



STATE OF PLAY

Colorado: Aspen to Parachute

ANALYSIS AND
RECOMMENDATIONS

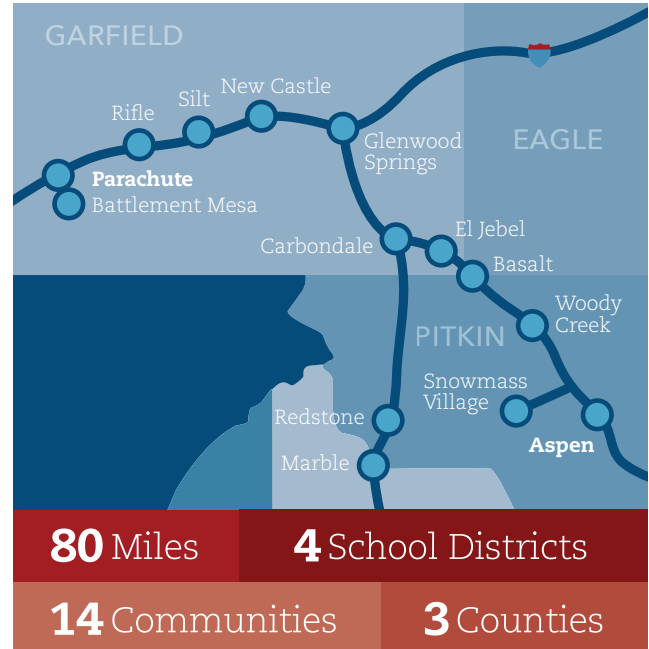


EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Aspen Institute Sports & Society Program analyzed the landscape of youth sports and physical activity in the Roaring Fork and Colorado River valleys from February 2023 to February 2024. “State of Play Colorado: Aspen to Parachute” offers a snapshot of youth engagement in play, sports and outdoor recreation, regardless of race, gender, income or ability.

Findings for this report were guided by the Aspen Institute through multiple methods: individual interviews with key stakeholders and community members whose work touches the lives of children; focus group discussions with young people, coaches, sports administrators and parents; surveys conducted of youth; media accounts; and existing reports, policy analyses and publicly available data collected by the Aspen Institute.

ASPEN TO PARACHUTE REGION AT A GLANCE



Learn about the demographics of these communities on [page 45](#)
The region's school districts are Aspen, Roaring Fork, Garfield Re-2 and Garfield County District 16

Some key findings in the report:

Local youth are slightly less physically active than the national average. According to our survey of more than 1,000 local youth, only 22% of children in the Roaring Fork and Colorado River valleys receive 60 minutes of physical activity daily. That's below the U.S. rate (24%). Of the youth taking our survey, local girls are two times less likely to be physically active than boys. Latino/a children (15%) engage in 60 minutes of daily physical activity less than White youth (27%).

More physical activity translates to better mental health. Physically active children reported feeling more excitement, happiness and motivation and less nervous, anxious, worried and depressed. For example, 25% of non-active youth (meaning zero days of physical activity) said they felt depressed or hopeless nearly every day, more than three times the rate (7%) of active youth (physical activity every day).

Transportation to and from sports and recreational activities is a major challenge. Where someone lives tremendously impacts access. While Aspen students can walk across the street to the Aspen Recreation Center from school, many children in Parachute are three to four miles away from the Grand Valley Recreation Center in Battlement Mesa and have limited transportation options. Children do not commonly use Roaring Fork Transportation Authority buses, which serve Aspen, Snowmass Village, Basalt, Carbondale, Glenwood Springs and New Castle. Yet more than half of surveyed youth said they would take public transportation from their neighborhood, if offered, to engage in more outdoor activities.

Youth are motivated by friendships to play sports.

The No. 1 reason kids said they play sports is to be with friends (52%), followed closely by having fun (51%). Winning games ranked sixth and chasing college athletic scholarships was 18th.

Latino/a children participate in outdoor recreation far less than their White peers.

White youth are six times more likely to participate in alpine skiing than Latino/a youth. Large participation gaps also exist in rock climbing, mountain biking, paddleboarding, archery, horseback riding and hiking. Parents and rec professionals told us that costs, transportation, equipment, communication barriers and family priorities are reasons for the major differences.

Soccer is by far the most popular sport played by Latino/a children.

Very few activities, if any, produce the level of enthusiasm and ability that brings the Latino/a community together in this region like soccer. Latino/a youth (42%) said they regularly play soccer far more than any other sport — and much more frequently than White children (19%).

The popularity of soccer among Latino/a youth serves as the inspiration for our main

recommendation, located in the Game Changer section starting on page 36.

Our Game Changer explores how community leaders could use soccer as a tool for social change aligned with the strong desire for purpose and well-being among Latino/a youth. What if soccer could more intentionally be applied to create belonging for youth and educational advancement? We identify three potential ways to do this:

- Offer more affordable soccer at younger ages — and target Latinas
- Use soccer to chart academic pathways toward college
- Bring organized soccer back to Colorado Mountain College

In addition, our Call for Leadership section (page 40) recommends the Roaring Fork and Colorado River valleys improve transportation to and from sports and recreational programming; create a scholarship portal for underserved children to access more affordable sports opportunities; provide coaching education on positive youth development; and pilot a regional adventure club to grow social connections among children.

"State of Play Colorado: Aspen to Parachute" is the Aspen Institute's 13th community report. The Aspen Institute has produced county reports on Tacoma-Pierce County, Washington, 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 Oakland, Baltimore, Harlem (New York), and Camden, New Jersey. Stakeholders in those communities have taken actions based on the recommendations and are seeing results. Learn more about State of Play communities: as.pn/SOPCommunitySuccess.

