



STATE OF PLAY

Oakland

ANALYSIS AND
RECOMMENDATIONS





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The Aspen Institute thanks our partner for its support of this report.

WELCOME

Eat. Learn. Play. Foundation is committed to unlocking the amazing potential of every child by fighting to end childhood hunger, ensuring students have access to a quality education, and providing safe places for all children to play and be active. As part of our mission, Eat. Learn. Play. is bringing the joy of sports and physical activity to the next generation of youth by providing opportunities and creating safe spaces for all Oakland children to be physically active and participate in sports.

Oakland has a tremendous passion for sports. However, only 19% of boys and 9% of girls from Oakland receive at least 60 minutes of daily physical activity, as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In addition, just 24% of Oakland public high school students play sports. All kids have the right to enjoy the benefits of sports.

To accomplish this goal, Eat. Learn. Play. is proud to partner with the Aspen Institute's Project Play initiative to commission *State of Play Oakland*. This report, authored by the Aspen Institute, offers an assessment of the state of play for youth sports and physical activity in Oakland, including hearing children's voices on what they like about sports and how to improve their experiences.

The work of Project Play is anchored in the body of research that has emerged over the past decade, establishing the many benefits of physical activity including 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.

That's why we're proud to continue to work for all youth to have the opportunity to develop as individuals through sports.

We firmly believe that access to sports in safe and healthy environments should be made available to every child. Each of us plays a role in making that happen.

Sincerely,



Stephen Curry

Eat. Learn. Play., Co-Founder



Ayesha Curry

Eat. Learn. Play., Co-Founder

THE VISION

An Oakland in which every child has the opportunity to be active through sports, play, and outdoor recreation, regardless of race, gender, income or ability.



skating, fencing, rock climbing, figure skating, gymnastics, skateboarding, and parkour also ranked high.

- **Playing with friends is the No. 1 reason to play sports.** Youth told us that friendships with peers and having fun are the main reasons they play. Winning games ranked seventh and chasing college athletic scholarships was 12th.
- **Physical education in Oakland lacks funding and accountability.** PE is the top location where youth told us they play sports. Yet only half (51%) of elementary school principals at Oakland Unified School District reported having a credentialed PE teacher on staff.

Our recommendations for improving the local state of play – located in the Game Changer section starting on page 35 – are based on the unique characteristics of Oakland and informed by feedback from key stakeholders in the community. One of the strengths of Oakland is its close proximity to so many unique sports and physical activities within the Bay Area beyond just basketball and football, which are very popular but don't serve the needs of all children. In our analysis, the most promising opportunity is to diversify Oakland's sports offerings through partnerships by leveraging the community school model since children spend so much time at school.

The community school model integrates academics, health and social services, youth and community development, and community engagement. Oakland could use its schools as hubs to align systems, services, and providers and create more sustainable exposure for kids to access different sports. Oakland could apply these four strategies:

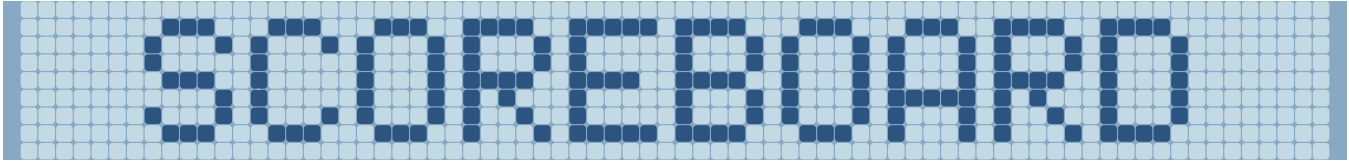
- Strengthen physical education, especially at elementary schools
- Align systems and providers to expand sports after school and in the summer
- Maintain directories of youth sports providers to help families and schools
- Use the power of the permit for sharing arrangements between schools and rec centers

Creating more diverse sports offerings through schools won't be easy. We recognize schools are overburdened with requirements in providing a quality education to students. Given Oakland's commitment to the community school model, we have found there is a shared understanding of the benefits of sports and physical activity in support of student-level and community-level outcomes. Progress will be achievable through collaboration. All parties need to come to the table with the goal of working together, so more children can enjoy the physical, social, emotional, and academic benefits research shows can come from participating in sports.



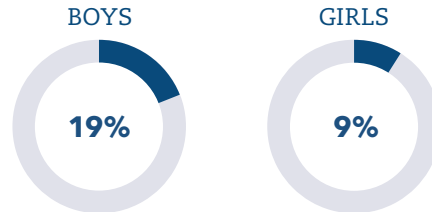
State of Play Oakland is Project Play's 11th community report. The Aspen Institute has produced county reports on Seattle-King County, Washington, and Mobile County, Alabama; a state report on Hawai'i; regional reports on Southeast Michigan, Western New York, Greater Rochester and the Finger Lakes, and Central Ohio; and local reports on Baltimore, Harlem, New York, and Camden, New Jersey. Stakeholders in those communities have taken actions based on the recommendations and are seeing results.

THE STATE OF PLAY IN OAKLAND



FEW YOUTH ARE ACTIVE ENOUGH

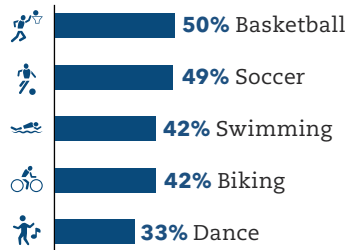
Only 19% of boys and 9% of girls meet the CDC's recommendation of 60 minutes of physical activity daily. Nationally, 31% of boys and 15% of girls meet the CDC recommendation for physical activity.



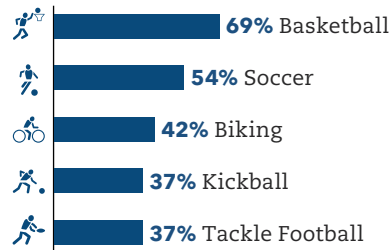
TOP 5 SPORTS OAKLAND YOUTH HAVE PLAYED

Results from Aspen Institute's survey of 1,076 youth. Multiple answers were allowed.

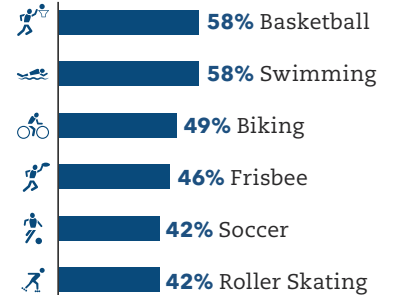
GIRLS



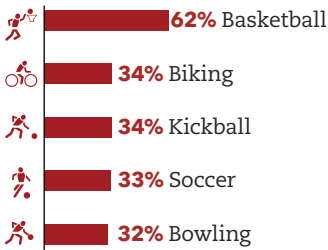
BOYS



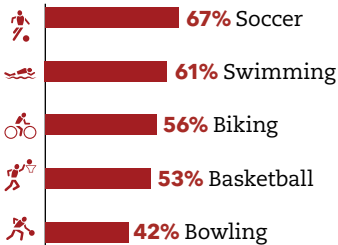
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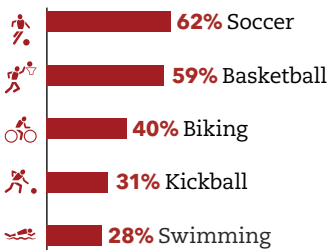
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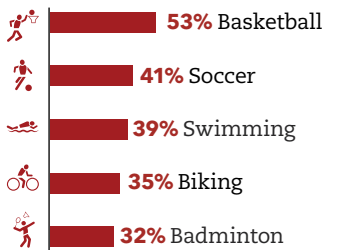
WHITE



LATINO/A**



ASIAN

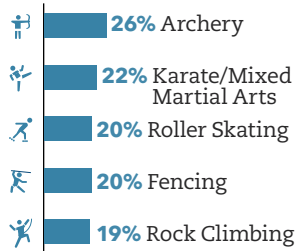


* Nonbinary refers to people who do not identify with any gender.

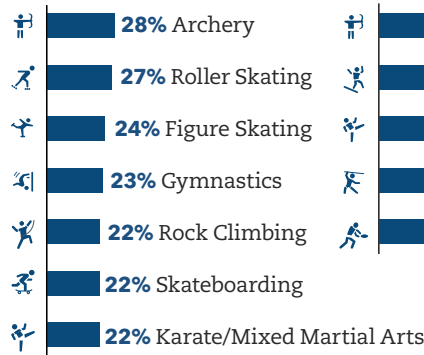
** The youth survey listed Hispanic as the answer option. For purposes of this report, the designation Latino/a is being used.

TOP SPORTS YOUTH WANT TO TRY

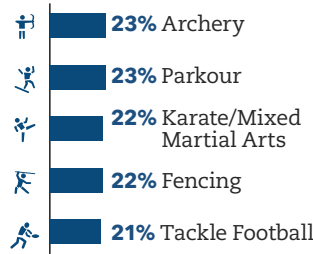
OVERALL



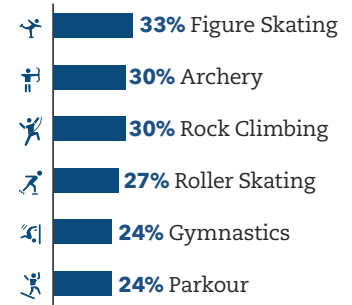
GIRLS



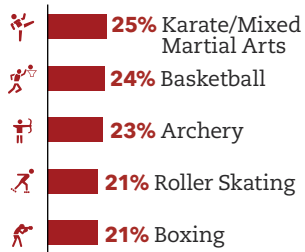
BOYS



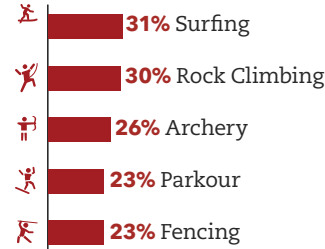
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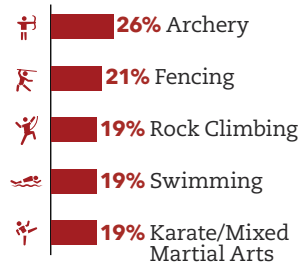
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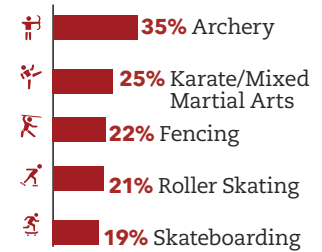
WHITE



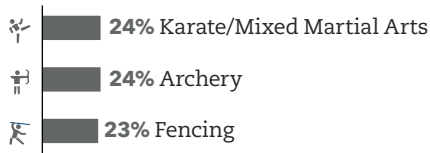
LATINO/A



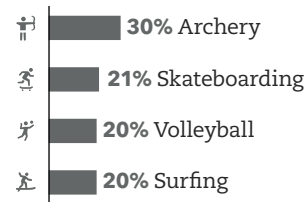
ASIAN



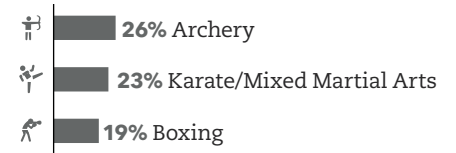
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



MIDDLE SCHOOL



HIGH SCHOOL



WHY SOME YOUTH DON'T PLAY SPORTS OFTEN

Girls	
No time due to schoolwork	26%
I'm not good enough to play	19%
I don't want to get hurt	18%

Boys	
No time due to schoolwork	23%
I'm not good enough to play	11%
I don't want to get hurt	10%

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 KEY FINDINGS IN OAKLAND

Youth are motivated by friendships with peers to play sports.

In our survey, the No. 1 reason kids said they play sports is to be with friends, followed by having fun. Winning games ranked seventh and chasing college athletic scholarships was 12th. That's not to say kids don't want to compete; 17% of them viewed competing as a reason to play. But far more children play to be with friends (51%), have fun (35%) and exercise to stay healthy (29%). White (42%) and Asian (40%) youth reported having fun as a motivation to play more than children who are Black (29%) and Latino/a

(35%). One middle school athlete said he likes to win, but more importantly, he wants to have fun and play with friends after not seeing so many of them during COVID-19 shutdowns. "If I lose, it's not the end of the world like some grown-ups act like," he said. A middle school tennis player said she feels pressure when her dad sometimes yells at her after losing a match, and she doesn't know how to change his behavior. "It's very uncomfortable," she said. "Sports should be about doing your best and making new friends."

Earning a college scholarship through sports is very important for Black youth.

They are motivated to play sports to reach this dream at greater than twice the rate of other children, according to our survey of Oakland youth. The odds of success are long: Although Oakland is tied for the 19th-most NBA players ever produced among U.S. cities,¹ the likelihood of a national high school basketball participant even playing Division I college basketball is just 1%.² Too often, "the Black family will say (playing sports) is a way for my kid to get out of this difficult situation and go to college, and the White family will say this is an opportunity for my kid to be physically active and make friends," said former NBA player Antonio Davis, an Oakland native who co-chairs the Positive Coaching Alliance's Racial Equity and Access in Youth Sports Task Force. "These are two totally different perceptions that can lead to different results. If kids think they can't be the best, they ask themselves, 'Why play?'"



It's incredible and unfortunate we're at a place where it's all or nothing." This sentiment was shared by an Aspen Institute focus group of Oakland parents, who hope coaches and sports providers can better model how kids can succeed academically in concert with sports, so they have different pathways.



In this city, it's more like, 'Be great in sports and you'll be fine.' Academics and sports need to be parallel."

YOUTH SPORTS PARENT WHO IS BLACK

Children want to play sports to exercise and stay healthy.

Almost 1 in 3 said health benefits motivate them to participate. Boys and girls expressed nearly equal interest in exercise as a reason for playing. Yet only 14% of youth ages 14-18 meet the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's recommendation of receiving at least 60 minutes of daily physical activity.³ In our youth survey, high school students (40%) expressed a desire to exercise for health benefits more than children in middle school (27%) and elementary school (26%). The challenge is that high schools in the U.S. typically have a limited menu of interscholastic sport options, and many children get weeded out of sports at younger ages due to cost and ability. The Aspen Institute's [Reimagining School Sports Playbook](#) showed that high school students nationally want more casual and fitness-focused activities, and the playbook offers strategies to center the model around student enjoyment and development. Oakland's public high school interscholastic sports participation rate is only 24%;⁴ nationally, it's 39%.⁵ Oakland's participation declined 9% during the pandemic. The top 10 sports Oakland high school students

want to try includes only two traditional team sports (basketball and volleyball). Archery, mixed martial arts, boxing, figure skating, roller skating, fencing, rock climbing, and parkour are the other activities.

Schoolwork and lack of self-confidence prevent more youth from playing sports.

The good news: More than half of surveyed Oakland children of all ages said they very often play sports in some form or another, from organized to pickup play. However, there were major disparities reported by geography, ranging from 66% in the East Oakland, Maxwell Park and Seminary communities to 37% in the Chinatown, East Lake and San Antonio neighborhoods. Among youth who don't play sports very often, almost 1 in 4 cited schoolwork as a reason why. This barrier was found the most in Fruitvale and Jingtletown (38%) and identified the least in East Oakland, Maxwell Park and Seminary (18%). Among all youth, 15% said they are not good enough to play sports, a sentiment shared most frequently by those living in Chinatown, East Lake and San Antonio (19%). "Kids are always quick to judge," one middle school-aged girl told us. "To some kids, it's just trash talking. But sometimes people can really take it to heart, and it gets in their head, so you don't want to play and mess up."



Almost one-third of Oakland youth spend six hours or more on a screen daily for fun.

In our youth survey, 32% of respondents reported spending that much time on a cell phone, tablet, TV, computer or video game for fun outside of school. Nationally, 48% of kids spend more than six hours per day online with mostly noneducational platforms; the average online time doubled during the pandemic.⁶ In Oakland, Black youth are four times more likely than White children to spend 11 or more hours per day on screen, and about twice as likely as Latino/a and Asian youth to be on that long. Kids in elementary schools are twice as likely to spend over 11 hours on screens as high school students. Parents often bemoan that video games and technology keep kids less physically active. While there’s truth to that, video games succeed by focusing on what kids want – action, freedom to experiment, competition without exclusion, playing with friends as co-players, and no parents looking over their shoulder to critique every move.

WHAT YOUTH LIKE MOST ABOUT PLAYING SPORTS

Playing with friends	51%
Having fun	35%
Exercising to stay healthy	29%
Learning new skills	26%
Getting better at sports	17%
Competing	17%
Challenging myself	15%
Winning	15%
Making my family proud	14%
Making new friends	13%

* Multiple answers allowed

Source: Aspen Institute Youth Survey





Marcus Davis, 14

At the end of the interview for this profile, Marcus asks the interviewer a question: When you look at Oakland, what do you see? It's a rhetorical question because Marcus clearly wants to share what he sees every day.

Troubles and violence throughout the city, punctuated by flashing red and blue lights.

Residents' longstanding homes taken away because they can't pay their mortgage, or the city wants to build a new freeway or condos – many of which will be populated by people who don't look like him.

BART stations and buses that people run in and out of while sometimes getting shot at.

"I don't really think it can change because once something new gets here, it always gets vandalized in some way," Marcus says. "You can tell that to the people who are here, but they aren't gonna take any mind to it. They're still gonna do the same things they do every time."

Marcus, who attends the East Oakland Youth Development Center, dreams of playing in the NBA. He says he's not currently on a team because his grades didn't meet the requirements.

He hopes to play AAU in the summer before trying out for Emery High School.

"I love the game as much as it loves me, and the things it's given me are the opportunities," Marcus says. "You also have to thank God. Without basketball or sports in general, I don't think I would be doing anything else. I found a path. I've had a focused path my whole life."

Marcus studies the moves of Stephen Curry, LeBron James and Michael Jordan. He connects most to James, who grew up with a difficult childhood, because, "I feel like I can relate to his story, and I can make a big name for myself once I get drafted."

Marcus plays basketball every day. If he's not shooting at a park or his school, he's dribbling the ball on the sidewalk outside his house. In pickup games at a park, Marcus once witnessed a losing player brandish a gun because of the result.

"It wasn't my fight, so I kept walking," he says matter-of-factly. "If it was me, then I don't know what I probably would have done in that case."

It's common for Marcus to see basketball players hop fences or cut gate wires to get access to a court. He wishes someone could supply basketballs at courts every other week since kids often have their balls stolen at parks.

"Most people don't feel safe [at parks]," he says. "But especially if you go there a lot, I feel all right because they've been here and been through it all."

Marcus views basketball players in two categories – those like him who put in the work and those who slack around. He is putting in the work because he hopes to escape his reality.

2

Challenge: Overstructured sports experiences

The Play: Reintroduce Free Play



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

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

FIVE KEY FINDINGS IN OAKLAND

Access to quality Oakland parks is unevenly distributed.

More than half of surveyed Oakland youth (58%) told us they have played sports at a park or playground. However, residents in Oakland neighborhoods where people most identify as a person of color have access to 66% less park space per person than those in predominantly White neighborhoods.⁷ Oakland Parks and Recreation Foundation's 2018 survey found that parks in the city's higher income neighborhoods were more likely to receive "A" and "B" maintenance scores, while the "D" and "F" parks were generally located in economically disadvantaged or gentrifying neighborhoods. The pandemic showed how essential parks are to the health and well-being of people and communities, but people living near unsafe or poorly maintained parks suffered. The life expectancy of Black residents in the West Oakland flatlands, which along with the East Oakland flatlands has the fewest well-maintained parks, is 14 years shorter than White Oaklanders in the hills.⁸ The lack of quality parks in the flatlands dates back to redlined maps of Oakland from the 1930s. For decades, the hills benefitted from federal investment and cheap mortgages; the flatlands were subjected to pollution, denied federal investment or access to loans, and considered valuable only for their proximity to industry.⁹

Unorganized free play often disappears due to park maintenance concerns.

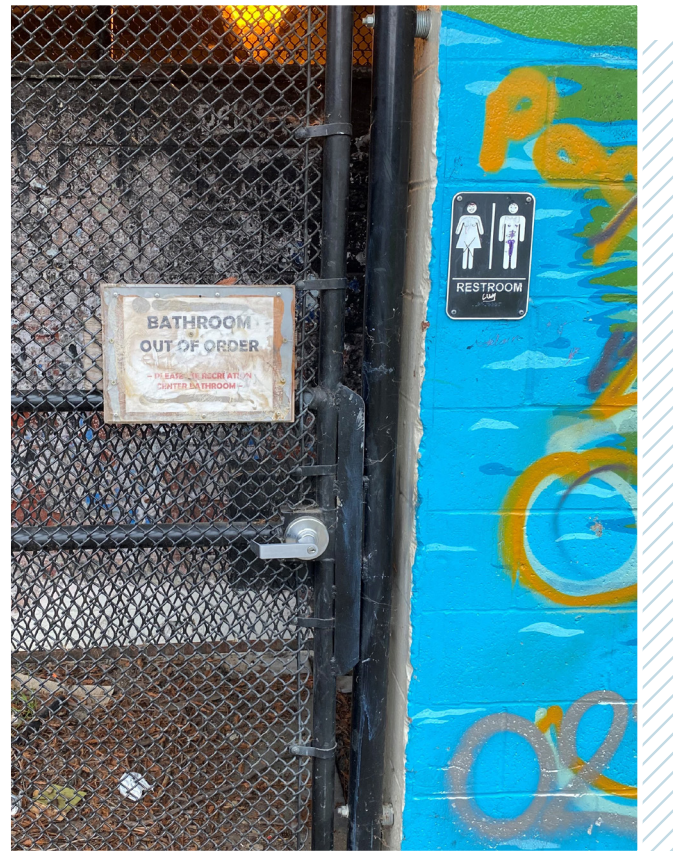
Unlike many cities, Oakland's public works department – not the parks and recreation department – handles all park maintenance. This practice is not ideal because it creates added layers of bureaucracy to maintain parks, said Terra Cole Brown, Oakland Parks and Recreation Foundation (OPRF) executive director. Brown said Oakland parks are historically maintained and invested in separately without a long-term strategic plan. Although 89% of Oakland residents live within a 10-minute walk of a park, the amenities (49 out of 100 score) and investments (52 out of 100) are much lower than comparable U.S. cities.¹⁰ In a study by the Oakland Parks and Recreation Foundation, 55% of participants said poor park maintenance was a barrier to visiting or fully utilizing Oakland's parks.¹¹ Participants bringing children were 13 percentage points more likely to report maintenance barriers. The biggest complaints about parks: bathroom conditions (53%), safety concerns (46%), homeless encampments (41%), litter and deterioration (40%), and drug paraphernalia (31%). "I wouldn't ever want my kids at parks by themselves," one Oakland parent told us, reflecting a common theme we heard.

City plans attempting to address park inequities have not yet materialized.

In March 2020, Oakland voters passed Measure Q to collect tax funding that will levy \$27.5 million annually over the next 20 years to support park maintenance and address homelessness.¹² Parks will not improve until homelessness is addressed. Oakland's homeless population increased by about 1,000 people since the start of the pandemic, but the growth rate has slowed, from 47% between 2017-2019 to 24% from 2019-2022.¹³ Measure Q will fund 35 to 40 new full-time employees for public works, adding to about 80 already employed. As of March 2022, about 75% of the new employees had been hired and trained. The Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission has oversight over Measure Q and plans to work with public works to create reports on how often sports fields get mowed, bathrooms are cleaned, and trash gets picked up. Still, many parents, children and city leaders told us they remain frustrated by the lack of progress. Oakland lacks the political will to improve parks, partly due to inertia by the community, said Brown of the OPRF. "If you've lived here your whole life, this is what you think parks are supposed to be," said Brown, who hopes the philanthropy sector will one day fund a public ad campaign to educate residents about the value of parks. "There's not this idea of, 'I need to put pressure on local politicians for parks,' and if there is, it comes from White people and not people of color. I think residents want better; we have to help them know it's possible."

Oakland Midnight Basketball provides a positive alternative to the streets.

Once very popular in the 1980s and 1990s before becoming politicized nationally, Midnight Basketball is making a comeback and offers a supervised, free play format. Midnight Basketball, which once had its national headquarters based in Oakland, disappeared for



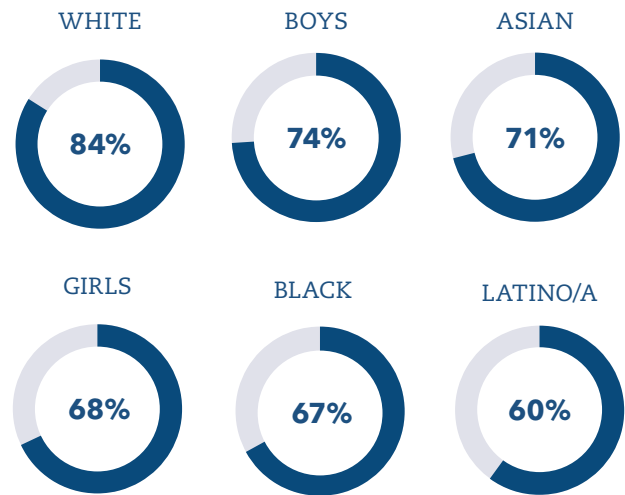
about a decade before returning in 2019 through partnerships with the Alameda County Probation Department, Oakland Police, and Oakland Human Services, plus support from corporate sponsors.¹⁴ Youth and young adults ages 16 to 25 play in weekly summer games held between 9 p.m. and 1 a.m. – the time frame when 1 in 3 shootings happen in Oakland.¹⁵ Players must participate in a one-hour life skills workshop before games on topics such as employment, legal services, community violence, and financial literacy. The league also hosts resource fairs, provides free food to players and spectators, and free Lyft rides. One of the program's goals is to improve community-police relations, and much of its \$150,000 budget goes toward police overtime pay. About 20% of program participants have a criminal background, including teens from a minimum-security residential program in Alameda County's Juvenile Justice Center.¹⁶

Recess provides a safe place to be physically active.

With one-third of surveyed Oakland youth not feeling safe to play in their neighborhood, recess at elementary school becomes a valuable tool for children to get physically active on their own terms. White children (62%) are more likely to have played sports at recess than those who are Black (48%), Latino/a (51%) and Asian (54%). A 2013 study by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation found that Playworks can reduce the transition between recess and class time – giving teachers more time to spend on instruction – and can cut back on bullying at recess.¹⁷ Although founded in Oakland and viewed as a national leader on recess, Playworks only has on-site staff at four Oakland schools (Manzanita Community, Bridges Academy, Aspire Berkley Maynard and Lazear Academy). The four schools pay on average about \$34,000 per year.¹⁸ “We’re just barely scraping by to make those payments,” said Amy Jones, the principal at Manzanita, who added that providing a trained recess coach to every Oakland school would be a “game changer.”

To help keep Playworks coach Matthew Bailey on Manzanita’s staff, his colleagues created a GoFundMe that raised about \$5,000 and The DICK’S Sporting Goods Foundation donated \$65,000.”¹⁹

YOUTH WHO FEEL SAFE PLAYING IN THEIR NEIGHBORHOOD



Source: Aspen Institute Youth Survey





OUSD assessed athletic facilities, practice and competition times, publicity, and transportation so girls have equitable experiences. The district earmarked about \$120 million in future sports facility improvements that will create greater gender equity, OAL Commissioner Franky Navarro said. “Many of our facilities were built in the 1960s so they weren’t constructed with a lens of equity for boys and girls,” he said. The settlement’s three-year monitoring period, which ends in June 2023, includes the expectation that OUSD will annually survey high school students about their sports interests. In 2021-22, OUSD’s sports participation ratio was 54% boys vs. 46% girls.²³

Archery is the No. 1 sport all youth want to try.

One in four Oakland youth expressed interest to pick up a bow and arrow and aim for a bullseye. “Archery is super fun,” said a 9-year-old boy who tried it at camp. “I just like the idea of using a projectile to hit something.” Surprisingly high interest in archery is a trend the Aspen Institute has found around the country. But children need access to programs. While 26% of Oakland youth want to try archery, only 12% have participated more than once and 2% do so regularly. White

youth are up to four times more likely to participate than other races and ethnicities, even though there is strong interest among all children to try archery. The highest population of youth who have tried archery comes from the Montclair, Dimond and Laurel neighborhoods in the hills, where the Redwood Bowmen Archery Club is located through East Bay Regional Parks. Ohlone Archery, located in San Leandro right outside Oakland, offers a weekly beginner class.

Ice sports offer promising opportunities.

Figure skating and ice hockey were two of six sports in which Oakland youth reported at least two times greater interest in trying compared to their actual exposure to the sport. The Oakland Ice Center and San Jose Sharks pilot a street hockey program at the nearby Lincoln Square recreation center. Upwards of 75 kids participate in the once-a-week, free street hockey program that the Sharks hope to replicate at other Oakland rec centers. Oakland Technical High School has fielded a coed hockey team since 2009 – an encouraging sign since Oakland girls in our survey reported nearly the same interest in hockey as boys. Also, 24% of girls and 5% of boys want to try figure skating – a sport that has produced elite Bay Area skaters such as Kristi Yamaguchi, Vincent Zhou, Alysa Liu and Karen Chen. Oakland School for the Arts partners with the ice center on a PE skating program and several other schools take free field trips there. “Step one is understanding you can be part of ice skating as a hobby by destigmatizing the sport’s competitiveness and that you’re done by age 16,” said ice skating coach Michelle Hong, who uses TikTok to promote accessibility.



Alyssa Belisle, 18

Alyssa never played sports until sixth grade. She didn't know how to get into sports, nor was she interested.

After Alyssa's father died, her mom thought it would be good for Alyssa to be part of a social group with peers. It just so happened the Oakland Lacrosse Club came to Claremont Middle School around that time, introducing a sport Alyssa had never heard of before. When one of her friends expressed interest in lacrosse, Alyssa decided to join with prodding from her mom.

"I wasn't very social, especially in elementary school," Alyssa says. "When I got to lacrosse, it was like a whole new world for me. I got to meet a bunch of different people from a whole bunch of different backgrounds, but we do everything together. I feel like this is my second family. I'm comfortable around these people, I enjoy being around these people, and I love these people."

Alyssa's story exemplifies how trying a sport – any sport – can benefit children if the sport is delivered properly. Oakland Lacrosse Club stresses developing skills, having fun and creating a positive culture.

Alyssa soon began playing the sport every season and developed into a respected leader of the Oakland Technical High School lacrosse team.

"I had never heard of [lacrosse] before, so I was a little confused when I started," she says. "I was like, 'What is this and why do I have to hold the stick like this?' Lacrosse is a community for me now. I saw people who looked like me and that made me feel comfortable enough to grow."

Lacrosse is perceived as a White, upper-class sport. The Oakland Lacrosse Club is trying to grow the sport by working with the Oakland Athletic League to start four high school girls teams.

"I think it will be a slow process," Alyssa says. "The Bay Area is very diverse, but lacrosse as a sport isn't necessarily diverse. I think it has the potential. We just have to expose more young children to it."

And that can change perceptions.

"I get asked all the time, 'Oh, do you play basketball or volleyball?'" Alyssa says. "Because I'm tall that doesn't mean I play those two sports. In middle school, it used to really bug me. I'm like, 'No, I play lacrosse.' They're like, 'What is that?'"



The Bay Area is very diverse, but lacrosse as a sport isn't necessarily diverse. I think it has the potential. We just have to expose more young children to it."

ALYSSA BELISLE, HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT

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 KEY FINDINGS IN OAKLAND

Oakland lacks quality recreational sports league opportunities.

Michael is an Oakland parent who pays \$5,000 to \$10,000 per year for two sons to play travel basketball and baseball. Andres, another local parent, spends \$500 on each travel soccer tournament for his son. “If you want to be competitive, you have to travel and play against higher teams because there’s nothing else here,” Andres said. Added Michael: “I would love there to be a more local option that’s affordable.



But usually if you want your child to be on a team that’s competitive and has really good coaches, travel is where you end up.” These examples underscore the decline of recreational programming in a city that was once considered one of the largest youth sports providers in the country. Today, about 1 in 4 youth said they have played sports on a recreation center team. Even fewer (15%) have played sports without being on a team at one of the city’s 24 rec centers. Oakland Parks, Recreation and Youth Development (OPRYD) reported serving 2,000 youth on sports teams in 2019 through basketball and flag football, while allocating \$120,000 for this programming.²⁴ OPRYD’s new, ambitious goal is 10,000 children, or about 10% of the city’s youth. Parents say they want to see more quality programming from the city. The department’s main initiative for kids is Town Camp, a summer experience that includes theater, urban nature, sports and science.

Youth of color and girls are the least likely to play sports at rec centers.

According to our youth survey, White children are three times more likely than Latino/a youth and two times more likely than Black and Asian kids to play on a rec center team. In the Montclair, Dimond and Laurel neighborhoods, 41% of youth have played sports on a rec center team. The story is dramatically different in Deep East Oakland, where that figure is just 13%.

Boys are more likely to play on rec center teams than girls, even though since 2004 California law has required equal participation opportunities by gender in community youth athletics programs.²⁵ In 2019, girls represented only 17% of Oakland youth participants on city-run sports teams.²⁶ “The way we generally run programs is not culturally acceptable,” said Nicholas Williams, former Oakland Parks, Recreation and Youth Development director, prior to his resignation in May 2022. “We want to find out what those nuances are to become more inclusive or produce specific programming for those groups.” Parks and Rec recently began door-to-door canvassing to inform residents about available programs and receive feedback. The department plans to focus in the next year on introductory mixed-gender sports and girls’ sports (basketball, touch football, soccer, lacrosse, tennis, golf and swimming).

Lincoln Square Park and Recreation Center is a model for other rec centers.

Many community members expressed two major frustrations with Oakland rec centers: They lack engaging programming for youth, and city leaders don’t hold the rec centers accountable. Residents question where the funding goes as they see many centers with small numbers of regular kids that don’t equate to how many adults are on staff. One exception is Chinatown’s Lincoln Square Park, which serves about 400 youth in person and reports about 1,000 total (including virtual attendees during COVID-19). Most rec centers focus on basketball as the primary sport. Lincoln Square director Gilbert Gong, a resident of Oakland for over 50 years, creates programs to expose kids to as many sports as possible, including tennis, softball, lacrosse, and swimming. The parks and rec summer swim league is held at Lincoln Park, which offers swimmers a junior lifeguarding program to develop skills as future

employees. “Without deliberate design, nothing will happen,” Gong said. His work hasn’t gone unnoticed. Lincoln Square Park is scheduled to receive an \$8.5 million renovation to create a new community center, outdoor classroom, badminton court, two patio and garden areas, and renovate the outdoor lighting and three existing basketball courts.²⁷

Efforts are underway to try to revitalize local baseball.

You can’t tell the story of baseball’s history without Oakland. Frank Robinson, Rickey Henderson, Joe Morgan and Dave Stewart are among the many major leaguers who came out of the city. At its peak in the 1980s and early 1990s, Oakland’s Babe Ruth League had more than 1,200 youth players on 86 teams across four age divisions.²⁸ Since then, the league’s participation declined 75% and the 13-year-old division was eliminated. High schools now struggle to field teams. In our youth survey, only 14% of boys said they regularly play baseball (vs. 50% for basketball, 33% for soccer and 26% for tackle football). Baseball didn’t even make the top 10 sports boys want to try, surpassed by activities like parkour, surfing and mixed martial arts. Oakland Babe Ruth President Louie Butler said the gentrification of the city and children’s changing attitudes about sports have hurt baseball. Oakland Athletic League (OAL) and Babe Ruth League are now partnering to try to revitalize the sport. About 60 kids from four elementary schools with baseball fields are learning T-ball after school twice a week. OAL provided the funding, including stipends to Babe Ruth coaches, and negotiated a reduced fee for elementary school teams to play in the league. In addition, recent MLB players Tyson and Joe Ross started “Loyal to My Soil,” a series of free baseball camps for Oakland youth coached by current and former pros, college players, and scouts.²⁹



Philanthropic investments in direct programming have been limited.

Leaders in Oakland said the opportunity exists to improve investors’ understanding of sports and play with health and educational outcomes, as well as racial and economic justice components to children having equitable access to safe, healthy and consistent play. One challenge many funders of youth sports and play communicated to us

was frustration in working with city-run entities. Funders sometimes experience bureaucratic challenges to provide large donations to the city, and then may feel dissuaded from offering future gifts. “It’s a big conglomerate with different departments and legal issues, so sometimes the red tape to protect liability takes a longer time or more energy than the smaller organization has the capacity for,” said Williams, the former parks and rec director.

WHERE YOUTH PLAY SPORTS

Sport	Girls	Boys	Black	White	Latino/a	Asian
Rec center (not on a team)	14%	15%	12%	20%	8%	16%
Rec center (on a team)	21%	27%	18%	45%	15%	19%
After-school/summer program	44%	46%	41%	65%	31%	45%
PE at school	69%	69%	60%	79%	67%	75%
Recess at school	47%	62%	48%	62%	51%	53%
School team	49%	45%	52%	54%	41%	38%
Travel team	11%	19%	17%	19%	7%	9%
Playground/park	57%	59%	52%	63%	60%	60%

Source: Aspen Institute Youth Survey



Victor Sanchez, 13
David Sanchez, 9

COVID-19 restrictions took a toll on the Sanchez brothers. Their typical day involved sitting around the house playing video games and watching screens for hours at a time.

“We’ve seen every movie because of quarantine,” says Victor, a seventh-grader at Berkley Maynard Academy, where his brother David is in fourth grade. “We don’t know what to watch now.”

Johanna Mota Garcia, the boys’ mom, had other ideas. As restrictions were lifted, she forced them to return to soccer and play for the Oaktown Futbol Club. Johanna likes that it’s a free experience through the boys’ school, limiting cost barriers and transportation challenges since she works odd hours at Target. Most importantly, it allows her sons to play with friends again.

Staying indoors during the pandemic “was tough and it was a little boring without seeing any of my friends,” says David, who went 18 months without in-person connections and only became motivated to play soccer once he saw Victor return. “Now it’s fun seeing friends.”

With limited field access in Oakland, the Oaktown Futbol Club practices on the middle

school blacktop with Emilio Navarro-Perez, the club’s founder. Johanna struggled to find the right team. Before COVID-19, the boys played in a Richmond league with coaches more interested in winning than developing players. “If they didn’t win, they’d get a whole speech of you guys didn’t do good,” she says. “I don’t like that, especially to younger kids.”

Then a rec team in El Cerrito “wasn’t really a welcoming environment for us,” Johanna says. “Being Latino, the organization is like not us. We were kind of pushed to the side.”

The COVID-19 layoff inspired Johanna to look again for a team that fits her family’s schedule and lifestyle. Victor joined a select team he likes. Both boys joined their school team. Their mom never considered a City of Oakland rec team. “There is programming that’s accessible, but the quality is not there,” she says.

Instead, she’s paying \$1,600 for Victor’s select team, which she says is manageable given that payments can be made through installments. She hasn’t applied for available scholarships.

“When the child has more talent, the sport becomes more accessible to them because it’s easier to navigate scholarships,” Johanna says. “For kids who are starting out, you have to figure out what paperwork to submit and when the deadlines are. It feels like a hassle.”

These are the details parents and guardians must navigate. Johanna wishes sports in Oakland were more local within each community. She used to drive 30 minutes each way for David and Victor to learn swimming. There aren’t enough safe parks and pools she trusts for her kids to visit.

For now, though, her children are happy again. And that’s all that matters to this mom.

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 and how kids can be transported there.

FIVE KEY FINDINGS IN OAKLAND

Transportation creates challenges for families to access sports.

Despite the availability of city buses and Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART), 82% of surveyed Oakland youth said they are driven to practices and games by a family member. Many community members feel public transportation is unsafe, leaving working parents in a bind, especially if taking one's child to a better facility in Oakland or elsewhere means a longer commute. In the neighborhoods of Fruitvale, Jingtowntown, East Oakland, Maxwell Park and Seminary, 10% use a city bus for sports – twice the rate of the West Oakland, Downtown and Lake Merritt communities. Biking (8%) is another method some youth use for transportation. Six percent of city streets account for more than 60% of severe and fatal biking collisions, which Oakland is trying to correct through its three-year, \$100 million Complete Streets plan to repave roads.³⁰ In the first year, the program implemented more than eight miles of new bikeways. Youth sports providers that offer transportation are incredibly valuable for families and schools. For example, Oakland Strokes uses a van to pick up about 10 youth at the East Oakland Youth Development Center and transport them to the boathouse. Rideshare

programs like HopSkipDrive offer vetted drives for kids, but it's expensive and only conducive for one or two children at a time.

Sports providers and city leaders aren't on the same page over facility improvements.

Ninety-four percent of Oakland residents strongly agree or agree that the city should invest more in parks, fields, pools, and recreation facilities.³¹



One of the most contentious debates is Raimondi Park, home to football, soccer and baseball fields, and homeless encampments. The Oakland A's received a grant from Major League Baseball to redo Raimondi's infield and outfield. Once the \$100,000 project was completed, homeless people cut holes in the fence and overtook the field, and the youth league didn't want to use the field due to safety concerns. The East Bay United plays some soccer games at Raimondi given its central location for the Jack London Youth Soccer League, which provides club and rec soccer for more than 7,000 youth in Oakland, Alameda and Piedmont. In the past, soccer clubs unsuccessfully offered to pay the city for renovation costs of Raimondi in exchange for access. Several community leaders said the clubs erred by not leading their pitch with equity or demonstrating how they would create more paths for all children to access soccer, not simply as a place for club soccer teams to play. Now both sides are stuck in their silos, although community leaders say opportunities do exist for everyone to work together and benefit.

Oakland's largest sports facility providers lack a formal joint-use agreement.

The joint-use agreement between Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) and the city to share facilities expired in 2013, so the schools and parks and recreation department are operating under the principles set in 2009. As of May 2022, both sides said they expect to soon finalize a new agreement. Because the agreement lapsed so long ago, they started from scratch on specific facility needs. Oakland leaders say the city and school district often have different priorities and can feel slighted by the other, causing delays and complexities in working together. For instance, Coliseum College Prep Academy school leaders have spent a decade trying to better access city-owned fields behind their school. The fields are largely for baseball use by the Babe Ruth League, although half of

the space was originally designed for football and soccer. The school wants to peacefully coexist with baseball and use approved Measure Y infrastructure funding to build multiuse turf fields for soccer. The Babe Ruth League says it has no problem adding turf to benefit everyone. What's holding this up? "The city owns and operates the fields, which means they're very protective of it, and the Babe Ruth League has a partnership with the city and primary access to it," said Andrea Bustamante, executive director of OUSD Community Schools Student Services. "I think that will change eventually."

Roller skating finds its niche through Black culture.

The name UMOJA Outdoor Roller Skating Rink comes from the word umoja, which means "unity" in Swahili. This pays tribute to the first principle of Kwanzaa to strive to maintain unity in the family, community, nation, and race. Located at Liberation Park on a once-vacant lot near Eastmont Mall, the rink is a joint effort of David Miles Jr. and the Black Cultural Zone, an East Oakland community development organization that manages the park. The goal is to reinvigorate Black business and culture after the gentrification of Eastmont. Liberation Park hosts an outdoor market that prioritizes Black vendors, plus a movie theater. On busy days, songs by Drake, Beyonce and other Black artists boom from a sound system controlled by a live DJ.³² Every fourth Sunday there's outdoor play with double Dutch jump rope, chess and tennis, plus casual skating opportunities. Twenty percent of Oakland youth told us they want to try roller skating, which was a top-5 activity in five of our seven surveyed Oakland communities. More Black youth (27%) have participated in roller skating than those who are White (21%), Latino/a (14%) or Asian (10%). CEO Carolyn Johnson plans to expand skating sites in Oakland and beyond. During COVID-19, Johnson said, "Liberation Park has been critical to people's sanity to have a place to be."

East Oakland Youth Sports Center is an underrated, quality facility.

Oakland neighborhoods often operate in silos, so some coaches and sports organizers living elsewhere in the city were surprised to hear about this facility even though it opened 11 years ago. The 25,000-square-foot center, located in William Patterson Park, has fitness, aquatic, and dance centers; a baseball field (although not well maintained); a playground; and plenty of grass for free play or potential future development. When the center opened, future unfunded phases called for an outdoor competition swimming pool, a two-court basketball gym with an elevated running track, three soccer fields, and additional parking.³³ The center features a water slide, activity pools, a two-lane lap area, lazy river, and zero-depth entry pool – designed shallow so parents in the community feel comfortable teaching their child to swim. Dance, gymnastics, and martial arts classes are available. The \$25.2 million facility’s development was led by former Oakland City Council President Larry Reid through multiple

sources, including \$11 million from a 2002 bond measure allocating \$198 million for better parks and cleaner water. More programming and publicity could increase facility usage.

MOST COMMONLY USED SITES TO PLAY SPORTS

- Brookfield Field
- Bushrod Recreation Center
- Chabot Field
- Dimond Recreation Center
- Montclair Field
- Stone Hurst Field

Note: 4%-7% usage by youth

Source: Aspen Institute Youth Survey



6

Challenge: Too much, too soon

The Play: Design for Development



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

Age 6 is not 16. Offer programming that is age and developmentally appropriate while tailored to the population served and needs of the individual child.

FIVE KEY FINDINGS IN OAKLAND

Physical education in Oakland lacks funding and accountability.

PE is the top location where youth play sports.³⁴ Yet only half (51%) of elementary school principals at Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) reported having a credentialed PE teacher on staff, and three middle schools and four high schools said classroom teachers instruct PE.³⁵ This is due to the lack of dedicated PE funding from OUSD. Schools may have only one extra teacher from discretionary funding, leaving principals to decide whether to use that for PE, art or music. Just 18% of schools reported using a formal PE curriculum. While on average, schools reported they comply with the state law of 200 PE minutes for every 10 days of elementary school, many schools lack anyone who tracks and reports PE minutes. Most schools do not regularly evaluate their PE programs or build in evaluation plans to help improve the classes. Schools expressed priorities to improve PE: more funding, additional trainings and professional development, more equipment and improvements to facilities, more hirings of PE teachers, and curriculum assistance/changes. OUSD was sued in 2015 over allegations that it was out of compliance with state physical education law. The parties settled with language requiring elementary schools to prove they are meeting the

mandated PE minutes.³⁶ Despite the challenges, 83% of youth in our survey said they enjoyed their PE class, but that decreased from 92% in elementary school to 78% in middle school to 65% in high school. Girls were twice as likely as boys to dislike PE, and 26% of White youth don't like PE (compared to 13% each among Black and Latino/a youth). Youth from Chinatown, East Lake and San Antonio were almost three times more likely to dislike PE than their peers in Deep East Oakland.

OUSD is adding elementary school sports.

OUSD's Expanded Learning Program recently partnered with Oakland Athletic League to fund elementary school sports camps in addition to middle and high school teams – and possibly later create organized elementary teams. The funding comes from a new \$10.45 million grant from California's Expanded Learnings Opportunity Program, which aims for schools to develop students' academic, social, emotional, and physical needs without replicating activities in the school day and including community partners. "There used to be a huge disconnect between OAL and Expanded Learning," said Martha Pena, OUSD Expanded Learning coordinator. "This year we took a step forward because OAL identified one issue in Oakland is there are superstar athletes and many kids who lack exposure to sports (to enjoy the social benefits)." OUSD's sports-based youth development program hopes to increase the menu of sport options through four- to eight-week skills programming for elementary students.³⁷

“We don’t have the capacity to train these organizations,” Pena said. “I’m hiring you because you’re the expert to do both youth development and coach. If you can’t, we have Positive Coaching Alliance to train your staff. It’s new. We’re probably going to make a lot of mistakes.” The goal is to have four sports or other physical activities taught in all after-school programs during 2022-23 and then consider if organized teams are sustainable in 2023-24.

Intramurals are identified as a potential way to grow sports participation.

OAL Commissioner Franky Navarro remembers the value of intramural sports when he was an Oakland student. The model gave many youth their first chance to compete and see if a sport is right for them within their school building. “Right now, they’re competing against other people they don’t know, and that can be frightening for a student,” Navarro said. The biggest challenge to bring back intramurals at high schools is Oakland athletic directors are not full-time. Navarro is making a push for full-time athletic directors, whose duties would include creating intramural sports at their school. “Intramurals can increase school community,” Navarro said. “The principals I have close relationships with are very supportive of the idea. Their challenge is capacity.” Project Play’s [Reimagining School Sports Playbook](#) recommended private investment to help fund alternate forms of play in schools, including intramural sports. Brands may be rewarded with product loyalty by reaching a larger segment of the student population than only interscholastic teams.

Soccer Without Borders serves as a model to assist newcomer youth.

Soccer Without Borders Oakland was recognized as a 2022 Project Play Champion for its work assimilating about 1,900 newcomer youth into school and community teams. Oakland is the

largest and oldest of the seven Soccer Without Borders sites in the U.S. and internationally, with 18 teams and 10 full-time staff. Almost half of its budget comes from government grants to design an inclusive soccer experience for boys and girls. Maddy Boston, Oakland’s senior girls program coordinator, played Division I soccer and was a rare female coach for five years at a competitive Oakland club. “I quit because I couldn’t reckon how different the ideology was from Soccer Without Borders,” Boston said. “I found a lot of male coaches [on club teams] really toxic and really abusive. I tried to speak up about it. Change is really tough when it’s an institutionalized setting.” Sophia Goethlas, a Soccer Without Borders coach, said the program’s model works because it’s based on community and fun. “But we’re unique,” she said.

Students who identify as nonbinary are almost three times less interested in sports.

In our youth survey, these students were far more likely to report they don’t feel welcome in athletic activities, think they’re not good enough to play, and don’t want to get hurt. While public recognition and acceptance of people who don’t identify as strictly male or female is growing, many sports remain structured or separated by gender. California law since 2014 allows students to participate on school teams based on their gender identity, irrespective of the gender listed on the student’s records.³⁸ Oakland youth who are nonbinary identified 15 sports they want to play at higher rates than their peers. (See Scoreboard on pages 4-5 for some results.) Only one-third of Oakland youth who identify as nonbinary said they regularly play team sports compared to 72% of all surveyed children. Separate research shows that 10% of Oakland youth who identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual receive at least 60 minutes of daily physical activity, compared to 15% of youth who are heterosexual.³⁹



Heykee Rivas Mass, 15

Through soccer, Heykee sees the story of her life.

“Just like in life, you’re not always going to win,” Heykee, a sophomore at Castlemont High School, says in Spanish through an interpreter. “Sometimes you’re not going to score, sometimes you will score. There are fouls. Sometimes you lose. In my life, I’ve had a lot of fouls and a lot of losses. But soccer has taught me how to grow as a person.”

Heykee came to the U.S. from Honduras about two years ago. She worries she will never again see her grandmother, who still lives in Honduras. She has a 5-year-old brother now in North Carolina and a 21-year-old sister she doesn’t see often. When she was younger, Heykee says she saw a therapist for a long time because she was very depressed.

Then came Soccer Without Borders, which uses soccer to deliver crucial direct services to vulnerable, newcomer youth to the U.S. The program started at Castlemont High School in 2020 when Heykee was a freshman. She hadn’t met a single person at school because she started during COVID-19 restrictions and joined the team to make friends.

“Without soccer, I would be a girl more timid, more scared, less confident,” Heykee says. “Before I didn’t have an idea of what I wanted to do in



Without soccer, I would be a girl more timid, more scared, less confident.”

HEYKEE RIVAS MASS, HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT

my life. I was always making bad decisions and involved in problems. When I started playing on the team, I became a more mature person and I started thinking about the type of person I want to be in the future.”

Heykee originally joined Castlemont’s school soccer team for about a month, but she says girls on the team made her feel unwelcome because she didn’t understand English and how they practiced. Soccer Without Borders coaches say it’s common for their players to try out for the school team and feel discriminated against or unwelcome.

“A safe space for me is when I don’t have to feel like people will judge me based on how I look that day, or I’m a (Latina) woman, or I don’t know English, or that I’m new to trying something,” Heykee says. “I know if I need to talk about something, my coach and teammates are here to help with that.”

Heykee now has goals. She wants to earn a scholarship to Cal-Berkeley, study criminology and find a job that financially supports her mom and emotionally supports women.

“I’ve been around a lot of male-dominated places,” Heykee says. “Lots of things have happened that I don’t want to happen to other girls because they’re bad. There are a lot of women who are in violent relationships and don’t have someone to be there for them and advocate for them. I want to be a person in the world that fights against these things as a strong woman.”

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 KEY FINDINGS IN OAKLAND

Oakland sports providers lack consistency in how they train coaches.

Anecdotally, Oakland’s inconsistent standards seem to mirror national trends. Few coaches nationally are trained in CPR/basic first aid (46%), general safety and injury prevention (32%), sports skills and tactics (32%), physical conditioning (30%), effective motivational techniques (29%), and concussion management (27%).⁴⁰ In Oakland, sports providers highlighted a lack of consistent training among organizations or even between multiple sites within an organization, such as recreation centers within Oakland Parks, Recreation and Youth Development, and school sites that hire outside partners. For instance, Oakland Leaf serves more than 800 students through after-school programming at six elementary and middle schools. This includes subcontracting with America SCORES for organized soccer and Junior Giants for baseball curriculum. Oakland Leaf Executive Director Melissa Mendez Ochoa said not all of her instructors are trained in coaching skills or how to engage kids, and she notices differences with untrained coaches. “When we don’t have someone to partner with, we research different curriculum,” she said. “We’re lucky everyone we’ve hired has played the sport. That doesn’t mean they don’t have



a lot to learn.” OUSD partners with 17 lead agencies, such as Oakland Leaf, to provide after-school programming beyond just sports at 75 schools. Becoming a lead agency “can be a lot of work if you’re a small agency and don’t have staff capacity,” Ochoa said.

Kids of color report feeling fewer positive coach interactions.

In our youth survey, Latino/a children were the least likely to say that a coach frequently or almost always makes them feel good when they improve a skill (52% Latino/a vs. 67% White) and tells the team that every player is important (45% Latino/a vs. 73% White). Among respondents who don’t play sports often, Latino/a youth were

two times more likely than Black and White youth to say it's because they're not good enough. Several Oakland youth told us they like having a coach who looks like them. Nationally, girls of color in urban communities drop out of sports by age 14 at roughly twice the rate of White girls in suburban communities.⁴¹ Positive Coaching Alliance created the Racial Equity and Access in Youth Sports Task Force to build community ownership of new strategies to grow access. The task force identified three equity gaps – community coaches, equitable access for girls, and capacity and alignment of services. “A lot of people want to coach, but they know the time commitment and burden on them and coaches’ families,” said Antonio Davis, the task force’s co-chair. “Even if you’re not with the team every day, if you commit to one day a week for two hours, that can be huge.”

Golf is helping to grow the pool of Black coaches in Oakland.

Representation matters, especially in a sport like golf that, over a lifetime, can open doors professionally and socially. At Ace Kids Golf, which has introduced more than 8,000 Oakland youth to the sport since 1998, the coaches are predominantly Black. “We’ve had like one White coach in the past 10 years,” said Adrian Davis, a 21-year-old golfer who was trained at Ace Kids Golf and now coaches there. “What’s really awesome in Oakland is a lot of Black kids have gone from playing to coaching, and they’re starting to spread out.” Davis grew up playing through Youth on Course, a nonprofit that partners with local courses to offer rounds for \$5 or less. “Oakland has a lot of minority golfers and coaches, so I never saw it as something that was lacking,” Davis said. “Then you go to a faraway tournament and realize, OK, I’m the only person of color here.” However, our Oakland youth survey showed White children are about two times more likely than Black and Latino/a youth to play golf regularly. Latino/a youth (14%) expressed the most interest to try golf.

Racial Equity and Access in Youth Sports Task Force

Positive Coaching Alliance’s task force is a learning community in Oakland in which local leaders work collaboratively to increase access to sports for youth in low-income neighborhoods. The group includes after-school education leaders (K-12), youth sports professionals, government leaders, community stakeholders, minority business leaders, and professional athletes. Together, the group utilizes “systems thinking” to analyze and address the underlying conditions that cause youth sports inequities and builds community ownership of strategies that eliminate them. The group’s long-term goal is to create more racially equitable youth sports opportunities for Oakland youth and increase the number of Black and Brown coaches trained in youth development who volunteer in the community. Visit PositiveCoach.org/racial-equity-initiative to learn more.

Students with disabilities need more coaches who understand their needs.

Special Olympics has robust programming in Oakland for youth with intellectual disabilities but lacks enough volunteers knowledgeable about a sport to coach. “People are always interested in volunteering for Special Olympics, but we struggle finding sustainable, committed volunteers for multiple days and at least half of the practice,” said Amanda Young, Special Olympics Northern California health and wellness director. Bay Area Outreach & Recreation Program (BORP), an adaptive sports and recreation nonprofit that offers free wheelchair basketball and sled hockey to Oakland youth, finds a lack of understanding of how to coach someone with a disability. “The challenge has been in the bureaucracy,” said Brandon Young, BORP athletic director. “Schools are responsible for education and a lot of services for kids, and busy parents feel like the school is taking care of my child’s needs, so kids with disabilities just get sidelined. The whole PE class may play volleyball but that doesn’t work for a blind child.” Young said BORP would like to partner with Oakland schools but has not consistently done so because school leaders often change. “We’ll have something good with one person and then the teacher or principal leaves, and it impacts our access,” he said.

Girls are looking for more encouragement from coaches.

In our youth survey, girls were more likely than boys to report that their coach almost never encouraged them to learn new skills or told everyone that they are important to the team’s success. One organization succeeding with coaching girls is Skate Like a Girl, a national skateboarding organization with a Bay Area chapter that empowers skaters to grow into strong, confident leaders. Skate Like a Girl offers an exclusive space for skaters who identify as women, trans, nonbinary and/or



gender nonconforming to build community through skateboarding. In addition to adult staff, teenagers are trained to be instructors – and sometimes retained as employees – because they understand youth voice and need community service hours for high school, said Ashley Masters, the chapter’s co-director. Masters intentionally sends emails to other youth-serving organizations looking for youth who could be a good fit to coach. Skateboarding is the fifth-most popular sport girls told us they want to try.

YOUTH PERCEPTION OF COACHES

Coach Made Me Feel Good When I Improved a Skill	
White	67%
Boys	63%
Black	62%
Girls	61%
Asian	57%
Latino/a	52%
Nonbinary	39%

Coach Told Us Trying Our Best Was Most Important	
White	69%
Boys	67%
Black	65%
Girls	64%
Asian	62%
Latino/a	60%
Nonbinary	50%

Coach Encouraged Me to Learn New Skills	
White	73%
Girls	63%
Boys	63%
Black	58%
Asian	58%
Latino/a	55%
Nonbinary	48%

Coach Told Us We All Were Important to Team Success	
White	73%
Black	63%
Girls	59%
Boys	58%
Asian	56%
Nonbinary	54%
Latino/a	45%

Coach Told Us to Help Each Other to Get Better	
White	65%
Boys	62%
Girls	60%
Black	60%
Asian	58%
Latino/a	55%
Nonbinary	42%



Note: Percentage of youth who responded "frequently" or "almost always"

Source: Aspen Institute Youth Survey



Rajon Amaru Mahones-Ospina, 11

Rajon finally got to play a real sled hockey game. All it took was leaving Oakland for a tournament in Los Angeles.

“We beat them all,” says Rajon, who has spina bifida, a condition that affects the spine as a type of neural tube defect. “We weren’t playing against skaters so that makes it easier. Having contact is fun.”

By skaters, Rajon is describing what his hockey practices at the Oakland Ice Center have looked like over the past four years. His Sharks team does drills and usually scrimmages each other or able-bodied skaters on the other side of the ice. No checking is allowed against skaters.

“It’s really hard to get the puck from them,” Rajon says. “And they have a giant goalie who has all the padding in the world. It’s just not fair.”

Rajon’s mom, Danielle, is just grateful this opportunity even exists in Oakland through Bay Area Outreach & Recreation Program (BORP), a nonprofit working to improve the health, independence, and social integration of people

with physical disabilities through sports, fitness, and recreation programs. Danielle learned about BORP through Rajon’s physical therapist and when another mom noticed Rajon’s braces and recommended sled hockey.

“His coach has now really encouraged Rajon to try wheelchair basketball,” Danielle says. “They say it’s really fun and there’s more opportunity to communicate with your teammates. With the helmet, it’s harder on the ice to hear each other. So far, Rajon has not wanted to learn two things – how to be in a wheelchair and how to try basketball.”

Danielle is also interested in Rajon exploring adapted bicycling, where youth pedal with their hands. “Pedal with your hands?” Rajon chimes in, sounding curious. “How does that work?”

The truth is Danielle isn’t very familiar with what sports are available for Rajon. At school, Rajon participates in PE and recess. He wears braces but walks unassisted and can run around.

“There’s a lot he can do,” Danielle said. “It would be great if the schools knew more about [sports] opportunities. It seems like that connection isn’t quite there. It’s just an underfunded area of sports and there needs to be more programs, resources, outreach, and education about the opportunities.”

It took Rajon a couple months to get the hang of using a sled for hockey. At first, he was scared because it’s easy to flip over. He still gets tired – and his legs fall asleep – because sledders don’t use their feet at all. The hands are the key.

Rajon’s new goal is to become good enough to allow his blades to be taped closer together to make hairpin turns. “I want to get faster and score more goals.”

8

Challenge: Safety concerns among kids, 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 KEY FINDINGS IN OAKLAND

Children fear injuries differently based on their gender, race/ethnicity and age.

Among Oakland youth who don't play sports often, children who are Latino/a, Asian or Black reported far greater concerns about getting hurt than White youth. Girls worried about injuries more than boys, and elementary school students shared these concerns much more than older children. Interestingly, some of the most affluent communities (Montclair, Dimond, Laurel) and least affluent (Deep East Oakland) had the highest injury concerns by youth – three times the rate of the North Oakland, Emeryville and Berkeley border communities. California is the only state that does not regulate who can and cannot call themselves athletic trainers.



More than half (55%) of California secondary schools reported they either do not employ an athletic trainer or they employ an unqualified health personnel in the role.⁴² That's a concern, considering California has the second-largest number of high school athletes in the nation. Project Play's [Reimagining School Sports Playbook](#) offers suggestions for how stakeholders can prioritize health and safety in high school sports.

Oakland public high schools have no athletic trainers.

“At our schools, if you get hurt, you have to see your coach for treatment,” said OAL Commissioner Franky Navarro. “There’s no rehab or training room. We’re competing against schools that can fund a full-time athletic trainer, and sometimes two or three.” Navarro hopes to soon hire three athletic trainers to serve OUSD’s 10 high schools, thanks to a three-year, \$150,000 grant from the Korey Stringer Institute. Also, OUSD has committed \$60,000 in 2022-23 for athletic trainer services, which will be contracted with the University of California San Francisco Sports Medicine Center for Young Athletes. “It’s a sad thing to know our kids don’t have access to athletic trainer services,” Navarro said. “I tell district leadership if tomorrow state legislation passes requiring a trainer, you’ll have to find the money. I think it’s coming down the pipeline. The question is when.”

In addition, a strength and conditioning coach at one Oakland high school told us there's a major need for the city's strength coaches to receive free training that can help with injury prevention.

FOOTBALL PARTICIPATION RATES BY NEIGHBORHOOD

Community	Tackle	Flag
Deep East Oakland	24%	12%
West Oakland/Downtown/Lake Merritt	22%	12%
East Oakland/Maxwell Park/Seminary	18%	5%
North Oakland/Emeryville/Berkeley Border	16%	8%
Chinatown/East Lake/San Antonio	8%	7%
Montclair/Dimond/Laurel	7%	15%
Fruitvale/Jingletown	7%	7%

Note: Percentage of children who play 20+ times in a year

Source: Aspen Institute Youth Survey

Long-term brain injury risks are causing youth football to evolve.

Youth tackle football players ages 6 to 14 sustain 15 times more head impacts than flag football players at practices or games and 23 times more high-magnitude head impacts, according to a 2021 study by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.⁴³ CDC said the findings suggest that non-contact or flag programs may be a safer alternative for reducing head impacts and concussion risk for youth under age 14. In our Oakland youth survey, 26% of boys reported playing tackle football regularly vs. 17% who regularly play flag. Oakland kids who are elementary-school age are three times more likely to play tackle than older youth. Black

youth (27%) play tackle more frequently than White children (7%); their flag participation rates are nearly similar (Black 17%, White 13%). In 2020, California adopted a law limiting non-scholastic youth football full-contact practices to 30 minutes, twice a week and no full-contact offseason practices.⁴⁴ State law limits full-contact practices for middle and high school teams to 90 minutes, twice a week. The state requires a medical professional present for all football games and an independent person must attend all practices with the authority to remove players who show signs of an injury. The state doesn't lodge penalties against teams who break sports safety laws. A survey of Bay Area youth leagues from various sports found 47% of respondents don't follow all of the state's safety requirements.⁴⁵

Many Oakland children don't know how to swim.

"It's a huge barrier for water sports like ours and general safety around the water," said Dana Hooper, executive director of the rowing program Oakland Strokes. "You think you can solve the swimming fear problem with the child and you're good, but you really need to solve it with the parents. It gets passed down from each generation." Nationally, 64% of Black children have little or no swimming ability, higher than Latino/a (45%) and White (40%) children.⁴⁶ The trend was noticeable in our Oakland survey with 72% Latino/a, 70% Black, 61% Asian and 39% White youth saying they have never tried swimming more than once. Deep East Oakland has the second-highest rate of youth (17%) who want to try swimming and the lowest percentage who swim regularly (6%). Oakland Parks, Recreation and Youth Development offers American Red Cross swim courses to help people of all ages develop water safety. Youth scholarships are available for the program but often go unused. Oaklantis Swimming serves about 182 students year-round, but it's running below capacity due to COVID-19 shutdowns and infrastructure issues at its pool.

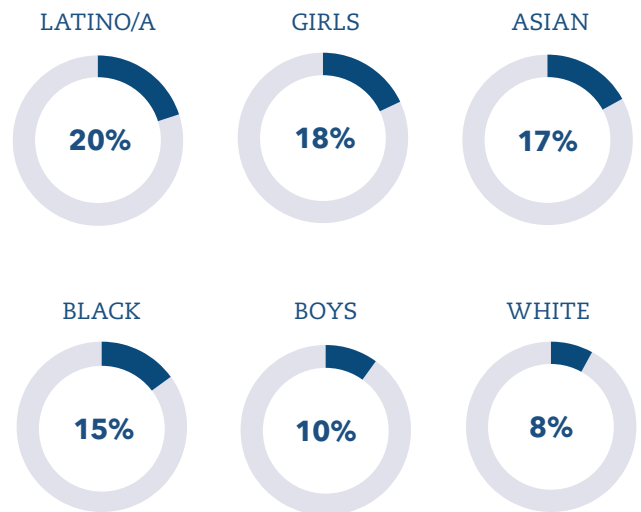
Oakland has five public pools, translating to just 1.4 pool pools per 100,000 residents (below the national average of 2.3 for the 100 most populated cities).⁴⁷ Oakland pools reopened at full capacity in summer 2022 for the first time during the COVID-19 pandemic, but the Roberts Park swimming pool was closed for maintenance, putting extra demand on other pools.⁴⁸

Youth are struggling with their mental health.

A common theme emerged in our focus groups with Oakland children: Many are struggling with trauma. Even before COVID-19, 25% of Oakland children experienced two or more Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) – a higher rate than the nation (23%), Alameda County (20%) and California (18%).⁴⁹ COVID-19 exacerbated this. Some children feared becoming ill or, especially in underserved communities, witnessed family members die. Nationally, more than one-third of high school students reported poor mental health during COVID-19 and more than half experienced emotional abuse by an adult in their home.⁵⁰ In our Oakland youth survey, almost 1 in 10 said the biggest reason they play sports is to get away from problems. One Oakland girl recalled how despondent she was when the Mosswood Park recreation center suffered major fire damage in 2016. “I didn’t come back for years because I didn’t feel safe, and a lot of my friends never

came back,” she said. “But now I feel safe because my coach is watching out for my safety.” Coaches can help youth feel safe and triage mental health red flags. For example, Girls Inc. Alameda County uses a trauma-informed approach to its activities that include bike riding and hiking. The nonprofit learned it must manage the trauma that youth experience in order for them to benefit from the activities.

YOUTH WHO DON'T PLAY SPORTS DUE TO INJURY FEARS



Source: Aspen Institute Youth Survey



Game Changer

Diversify Oakland’s sports offerings through partnerships leveraging the community school model

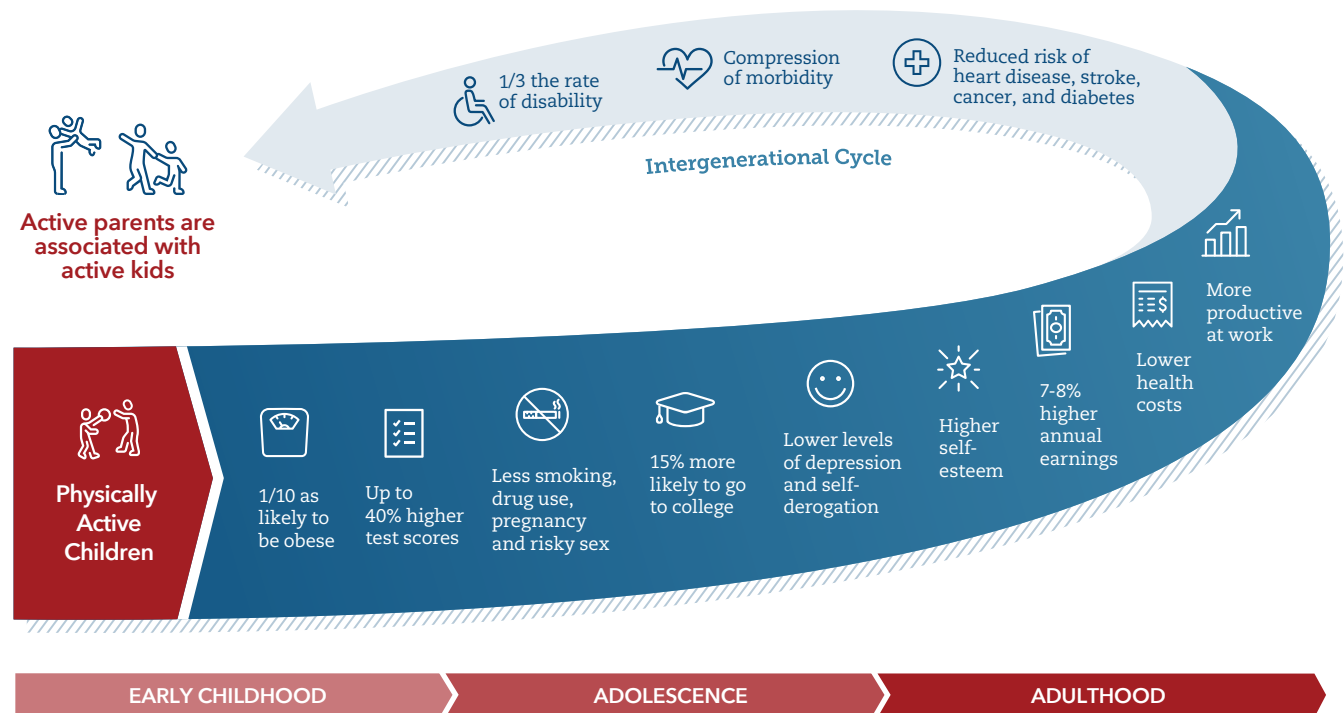
One of the strengths of Oakland is its close proximity to so many unique sports and physical activities within the Bay Area. You can surf in the ocean, row on a lake, hike in the hills, and find almost any team or individual sport imaginable.

Still, only 14% of Oakland youth receive at least 60 minutes of daily physical activity, as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.⁵¹ If even just 25%

of these children became physically active, \$157 million in direct medical costs would be averted and 9,829 years of life would be saved. (See further projections on page 50.) Research shows a mountain of evidence documenting the physical, mental, social, emotional, cognitive and academic benefits that flow to youth whose bodies are motion. Communities thrive when they promote policies and develop infrastructure that encourage sport and recreation activity.

ACTIVE KIDS DO BETTER IN LIFE

What Research Shows on the Lifetime Benefits





Although Oakland is largely viewed as a football and basketball town, youth told us they are very interested in trying other sports. However, children lack sustainable ways to keep playing these new sports to establish healthy habits for life. In our analysis, the most promising opportunity to improve the city's state of play for youth is using Oakland schools as hubs to align systems, services and providers through the community school model. California's 2022-23 state school budget allocates more than \$1 billion to partnerships with community schools in underserved areas.

Most Oakland students spend the start of the school day through early evening on campus through the community school model, which integrates academics, health and social services, youth and community development, and community engagement. Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) operates 54 community schools led by community school managers to coordinate programs and services to meet the holistic needs of youth, families and the school community.⁵²

Here are four strategies that can leverage the community school model to give youth more sustainable sports options, plus the sectors that can help make it happen.

Strengthen physical education, especially at elementary schools

Only half of OUSD's elementary schools reported in 2018-19 having a credentialed PE teacher on staff. PE teachers are getting burned out and many lack the training or professional development to produce effective curriculum. Funding and supporting credentialed PE teachers, especially in elementary schools, will build a strong foundation of fundamental physical literacy skills, instill a commitment to wellness, and introduce more sports.

CITY-LEVEL AGENCIES

Audit the current state of PE

There's a general lack of understanding within the OUSD administration of what deficiencies need to be addressed. OUSD could take New York City's lead in this space. New York City invested \$100 million to improve PE across its public schools,⁵³ plus \$385 million in capital funding to upgrade schools' PE spaces.⁵⁴



This funding enabled all elementary schools to receive a credentialed PE teacher and training for classroom teachers in the city’s evidence-based PE curriculum. In addition, the city hired people to conduct a needs assessment of PE across the district, which included interviews with school principals led by experts in PE pedagogy and school administration, who provided feedback to the principals and ongoing technical assistance to ensure quality PE was occurring up to state standards.

With more private or public funding, OUSD could create a PE department at the district level. San Francisco public schools have a nine-person Physical Education and Physical Activities Department for their 114 schools, including separate PE administrators by school level, implementation and content specialists, and an administrative analyst. In stark contrast, Oakland has one districtwide PE specialist, Nathan Jackson, who helps train PE teachers and is tasked with supporting PE across all 87 district schools by himself. He does this without access to, or knowledge of, OUSD’s budget or hiring decisions.

SCHOOL-LEVEL LEADERS

Integrate physical activity into the school day

Given that the Oakland community school model attempts to address the student holistically, there is an opportunity to integrate physical activity throughout the school day. “We don’t need just PE teachers as the ones trained,” Jackson said. “We can get other staff to buy into it. Let’s talk about social-emotional learning in PE. Let’s do student-led activities, not teacher-led.” All of these strategies do not need to be limited to the gym or the playing field as they are equally valuable in the classroom and contribute to a broad range of student outcomes. Principals need to see the benefits of PE and physical activity, or they won’t prioritize and advocate for this in their schools.

More specifically, PE teachers in Oakland can take advantage of resources provided by SHAPE America, the national leader on educating PE teachers. SHAPE America makes it easy for teachers to utilize [free, self-paced webinars](#) and [paid professional development opportunities](#). Topics include desired grade-level outcomes, curriculum, classroom strategies, comprehensive school physical activity programs, technology, interdisciplinary learning, and adapted PE, which assists students with exceptional or developmental needs.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Think creatively to fund PE and reach more students

Financial support for PE can't be counted on from OUSD. Facing a \$50 million budget deficit, the school district plans to close, consolidate, and merge 11 schools over the next two years. Funding PE will need creative solutions from community partners and other sources. One good resource is the [SPARK Grant-Finder Tool](#), which helps locate funding for PE, after-school, early childhood, classroom activity, or coordinated school health programs. Grants can be used for curriculum, teacher training, or equipment.

Pro sports teams periodically fund recreational sports programming within Oakland based on their particular sport. The more impactful idea would be subsidizing PE teachers throughout the Bay Area from ticket or concession sales and the teams' corporate sponsors. The teams could use their platform to encourage their fans to participate in fundraising. "Because PE is so lacking and actually touches all students, it's the one opportunity to really move the needle on population health in terms of physical activity," said Hannah Thompson, an epidemiologist at Cal-Berkeley who has studied PE and youth physical activity in Oakland.



Align systems and providers to expand sports after school and in the summer

In Oakland, community sports providers, OUSD and the parks and rec department often don't view themselves as one sector in order to benefit children. They compete for the same children, field spaces, funds, and other resources, so they operate in silos. When collaboration does occur, it's usually due to individual relationships as opposed to fully aligned systems that people and organizations can plug into. Building systems will take time and require community organizing efforts. For example, Positive Coaching Alliance's Racial Equity and Access Youth Sports Task Force is attempting to articulate the community's shared vision for children of color to access sports.

CITY-LEVEL AGENCIES

Centralize and standardize how community partners offer programming

Sports programming at schools is too often determined on a school-by-school basis instead of providing schools with top-down menu options and logistical support. School leaders say their best community partnerships occur when they have been vetted by the district and pushed down to see if schools are interested.

Community school managers (CSMs), though often overwhelmed with responsibilities, could work with OUSD to seek partnerships with sports/physical activity community providers and funding opportunities. At mature, OUSD full-service community schools, the CSM operates as a school-level administrator who manages, leads and coordinates partnerships to support school and student needs.



In a promising development, OUSD’s Expanded Learning Program recently began partnering with the Oakland Athletic League to expand sports beyond grades 6 to 12 and into elementary schools. Plans are in motion to develop clinics for elementary school students in various sports, and perhaps create future organized teams. The goal: Help children learn sports when they’re younger before their frustration sets in if they lack basic skills. This effort is being funded through California’s Expanded Learnings Opportunity Program (ELO-P), which asks schools to develop students’ academic, social, emotional, and physical needs while including community partners.

SCHOOL-LEVEL LEADERS

Center student interests and needs in sports

Ask and listen to what sports and physical activities students want. Our youth survey results in this report are one resource. Even better, schools can annually conduct sports-interest surveys, regardless of whether they are needed for Title IX compliance.

Use surveys that allow analysis by disability, gender, race or ethnicity, and grade level. Ask about the sports students play, want to play, and other health and fitness activities. Ask why they play and why they don’t. And then build partnerships with community sports providers

that are the direct result of youth voice and offer inclusive environments to everyone.

Coaches and athletic directors could use principles related to restorative justice – empowering students to resolve conflicts on their own and in small groups – within the sports setting. “Restorative justice has to be at the forefront to get kids to try new sports, just like it is everywhere else in schools,” said Franky Navarro, OAL commissioner. “You’re asking someone to try a sport they and their family have never seen. Having a welcoming community that shows respect for each other would better allow them to try the sport.”

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Ask schools what they need and how to help

The relationship only works if there’s a give and take. Oakland Lacrosse Club offers one of the best templates for sustained work in schools. Coaches enter schools for six- to eight-week PE or after-school programming – instead of one-and-done introductions – to generate interest and cycle through groups of students. There are now four high school girls lacrosse teams in Oakland, in part because one Oakland Lacrosse Club staff member constantly visits girls at school. “It’s about the follow-up and face-to-face connection to show the young woman she can be a lacrosse player,” said Kevin Kelley, the club’s founder. “You just keep showing up.”

Kelley’s future goal is for more of his coaches to teach school staff lacrosse curriculum. OUSD partners with 17 lead agencies for after-school programming that extends beyond sports. For instance, Bay Area Community Resources (BACR), a lead agency, subcontracts with America SCORES, which teaches soccer and poetry to 400 Oakland students in 19 schools. America SCORES says it could easily be in 30 to 40 elementary schools through a more sustainable model.

Training school staff in youth development sports curriculum “is the future of Oakland,” said Colin Schmidt, America SCORES Bay Area executive director, noting his organization’s [training platform](#). “Anything else is too risky. Volunteers can’t be relied upon for scheduling. Creating more stability would allow sports agencies a more predictable, less stressful environment. We could plan the right curriculum and price point a little better.”

What makes a good community sports partner

Tips from Oakland schools on what they want

1. Offer flexible hours for adult volunteers or utilize college students with more flexible schedules.
2. Adjust to the school’s programming needs and time frames.
3. Provide transportation if programming is off campus.
4. Create inclusive spaces. Either use a trusted messenger within your community or show the willingness to adapt and meet the needs of communities different than your own.
5. Stay focused on the task at hand and what you do best. Too many outside partners try to tackle more than they’re capable of without the right skill sets or staffing needs.

Maintain directories of youth sport providers to help families and schools

Many families and schools don’t know where to find sports for youth to try, and whether the community sports provider offering it is reputable. Children from Fruitvale, Jingletown, Chinatown, East Lake and San Antonio are twice as likely to not play sports because they lack program information than those in Montclair, Dimond and Laurel, according to our youth survey. A directory connecting the dots between schools and community partners has strong interest from local sports leaders. The closest OUSD has to a directory is a [work-in-progress database](#) for any type of community partnership and it’s vetted by one district employee.

CITY-LEVEL AGENCIES

Provide annual listing on offered sports by school

OUSD can start by publicly listing all sports teams and programming available at each elementary, middle and high school. This would provide a head start for data in a directory, allowing families, youth and community partners to identify diverse sports opportunities they may want to try or partner on with schools.

This basic knowledge was key to a New York City settlement that will create 200 new high school sports teams by spring 2024.⁵⁵ The New York City Fair Play Coalition inspired the city council to pass a resolution requiring the collection and public release of sports programs offered by school. Data showed Black and Latino/a students attend schools with about 10 fewer teams on average compared to students of other races and ethnicities, driving grassroots-driven community engagement to change the problem. A lawsuit argued the athletic team disparities violated the city’s human rights law, and a settlement was reached.

SCHOOL-LEVEL LEADERS

Clarify what information-sharing looks like

School administrators, coaches and athletic directors can work with OUSD and parks and recreation to determine what information will be helpful to promote on directories – perhaps one for families and one for community providers. Families might want to know which sports are offered, how to register, costs, available scholarships, and contact information. Schools seeking partnerships might want to know from community sports providers what’s being offered (staff, equipment, teams), costs (per child or school contract), availability of volunteers, and previous experiences with schools.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Build the directory and bring it to life

Technology companies and local brands could help build and finance one or more online directories. They have the technological expertise. Given the public’s frustration with Oakland city bureaucracy, a private entity could be best to host the site or sites, with OUSD and parks and recreation helping to market the product.

To support usage of the directory, have local sports providers team up for a sport sampling

festival each year. In Canada, Calgary’s popular “All Sport One Day” event annually helps over 4,000 youth ages 6 to 17 try a new sport for free. In 2019, local organizations representing 77 sports hosted sports sessions at 20 facilities across the city. Families report children become more comfortable trying new sports due to this annual event, with 43% of surveyed parents saying they plan to enroll their child in a sport that was tried at “All Sport One Day.”⁵⁶ The event is free for youth. Costs are kept low by utilizing volunteers and donated sports facilities.

Oakland community sports providers can also collaborate with Oakland Parks, Recreation and Youth Development (OPRYD) to include its programming in the directory while expanding the sports offerings at Town Camp each summer. Town Camp’s eight-week sessions currently have one week devoted entirely to sports, such as soccer, baseball, basketball, four square, gaga ball, and bocce ball, although sports themes at the camp aren’t guaranteed every summer. After our State of Play Central Ohio report was released in 2021, Greater Columbus Sports Commission launched a weeklong youth camp with 16 sports to provide equitable opportunities for kids ages 6 to 12 to sample. The camp leverages many providers, including pro sports teams and universities.



Use the power of the permit for sharing arrangements between schools and rec centers

More sports can only be tried if there are available facilities and cooperation. OUSD and the City of Oakland are in the process of finalizing a new joint-use agreement (JUA) after the previous one expired in 2013. The next JUA – and subsequent policies for facility users – offers the opportunity to address coaching quality and health/safety gaps as a condition for access to public schools and parks spaces. The concept is referred to as the power of the permit, and it's commonly used in youth sports throughout the country to create better experiences for kids.

CITY-LEVEL AGENCIES

Consult Children's Bill of Rights in Sports

Project Play's [Children's Bill of Rights in Sports](#) was developed with human rights and sports policy experts to create a shared cultural understanding that all youth should have the opportunity to develop as people through sports. For instance, children have the right to play in settings free from all forms of abuse (physical, emotional, sexual), hazing, violence, and neglect. Children also have the right to play under the care of other adults who pass background checks and are trained in key competencies. Specific standards to use sports facilities could be set based on these core rights.

More than 360 athletes and over 130 national and international organizations have endorsed the Bill of Rights, the latest of which are Golden State Warriors star Stephen Curry and the city of Houston. As the first U.S. city to adopt the framework, Houston will operationalize the Bill of Rights through a municipal plan that includes educating and engaging the city's parks and recreation department, schools, and more than 30 local organizations, who may be eligible for grant funds to implement new programs and services.



SCHOOL-LEVEL LEADERS

Better utilize facilities booking system

Finding quality and available spaces can be difficult in Oakland. OUSD uses a system called [Facilitron](#) to book any community space, including for sports events and practices. The website includes useful information for each facility, such as rental costs, available dates, parking and other amenities. But not enough schools use Facilitron.

Some schools are better at utilizing the system than others, even though OUSD reminds them to go through the proper channels. Many community sports providers secure spaces based on who they know, not a standard system that allows equitable access for all youth and to introduce new sports with organizations lacking those built-in relationships. Established usage patterns predate the current system. Nobody has supported schools and community providers in aligning with it in a way that feels helpful and isn't burdensome or discouraging.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Embrace coach trainings to meet permit standards

The good news for Oakland is there's a consistent pipeline of community sports providers that are committed to training coaches in youth development. Oakland Strokes, ACE Kids Golf, Oakland Girls Softball, Soccer Without Borders, America SCORES, Oakland Lacrosse Club, and many more have demonstrated capabilities to be part of this pipeline. Now consistent trainings need to be embraced by more people interested in becoming coaches. Volunteering time isn't always doable for many adults – and trainings add one more layer.

But they're needed to have more Oakland youth enjoy safe and positive experiences in sports. Positive Coaching Alliance is positioning itself to help train more coaches, including high school students to become recreational coaches. The coaching pipeline is strategically growing.

Creating more diverse sports offerings through schools won't be easy. We recognize schools are overburdened with requirements in providing a quality education to students.

Given Oakland's commitment to the community school model, we have found there is a shared understanding of the benefits of sport and physical activity in support of student-level and community-level outcomes. Progress will be achievable through collaboration. All parties need to come to the table with the goal of working together, so more children can enjoy the benefits they tell us they want from more sports.

5 National Resources to Help Sport Sampling

NHL Street: This new NHL program aims to build a new era in street hockey that is fun, relevant, and designed to get more kids playing. NHL Street is especially interested in entering urban and rural communities outside of NHL markets while increasing female participation in the sport.

School Tennis: The U.S. Tennis Association offers free access to turnkey curriculum, lesson plans and equipment to bring tennis into schools. Realizing that schools need more support than simply equipment that may go unused, the USTA changed tactics and now offers a relationship to a local tennis partner. This allows the local USTA section and school to determine what they need.

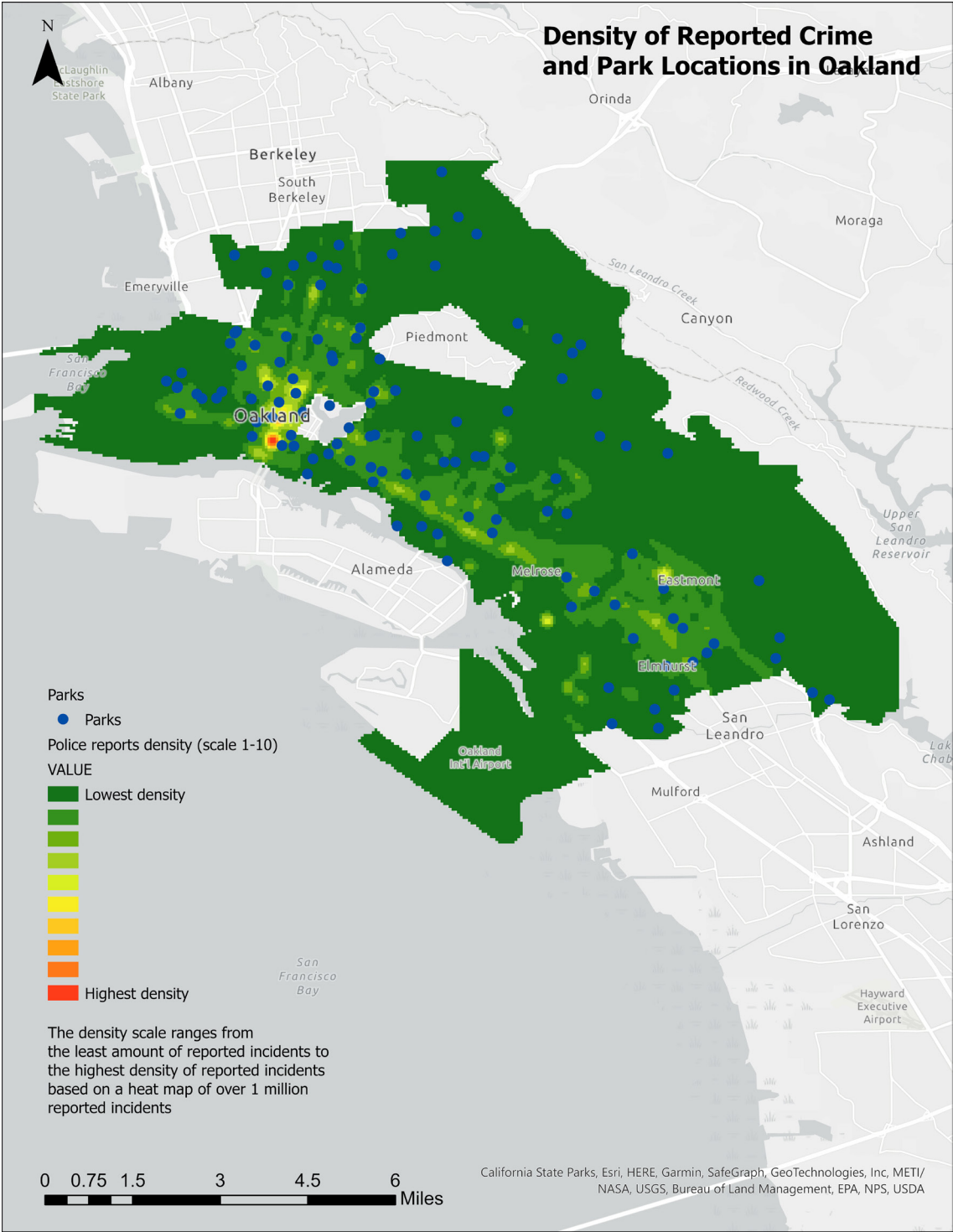
Jr. NBA Basketball Curricula: Jr. NBA teamed up with SHAPE America to create free curricula for grades K to 2, 3 to 5 and 6 to 8. There are more than 50 activities that engage students and reflect best practice in instruction. The written and video resources offer sequential lessons leading to mature patterns of motor performance for youth.

2-4-1 Sports: This sport-sampling program focuses on fostering physical literacy and social-emotional development. 2-4-1 Sports helps build confidence in young athletes to learn the rules of different sports and be creative with equipment and space so they can organize themselves into games. 2-4-1 Sports assists with summer camps, before- and after-school programs, weekend camps and clinics, coach training, physical literacy curriculum and implementation, and program evaluation and consulting.

Every Kid Sports: This organization pays registration fees directly to income-restricted families to play sports. Families can apply to cover costs for recreational and school sports. Travel sports costs are not permitted. Every Kid Sports was recognized as a Project Play Champion.

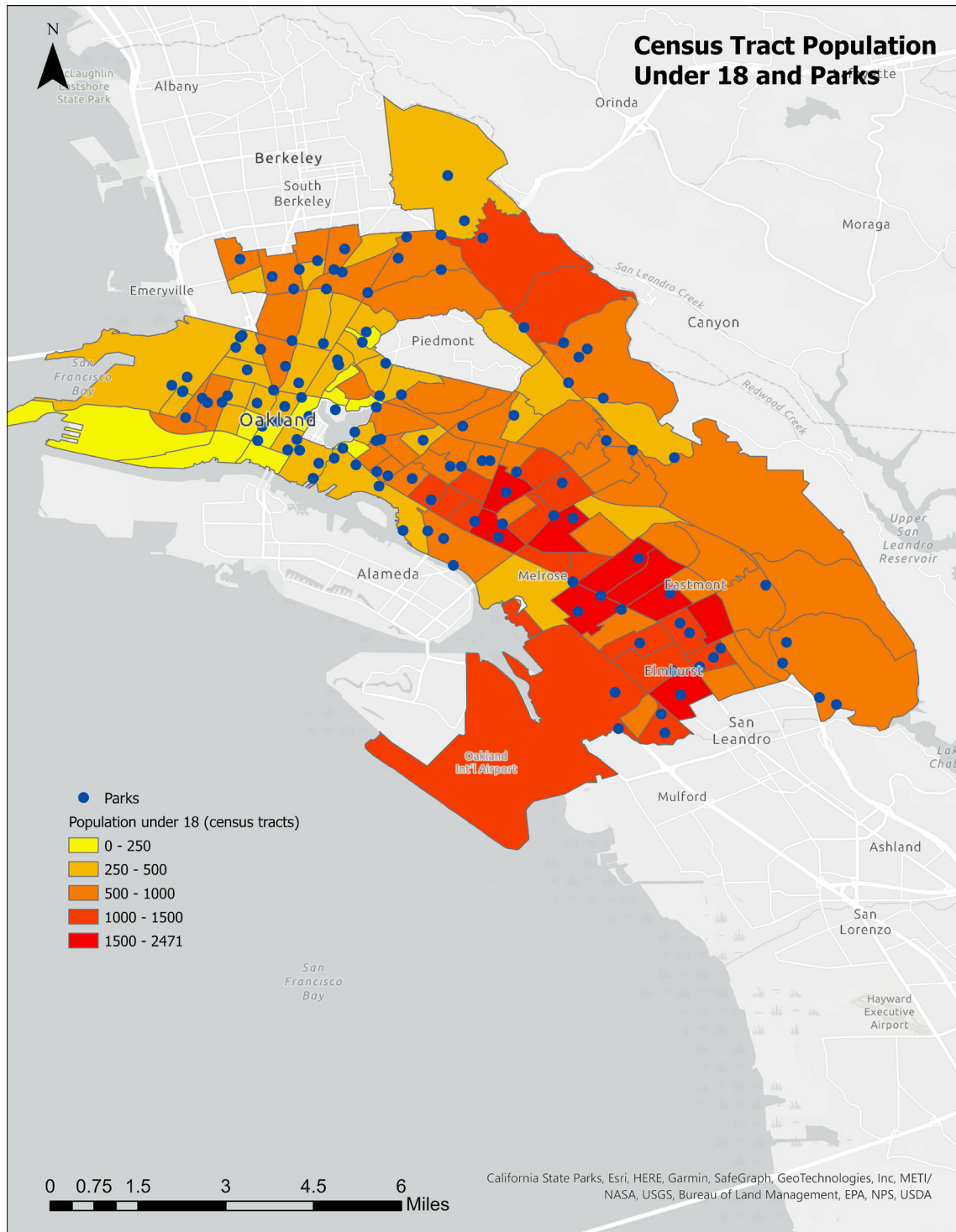
APPENDIX A | CRIME AND DENSITY

Parks in the flatlands are in areas that have increased levels of reported crime



APPENDIX B | PARKS AND YOUTH POPULATION

Some areas of Oakland with large youth populations lack nearby parks



APPENDIX C | TOP SPORTS BY COMMUNITY

North Oakland/Emeryville/Berkeley Border	
Regularly Play	
Basketball	42%
Soccer	31%
Biking	23%
Swimming	18%
Tackle Football	16%
Want to Try	
Karate/Mixed Martial Arts	24%
Fencing	22%
Surfing	21%
Roller Skating	20%
Archery	20%

Chinatown/East Lake/San Antonio	
Regularly Play	
Basketball	29%
Soccer	28%
Biking	13%
Swimming	12%
Cross Country	12%
Want to Try	
Archery	27%
Rock Climbing	24%
Karate/Mixed Martial Arts	21%
Fencing	20%
Roller Skating	19%

West Oakland/Downtown/Lake Merritt	
Regularly Play	
Basketball	42%
Soccer	30%
Tackle Football	22%
Biking	20%
Swimming	15%
Want to Try	
Archery	26%
Skateboarding	20%
Tackle Football	20%
Basketball	20%
Karate/Mixed Martial Arts	19%
Parkour	19%

Montclair/Dimond/Laurel	
Regularly Play	
Soccer	23%
Basketball	22%
Biking	20%
Baseball	19%
Swimming	17%
Want to Try	
Rock Climbing	28%
Archery	27%
Skateboarding	22%
Karate/Mixed Martial Arts	20%
Roller Skating	20%
Figure Skating	20%

Source: Aspen Institute Youth Survey

APPENDIX C | TOP SPORTS BY COMMUNITY

Fruitvale/Jingletown	
Regularly Play	
Basketball	35%
Soccer	30%
Volleyball	15%
Biking	15%
Swimming	12%
Want to Try	
Archery	31%
Volleyball	22%
Figure Skating	21%
Swimming	21%
Karate/Mixed Martial Arts	19%
Rock Climbing	19%

East Oakland/Maxwell Park/Seminary	
Regularly Play	
Basketball	39%
Soccer	26%
Biking	19%
Tackle Football	18%
Kickball	13%
Swimming	13%
Want to Try	
Archery	27%
Roller Skating	26%
Karate/Mixed Martial Arts	24%
Fencing	24%
Basketball	23%

Deep East Oakland	
Regularly Play	
Basketball	45%
Soccer	38%
Tackle Football	24%
Biking	17%
Kickball	16%
Want to Try	
Karate/Mixed Martial Arts	23%
Archery	21%
Fencing	20%
Roller Skating	19%
Parkour	18%



Source: Aspen Institute Youth Survey

APPENDIX D | OAKLAND ATHLETIC LEAGUE COACHING STIPENDS, 2022-23

Sport	Total Stipend for All Coaches
Basketball	\$56,821
Soccer	\$53,434
Track and Field	\$50,890
Volleyball	\$48,565
Football	\$47,915
Baseball	\$27,196
Cross Country	\$24,282
Cheerleading	\$24,282
Tennis	\$16,998
Softball	\$15,541
Wrestling	\$11,413
Swimming	\$10,684
Bowling	\$9,173
Badminton	\$7,285
Golf	\$4,856
Lacrosse	\$2,428
Gymnastics	\$0

Source: Oakland Athletic League

Note: The coaching stipend pool more than doubled for 2022-23.



APPENDIX E | YOUTH WHO BELIEVE THEY'RE NOT GOOD ENOUGH TO PLAY

Youth Who Believe They're Not Good Enough to Play	
Nonbinary	30%
Asian	25%
Latino/a	23%
Girls	19%
All Youth	16%
Black	11%
White	11%
Boys	11%

Source: Aspen Institute Youth Survey

APPENDIX F | OAKLAND ATHLETIC LEAGUE COSTS/ PARTICIPATION

High Schools

- Participants in 2021-22: **2,274**
- % of students playing interscholastic sports: **24%**
- Total expenses (2022-23 budget): **\$1,763,500**
- Transportation share of budget: **27%**
- Expense allocation by school per student: **\$776**

Middle Schools

- Participants in 2021-22: **1,246**
- % of students playing scholastic sports: **18%**

Source: Oakland Athletic League

**APPENDIX G | OAKLAND ATHLETIC LEAGUE HIGH SCHOOL
SPORTS PARTICIPANTS, 2021-22**

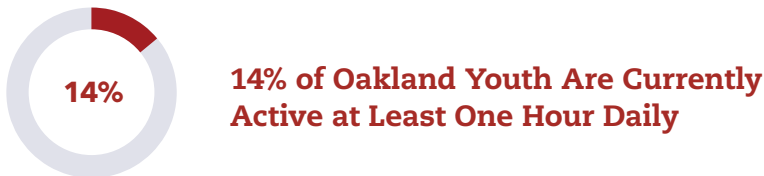
Sport	Varsity	JV/ Freshman	Schools with Teams	Most Participants
Badminton (Girls)	42	0	3	Oakland High
Baseball	87	37	6	Oakland Tech
Basketball (Boys)	107	86	9	Oakland Tech
Basketball (Girls)	94	17	7	Oakland Tech
Bowling*	0	0	0	None
Cheer	94	0	5	Skyline
Cross Country (Boys)	68	0	5	Oakland Tech, Skyline
Cross Country (Girls)	67	0	6	Oakland Tech
Football	199	173	6	Oakland Tech
Golf (Boys)	20	0	2	Skyline
Golf (Girls)	17	0	3	Skyline
Lacrosse (Girls)	72	0	4	Skyline
Tennis (Girls)	70	0	4	Oakland Tech
Tennis (Boys)	14	0	1	Skyline
Soccer (Boys)	168	74	8	Oakland Tech
Soccer (Girls)	118	20	7	Oakland Tech
Softball	81	0	5	Fremont, Oakland High, Oakland Tech
Swimming (Boys)	28	0	3	Skyline
Swimming (Girls)	49	0	3	Skyline
Track & Field (Boys)	201	0	9	Oakland Tech
Track & Field (Girls)	122	0	9	Oakland Tech
Volleyball (Boys)	92	0	6	Oakland High
Volleyball (Girls)	102	77	8	Skyline
Wrestling (Boys)	35	0	4	Skyline
Wrestling (Girls)	3	0	2	Castlemont

Source: Oakland Athletic League

* Bowling was not played in 2021-22 due to the pandemic.

APPENDIX H | HEALTH AND ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF PROGRESS

The Public Health Computational and Operation Research (PHICOR) team develops computational approaches, methods, models, and tools to help decision makers better understand and address complex systems in health and public health. The Aspen Institute asked the PHICOR research team to calculate the lifetime benefits in Oakland if stakeholders can get more youth physically active at least 60 minutes a day, as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Here are PHICOR's projections based on data from youth ages 14 to 18.



Fewer Overweight and Obese Youth:

Number of additional youth dropping below the 85th Body Mass Index (BMI) percentile, which is the CDC's definition of overweight. Currently, 20% of Oakland girls and 18% of boys are overweight; another 12% of girls and 17% of boys 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 doctor 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 the bar will on average lengthen their lives by approximately two years.

Source: PHICOR, www.bruceylee.com/phicor. PHICOR Executive Director Bruce Y. Lee, MD, MBA, bruceleemdba@gmail.com

PHOTOS

Photos in this report were provided by Eat. Learn. Play. Foundation, Jack London Youth Soccer Sports League, Jon Solomon, Lift Us Up Foundation, Oakland Athletic League, Oakland Lacrosse Club, Oakland Parks and Recreation Foundation, Oakland Parks, Recreation and Youth Development, Oakland Roots Sports Club, Oakland Strokes, Positive Coaching Alliance, and Skate Like a Girl.

CREDITS

The *State of Play Oakland* project was managed by Jennifer Brown Lerner, deputy director of the Aspen Institute Sports & Society Program, and the report was written by Jon Solomon, the program's editorial director. Leilani Wagner served as the local investigator. She was assisted by Zachary Cohen, Zach Moo Young, and Dr. Hannah Thompson. Maps were designed by Dr. Gidon Jakar. The report was designed by The Hatcher Group and proofread by Brady Hurley. Tom Farrey, executive director of the Sports & Society Program, provided editorial and project guidance. We appreciate the partnership with the Racial Equity and Access in Youth Sports Task Force convened by Robert Marcus of Positive Coaching Alliance. The report was generously funded by Eat. Learn. Play. Foundation.

ABOUT THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

The Aspen Institute is a global nonprofit organization committed to realizing a free, just, and equitable society. Founded in 1949, the Institute drives change through dialogue, leadership, and action to help solve the most important challenges facing the United States and the world.

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ABOUT PROJECT PLAY

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

www.ProjectPlay.us

ABOUT EAT. LEARN. PLAY. FOUNDATION

Eat. Learn. Play. Foundation is an organization dedicated to unleashing the potential of every child, paving the way for amazing kids and opening doors to bright futures. Founded by Stephen and Ayesha Curry in 2019, Eat. Learn. Play. launched with a focus on improving the lives of kids and families in Oakland, the Bay Area, and across the country. Rooted in three of the most vital pillars for a healthy childhood – nutrition, education, and physical activity – Eat. Learn. Play. is working to ensure that every child in Oakland has access to the nutritious food they need to be healthy and thrive; resources to learn and read; and safe places and equitable opportunities to play. The organization, which is anchored around the message that children are our future, is committed to developing partnerships and initiatives that make a positive impact for generations to come.

www.EatLearnPlay.org



REPORT METHODOLOGY

Throughout the report, “sports” 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 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 both sports and other physical-activity programming.

The youth survey data reported in the scoreboard section and throughout the report comes from youth in grades 3 to 12. From February 2022 to April 2022, 1,076 youth completed a survey about their experiences and perceptions of sports and other physical activities. Surveys were largely distributed by Oakland Unified School District (population of 50,202 students), along with Oakland Parks, Recreation and Youth Development,

and other community-based organizations. The survey was conducted on an online platform and results were analyzed by Resonant Education.

Although the racial demographics are not entirely representative of the Oakland Unified School District, the survey data still reflects a large and diverse group of respondents. The demographics included: 47% male, 45% female, 3% nonbinary; 28% Black, 23% Hispanic, 16% White, 15% Asian, 7% two or more races; 49% elementary school students, 33% middle school students and 18% high school students. The survey received broad representation throughout Oakland communities: Deep East Oakland (16%), West Oakland/Downtown/Lake Merritt (15%), North Oakland/Emeryville/Berkeley border (13%), Chinatown/East Lake/San Antonio (11%), Montclair/Dimond/Laurel (11%), Fruitvale/Jingletown (8%), and East Oakland/Maxwell Park/Seminary (7%).



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