victorino. The wealth of programs here allows a kid to play every month of the year if he or she chooses to. Yet, ironically, baseball was not among the top five sports kids in Maui reported playing in our survey. In fact, baseball was not among the top five sports played by kids on any of the islands. That suggests baseball is becoming an elite sport, played by a dedicated and skilled few rather than by many.



**Kea Sheldon, 10**  
*baseball player*

Kea Sheldon picked up a baseball for the first time when he was 2, and by age 3 he was playing T-ball. After his first season ended, he asked when the next game would be, and when told that was the last game, he began to cry. That was when his parents explored options, venturing from their

neighborhood league in Kihei into central Maui, where baseball is a 12-month sport.

These days, Kea, now 10, has no more than a month off baseball in a year. He plays baseball seven days a week. He finishes homework at school or before practice and plays video games to unwind after practice. Baseball doesn't compete much with his other interests because he does not have many others. The disparity between kids who play year-round and those who play a single season is very apparent, even at Kea's age.

"I just always loved baseball," he says. Despite not having a professional team to watch in person, he watches games on the MLB Network so he can watch his favorite players like Mike Trout, Kurt Suzuki, whom Kea has met, and Kolten Wong, who is from Hilo. "Before I go to sleep," he says, "I usually watch baseball."



Keakealani Cashman, 12, grew up in Lahaina in a hula family, the oldest of four kids, three of them girls. Her great-great-grandmother was Native Hawaiian; her Portuguese great-great-grandfather dug the hole for the famous banyan tree by Lahaina Harbor.



**Keakealani Cashman, 12**  
*tennis player and hula dancer*

All the women on her mother’s side of the family danced hula, so it was expected that she would too. Her mother is a kumu (teacher) and belongs to a hālau (hula school). Because ancient Hawaiians had no written language, they built a strong oral tradition around hula. Hula chants served as their historical record and were memorized and passed down for centuries.

In the early 1800s, newly arrived missionaries discouraged hula, urging royalty to ban the practice. Hula was driven underground, still practiced but hidden. Those who carry on the tradition of hula today talk about a cultural responsibility and this near extinction as motivation to practice it today and help it flourish. Keakealani is no exception.

She attends Kamehameha Schools (KS) in Pukalani, nearly an hour drive from her home. Almost all the students, boys and girls, learn to dance hula as part of the school system’s mission to incorporate Hawaiian culture into its education. While P.E. programming varies slightly from one KS school to another (there are three campuses on O’ahu, Maui and Hawai’i), all students are virtually guaranteed a rich experience and an



assurance they will graduate knowing how to swim. Freshmen and sophomores are obliged to meet standards in both swimming and running (unless they have a medical exception). Health education is also built into the P.E. requirements.<sup>34</sup> The KS schools are among the handful who have surfing teams, although it is a club sport.

But Keakealani’s favorite sport is tennis, which she has been playing for almost as long as she has been dancing hula. She got her first taste when she was six, in a class at a private club in Kapalua, before settling down in a more affordable club in Lahaina which uses public courts and raises much of its own funds. She also plays with her middle school team and sometimes practices with the high school team. She practices hula about once a week, while she practices tennis every day. To do that, she wakes up at 5:45 a.m. and returns home at 4:45 p.m.

“I feel like hula is more of a cultural practice than a sport,” Keakealani says. “But it hurts a lot — my whole body hurts, it hurts my knees, the muscles in my arms. I’m in more pain dancing hula than playing tennis.”





**I love tennis because it's very challenging. Your ball is either going to go out or in the net. I get an anxious feeling, and it gets scary, and that makes it even more fun — it's like a thrill."**

**KEAKEALANI CASHMAN**

*Hula dancer and tennis player*

Like hula, canoe paddling is a sport inextricably tied to Hawaiian culture. When high school paddling teams gathered last winter in Kihei for a county-wide regatta, all the students from all the schools recited Hawaiian chants. Some were competitive, war-like chants; others expressed thanks to the elders running the event; still others addressed a greater, unseen power, asking permission to enter the waters and for knowledge to come from the nature around them.



Avtalya Glickman, 18, a senior paddler from Kihei Charter School, was raised as an observant, religious Jew — her father is Jewish; her Portuguese-Japanese mother converted. Avtalya says when she was 13, she decided it “was not the path I wanted to lead anymore, so I broke away from that (religion) and started paddling. That opened up a whole new world for me.”



**Avtalya Glickman, 18**

*paddler*

High school teams are often hosted or sponsored by a local canoe club, which provides canoes and hales, or boat houses, to store them. The capital expense of the canoes is carried by the clubs, although teams are expected to help maintain them and pay for the costs of travel and competition. Kihei Charter’s team is sponsored by the Kihei Canoe Club.



Growing up, Avtalya was not immersed in sports. She rode her bicycle around the neighborhood and rented rollerblades at the local rink. When she was 10, she started swimming competitively, but it was paddling that became her sport that was more than a sport. Paddling represented both an individual effort, of staying in shape and getting stronger, and a group effort of working in concert. The arena was both small — the boat — and immense — the ocean.





“

**When you train with your crew, you all help each other to get better and to improve your stroke so you can all be better as a team. If one person is off, it can throw the whole canoe off; you have to work together like one big moving organism.”**

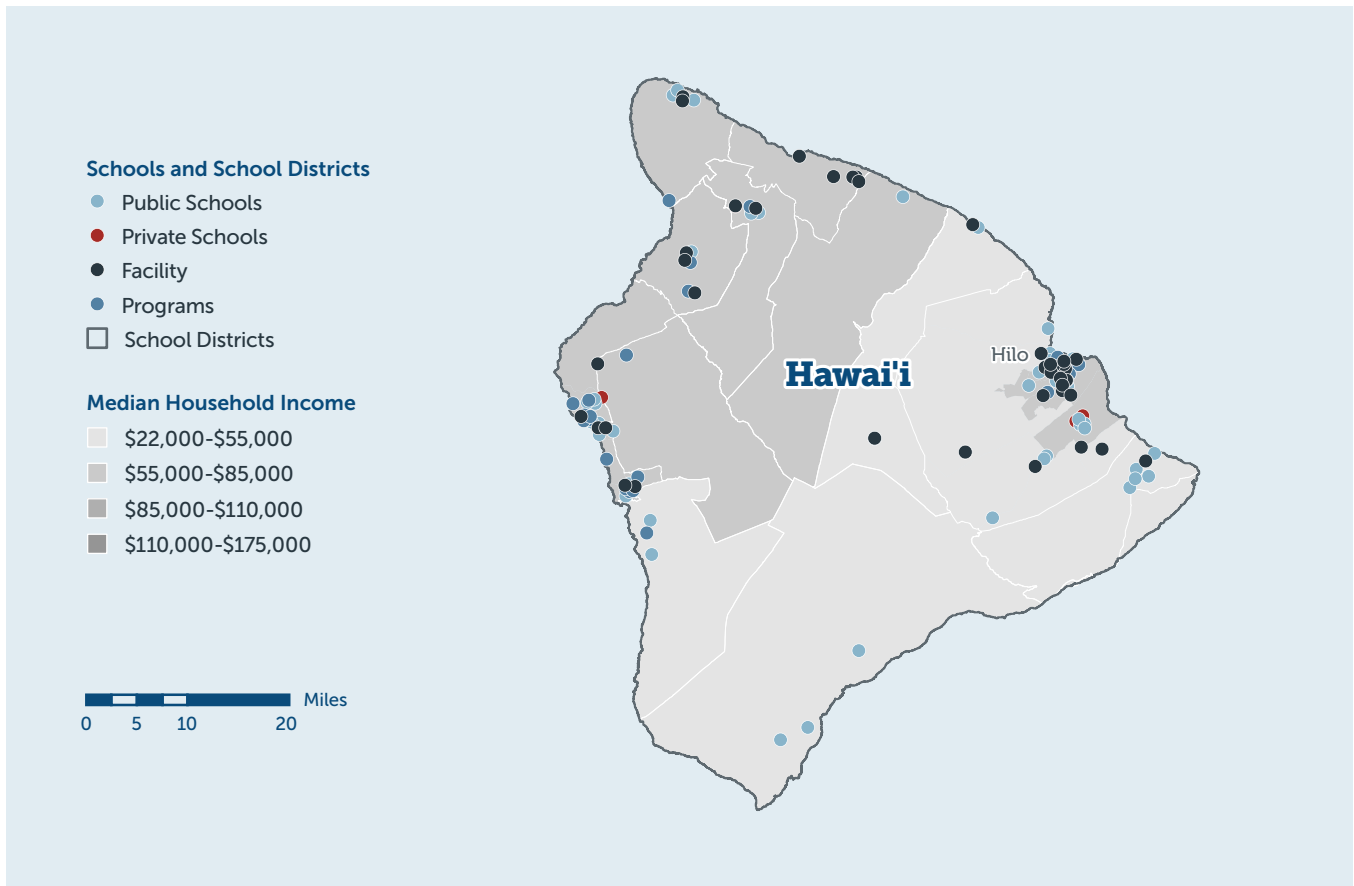
**AVTALYA GLICKMAN**

*Paddler*

Paddling served as Avtalya’s gateway to the ocean and led her to embrace a culture she was not born into. After the winter paddling season, she took a camping trip in a double-hull sailing canoe with a school group. Paddling canoes and sailing canoes were how ancient Hawaiians discovered and settled Hawai’i, a fact brought home by the travels of the famous Hōkūle’a voyaging canoe, a replica launched in 1975. Perhaps more than any other sport in the state, paddling is inextricably linked to the language, song, and history of Hawai’i. And like surfing, paddling creates strong swimmers.



# HAWAI'I COUNTY



The sport ecosystem on the youngest, biggest and highest island in the chain reflects the characteristics of those features. Among its more colorful and curious activities: rodeo, an outgrowth of a ranching industry that is now 200 years old. The Hawaiian cowboy, or *paniolo*, predated cowboys on the mainland. Other islands also have cattle ranches, but the Big Island, with its vast tracts of high-altitude rangeland, is the geographical heart of the industry and the *paniolo* tradition.

Marley Endreson was 7 when she moved to Hawai'i, in the rural north, with her grandfather Bob Endreson. It did not take long for her to spot kids riding horses along the road the way suburban kids might ride bicycles.



**Marley Endreson, 10**

*rodeo*

Marley, now 10, and her grandfather live on an eight-acre farm with six horses and a small arena she can practice in every day, so they had the means to entertain her interest in rodeo.

Living in the rural North Kohala district, her sports options were more limited. Her school, Kohala Elementary, does not provide sports programming outside of a rudimentary P.E. class. She could join a local basketball league or soccer league, but rodeo was a more natural option given where and how she lived. There is generally a rodeo held on the Big Island every month.



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**The Hawai'i High School Rodeo Association counts 154 members statewide: 73 on Hawai'i, 41 on Maui, 27 on O'ahu, and 11 on Kaua'i.**<sup>35</sup>

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Having your own ranch or knowing people who have one is essential, so forging relationships within the community is a big part of finding lessons, horses and the space to practice. The rodeo world can be insular, built around ranching families that nurture the tradition.<sup>36</sup>

Rodeo, like fishing, hunting and diving (spearfishing), are sports founded in the Native Hawaiian tradition of living off the land.

Keawe-Wai Lincoln got his hunting license as soon as the law allowed, at age 10, joining his father and uncle on the trail with his bow. He had walked with his father for years, learning the patience required to stalk an animal and respect for the land they used, before he ever shot his first animal.



**Keawe-Wai Lincoln, 14**  
*hunter*

Like many Native Hawaiian families, the Lincolns hunt for sheep, goat and pig on the hillsides of Kona, where they live. Their journeys last for 10 or 12 miles and bring them closer to one another and to the land. The family also fishes from shore with rods and nets. Keawe-Wai has the same attitude about hunting that he has about playing football and rugby.



**Hunting is everything to me. That’s something I can do to help my family. I can help provide food for my family. I’m helping mom and dad make the next meal or bring a pig to the next party.”**

**KEAWE-WAI LINCOLN**

*Hunter*

“I’m trying to help my parents not pay for anything,” he says. “I’m trying to work my butt off to earn that scholarship, so they don’t have to pay for my schooling. My brothers and sister, they have to go to college too, so if there is one less kid to pay for, it helps my family.”

Keawe-Wai attends the ‘Ehunuikaimalino Hawaiian immersion school. Because the school does not offer football, Keawe-Wai plays for Konawaena High School next door, an accommodation the DOE makes for some small schools. As a freshman, he played quarterback for the junior varsity team.



The Lincolns have five boys and one girl, who is the youngest and not yet old enough to walk. The five boys, Keawe-Wai, Kama’aliliwai (11), Kāeowai (8), Kekaunawai (5), and Kapikoolawai (3), all play rugby. The once-niche sport is gaining popularity fast on the Big Island. The two oldest boys play tackle rugby while the three youngest play flag rugby. League rules don’t allow tackle until children are at least 11.

“They come home after games and talk about it for hours,” says their mother, Kalena Lincoln. “They go over all the plays and talk about it all night. For us, rugby is a family thing.”

Once Keawe-Wai’s baby sister is old enough to play, the brothers expect her to. While girls in Hawai’i are often steered toward sports expected of them like cheerleading, hula, and volleyball, they also have access to nontraditional sports like rugby and, in the case of Roxie Umu, wrestling.



**Roxie Umu, 17**

*wrestler*



**There’s no genders in the room, just weight classes that separate us. It’s like if you’re a wrestler, you’re a wrestler and that’s it.”**

**ROXIE UMU**

*Wrestler*

In middle school, Roxie attended a wrestling tournament just to watch the match of a family friend, but ended up staying to watch the entire tournament. Now 17 and a senior at Kealakehe High School in Kona, she has competed in several weight classes from 184 to 225 pounds, qualified for the state meet every year in high school, and

won the state title her junior year in the 191-pound weight class. She has also competed in national tournaments with USA Wrestling.

The eruption of the Kīlauea volcano in 2018 displaced many of the families who had K-12 students attending Hawai'i Academy of Arts and Science, a charter school in Pāhoa in the rugged southeast part of the Big Island. Enrollment fell slightly, which meant the school received less money.

The eruption also drastically altered beaches, burying tide pools and disrupting surf breaks. The school, the only one on the island to run a surfing program as part of physical education classes, lost some of its favorite surf breaks. The school has offered surfing since 2001 and has claimed only one minor injury over the years.

“

**I understood how to surf, but I wasn't very good. A lot of kids my age have been surfing their entire lives, but I've always been too timid to do it. The class pushed me out of my comfort zone, and I finally did it.”**

**ZOE MAYHEW**  
*Aspiring lifeguard*

“As a sport, surfing has way less liability than football,” says Hawai'i Preparatory Academy Principal Steve Hirakami, an avid surfer himself and a fierce advocate for the inclusion of surfing and ocean education in public curriculum. He carries an extra insurance policy for his school's program, in addition to the one required by the Hawai'i

State Board of Education, reframing the issue of liability into one of risk management. While there are rules and red tape, Hirakami did not find them insurmountable.

Senior Zoe Mayhew, 17, enrolled in the school's surf class after completing the free junior lifeguard program run by Hawai'i County's fire department.



**Zoe Mayhew, 17**  
*aspiring lifeguard*

She plans to apply to the county to work as a full-time lifeguard as soon as she can. As a woman, she would be a minority among lifeguards, who are mostly men. She would like to see more lifeguards, in general, posted at beaches.



“Most beaches don't have any lifeguards at all,” Zoe says. “When there is, there are only two on duty.” Her home island has 12 guarded beaches, or one per 36 miles of coastline, the highest ratio of all the islands. (O'ahu has the lowest ratio of one guarded beach per 6 miles of coastline)<sup>37</sup>

# Call For Leadership

## Grow surfing as a club sport in middle and high schools.

Surfing is deeply embedded in the culture of Hawai'i but falls short of being part of daily activity for most youth. Just as paddling and rodeo have become sanctioned high-school sports, so can surfing with organization and active risk management.

To date, efforts to institute surfing into the school or club sports systems have been met with mixed results. Surfing, far too often, is a sport kids have to be born into rather than taught. Surfing clubs can be modeled after the paddling clubs that flourish in the islands. Surfing clubs can lend and store surfboards, carry insurance, build relationships with expert surfers and watermen and create a mentorship program. A club can sponsor a school surfing team or a community club, host small competitions, and seek sponsorships and other potential revenue streams. Hula has the hālau system of schools, and paddling has the network of clubs across the state. Surfing needs a similar structure or system to nurture young surfers.



**On O'ahu, 20% of youth surveyed listed surfing as a sport they would like to try; on Maui, it's 35%**

## Engage Hawai'i's pro athletes to better leverage their networks and resources.

In addition to hosting clinics for the sports they are known for, high-profile athletes can host youth focus groups to amplify the voices of children. Invite them onto the boards of organizations and large projects. Encourage them to be active politically, and use their names and faces to advocate for changes in policy.

Athletes from Hawai'i already possess a sense of responsibility and loyalty to their home state, so tapping into their generosity is a logical step. The key is to help them direct their energy to the right causes. Their money is not as valuable as their influence and their ability to connect with kamali'i and to advocate for positive change, whether it be access, safety or training.

Beyond current stars like Major League Baseball catcher Kurt Suzuki, retired athletes might have more time and motivation to reach out

and the wisdom and perspective to be effective stewards. Pros are not the only resource. College athletes, even high school stars, can be recruited and called upon to galvanize a community around a cause and become advocates for younger generations of athletes.

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## Hold the state accountable in closing the gender gap in school athletic programs.

In December 2018, two girls at James Campbell High School in Ewa Beach, represented by the ACLU, filed a class-action lawsuit in federal court against the Hawai'i State Department of Education and the Oahu Interscholastic Association, alleging that both discriminate against female athletes and are in violation of Title IX. The case is currently being litigated.

The plaintiffs contend that Campbell, one of the state's largest schools with more than 3,000 students, failed to provide a locker room for girls, forcing them to change in restaurants, closets or on the field. The suit also claims: The girls water polo team was not secured a pool to practice in; use of high-profile venues like Aloha Stadium is reserved only for boys teams; and resources like travel money, promotion and advertising, coaches and prime-time slots for games are disproportionately given to male athletes.<sup>38</sup>

Thirteen schools in the state do not provide locker facilities for girls but do for boys.<sup>39</sup> State lawmakers recently allocated funds to 10 of those schools; Campbell is not among them.<sup>40</sup>

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## Through land-use regulations governing the development of large parcels, require reciprocal investment in public recreation.

The most high-profile and potentially impactful land sale in the state is in Moloka'i, where about one-third of the island, in the form of Moloka'i Ranch, is up for sale for an asking price of \$260 million.<sup>41</sup> We know that residents of the island want to preserve the slow pace of their community and control development, while also creating avenues for revenue and improving the quality of life.



Useful amenities, jobs and improved infrastructure could be added without fundamentally altering the character of the island. Recreational amenities can be part of that new investment. More jobs and additional housing could revitalize towns like Maunaloa and bring back families and local sports leagues.

Maui County leadership updated its Moloka'i Island Community Plan in 2018,<sup>42</sup> affirming its priorities: environment, culture, education, health care, housing, the economy, parks and facilities, more diverse transportation options, physical infrastructure, sustainable land use and growth, and good governance. Moloka'i also prides itself on its entrepreneurial spirit (many residents operate their own businesses) and its subsistence lifestyle. All of these priorities can be tied into sports and recreation at some level.

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## Expand the Friday Night Lights model of mixed-ability school sports.

Parents of kids with disabilities want the same things for them as all parents do: opportunity. The Friday Night Lights program, started by Dr. Nathan Murata, gives youth with disabilities the chance to represent their school in an athletic contest against another school, an experience so many able-bodied kids take for granted.

Schools on Maui and the Big Island have expressed interest in bringing Friday Night Lights to their schools, as have other schools on O'ahu. Murata would like to see the program eventually get some kind of public funding and even its own division within the county's interscholastic league.

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## Incentivize hotels and resorts to help keep local kids active through sports.

Develop partnerships that lead to access to facilities, vehicles, equipment, food and instruction. The strongest candidates are the resorts within reach of working and middle-class communities, such as the Ko Olina resort on O'ahu's leeward coast. The resort's four man-made lagoons, already open to the public, would make excellent surrogates for a swimming pool.



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**Parents are coming to you in tears. Never in their wildest dreams did they think they would get to see their kids experience this."**

**NATHAN MURATA**

*Dean of college of education  
at the University of Hawai'i*





Build on the models already in place: In Lānaʻi, the Four Seasons resort provides to local youth free golf instruction, access to its course, and equipment.<sup>43</sup> On the Hawaiʻi Island, the Seaside Tennis Center at the Mauna Kea Beach Hotel serves as the home court for two area schools, public Kohala High in Kapaau and private Parker School in Waimea. The Mauna Kea resort donates its employees' time in the form of community holidays; through this arrangement, its tennis pro can use a work day to give clinics or lessons to kids in local schools.<sup>44</sup>

The challenge is to move beyond the benefactor-beneficiary dynamic that drives so much interaction in Hawaiʻi. Encourage resorts to be better community partners and share their human resources and facilities. Develop a standard menu of options that can guide conversation between resorts and local nonprofits. Go beyond generosity as a motivation. Brand youth events and programs as community outreach, corporate citizenship and marketing opportunities.



# Game Changer

## Form state-level authority to coordinate sports activity

Let's start with the end in mind. Imagine a Hawai'i in which all children have the ability, confidence and desire to be active for life, made possible through broad access to sport activity that is developmentally appropriate. Imagine the state as not just the world's best playground for tourists, but the best playground for its citizens.

Possible? Don't doubt it for a second. More than any geographic area in the U.S. landscaped by the Aspen Institute through Project Play, Hawai'i has the natural and human assets to deliver on this vision. Beaches. Water. Mountains. A tropical climate. An appreciation of free play, and sport in general. Mainstream sports. Cultural sports. Imported sports, like rugby. Lifestyle sports, like rodeo. And so many parents who will do just about anything to help their children, regardless of gender.

Hawai'i has both supply and demand working in its favor. Not that there aren't gaps — this *State of Play* report highlights the need for more pools, gyms and other recreation sites — but the state's primary challenge is at a systems level: connecting those who want sport activity, including those most in need, with the programs and places that provide it. Or could provide it.

Transportation obviously is part of that equation. On just about every island, getting children to and from sport sites is a challenge — and a barrier to participation. Many parents just don't have time to make the long treks to practices and games, working the hours they do to support their families in the most expensive state in the country. Solutions need to be developed so kids in Kaua'i don't have to rely on \$1 county buses to get to and from practice,

and after-school programs can safely and efficiently deliver kids to their homes at the end of the day.

But creating efficiencies in the system that delivers sport activity requires more than wheels.

Right now, the key institutions that touch the lives of kids largely work in silos. Schools do their thing. Clubs do theirs. A nonprofit might get some help from a resort, but it's a one-off. Policymakers might understand the value of introducing active lifestyles, but sport is still seen as a nice-to-have, not fully baked into plans for improving public health or educational outcomes.

Hawai'i needs a state-based authority to coordinate and develop sport activity. To codify the vision of sport-for-all in government policy. To set a shared agenda for stakeholders across sectors. To identify key performance indicators and collect data to measure efforts against. To introduce strategies aimed at the most vulnerable populations, including youth with disabilities. To inspire entrepreneurs, hospitals, schools and universities, media organizations, and community recreation groups to introduce mutually reinforcing actions. To ensure the games traditional to Native Hawaiians grow as a part of their unique sport culture.

To serve as the backbone for driving progress.

For inspiration, look up and halfway across the globe to another unique sport culture. Norway is as cold as Hawai'i is warm, among the northernmost countries in the world. But 93% of children grow up playing sports there, and that's not by accident. Sport is coordinated and developed with the help

of government, which recognizes sport as a “great common denominator and social force in society” and embraces a policy of “joy of sport for all.”

Youth is the primary target. Stakeholders are guided by the Children’s Rights in Sport,<sup>45</sup> an eight-page document that outlines the type of experience that every child deserves, regardless of background or ability. In 2007, the 14 counties and 54 sport federations all voted in favor of the framework, which calls for youth voice in the design of experiences and encourages local, low-cost sport activity, especially through age 13. It’s a bulwark against the travel-team culture that has overtaken the U.S. and pushed aside kids from families that cannot afford the fees.

Community clubs and sport organizations that abide best practices are eligible for matching grants to build local facilities. The money comes from the proceeds of legalized gambling and sports betting and is distributed through the ministry of culture, Norway’s version of a sports authority. Municipalities decide what to build and which sports to offer. The grant funding merely serves as the carrot for clubs, locally controlled and often led by volunteers, to get it right.

The model works. Norway isn’t just among the healthiest and happiest nations in the world according to various measures; it’s also a sport powerhouse. At the 2018 Olympics in South Korea, Norway won more medals than any nation in the history of the Winter Games, 39. The U.S. finished fourth, with 28. Norway has 5.3 million citizens; the U.S. has nearly 330 million.

Bigger isn’t always better. The architects of Norway’s sport system say one of their advantages is the country’s size — and therefore the ability to get all key stakeholders around the table. So why not Hawai’i, with one-fourth as many people? It will take leadership to make it happen — and resources.

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## We recommend forming a task force to:

1. **Develop a charter for a Hawai’i sports authority.**
  2. **Identify a revenue source to fund its work and grant-making.**
  3. **Lay the groundwork for adoption by the state legislature.**
- 

The committee should include a representative from each county, leaders from the key sectors including schools and recreation, youth voice, and champions from the transportation, health, business and tourism industries.

The resorts could and should be a terrific partner in this effort, if the goal is Hawai’i as a true playground for all. The most obvious way to fund the authority’s work is through the Transient Accommodations Tax, a small cut from every tourist head that hits a rented bed. It’s how the Bahamas, where tourism is also king, funds its national sports authority.

Then, watch Hawai’i lead the nation in building a sport model that serves families above all. Innovating in play, as it has throughout history.



# Ideas

## Civic Leaders & Policy Makers

**Explore use of recreational facilities on military bases:** Maui has a Coast Guard station; Kaua'i has a Navy missile base. O'ahu has 11 military installations. While not all have recreational facilities appropriate for children, many have gyms, field space, pools and possible sources of coaching in active-duty personnel or veterans.

**Invest to improve existing park amenities and hub facilities:** Providing shade, seating and drinking fountains can make a playfield more inviting. Adding or improving restroom facilities can increase park usability. This lets kids and parents commute to the same places. For example, the old airport park in Kona has the potential to become the west side's Central Park.

**Explore funding for free passes for children to ride buses with schedules catering to youth:** The nonprofit agency MEO (Maui Economic Opportunity Inc.) operates bus service on Moloka'i and Maui free of charge, giving more kids a chance to participate in after-school sports programs.

## Community Recreation Groups

**Create youth sports commissions:** Have kids as young as middle-school age offer their input on recreational programs and facilities at the municipal and county level. Keeping in mind the accomplishments of the students of Chiefess Kamakahalei Middle School, encourage creation of student advisory groups at every high school and middle school.

**Create mini-teams in small communities:** Rural communities often don't have enough players to

field full teams and leagues, so adapt sports to be played by teams of a few players. Small-team sports do not have to be born only out of necessity; fewer players on a team in any sport, in any community, means more playing time for kids and more time spent on the ball.

**Create more adaptive play leagues:** Pair athletes with and without disabilities on the field of play. Blend it into existing programming by scheduling adaptive games alongside non-adapted games. AYSO's VIP program and the Friday Night Lights program are models of this for soccer and basketball.



## Media & Technology

**Establish a crowd-sourced website or app:** List all available sports programs in each county with points of contact, dates, deadlines, costs and locations of practices and games. Content can be managed and updated by each program. The Hawai'i Afterschool Alliance has an interactive map feature ([www.hawaiiafterschoolalliance.org/interactive-map.html](http://www.hawaiiafterschoolalliance.org/interactive-map.html)) that can be adapted and built upon.

**Van sharing:** Use technology to share vans, Zipcar style. Explore partnerships between youth leagues and rideshare services like Lyft or Uber, with the goal of creating low-cost carpools to practices and games.

**Deploy mobile clubhouses:** Instead of requiring kids to come to sports, bring the sports to where they are, in neighborhood and district parks during the week and beach parks on the weekends. Load vans with play equipment and staff trained to initiate and supervise play. Need can be managed using social media.

## Parents & Guardians

### **Grow awareness of best practices in sport**

**parenting:** Tip sheets offering advice on how to be a good sports parent can be found on the new parent resource center for the Aspen Institute's Project Play at [www.ProjectPlay.US](http://www.ProjectPlay.US). Share them with other parents in your community.

**Find the best sport for your child:** Consult the Healthy Sport Index ([www.healthysportindex.com](http://www.healthysportindex.com)) for information on the top 10 sports played by boys and girls at the high school level, evaluated with data and insights in three areas of health: physical activity, injuries and psychosocial outcomes.

### **Combine travel time with tutoring and homework:**

Make use of long trips to games and events by turning buses into study halls run by parent volunteers. Schoolwork is the most-cited reason kids give in our survey for not participating in sports.

## Education

### **Recruit college and high school athletes as**

**youth coaches and referees:** Target private schools, whose students likely have more bandwidth to take on coaching responsibilities. Offer class credits, academic credentialing or some kind of vocational incentive.



### **Collaborate with community partners to offer more after-school programming:**

Providing kids with on-site, low-cost, health-promoting sport and physical activity during the 3-6 p.m. window is a deep need in Hawai'i.

**Unleash the power of school principals:** Follow the example of Big Island charter school principal Steve Hiramaki, who led the creation of a surfing program in his P.E. classes. Although charter schools generally are given more flexibility, all principals have the power to institute change within schools, push for new policies and turn ideas into action.

## Public Health

**Treat swimming as a public health priority:** Set a statewide proficiency standard so there is a way to measure swim literacy. Create a system of vouchers for instruction and a funding mechanism to pay for those vouchers so that kids can afford to take lessons.

### **Explore funding and deployment of portable, above-ground pools for use at schools and parks:**

These can be used for instruction at a fraction of the cost of a permanent, in-ground pool. Portable pools can be purchased and installed for \$20,000 to \$40,000 and will last an average of 10 years.

**Recruit churches to donate or lease gym time for in-town leagues:** Insurance and liability concerns are often cited as obstacles. Work with property owners and insurers to establish an affordable, standard policy that works countywide or statewide to cover usage of gyms by local leagues.

## National Sport Organizations

**Partner with universities to revitalize local recreation leagues:** On the continent, professional leagues are leading the charge to bring back low-cost, non-travel leagues to the largest sports. With no pro teams in Hawaii, partner with the University of Hawai'i and colleges on other islands to share best practices and program curriculum.

**Mandate community outreach when bringing national sporting events to Hawai'i:** These events could include the Moloka'i Hoe, Ironman Triathlon, the Maui Invitational basketball tournament, the Vans Triple Crown of Surfing, and various PGA and LPGA events.

**Create more school partnerships with US Tennis Association's Net Generation program:** Designed to help schools, Net Generation provides teaching materials created by USTA experts to introduce tennis to young children at little to no cost. Curriculum and equipment are adapted to age level. Programs are designed to work in a P.E. class or outside of school, with or without access to tennis courts.

## Business & Industry

**Leverage incoming sporting goods investments to benefit local youth sports:** Dick's Sporting Goods has signaled its interest in entering the Hawai'i market. Its possible entry marks an opportunity to work with communities. If Dick's or any store comes to Hawai'i, incentivize it to sponsor teams and leagues, donate equipment, host events, or invest in infrastructure. Present them as branding

opportunities. A more involved, sports-literate community will buy more sporting goods, and it pays to invest in future, loyal customers.

**Pay employees to volunteer their time to help the community:** Take a cue from the Mauna Kea Beach Hotel's community holiday program, which pays employees to volunteer their time to help the community. While sports will not be the only beneficiary of such a policy, the *kamali'i* of Hawai'i will almost certainly see a large benefit.

**Renovate the Waikiki Natatorium War Memorial.** Use private-public collaboration to finally bring the Natatorium back to life as a community resource. Operate it in a manner to favor use by residents rather than tourists. A rebuilt Natatorium, as the state's largest swimming pool, can be an important resource in promoting swim education, and connecting youth to the state's water culture.



# 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 to the state of Hawai'i 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:

## 20% of Youth in Hawai'i Are Active Daily

IF...	FEWER OVERWEIGHT AND OBESE YOUTHS	DIRECT MEDICAL COSTS AVERTED	PRODUCTIVITY LOSSES AVERTED	YEARS OF LIFE SAVED
<b>25% of Youth</b> Get and stay active until they are 18 years of age	17,254	\$285 million	\$304.1 million	22,046
<b>50% of Youth</b> Get and stay active until they are 18 years of age	34,459	\$569.3 million	\$607.4 million	44,049
<b>75% of Youth</b> Get and stay active until they are 18 years of age	51,724	\$854.7 million	\$911.8 million	66,141
<b>100% of Youth</b> Get and stay active until they are 18 years of age	68,956	\$1.14 billion	\$1.24 billion	88,172

### Fewer Overweight and Obese Youth

Number of additional youth dropping below the 85th BMI (Body Mass Index) percentile, which is the CDC's definition of overweight. Currently, 15% of girls in Hawai'i and 14% of boys are overweight; another 11% of females and 18% of males are obese (at or above the 95th BMI percentile).

### 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.

### 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.

### 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)

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An initiative of the Sports and Society Program, Project Play develops, applies and shares knowledge that helps stakeholders build healthy communities through sports.

[ProjectPlay.us](http://ProjectPlay.us)

## About Lili'uokalani Trust

Lili'uokalani Trust is a private operating foundation founded in 1909, for the benefit of orphan and destitute children with preference given to Native Hawaiian children. The trust serves approximately 10,000 children annually through direct services and reaches thousands more through collaborations with community partners.

A diversified portfolio of real estate, marketable securities and private investments provides the resources to support mission-related programs and activities.

[onipaa.org](http://onipaa.org)

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## Contact the Aspen Institute Sports & Society Program

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