



STATE OF PLAY BALTIMORE

ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

THE ASPEN INSTITUTE
PROJECT PLAY
REIMAGINING YOUTH SPORTS IN AMERICA

STATE OF PLAY BALTIMORE

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The Aspen Institute thanks Under Armour for its support of this report and Project Play: Baltimore

THE VISION

A Baltimore in which all children have the opportunity to be active through sports

WELCOME

Baltimore has a rich history of developing its children and communities through sports, from the early days of Babe Ruth, to the proliferation of recreation centers in the 1960s and '70s, to the rise of the most decorated Olympian in history, Michael Phelps. Sports are baked into the DNA of this unique city.

The Aspen Institute aims to help Baltimore tell its best sports story yet. Project Play: Baltimore, our first model community effort, will identify and facilitate opportunities for leaders to grow the quality and quantity of youth sport opportunities. Our specific focus is on a two-square-mile area of East Baltimore (see map on page 4), where Under Armour helped renovate a recreation center in 2016 and asked us to assist stakeholders throughout the area – so lessons can be learned and shared with other communities around the city and the country.

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

The Aspen Institute Sports & Society Program produced this State of Play report, analyzing sport programs and facilities in East Baltimore through the eight strategic filters (“plays”) highlighted in the Aspen Institute’s seminal 2015 report, *Sport for All, Play for Life: A Playbook to Get Every Kid in the Game*. Supporting Aspen is the Project Play: Baltimore Advisory Group, which consist of local leaders across several key sectors.

We hope the report informs short- and long-term community strategies related to the broad spectrum of sport opportunities for youth (through age 17). Should stakeholders create the conditions to get and keep all city youth physically active, the projected downstream benefits are huge: \$1.4 billion in direct medical costs saved and economic productivity losses averted, according to the Global Obesity Prevention Center at Johns Hopkins University (see Appendix D). Plus, lives can be lengthened, in this case by a collective total of more than 54,000 years.

We applaud the desire of Baltimore stakeholders to improve the lives of youth through sports. We encourage you to seize the opportunity to be a national model. It's there for the taking, with collective, sustained action guided by our findings.

Sincerely,



Tom Farrey
Executive Director, Aspen Institute
Sports & Society Program



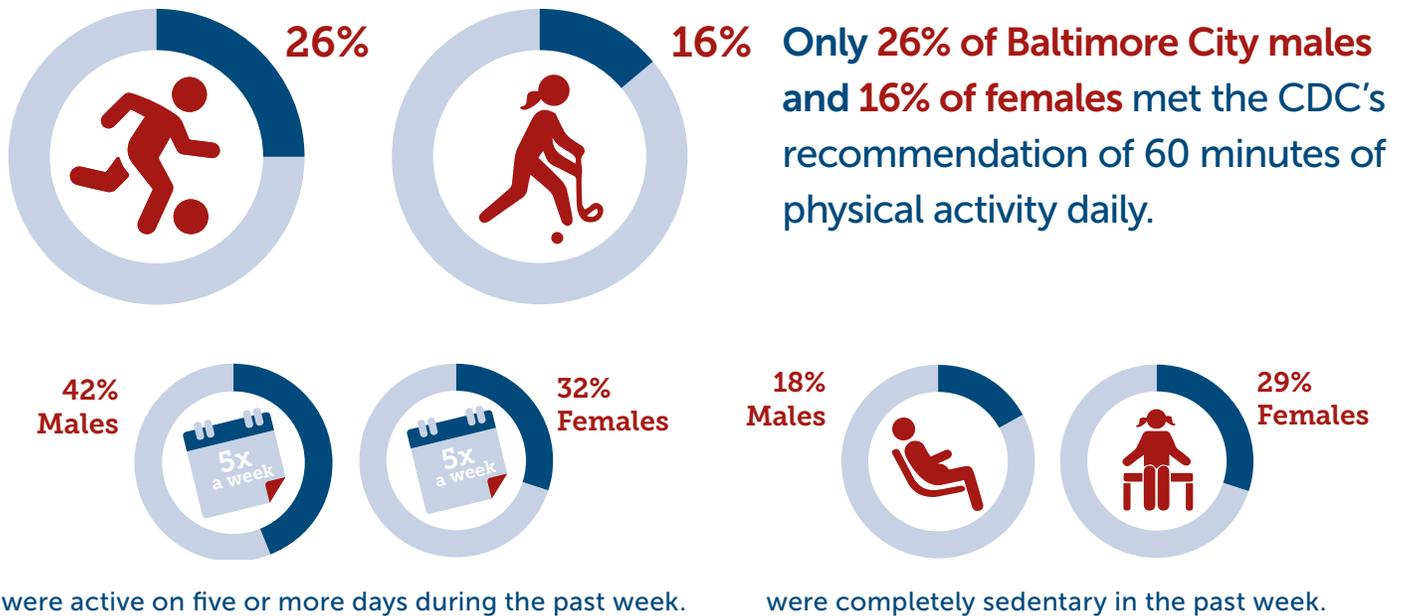
Andre Fountain
Project Coordinator, Aspen Institute
Sports & Society Program

THE STATE OF PLAY IN BALTIMORE CITY

SCOREBOARD

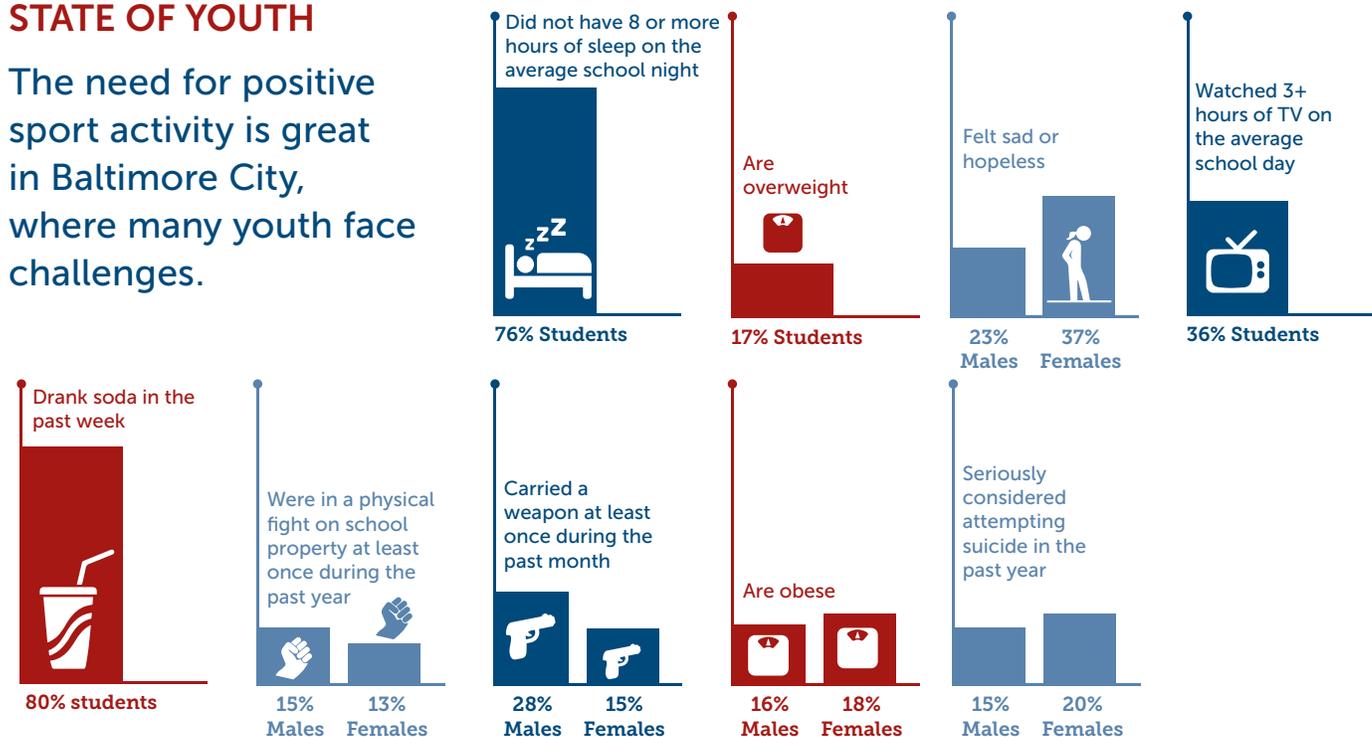
Among high schools students, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance study (2015):

ON THE WHOLE, FEW YOUTH ARE ACTIVE ENOUGH



STATE OF YOUTH

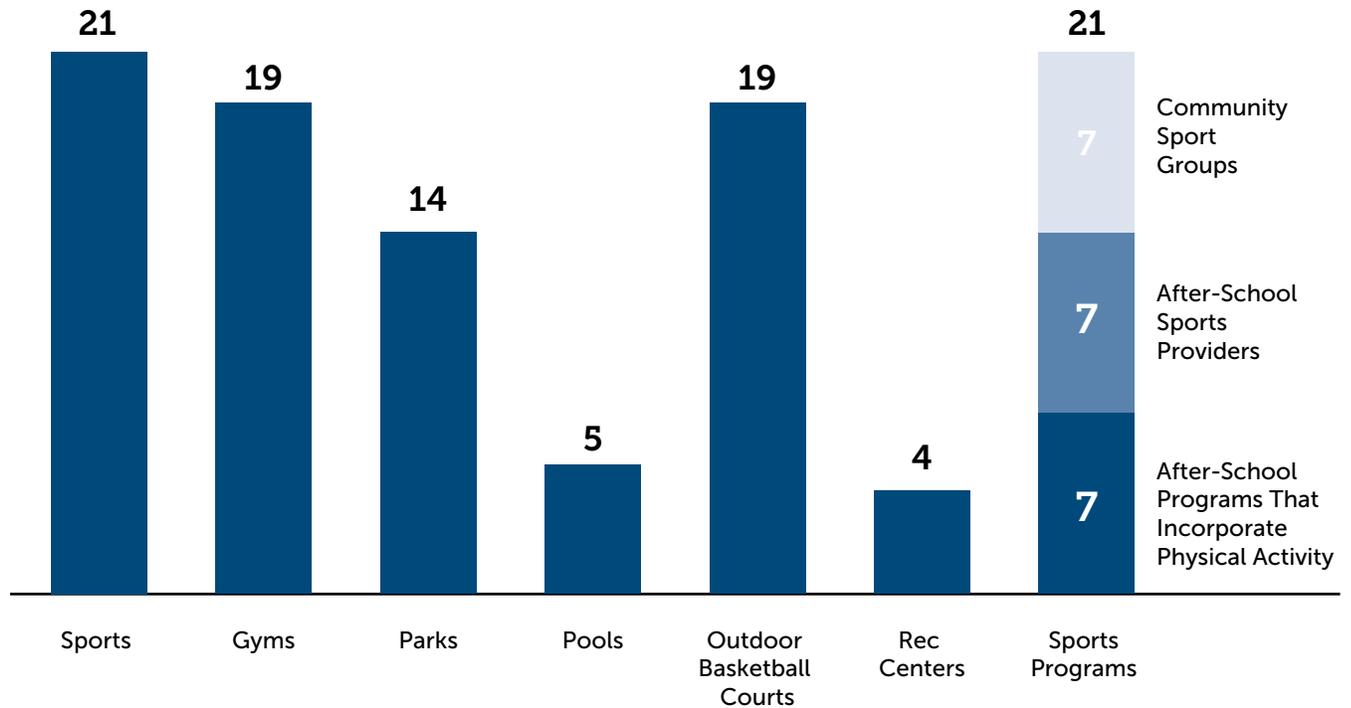
The need for positive sport activity is great in Baltimore City, where many youth face challenges.



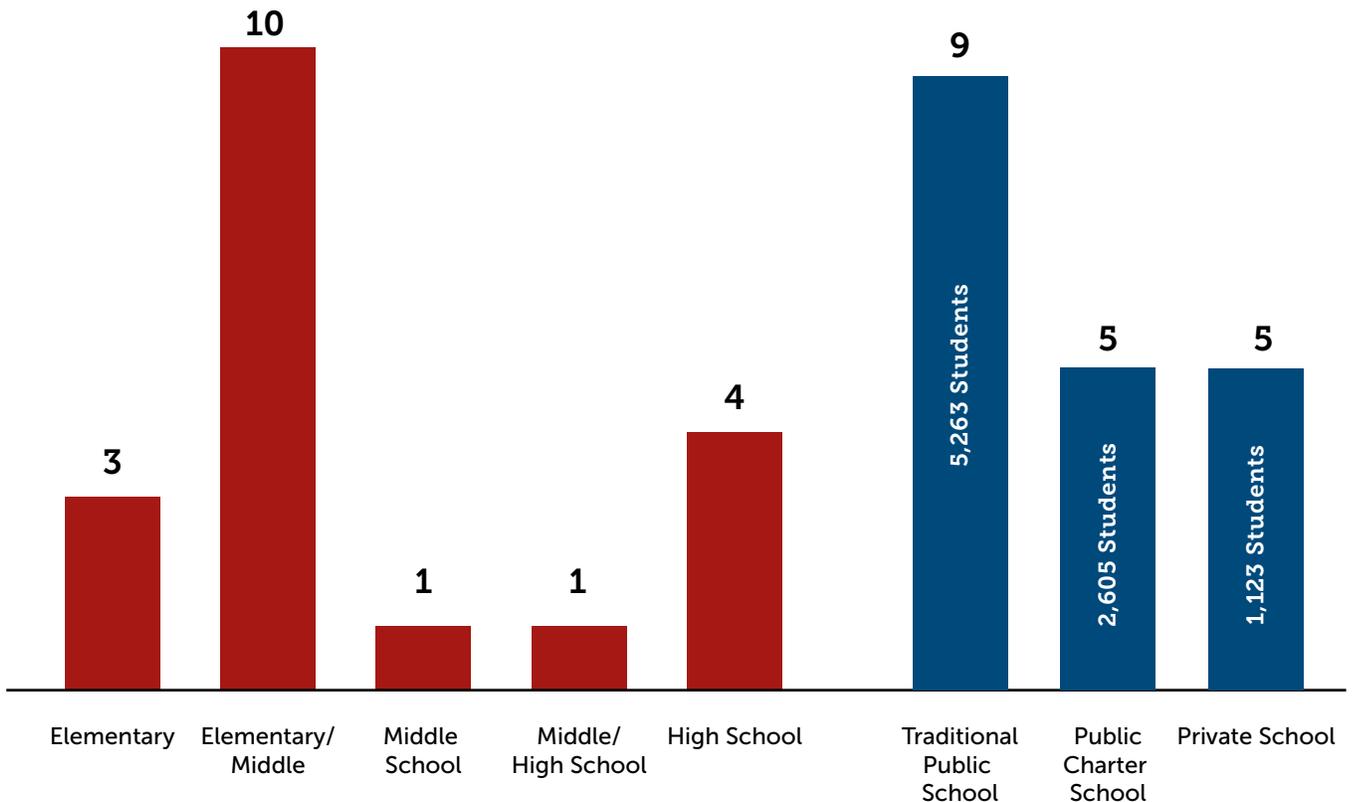
STUDY FOCUS AREA: EAST BALTIMORE

Specifically, a roughly two-square-mile area of East Baltimore

TOTAL NUMBER OF FACILITIES, SPORTS, AND PROGRAMS OFFERED



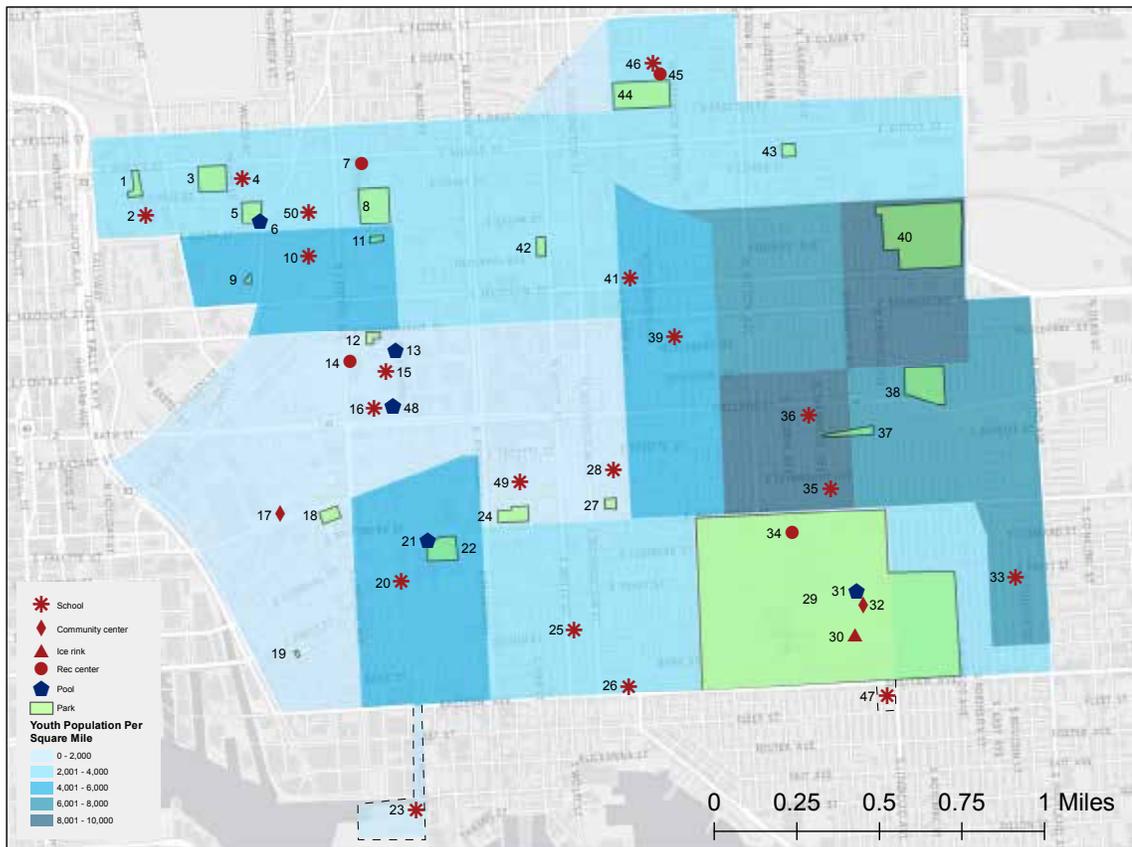
NUMBER OF SCHOOLS AND STUDENTS



SCOREBOARD

EAST BALTIMORE STUDY AREA

Key community assets and where youth live



Data sources: Open Data Baltimore, Baltimore Parks and Recreation, and US Census Bureau. Study area is the same as the Target Investment Zone, a strategic initiative led by Living Classrooms Foundation that aims to improve education, workforce and health outcomes for area citizens.

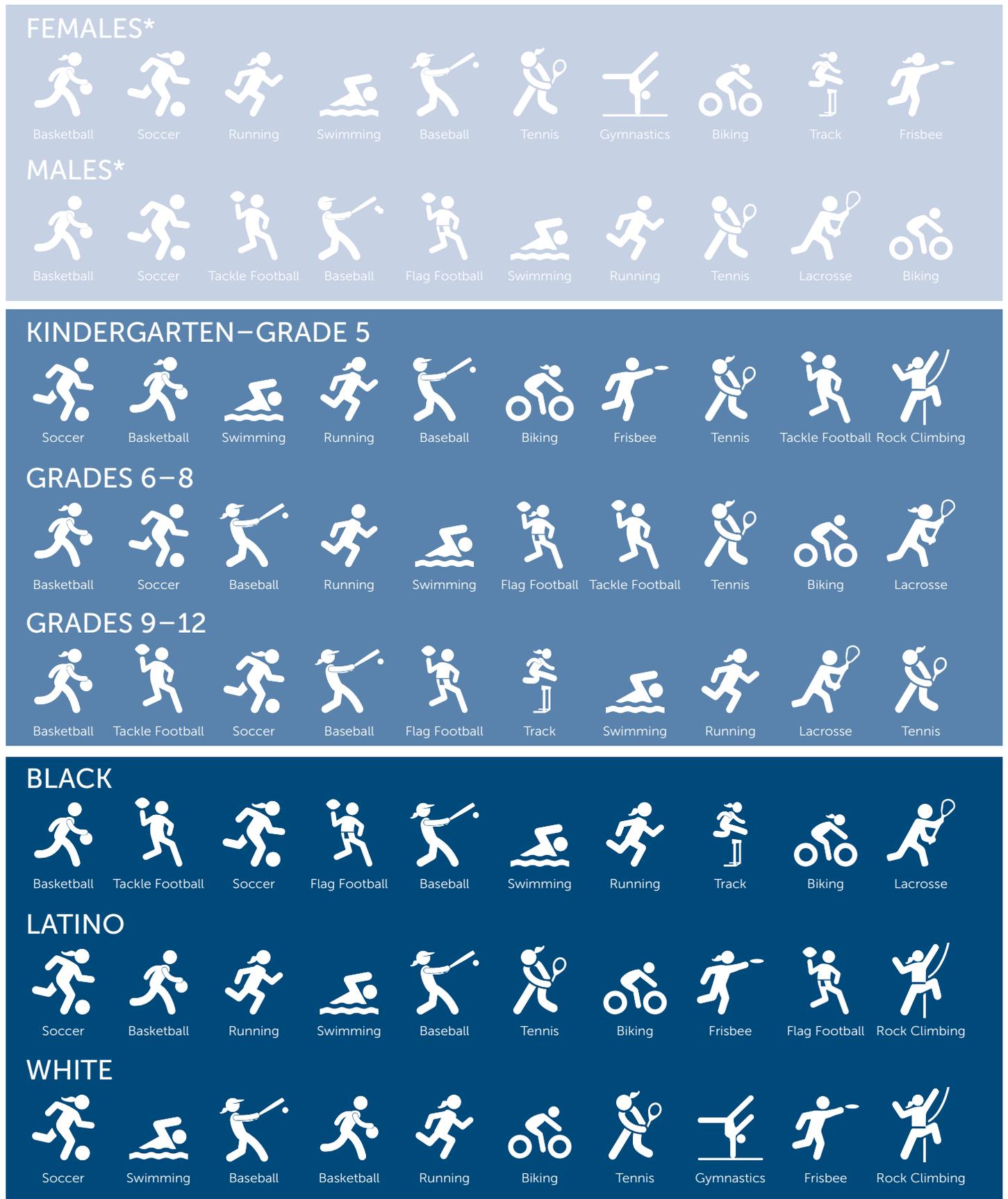
1	FORREST STREET PARK
2	ST. FRANCES ACADEMY HIGH SCHOOL
3	JOHNSTON SQUARE PARK
4	JOHNSTON SQUARE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
5	AMBROSE KENNEDY PARK
6	AMBROSE KENNEDY POOL
7	MADISON SQUARE REC CENTER
8	MADISON SQUARE PARK
9	PARK AT ENSOR & MCALEER CT
10	INSTITUTE OF NOTRE DAME
11	EDEN & EAGER PARK
12	CHICK WEBB PARK
13	CHICK WEBB POOL
14	CHICK WEBB REC CENTER
15	NATIONAL ACADEMY FOUNDATION
16	PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR HIGH SCHOOL
17	UA HOUSE AT FAYETTE
18	MCKIM PARK

19	SAINT LEO'S BOCCIE PARK
20	CITY SPRINGS ELEMENTARY/MIDDLE SCHOOL
21	CITY SPRINGS POOL
22	CITY SPRINGS PARK
23	THE CROSSROADS SCHOOL
24	THE BETTY HYATT COMMUNITY PARK
25	WOLFE STREET ACADEMY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
26	CRISTO REY JESUIT HIGH SCHOOL
27	CASTLE ST PARK
28	COMMODORE JOHN RODGERS ELEMENTARY/MIDDLE SCHOOL
29	PATTERSON PARK
30	MIMI DIPIETRO FAMILY SKATING CENTER
31	PATTERSON PARK POOL
32	PATTERSON PARK YOUTH SPORTS AND EDUCATION CENTER
33	HIGHLANDTOWN #215 ELEMENTARY/MIDDLE SCHOOL
34	VIRGINIA S. BAKER REC CENTER

35	PATTERSON PARK PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL
36	WILLIAM PACA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
37	BELNOR SQUARES PARK
38	ELLWOOD AVE PARK
39	TENCH TILGHMAN ELEMENTARY/MIDDLE SCHOOL
40	BOCEK PARK
41	HENDERSON-HOPKINS ELEMENTARY/MIDDLE SCHOOL
42	EAGER PARK
43	LUZERNE AVE PARK
44	COLLINGTON SQUARE PARK
45	COLLINGTON SQUARE REC CENTER
46	COLLINGTON SQUARE ELEMENTARY/MIDDLE SCHOOL
47	HAMPSTEAD HILL ACADEMY
48	DUNBAR HIGH SCHOOL POOL
49	KENNEDY KRIEGER SCHOOL
50	ST. JAMES & JOHN SCHOOL

TOP 10 SPORTS PLAYED IN STUDY AREA

Results from the Aspen Institute's survey of 1,884 students in eight schools when asked what sports they play, whether in or out of school



*Does not include the less than 2% of youth surveyed who answered "other/prefer not to answer" when asked about gender.

TOP 5 SPORTS YOUTH WANT TO TRY

From our survey of East Baltimore students

FEMALES



1. Gymnastics
2. Swimming
3. Track
4. Basketball
5. Rock climbing

MALES



1. Basketball
2. Baseball
3. Soccer
4. Tackle football
5. Parkour

K-GRADE 5



1. Gymnastics
2. Swimming
3. Ice hockey
4. Soccer
5. Basketball

GRADES 6-8



1. Swimming
2. Gymnastics
3. Basketball
4. Tennis
5. Rock climbing

GRADES 9-12



1. Basketball
2. Swimming
3. Track
4. Baseball
5. Soccer

BLACK



1. Basketball
2. Swimming
3. Track
4. Gymnastics
5. Baseball

LATINO



1. Swimming
2. Soccer
3. Basketball
4. Gymnastics
5. Ice hockey

WHITE



1. Gymnastics
2. Parkour
3. Lacrosse
4. Rock climbing
5. Basketball

When asked the question,

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

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

2017 State of Play Grade
East Baltimore:

D+

Report Methodology

Data on sport activity patterns of youth in East Baltimore were derived from student and school administrator surveys conducted by the Aspen Institute. During February and March 2017, a total of 1,884 youth from kindergarten to grade 12 across eight public and private schools completed a paper-based survey about their interest and participation in sports. Administrators at eight schools completed an online survey about their sport offerings, participation, facilities, and coaching. The surveys allowed us to understand the current landscape of youth sports in our focus area.

Other insights in this report were developed by Aspen's research team over the course of six months in late 2016 and mid-2017. Researchers conducted group and individual interviews, hosted focus groups with school administrators, toured recreation facilities and outdoor play spaces, hosted a community night to capture thoughts from leaders, conducted a literature search, and created an inventory of community programs and facilities, among other efforts. Throughout the report, "sport" refers to all forms of physical activity which, through organized or casual play, aim to express or improve physical fitness and mental well-being.



THE 8 PLAYS

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

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

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

Challenge: Youth sport is organized by adults
1 | THE PLAY: ASK KIDS WHAT THEY WANT

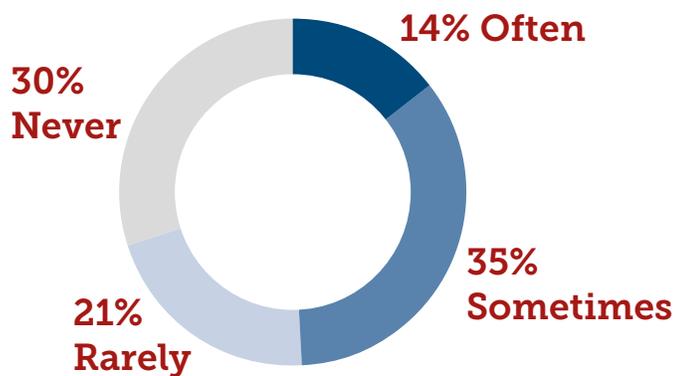
From the *Sport for All, Play for Life* report:

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

Five findings in East Baltimore:

- Youth have minimal input into the design of programs.** In our survey of youth in eight schools, respondents said that the adults leading sports practices or physical education classes rarely ask them about activities they want to engage in. An officer at a Baltimore grantmaking foundation told us he encourages community program leaders to conduct youth surveys and use that information to refine programs and demonstrate impact. But such surveys are rarely done, due in part to the limited capacity of many programs. “The funding landscape makes incorporating youth voice challenging, as funders build expectations for program design without providing the support for organizations to incorporate youth voice in design,” said Casey Thomas, director of Soccer Without Borders, which does make such efforts. Another bright spot: In 2014, as part of a Baltimore City Recreation and Parks (BCRP) review of its services, 23 youth were convened to discuss their views on BCRP recreation programs and services. But systematic efforts to solicit youth insights are not common.
- School district administrators collect data on the interests and abilities of students through Title IX requirements.** The federal government requires a biennial survey of participation rates, student interests, and other data that show whether schools are providing equitable athletic programs for their male and female students in grades nine through 12. Baltimore City Public Schools athletic coordinator Tiffany Byrd says the district has used the data to introduce new sports, such as competitive badminton in schools where girls have demonstrated an interest and the ability to participate. The most recent results available are from 2013-14, which show that 42 percent of athletes at Dunbar High School and 48 percent of athletes at National Academy Foundation (NAF), are female. In the city of Baltimore, 44.3 percent of athletics opportunities went to females, who comprised 49.3 percent of all students.
- There's strong interest in two sports not widely offered—swimming and gymnastics.** Only five of the 23 pools in Baltimore City are located in the geographic area that is the focus of this report, yet swimming was identified in our survey of K-12 students as the sport they would most like to try (23 percent overall; 18 percent for boys, 27 percent for girls). Among girls, the only sport that fared higher was gymnastics (32 percent). Members of our task force speculated that desire to try those sports may have been inspired by Olympic successes—the accomplishments of Baltimore hero Michael Phelps and Simone Manuel, who in 2016 became the first African American woman to win gold in swimming, as well as the diverse USA women's gymnastics team, led by African American stars Simone Biles and Gabby Douglas. Task force member Dionne Koller noted the opportunity around gymnastics, with tumbling as a relatively low-cost entry option, saying, “It is not necessary to have a facility that would immediately support a competitive program. Much can be accomplished with mats and basic equipment that would support foundational skill building.”

FIG. 1 | HOW OFTEN DOES A COACH OR PE TEACHER ASK WHAT YOU WANT TO DO IN CLASS OR IN PRACTICE?



- **Youth say the main reason they want to play sports is to be with friends.** This is by far their driving motivation, regardless of gender. After that, they like the feeling of “winning” that sports provide, though boys were more motivated in that way than girls, who prioritized the benefits of exercise. The prospect of getting better at a sport also rates highly among the answer options. The findings from youth in East Baltimore generally align with those produced in national studies that found that youth see sports primarily as a venue for social engagement and personal challenge or development. Eboni Preston-Laurent, senior manager of diversity at US Lacrosse, told us that local organizations could do more to understand the desires of kids. “I’m not sure kids are being asked what they want,” she said. “The programming is based on the desires of coaches and program leaders who sometimes lack the ability to be kids centered.”

- **Youth say the biggest barrier to playing sports is the demands of homework.** More than four out of 10 youth told us in the survey that they don’t participate more often because they “don’t have time to play due to schoolwork.” Some programs recognize this dilemma and supplement their programs with an academic component, such as tutoring or homework help. Among them: before- and after-school provider Fitness Fun & Games, which offers homework support and introduces a variety of sports to students at three schools in our focus area (Hampstead Hill Academy, Henderson-Hopkins, and Patterson Park Public Charter School). Another challenge that emerged from our survey was family responsibilities. Said Dana Johnson, athletic director at Dunbar High School, “It’s hard to get girls dedicated to a sport because there’s so much pulling at them. We have so many kids who have to work to pay bills. Many have to get younger siblings from school.” Our survey also shows that one in five boys feel the pressure of family responsibilities.

FIG. 2 | WHAT KIDS LIKE MOST ABOUT SPORTS

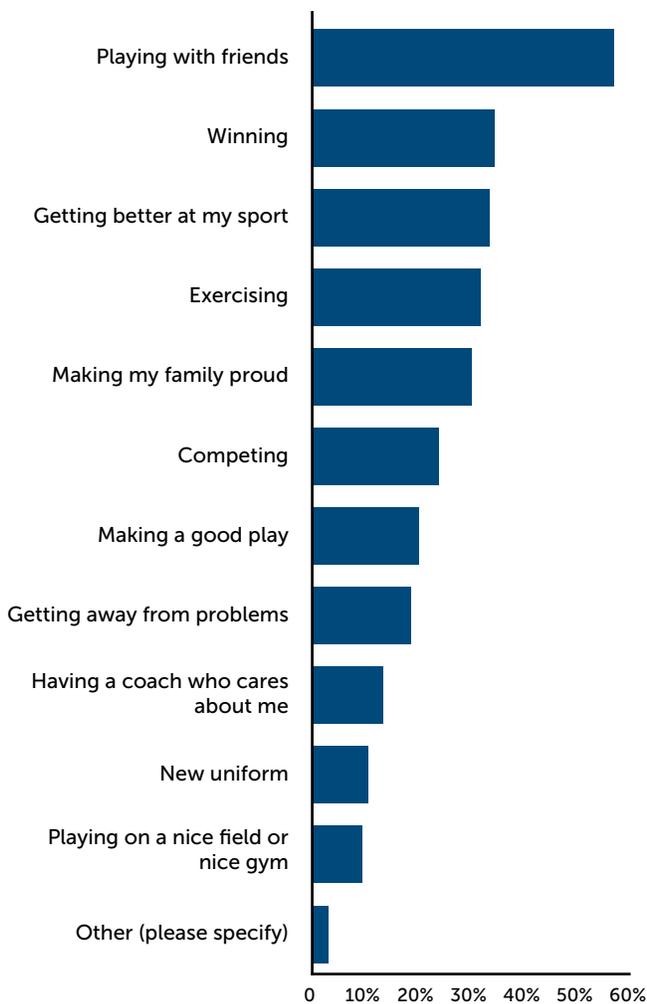
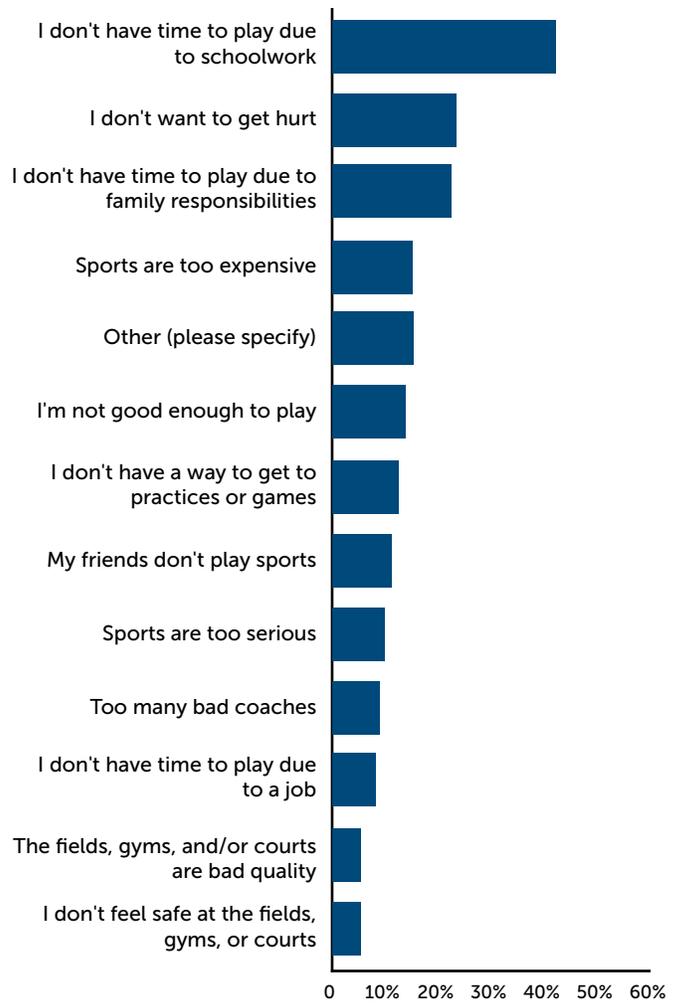


FIG. 3 | WHY KIDS SAY THEY DON'T PLAY



Challenge: Overstructured experiences

2 | THE PLAY: REINTRODUCE FREE PLAY

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

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

Five findings in East Baltimore:

- **Concerns over personal safety inhibit informal play.** Only 64 percent of students in our area survey said there’s a safe place to play in their neighborhood, with girls slightly more concerned than boys. Their fears are not unfounded: In 2014, more than 300 violent crimes were committed in the neighborhoods of Johnston Square, Jonestown, Butcher’s Hill, Little Italy, Patterson Park, McElderry, and Middle East. In 2017, Baltimore experienced more than 100 homicides before the end of April for the first time since 1998.¹ For many parents, even those who appreciate the hazards of physical inactivity, it can be seen as more prudent to keep their kids in the home—even when safe enrichment opportunities are just a few blocks away. “The barriers to walking that we hear all the time is safety,” said Chas Ackley, director of the UA House at Fayette. “Families that live in Perkin Homes often don’t allow their kids to walk to the UA House because of the uncertainty of the walk.”
- **Financial considerations limit access to public spaces.** Patterson Park is a community gem—an open, invigorating place to run, play tennis, swim and ice skate. But, consistent with the trend around the country, priority on field space goes to organizations who pay fees. Programs run by rec-and-park programs get first dibs, followed by nonprofits that serve youth, then for-profits that serve youth and adults. Permits go fast, limiting opportunities for kids to create spontaneous games with friends. Community centers, which can cost \$300,000 a year to run, are also being encouraged to develop revenue streams to better support their operations²—whether from fees generated from travel teams, birthday parties, or partnerships with outside providers in emerging sports such as lacrosse. “As an organization, we have to pay for space to hold free, safe play,” said one nonprofit sport provider representative. Still, mindful of the rec and parks division’s stated role in fostering community health and social equity, most centers keep the gym open for free community use two hours a day.
- **Recess is being outsourced through promising models.** There is no mandate from the school district or state that requires elementary or middle schools to have recess, which can be a great venue to introduce all children, regardless of ability, to sports and physical activities. Still, at the elementary and middle school level, most schools try to provide some form of recess for 20 to 45 minutes every day, even if it’s attached to the lunch period. Playworks Maryland, the local affiliate to a national nonprofit that has grown significantly in recent years, manages recess for three schools (City Springs Elementary/Middle, Patterson Park Public Charter, Commodore John Rodgers Elementary/Middle) in our focus area, helping to get kids active during those breaks. Lines are drawn, a variety of student-led games are organized, and staff intervene in disputes.³ One Project Play: Baltimore task force member, Jessica Gappa of T. Rowe Price, wonders whether recess could be introduced in high schools: “Look at workforce trends. People are trying to integrate movement into the office work space. Did we forget about it for the kids?”
- **Weather and maintenance concerns impose barriers to facility usage.** Said one recreation center director, “The middle school that we share the gym with never cleans the gym before we enter. This makes it impossible for us to maintain a clean and presentable gym.” Another example: The Dome at Madison Square is one of the inspiring spaces on the East Side, a refurbished outdoor basketball court with glass backboards, protected by a roof. It’s off limits to the community outside of the spring and summer—and requires a permit for league or individual play. The desire to preserve and protect the shiniest recreational assets in the community impacts the smallest children. In 2007, the Ravens donated \$100,000 and the time of their players to build in one day a gleaming playground, designed by kids, at Collington Square Elementary/Middle School. It’s the site of smiles, but only during the hours when monitored by adults. It’s locked up by the school during nonschool hours.

- **(Some) technology is taking play to kids.** With a presence in 13 schools in our geographic focus area, GoNoodle tries to meet kids where they are most of the day: in classrooms and living rooms. The digital platform offers mobile games, interactive videos and kid-friendly entertainment that allow teachers to introduce in-room physical activity “brain energizers.” Through September 2016, 156 teachers had introduced 3,459 of these breaks and 211,648 minutes of student activity, according to GoNoodle CEO Scott McQuig. Youth are also encouraged to access the games at home, where they can choose from a wide variety of content designed to turn screen time into active time, from videos led by cartoon figures to dance parties led by teenagers, all of which support the development of physical literacy. McQuig said that in the next phase of growth, he wants to work with sport governing bodies, developing videos that introduce kids to sport-specific skills—and potentially related programs in a community.



2017 State of Play Grade
East Baltimore:

D+



YOUTH VOICE

Nina Locklear, 11

Nina is a people person with wisdom well beyond her years as a fifth-grader at City Springs Elementary School. She questions why boys at the UA House, a community rec center built by Under Armour that she often visits, don't play football and basketball after school despite wanting to grow up and become football and basketball players.

“I’m like ... ‘why don’t you try the sport and that can actually help you get to where you want to go to make you successful?’” Nina said.

If this sounds like coach-speak, well, it is. Nina is a coach. She’s part of a junior coaching program at her school for kids to motivate kids academically and athletically.

The program is run by Playworks Maryland, a national nonprofit that manages recess for three schools in our focus area. Playworks helps teach kids to run their own games at recess and settle disputes quickly—rock-paper-scissors is the problem solver—while teaching no bullying and working cooperatively.

“Other girls don’t really like to play sports,” said Nina, wearing a Baltimore Orioles jersey on the day her class took a field trip to Camden Yards for a baseball game. “They just do their nails, do makeup, put on some pretty clothes. I’m not that type of girl.”

Nina said very few children play outside in her Perkins Homes neighborhood and she usually stays inside because “you’ve got violence and stuff.” Nina’s father never imagined she would like sports.

But since Nina started watching basketball on TV with her dad, she’s curious about joining a basketball team. She hasn’t joined a basketball team yet because she wants to improve her jump shot and not embarrass herself or her team.

“I might join at my middle school next year,” said Nina, who, unconventionally, managed to become a coach before playing in team sports.

Challenge: Sameness and specialization

3 | THE PLAY: ENCOURAGE SPORT SAMPLING

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

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

Five findings in East Baltimore:

- **Swimming has emerged as a promising, triple-threat model addressing teen needs.** “The goal for us is to give all children access to learn to swim,” said Darryl Sutton, aquatics director for Baltimore City Recreation and Parks. BCRP offers swim lessons through its Learn to Swim program at Chick Webb and Callowhill recreation centers. As identified in our survey, one in five students say they want to try swimming. Currently, only one swim club exists in Baltimore City. BCRP aims to develop teams representing every rec center—even if it lacks a pool—aided by transportation solutions. Once a kid can swim, an array of water-based sports can open up—from triathlon to rowing. Swimming also creates youth jobs. “I help them become lifeguards,” said Nikki Cobbs, aquatics director for Chick Webb and swim coach at Dunbar High School. Over the past two years, she’s given summer jobs to 10 girls. Other students of hers become pool operators.
- **Grassroots providers are innovating to introduce new sports.** Founded in Baltimore in 2013, NEWfit Kids contracts with elementary and middle schools that lack the staff or expertise to program sports teams. “Athletic deserts” is what Kevin Anderson, CEO of NEWfit and a former East Baltimore PE teacher, calls those schools. He started with basketball, where no more than a quarter of the 137 middle schools have access to the school-based leagues. Later, he introduced baseball, which Aspen’s student survey found there’s some demand for despite a lack of city fields. He soon discovered a problem: “Our kids don’t know how to play baseball. They’d hit the ball and run to second base. So we thought, let’s introduce the kids to (coed) kickball in grades three to five, to get the fundamentals of the game. Now, they just have to learn to bat and catch.” This year, for the first time, NEWfit introduced girls softball.
- **Area high schools do a lot with little.** Dana Johnson became Dunbar’s athletic director in 2011. Since then, she has added junior varsity badminton and volleyball, wrestling, boys and girls soccer, girls lacrosse, and girls indoor and outdoor track. “My goal was to add more activities for young ladies, to get them into athletics, because I’m a product of athletics,” said Johnson. She does this with a budget of just \$8,000, which covers uniforms, equipment, and first aid; the district picks up transportation, officials, and

other costs. Johnson is always looking to add sports. For the 2016-17 school year, Dunbar had 20 students in competitive badminton, varsity and junior varsity combined. “It’s good for girls who are not athletic—there’s not a whole lot of sweating and running,” she said. Now, Dunbar is seen around the city as having one of the more robust athletic programs. NAF has a more modest high school sports program but wants to add soccer for boys and girls and a coed tennis team. It has held off on doing so because the school has been told it would have to cover the cost of coaches and other expenses that the district office normally handles.

- **Contributions from pro and elite sports organizations are helpful, if sporadic.** The Baltimore Ravens and Baltimore Orioles have foundations that provide grants. In 2016, the Ravens Play 60 Grant supported two programs (Charm City Lacrosse and Friends of Patterson Park) in our focus area. Also, the Ravens donated \$1 million to the UA House project for a new community center. The Washington Capitals partner with BCRP to teach local youth how to play street hockey through an annual tournament. Stakeholders we spoke with want more of those clinics led by pro franchises and/or less-visible national governing bodies that are looking to grow their pipeline. “Handball,” suggests Devon Brown, northeast area manager with BCRP. Stakeholders also want more policy leadership from national sport bodies, to avoid contributing to trends such as early sport specialization.
- **Baltimore has invested deeply in cycling infrastructure—for young professionals.** In 2016, the city of Baltimore spent nearly \$7 million on downtown cycling infrastructure to entice young professionals to live there and ride a bike to work and other places. Seven bike stations are in our focus area, most in Patterson Park, with one near Dunbar High School. Opportunities to extend bike culture to more lower-income neighborhoods exist. Despite the lack of infrastructure such as a BMX track or skate park in our focus area for youth to ride safely, 11 percent of students from our survey said they want to try biking (see Appendix B).

2017 State of Play Grade
East Baltimore:

C-

FIG. 4 | SPORTS OFFERED IN SCHOOLS VS. SPORTS DESIRED BY PRINCIPALS

BOYS SPORTS OFFERED	BOYS SPORTS DESIRED	GIRLS SPORTS OFFERED	GIRLS SPORTS DESIRED
CRISTO REY JESUIT HS			
Basketball, Cheer/Dance (Step Team), Lacrosse, Soccer, Club Rugby	None	Basketball, Cheer/Dance (Step Team), Soccer, Softball	None
THE CROSSROADS SCHOOL			
Basketball, Cheer/Dance, Flag Football, Lacrosse, Track and Field	Baseball, Cheer/Dance, Fencing, Tennis, Wrestling	Basketball, Cheer/Dance, Flag Football, Lacrosse, Soccer, Track and Field, Volleyball	Cheer/Dance, Fencing, Gymnastics, Softball, Swimming, Tennis
JOHNSTON SQUARE ES			
Baseball, Flag Football	Baseball	None	Baseball, Basketball
HAMPSTEAD HILL ACADEMY			
Baseball, Basketball, Cheer/Dance, Flag Football, Soccer, Tennis	Lacrosse, Track and Field, Swimming, Volleyball	Baseball, Basketball, Cheer/Dance, Flag Football, Soccer, Tennis	Cheer/Dance, Lacrosse, Swimming, Volleyball, Track and Field
PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR HS			
Baseball, Basketball, Cheer/Dance, Cross Country, Football, Indoor Track, Lacrosse, Soccer, Swimming, Tennis, Track and Field, Wrestling	None	Badminton, Basketball, Cheer/Dance, Cross Country, Indoor Track, Lacrosse, Soccer, Softball, Swimming, Tennis, Track and Field, Volleyball	None
NATIONAL ACADEMY FOUNDATION (HS OFFERINGS)			
Baseball, Basketball, Cross Country, Football, Indoor Track, Lacrosse, Swimming, Track and Field, Wrestling	Fencing, Golf, Soccer, Tennis	Basketball, Cheer/Dance, Cross Country, Indoor Track, Softball, Swimming, Track and Field, Volleyball	Fencing, Golf, Tennis, Lacrosse
WOLFE STREET ACADEMY			
Baseball, Basketball, Soccer,	None	Baseball, Basketball, Soccer, Running	None
TENCH TILGHMAN ES/MS			
Basketball, Flag Football	Badminton, Baseball, Gymnastics, Soccer, Swimming, Tennis	Cheer/Dance	Basketball, Soccer, Softball



YOUTH VOICE

Keney Davis, 16

By her own admission, Keney, a sophomore at Dunbar High School, said she can have a “pretty bad attitude and temper.” She was kicked off the tennis team as a freshman for fighting and has battled teachers.

The anger resurfaced during a soccer game last fall when an opposing player repeatedly pushed her and Dunbar’s goalie, according to Keney. She said she “blanked out,” hollered at the referee, and was prepared to fight. Keney got a red card and was banned from soccer for the season.

“I was wrong. ... I’m not really good at talking,” she said. “So it was as if somebody said something to me I didn’t like, I was fighting.”

Several months after the incident, school administrators and coaches are impressed at how she’s maturing. Swimming may have helped.

Keney’s favorite sport is lacrosse. She also likes badminton, enjoying the unity of playing doubles and the nuance of understanding a partner’s strengths and weaknesses. But she had never swum in her life and was afraid of drowning.

Nikki Cobbs, Dunbar’s swimming, soccer, and badminton coach, convinced Keney to try swimming since her grades and attitude usually improve while playing sports. One added bonus: Keney was hired as a summer pool attendant for Cobbs, who oversees aquatics at Chick Webb recreation center.

Coaches patiently asked Keney to trust them with her life. She eventually conquered her fears. At the city championship, Keney finished second in a 50-meter freestyle heat. Now one of Keney’s friends wants to try swimming.

“You never really hear (of) kids swimming,” Keney said. “It’s just different. People are scared of different.”

Keney embraced different. She dove into a sport where safety depends on staying calm—a characteristic that may help her in life.

Challenge: Rising costs and commitment

4 | THE PLAY: REVITALIZE IN-TOWN LEAGUES

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

It's been a setting where kids of all skill levels and backgrounds play at the same local field or gym, rarely roaming beyond the town borders. But today, house leagues can be stigmatized as inferior, a casualty of tryout-based, early-forming travel teams that cater to the "best" child athletes. ... Revitalizing recreational leagues depends on improving both the quality of the offering and the quantity of available kids. Parents with means must be given a reason not to flee early for travel teams, through programming that develops their child's skills and provides opportunities for advancement, with fewer impacts on family time. Sport providers need to develop business models that wring less money out of more participants. And organizers must look in new places to grow the pool of players.

Five findings in East Baltimore:

- **Basketball provides the most options, at least for boys.** BCRP runs the Baltimore Neighborhood Basketball League, for kids and teens ages five to 19, including a coed 11-and-under division. The cost is relatively low, \$200 for a team, and games are played at various sites in the city—Chick Webb Recreation Center is one site. In 2014, the B'More Night Hoops Basketball League was added for ages 15 to 17. The Baltimore Elementary and Middle School Basketball League is school based and is privately funded. It offers middle school boys and girls, elementary coed and girls, and under-third-grade divisions. Said Baltimore City Councilman Brandon Scott, "Basketball is the one thing we have a lot of. But we need to keep pushing on the gender balance." There are no female-only leagues.
- **Baltimore has pioneered a national model to make room for all kids.** Even with the above basketball options, the options are limited for children who harbor no ambitions of a college athletic scholarship. Enter Volo City, formerly known as Baltimore Social, which taps adults' interest in social sports leagues to provide the resources to deliver recreational sports opportunities at no cost for kids. The adult leagues provide a space for young professionals to network and meet other professionals, all while playing a sport. Turns out kids aren't the only ones who play sports mostly to be with and develop friends. Volo City's genius has been to marry that with volunteerism, as participants are asked to organize leagues for Baltimore kids. More than 800 kids signed up for leagues this year, up from 100 two years ago.
- **Soccer holds strong potential for growth.** Soccer is one of four sports offered by the Parks & People Foundation, which is based in West Baltimore but is one of the largest providers of youth programming on the east side.⁴ It serves 500 kids through soccer, with programs run mostly out of middle schools. The US Soccer Foundation partners with the Family League of Baltimore to operate the Soccer for Success program, a free after-school program that provides supper, academic assistance, and teaching in the fundamentals of soccer. The program is offered in the spring and summer through 10 recreation centers in the city, one of which, Virginia S. Baker, is in our focus area. And there's additional demand for the sport. While 30 percent of students in our school survey told us they're playing the sport, another 19 percent want to try it. The opportunity is there for local organizations to deliver: Soccer can be affordable, attractive to many immigrant populations, and lends itself to coed play, which in turn fosters the creation of more teams and in-town leagues. The sport can also be played in small spaces, which is good because there's a shortage of long fields in our area of focus. Indeed, small-sided soccer is increasingly seen as developmentally appropriate for kids, as it promotes touches on the ball, and skill improvement and minimizes the use of headers.
- **Equipment exchanges are working.** Based in Silver Spring, Leveling the Playing Field (LPF) is a nonprofit created in 2011 by a former college equipment manager, Max Levitt, who wanted to do something constructive with all of the equipment that gets thrown away each year by families and youth sports organizations with means. He recognized the need in cities like Baltimore, where cost can be a barrier to playing sports and equipment is no small part of that equation. In 2016, LPF supported 64 programs (36 schools and 28 youth programs) across Baltimore with \$250,000 of donated equipment, which in turn can reduce the cost of registration fees. About \$37,000 of that went to entities in our focus area—five schools and five programs. As one of our task force members noted, "Sports don't have to be expensive. We make them that way. We should be innovating in ways that make sport less expensive, safer, and I think Baltimore provides an opportunity for that." LPF is proving to be an asset.

- **Intramural competition is a rarity.** The school-based analog to in-town leagues are intramurals, classmates on site in low-cost, loosely supervised games that make room for all students, regardless of ability. Few schools offer as much. Structural barriers make it difficult, with the smaller size of some schools and the move to “school choice” after the elementary school level, in which children come from all over the city, making it difficult for many to walk home. Finding dedicated coaches or supervisors can present a challenge. Finally, cultural expectations around school-based sports also challenge their reintroduction, as interscholastic sports are seen as a tool of school pride and an avenue to chase a college scholarship. Intramurals also require creative use of available field, gym, and other spaces. All in all, schools are reluctant to shift resources toward intramurals, even if they engage more kids.



2017 State of Play Grade
East Baltimore:

C-



Lily Agueda, 13

Ideally, Lily, a seventh-grader at Hampstead Hill Academy, would not be the only girl on her coed basketball team. Not enough middle-school girls are interested to create girls-only teams. Only five girls tried out for the coed basketball team.

“It’s mainly that more girls aren’t interested, because I know from my school there aren’t many girls that want to play any sports,” Lily said. “But sometimes I feel like the important people who can make the leagues happen, they don’t actually think about what girls really want to do. They think about how to improve leagues, but not for any specific gender.”

So Lily speaks out. She tells teachers, her principal, vice principal, and parents of friends with businesses that they can help create an all-girls team.

A girls basketball team exists in Lily’s area for fourth- and fifth-graders, but not for middle-school players. Lily said that she would like to play other girls her age that also enjoy a less competitive league.

Lily finds that a huge difference exists between playing with boys versus girls. Boys tend to focus on whether they win or lose, she said. Lily is less concerned about who won and gains satisfaction if she plays well.

To Lily, the joy of basketball revolves around finding friends to shoot hoops with at their own pace.

Lily lives across the street from Patterson Park and near a basketball court, where she often plays with friends. Yes, she said, there have been incidents around her neighborhood. But that doesn’t stop her from playing the game she loves.

“I like it when I can just be myself and make up my own rules,” she said. “It’s not like I’ve ever had a bad time playing basketball.”

But just the same, she wishes more girls would join her.

Challenge: Not enough places to play

5 | THE PLAY: THINK SMALL

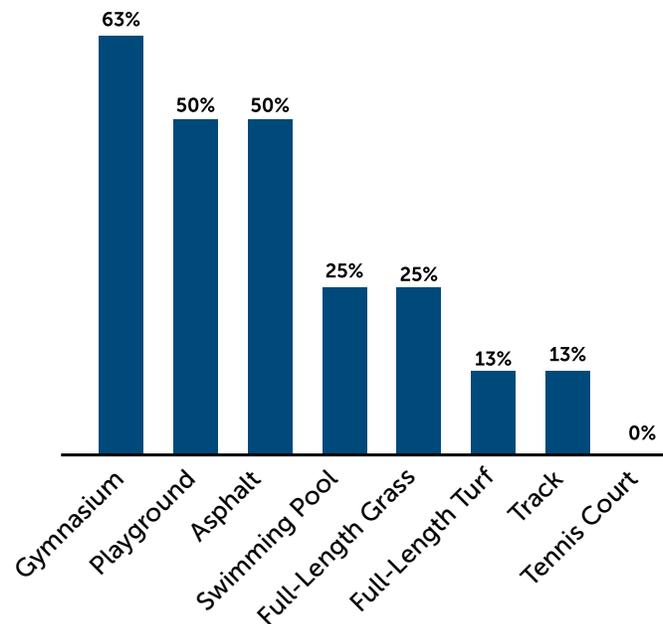
From the *Sport for All, Play for Life* report:

Growing access to play spaces for most children starts with the small—simple, smart moves that hold great promise. In urban areas, this may mean finding small spaces to develop quarter-sized courts for small-sided play. ... When schools agree to share their playing fields and facilities, it gives families and kids, especially those in underserved communities, more places to play in the evenings, on weekends, and during summer. ... Transportation to parks and school sites is vital, especially in predominantly African American and Hispanic neighborhoods, which often have fewer nearby recreation facilities than other areas. That's significant, because people living within a mile of a park are four times more likely to use it than those who live farther away. Funding enables, but so do small gestures of other types of support. Which is another way of saying: be creative.

Five findings in East Baltimore:

- **Baltimore's defining struggle continues to be the loss of two-thirds of its rec centers.** In the 1980s, more than 130 community centers dotted neighborhoods across the city.⁵ They provided safe, nearby places that children could walk to after school and be introduced to sports under the supervision of adults. Many were shut down as the local economy sputtered and families began to leave the city. Today, only 42 rec centers remain—just four of them in the East Baltimore area of focus for Project Play: Baltimore (Chick Webb, Collington Square, Madison Square, and Virginia S. Baker). Baker and Chick Webb are the most highly rated facilities, among the top six in the city.⁶ As important, Chick Webb serves one of the most challenged neighborhoods, with 51 percent of nearby residents living below the poverty line. Fewer than three in 10 youth in our geographic area of focus say they play sports at a rec center. The opening of the UA House at Fayette in 2016 and BCRP's plan to renovate Chick Webb and Madison Square and expand Baker Rec Center will improve the offering of quality play spaces (see Appendix A).
- **Still, the city has a relative abundance of potential places to play.** Due to Baltimore's original urban plan, a full 99 percent of residents live within a half mile of a park or one mile of a recreational facility.⁷ In Maryland, only Montgomery County offers its citizens greater nearby access to a local or state park, gym, dance center, YMCA, pool, or other facility, whether public or commercial. Our geographic area of focus in East Baltimore is the site of 14 community parks, 22 sport fields, 19 outdoor basketball courts, 19 gyms, and one ice rink. What those numbers do not address is the viability of those spaces. Many suffer from lack of maintenance. While city spending on public safety has doubled since the late 1980s to more than \$500 million a year, the budget for Recreation and Parks has remained stagnant, at just over \$30 million.⁸ In East Baltimore, it's not hard to find basketball courts, asphalt spaces, or green spaces that technically can be played on but are run down or unsafe. The neighborhood in greatest need of park space is around Tench Tilghman Elementary/Middle School, according to the Trust for Public Land.⁹

FIG. 5 | PLAY SPACES AVAILABLE AT SCHOOLS

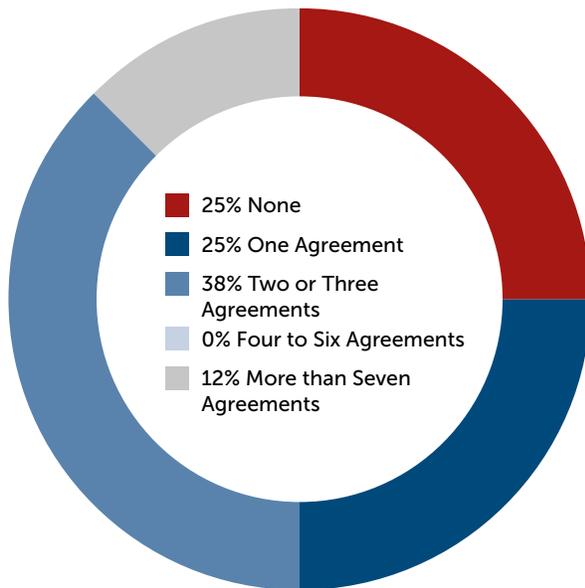


- **Mobile Recreation Units are a hit.** One innovative way that Baltimore Recreation and Parks has eliminated transportation barriers is by bringing the fun to kids, rather than the other way around. Mobile Recreation Units are like food trucks, only with sports equipment as the draw. They go into neighborhoods, bringing pop-up basketball courts, hula hoops, jump rope, balls, and board games. City officials block off the street in two and four-hour intervals, and a mini-sports festival emerges. “They say kids and cops don’t mix,” said a Recreation and Parks official. “I have photos (showing otherwise).” If a kid is enjoying a new sport or activity, a recreation staffer may hand them a flyer, connecting them with a community center where they can take the next step and sign up for a program.

- **Shared Use Agreements are an underutilized opportunity.**

Our survey of school administrators found that 25 percent of schools in the area do not have in place any Shared Use Agreement (SUA), a legal instrument that helps nonprofits and other organizations gain access to school facilities after hours. More than half of the schools have no more than one such agreement in place. It's easy for schools to not open their doors after the school day, due to concerns about wear and tear and vandalism, and energy costs of keeping spaces lit. But SUAs are recognized by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as a key opportunity for communities to leverage existing assets. It can be done. Dunbar has more than seven SUAs in place. And, as the city's 21st Century Schools initiative moves forward, it will be done: It's required of schools that will be renovated, including Commodore John Rodgers Elementary/Middle School.¹⁰

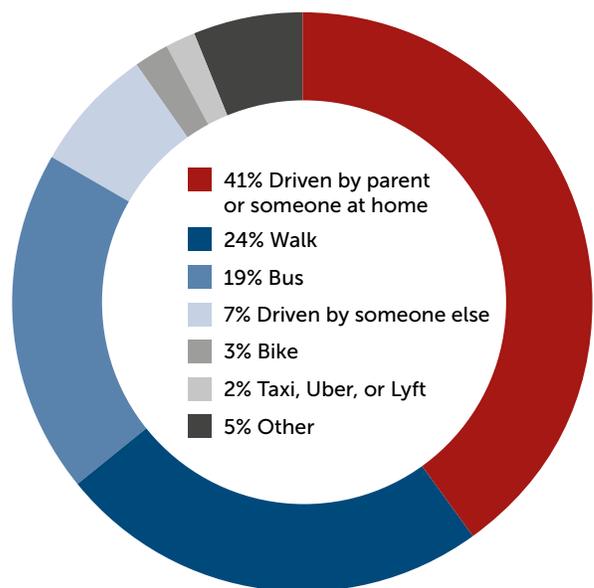
FIG. 6 | SHARED-USE AGREEMENTS WITH OUTSIDE ORGANIZATIONS



- **Transportation challenges limit use of available spaces.**

In 2015, a local coalition surveyed 60 Baltimore schools, finding that 49 of them identified transportation to and from after-school activities as a barrier to providing more sports opportunities.¹¹ Recreation and Parks only has four vans that can be requested for use by providers. The city bus system is not always a viable option for kids to get around. That includes the Charm City Circulator, which is free, but its routes do not go to parks or play spaces. “Baltimore is not like DC or New York where you can go east-west, north-south,” said Sue Elias, executive vice president at Parks & People. Nor is Baltimore like New Haven, Conn., where the schools transport kids to after-school programs at other sites. “Everybody is just doing their own thing,” Elias said. “Nothing is coordinated.” Half of all kids surveyed told us they hail rides with family members or others (see Appendix B).

FIG. 7 | HOW YOUTH GET TO PRACTICES AND GAMES



Challenge: Too much, too soon

6 | THE PLAY: DESIGN FOR DEVELOPMENT

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

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

Five findings in East Baltimore:

- **Physical education isn't provided much.** National studies have shown that the more youth take physical education (PE), the more likely they are to get involved in sports and stay active into adulthood. It's a primary site to teach fundamental movement skills, and studies have shown that active kids do better in school. State law recognizes the benefits, but doesn't require much in the way of PE—just one day a week between kindergarten and eighth grade, and only a 0.5 credit in order to graduate high school.¹² The Maryland Association of Boards of Education lobbied against mandating more PE, largely on cost grounds.¹³ Without higher standards in place, most schools in our target zone provide little more than the minimum required amount of PE, with offerings falling off significantly after children move through the middle school years. "There are basic fitness issues," one educator told us. "Kids don't have the fitness to walk on to teams."
- **Youth with disability have levers but still barriers to inclusion.** In 2008, the Maryland Fitness and Athletics Equity for Students with Disabilities Act was passed. The law made Maryland the first state mandating equal athletic opportunities for students with disabilities, and required the state Department of Education to file an annual report to the General Assembly.¹⁴ Its 2016 report states that 6,286 boys and 2,442 girls with Individualized Education Plans played on school teams.¹⁵ No breakdown was provided for schools in any particular city. Despite the progress, barriers remain—among them, a state rule saying school athletes cannot compete past age 19.¹⁶ "This can have a disproportionate impact on children with disabilities, many of whom may not move through school at the same pace as others," said Dionne Koller, a University of Baltimore law professor.
- **Lacrosse is a hometown ally.** Few national governing bodies of sport have worked more diligently at anchoring its sport in the principles of developmentally appropriate play than US Lacrosse, which last year moved its headquarters from Baltimore to nearby Sparks. But its leadership has not left the city behind. Its website actively promotes Charm City Lacrosse, which aims to build a full-scale league "modeled after the best leagues in the Baltimore area by starting with our youngest players and getting kids involved in structured athletics before they are pulled into less positive activities." US Lacrosse provides a \$25,000 grant for Parks & People to run a different program, one of five in the city. It also recently grew its commitment to diversify the game, launching pilots in other states where it will provide training for coaches and officials, grants, and synthetic mini-fields—an opportunity East Baltimore could vie for as the program grows. There's demand: 14 percent of students surveyed said they want to try the sport, atop the 9 percent who already play. Even New York-based Harlem Lacrosse has recognized the opportunity, introducing an affiliate program at Commodore John Rodgers Elementary/Middle School.
- **Unified Sports are the preferred format for schools serving youth with disabilities.** As required by the state, BCPS partners with Special Olympics of Maryland (SOMD) to provide support for offering Unified Sports to students. The Unified Sports programs are promoted to students with and without disabilities. SOMD's Baltimore chapter works with adaptive education teachers at the schools to identify students with special needs. Tennis and bowling are offered in the fall, indoor bocce in the winter, and track and field and outdoor bocce in the spring. SOMD pays for the coaches and BCPS for the transportation. BCPS Athletics Coordinator Tiffany Byrd said that there is not enough interest in the unified sports. "(Perhaps) many of the students who might qualify are on our traditional teams." The age limit for students with disabilities to participate in the Unified Sports program is 21.

- **Transgender youth have new protections.** In 2016, the Maryland Athletic Association issued guidance that each school system should develop and apply criteria for students to participate on interscholastic teams consistent with their gender identity.¹⁷ Three out of 10 youth who took our survey but opted not to share their gender identity said that what they like most about sports is getting away from problems. (They also prioritized different sports that they want to try—with rock climbing and parkour at the top). While the survey does not tease out why these respondents chose not to identify with either gender, the results may suggest that sports are seen as a valuable outlet for physical and social-emotional health. If policies related to gender rights continue to advance, prospects of full inclusion for transgender youth in sports grow as well, especially if they can be engaged before high school when most people decide whether they are athletes.



2017 State of Play Grade
East Baltimore:

D+

Challenge: Well-meaning but untrained volunteers

7 | THE PLAY: TRAIN ALL COACHES

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

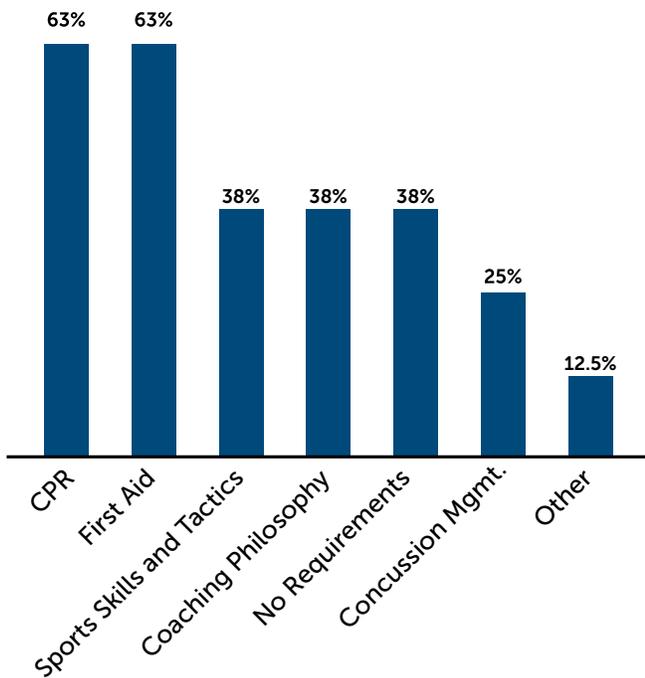
Coaches are the delivery mechanism for quality sport programming. They determine how much exercise occurs during practice. Research aggregated by the President's Council on Fitness, Sports & Nutrition shows that good coaches also lower kids' anxiety levels and lift their self-esteem. They help boys and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

Five findings in East Baltimore:

- **Schools and programs need more coaches.** A city-wide survey of Baltimore schools in 2015 found that the second-biggest barrier to adding more sports programming, after transportation, was a lack of coaches.¹⁸ Many schools wanted to add sports, and most say they have space on campus to do it (NAE, Henderson-Hopkins and The Crossroads School among them), but they could only do so much. Schools are almost entirely reliant on staff to coach their teams. The time demands surpass the rewards of the \$500 stipends. The shortage is such that some coach as many as three teams. Thus, there's a need to partner with outside providers, which can struggle as well to recruit and retain coaches. This can be a challenge with mainstream sports such as soccer, but especially with emerging sports. Recently, Parks & People had to drop girls lacrosse due to a loss of coaches. "Many coaches are willing to donate their time to coach, but the more time training takes, the less likely it is that it will be completed," said Nayla Bautista, executive director of Volo City Kids Foundation.
- **College students are being recruited to fill gaps.** Coaching Corps is a national nonprofit with an innovative model: It specializes in recruiting and training college students to be volunteer coaches for after-school programs. In 2016, Coaching Corps set up shop in Baltimore, with its access to a rich array of nearby college campuses: Coppin State University, Johns Hopkins University, Loyola University, Morgan State University, Towson University, University of Baltimore, University of Maryland, and University of Maryland, Baltimore County. The curriculum focuses on five areas: safety (physical/emotional), team building (caring adults/supportive peers), youth engagement (voice/choice/leadership), skill building (sports skills/life skills), and physical activity (consistent/challenging/fun).¹⁹ "We get them field ready," said Lynne Lee, executive vice president of Coaching Corps.
- **Training basketball coaches is key to improving the culture of youth sports.** Basketball has the longest history, deepest roots, and widest reach of any sport in East Baltimore, as in other parts of the city. Between Dunbar's national profile, stories told about legendary games at The Dome, and the history of sending players to the NBA and WNBA (Reggie Lewis, Sam Cassell, Muggsy Bogues, Juan Dixon, Angel McCoughtry, et al.), there's a lot to be proud of. But, says Tracey Estep of Baltimore City Recreation and Parks, too many of the adults who coach teams are not placing the child's needs at the center of the experience. "Quality coaching is more important than quantity of coaches," she said. "We need to get our coaches trained, because right now we have a lot of street agents who are teaching from the angle of 'I could've, should've, would've.'" It is a challenge that has been recognized nationally by the NBA and USA Basketball, which this year introduced a Youth Development Guidebook to promote developmentally appropriate play.²⁰ The league and national governing body for basketball have also moved into the area of coaching licensing.²¹

- Reliance on PE teachers presents challenges.** Baltimore City Public Schools requires that all high school physical education teachers coach at least one interscholastic team. That's good in that PE teachers are trained educators, immersed in the educational mission of schools and familiar with the health needs of students. It can also spread thin the most committed person, organizing everything that goes into coaching a sport while also effectively teaching PE to masses of students who are at risk of chronic diseases such as obesity if they don't develop active lifestyles. That challenge has only grown with budget cuts and PE teachers being asked to serve multiple schools at once. Other school staff are encouraged to coach teams as well, but the pool is still limited. The trend nationally is to recruit more non-educator coaches from the community. The challenge there, and it's not a minor one, is getting those coaches trained in key competencies.

FIG. 8 | TRAINING REQUIREMENTS OF COACHES BY SCHOOLS



2017 State of Play Grade
East Baltimore: **D+**

Challenge: Safety concerns among parents

8 | THE PLAY: EMPHASIZE PREVENTION

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

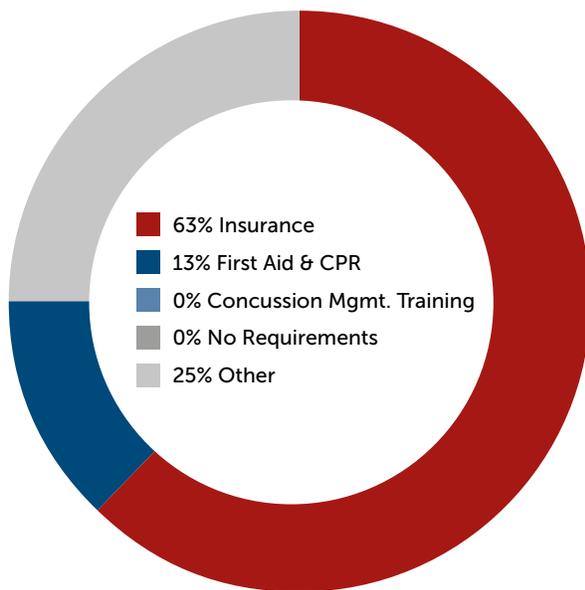
Among the many issues facing youth sports, injury risks trouble parents the most. An espnW/Aspen Institute Project Play survey showed that nine out of 10 parents have safety concerns—and half of those describe safety as a major concern. Both mothers and fathers said that concussions are the most worrisome and one-quarter of parents have considered keeping a child from playing because of that. Football, by far, gave parents the most cause for concern. ... Youth sport organizations should err on the side of caution—and ultimately participation—and embrace policies that eliminate or greatly reduce head contact at the 12-and-under level.

Five findings in East Baltimore:

- **Fear of injury is limiting sports participation.** A 2017 Harris Poll conducted on behalf of the American Osteopathic Association found that 16 percent of parents are now concerned enough about concussion risks that they won't let their child play any sport. Our survey of youth in East Baltimore found that they also are concerned with, "I don't want to get hurt" as the second-most listed response when asked what is keeping them from playing sports more often. Nearly three in 10 girls feel that way. It's understandable—in sports such as soccer and lacrosse that are played by both genders, girls nationally have higher rates of knee and concussion injuries. Our survey results underscore the need for programs to embrace policies, such as no or limited heading of a soccer ball and the use of "soft sticks" in lacrosse before the teen years, that help build confidence for youth and their families to sign up for sports. "There is very little education and collective collaboration on how to keep youth players safe," said Artie West, executive director of Charm City Lacrosse.
- **There's a lack of athletic trainers.** Around the country, 42 percent of high schools use athletic trainers, according to the National Athletic Trainers' Association. In our focus area, St. Frances Academy has them through a contract with MedStar that provides access to two trainers, and the other two private high schools each have one athletic trainer, per association rules. Neither of the public high schools has trainers. A study from the American Academy of Pediatrics showed that the presence of trainers can have a strong, positive impact on athlete health, resulting in lower injury rates, improved diagnosis, and return-to-play decisions for concussion and other injuries. Without anyone with such credentials on the sideline, athletes typically get referred to hospital emergency rooms for diagnosis and treatment. That can be a burden on families without health care insurance coverage—and a reason to avoid sports.
- **Football increasingly presents special challenges.** The BCPS makes its deepest investment in football, the most expensive sport. In 2015-16, it cost the district \$585,072, nearly as much as it cost to underwrite all five other fall sports. Most of that goes to coach stipends, followed by transportation to away games and school police overtime. Another \$40,000 was spent on helmet and shoulder pad reconditioning and \$26,254 on an EMT or nurse to attend games in lieu of an athletic trainer.²² Increasingly, pressures are bearing down on football to add protections for students, given growing concerns around head injuries. Under Maryland law, high school coaches are now required to be trained in understanding the nature of the risk of a brain injury and of not reporting a brain injury, and criteria for removal and return to play. Community-based youth coaches are subjected to these standards, but it's unclear if the law is meeting its goals.
- **Flag football is an emerging opportunity for both boys and girls.** In our area student survey, 26 percent of youth said they have played flag football, and another 9 percent play now or plan to do so this year. More than tackle football, it's a form of the game that fosters boys and girls playing together, as well as families and other adult-youth scenarios. Size matters less, the lack of required equipment makes it less costly to play, there's more flexibility with game and field sizes, and the game lends itself easily to both pickup and organized play. Increasingly, flag is promoted by the NFL and USA Football as an entry-level alternative, and the age at which youth transition into tackle appears to be moving up. As the game evolves, funders and parents will be presented with—and have the opportunity to influence—the conditions under which football is played.

- **Schools rarely use the power of the permit to set standards.** Of the eight schools surveyed, most require outside organizations using their sports facilities to provide no more than proof of insurance. One school required coaches to be trained in basic first aid/CPR, and none required training in concussion management. Nationally, the power of the permit has been used by municipalities in New York City, Buffalo, and elsewhere to improve minimum standards related to youth coaching and equipment. Baltimore schools have the ability to both adopt higher standards and, with partnerships with Johns Hopkins and medical providers, facilitate the provision of training and safety protections. “Community trainings available to sports-based youth development organizations would help ensure consistent implementation of this pillar,” said Casey Thomas of Soccer Without Borders Baltimore.

FIG. 9 | REQUIREMENTS TO USE SCHOOL SPORTS FACILITIES



2017 State of Play Grade East Baltimore: **D+**



YOUTH VOICE

Alonzo Horton, 17 & Keyon Woods, 15

The reason Alonzo and Keyon each play three sports at the National Academy Foundation School became clear as they described their neighborhoods. Alonzo spoke of trash, fights, and shootings. Keyon said he’s friends with kids who are drug dealers, “but I try to stay away from it.”

Sports keep them occupied. Sports give them pride—a basic feeling every child needs.

Feeling proud about NAF sports facilities can be challenging. NAF’s varsity football games are played on Dunbar High School’s field. Every junior varsity game is on the road.

“It’s kind of messed up,” Keyon said. “It would be nice to have your own home field so your school has support.”

Last season, the junior varsity team walked several minutes with equipment to practice at McKim Field. That site is now unavailable, being converted into a \$30 million Ronald McDonald House for seriously ill children and their families. The school is exploring alternatives.

Alonzo believes Dunbar should share its football field with NAF for practices. “Let us practice on the other side,” he said. “It’s a wide field.”

A NAF administrator said school leaders understand the scheduling challenges for Dunbar in sharing its field. She said that occasionally, Dunbar does make its fields, pool, and other facilities available.

NAF wrestling practices involve mats in a classroom. Baseball practices occur in a small patch of grass near a parking lot.

“It’s not a lot of space, but you’ve got to work with it,” Keyon said.

The alternative is no sports. That’s not an option for Alonzo and Keyon, who use sports to stay focused on becoming mechanical engineers.



CALL FOR LEADERSHIP

The focus of this report has been on providing stakeholders with the state of play for youth in East Baltimore. Based on our analysis of the unique characteristics of East Baltimore, here are five recommendations of systems-level interventions that can help committed leaders grow access to quality sport options for children, in support of building healthy, vibrant communities:

Build an online portal that includes all sport options

Tracey Estep, a senior official with Baltimore City Recreation and Parks, sees both a supply of and a demand for youth sport opportunities in the city, but a failure to connect the two due to lack of collaboration among providers. “It’s astonishing that we’re not working together well enough,” she said. “We’re just not meeting youth where they are.”

Baltimore needs a one-stop, online search marketplace that displays the full array of sport programs available to youth. Think Yelp! for recreation, with listings sorted by age, gender, sport, cost, and neighborhood. Add features that help parents and youth sort by quality, via user ratings, affiliation with reputable organizations, or other filters (such as whether coaches are trained, if the program promotes multi-sport play, etc.).

Place the portal on a website and app, and invite programs and schools from across the city or even the county to participate. Let them use the platform to recruit and train coaches, game officials, and league administrators; coordinate facility times and shared-use agreements; identify athletic trainers; sell or share used gear; conduct surveys of kids; conduct background checks; and crowdfund for the covering of registration fees for kids in need.

Entrepreneurs know the promise of technology: A custom app has helped fuel the growth of NEWfit Kids, which partners with Baltimore schools to provide sports programs. Now, the city needs a one-stop shopping resource for all stakeholders in the community. Explore one of the emerging templates offered by national providers. Or create your own, underwritten by a local sponsor, respected nonprofit, and/or BCRP.

Create more shared-use agreements

Baltimore is taking the right step by requiring future renovated schools to have shared-use agreements for public access to their athletic facilities. But there’s no need to wait until schools are renovated to pursue more of these arrangements, which require a lot of thought, effort, and cooperation to reach agreements. Think about partnerships with private businesses as well. Nearby hotels have pools; why not rent them out at times for learn-to-swim classes?

ChangeLab Solutions is a great resource on how to manage the process. It offers customizable templates that schools and community organizations can use to open doors. They can be found at: <http://www.changelabsolutions.org/publications/model-JUAs-national>.

Harness the power of the permit

Public oversight over the use of taxpayer-funded facilities is one of the most effective ways to improve the safety and enjoyment of youth in sports. Yet of the eight schools surveyed in our East Baltimore focus area, most only require outside organizations using their sports facilities

5 recommendations for stakeholders in East Baltimore



to provide proof of insurance. The city's Department of Recreation and Parks has the same requirement for renting out its athletic fields and facilities, although it goes a step further by also requiring cleanup of the area after an event.

The city and schools can use the permit to require training coaches in key competencies, including basic first aid/CPR, injury prevention and management, and athlete abuse and misconduct. On safety and abuse matters, one resource to draw guidance from is the SafeSport program, which is part of the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Movement.

Sports participation inevitably carry a risk of injury at any age. Youth sports also offer fewer protections, due to a lack of athletic trainers available to attend games or practices. To enhance protections—and give parents and youth the confidence to sign up for programs—the city and schools should insist on higher standards for use of their fields, gyms, and other facilities.

Partner with national organizations to expand sport options

Baltimore is dominated by basketball and few other sports. Support of those sports should continue. But our survey of students made clear that there's strong interest in trying other sports as well, swimming and gymnastics among them. Local stakeholders should try to meet that demand—and should know that outside organizations are open to helping them.

USA Swimming and its foundation have strong programs aimed at reaching ethnically diverse populations. Baltimore is also fortunate to be the home of Michael Phelps, whose foundation is focused on bringing swim lessons to children from communities of greatest need. Swimming can be an expensive sport to offer due to the costs of building, maintaining, and staffing pools, so creativity will need to be applied in addressing transportation and other challenges. But local leaders don't have to figure it out alone, and it's worth the effort, given the array of lifetime sports that open up to someone who can swim, from rowing to windsurfing to stand-up paddleboarding. More of those sports could become available nearby as well, if plans to clean up the Inner Harbor continue.

Help kids think out of the box, as well. Know what's a great sport for youth with basketball-like athleticism and size? Team handball. Popular in Europe (and different from the form of handball in which players smack a ball against a wall), team handball is fast, fun, af-

fordable, and is tailored for dense, urban cities like Baltimore with its smaller recreation spaces. Players run around a court and throw balls into nets on each end. Since it's an Olympic sport, the U.S. Olympic Committee is interested in helping it gain a foothold in the country. The USOC offers pilot programs for cities willing to try under-the-radar sports such as team handball and table tennis. Be that city of experimentation and new ideas, Baltimore.

Create a new model of investment

While Baltimore has challenges in supporting sports at the grassroots level, it also has real assets at the top of the sports pyramid: two franchises in major professional leagues, and nine area colleges and universities that compete at the NCAA level (Coppin State, Loyola, Morgan State, Notre Dame at Maryland, Johns Hopkins, Towson, Goucher College, University of Maryland, Baltimore County, and the University of Maryland, College Park).

Each college offers an array of sports, and thus has coaches and athletes with expertise that could be tapped to grow the quality and quantity of local youth programs. This approach could include new opportunities for kids and student-athletes alike through coaches' clinics, sport-specific clinics, and opportunities for youth to attend college and university events.

As noted in this report, both the Ravens and Orioles support youth recreation through grants and other community efforts. One innovative model that could be explored was first pioneered by Patagonia. Through this model, a dedicated percent of revenue is donated to support environmental nonprofits. Since the launch of the 1% for the Planet foundation, more than 1,200 member businesses have donated more than \$150 million.

Companies, from all sectors, could do the same to support youth sports. That includes the pro franchises, who have a vested interest — research shows that kids who play sports more often become sports fans. It's a new idea that holds promise in any city that is willing to place a premium on the long-term health of its youth.



GAME CHANGER: *The Children and Youth Fund*

Starting in 2018, funding will be distributed annually to local organizations – including \$12 million in the first year – through the newly created Children and Youth Fund. The money comes from Baltimore property taxes, at the direction of city voters, and represents a major opportunity to build a healthier community through growing the quality and quantity of youth recreation activities. The fund was among the initiatives put in place to respond to the conditions that contributed to Freddie Gray’s death.

But sport programs are not guaranteed any defined portion of the fund, as the money can be used to support all types of youth programs. A task force is currently determining the structure and conditions under which funds will be granted.

Sport and recreation providers²³ can build their strongest argument for support by designing them in a manner that promotes health, inclusion, and positive academic or social skills. It can’t just be about sports or chasing athletic scholarships—but sport for development of the whole child and the community. Managers of the fund can ensure as much by prioritizing programs that abide best practices and make room for all youth, regardless of ability or family resources.

We hope this report offers guidance, with its Project Play framework of eight plays (or strategies) that experts have identified as useful in getting and keeping kids active through sports.

The fund could be used to:

- **Promote shared-use agreements between sports organizations and schools.** Too many Baltimore facilities are not shared, often due to the fear of vandalism or poor maintenance by occupants (leagues, camps, clinics, etc.). The fund could stipulate that sports organizations receiving grants must provide maintenance for each event. And the fund could help cover those costs.
- **Ensure that every sports organization surveys kids about their experience, to give them a voice in programs designed to serve them.** A platform could be created allowing youth-serving organizations to ask the same set of questions to kids throughout the city. The survey results should be used annually as a tool for funding consideration.
- **Encourage the design of their programs for athletic development and positive mentorship, more than just competitive results.** That would help shift the culture away from a win-at-all-costs mentality—an attitude that shuts out many kids. Kids learn different skills at different ages. An age-appropriate framework recognizes that young kids are not miniature adults. USA Basketball, USA Baseball, US Soccer, and many other national sport governing bodies now offer documents describing what constitutes developmentally-appropriate play.
- **Motivate programs to encourage sport sampling.** At the end of every season, organization leaders could identify other sports and programs for youth and provide information on how to sign up. As discussed in this report and in [a story by *The Baltimore Sun*](#), Dunbar High School’s Keney Davis is an example of the benefits of trying new sports. Further, research shows that sport sampling reduces overuse injuries and burnout, and is better for athletic development.



- **Recognize organizations that “think small” (i.e., they’re creative with the space and resources they have).** This falls in line with a Children and Youth Fund guideline that any organization can serve an area as small as one neighborhood block. In urban areas, this may mean finding small spaces to develop quarter-sized courts for small-sided play, as the U.S. Soccer Foundation has done with local partners in several cities. Or, developing an innovative solution to transportation challenges facing kids.
- **Require a culture where coaches are trained.** All coaches should receive regular training in coaching philosophy on how to work with kids, best practices in the areas of physical literacy and sport skills, and basic safety (CPR, first aid, and concussion management). Maryland law now requires coaches to be trained in understanding the risks of brain injuries and criteria for removal and return to play. But the Children and Youth Fund could go further and incentivize coaches to be trained in sportsmanship and coaching skills relative to the age of their youth participants.
- **Promote health and safety.** Grants could go to programs that emphasize flag football, apply pitch count rules in baseball and softball, and have no-heading rules in soccer for little kids. Our survey of youth in East Baltimore found that fear of injury is the second-most popular reason they are not playing sports more often. Nearly three in 10 girls feel that way. Also, the Children and Youth Fund could require sports organizations applying for grants to have all youth take a pre-participation health exam from a qualified medical professional. These evaluations are especially important for children from low-income families, since sports may be the only time a child interacts with the health care system all year. The fund could provide financial resources for these exams.

The carrot is a powerful tool. By merely creating a framework for funding on the front end, the Children and Youth Fund has the ability to prompt every youth-serving organization to measure itself against best practices—whether or not they ultimately receive support. That process, in turn, has the capacity to improve and expand opportunities for children throughout the city.

The value of sports is not lost on one of the fund’s leading champions, Baltimore City Council President Bernard “Jack” Young, who told *The Baltimore Sun*, “We either invest in our youth now or we pay later.”

We agree. Sports, done right, build community.





IDEAS

These are ideas that can help reimagine youth sports through the core values of health and inclusion. Ideas were developed at the Project Play: Baltimore Huddle in June 2017 with local leaders.

Community Recreation Groups

Sport combines: Give youth the opportunity to feel like an elite athlete while developing physical literacy skills. Model a pro sport combine, open to all kids—and without the scouts. Encourage and facilitate personal improvement more than competition with others.

Local leagues: Fourteen percent of area youth said that they don't play sports because they feel that they aren't good enough to play. So, create formats to draw them in. Try new field dimensions and rules. National governing bodies offer ideas.

League boards: Mandate that coaches are trained in key competencies, including coaching philosophy on how to work with kids, sport skills and tactics, and basic safety. To help, offer coaches a discount on their kids' fees to incentivize trainings.

National Sport Organizations

Youth sports festival: Introduce sports rarely played in Baltimore by annually inviting programs from around the city and county to Royal Farms Arena, or even a rec center, where kids who sample the widest variety of sports receive rewards.

Out-of-season: Recruit pro teams, colleges, and/or national governing bodies to teach youth coaches. Have a training camp for youth coaches to learn best practices on developing youth as athletes with proper practice templates and general coaching philosophy tips.

Year-round: Make free play cool. Create public-service announcements that feature star players reflecting on their favorite free-play memories. Piggyback off the Orioles' "Have a Catch" campaign to get more kids outside playing catch.

Education

Elementary and middle schools: Partner with community groups to offer weekend fitness activities for students and families. Recruit food vendors and add nutrition lessons.

Schools: Reintroduce intramurals (i.e., games among classmates hosted at their school). Partner with community organizations to allocate on-site fields, gyms, and other spaces after school to leagues that are open to all students. Add bus options for participating youth to return home.

School boards: Mandate recess for elementary and middle schoolers. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends recess before lunch. Recess is not just downtime for teachers or playtime for students. Research shows that play helps students pay attention in class, prevents bullying, and develops social and emotional learning.²⁴

Civic Leaders & Policymakers

Elected officials: Rely more on the appointed youth commission for Baltimore City that makes recommendations to city leaders on youth policies, programs, and other services. Elected officials can and should offer sport as a key solution to engage kids in positive activities.

Local leaders: Build support for pocket parks, mini-play spaces in neighborhoods. Abandoned courts, empty schoolyards, and vacant lots can be transformed into viable play areas. Seek out local artists, gardeners, and other activists to ensure that these locations make signature statements.

Administrators: Prioritize Title IX enforcement in city schools. Educate key officials on Title IX obligations and seek to develop opportunities for girls. Process mandated Title IX surveys with urgency, using the data to make future decisions.

Tech & Media

Baltimore news: Start a youth-to-youth podcast as a forum for youth athletes to share their sports experiences. The podcast should feature a diversity of youth—not just the all-star athlete—and cover topics that can help stakeholders improve area sports.

Local developers: Develop a youth sports app to help parents/guardians find nearby sports programs and leagues through a zip code search. For more information, see the Call for Leadership section titled “Build an online portal that includes all sport options” in this report.

Virtual reality: Colleges and pro teams are using VR software to help improve the performance of athletes. But these tools can also be used to introduce youth to sports they have never played. Enthusiasm can be built around a sport when youth can see themselves in the game.

Business & Industry

Local business: Sponsor a school’s athletic program. The sponsorships would allow schools to increase the number of sport offerings. Sponsorship funds could support equipment, transportation, coach trainings and stipends, facility maintenance, and/or youth scholarships.

Corporate responsibility: Develop a rewards system for employees who become certified trained coaches. A flex-hours policy could allow employees to volunteer to coach.

Volunteer day: Partner with a recreation center to provide volunteers for a full day of activities.

Public Health

Hospitals: Partner with high schools to provide athletic trainers and physicians in residency at games, and/or set up weekly clinics open to all youth and school athletes with injury concerns. Potential partners include Johns Hopkins and MedStar Sports Medicine.

Doctors: Promote sports programs to enhance overall wellness in kids during doctor visits. Educate parents on the benefits of sports participation to lower the risk of childhood obesity and other health concerns. Recommend at least one hour of physical activity daily.

Organizations: Retool the public health message for youth activity. Sports specialization and overtraining concerns are less important than access, basic fitness, and injury prevention.

Parents/Guardians

Create parallel activities: While your child is at practice, organize a fitness session on site for parents and guardians. Include siblings. If youth see adults model healthy behavior, they’re more likely to stay active.

Adopt “Sandlot Day”: Schedule a day each season when coaches and parents step aside and allow players to run the show. They make the lineups, decide on substitutions, and manage the show like in the days of sandlot sports. For youth, it’s a lesson in problem-solving. For parents, it’s a lesson in what kids want from a sport experience.

Prioritize safety: Safety best practices evolve. Use Safe Kids Worldwide Sports Safety Checklist for Parents as a resource to stay up to date. The checklist can be found at: <https://www.safekids.org/tentips>.

APPENDIX A

RECREATION CENTERS – THEN VS. NOW

Below is a map of Baltimore City operated recreation centers in our study area. Only four are open today, down from 14 in the 1980s. Even with privately operated community centers in the area (UA House and Patterson Park Youth Sports and Education Center, both run by Living Classrooms), that represents a decline of nearly 60 percent of the indoor recreation spaces that were once made available to youth.



Data sources: *Right to the Active City: Public Recreation and Urban Governance in Baltimore* by Jacob Bustad, PhD; *City of Baltimore Bureau of Recreation Centers and Activities 1979-80*.

REC CENTERS CLOSED SINCE 1980S

- ANN STREET REC CENTER
- BOCEK REC CENTER
- ELMER HENDERSON REC CENTER
- FLAG HOUSE REC CENTER
- JOHNSTON SQUARE REC CENTER
- LAFAYETTE COURTS REC CENTER
- LATROBE HOMES REC CENTER
- RALPH J. YOUNG REC CENTER
- SOMERSET COURTS REC CENTER
- TENCH TILGHMAN REC CENTER

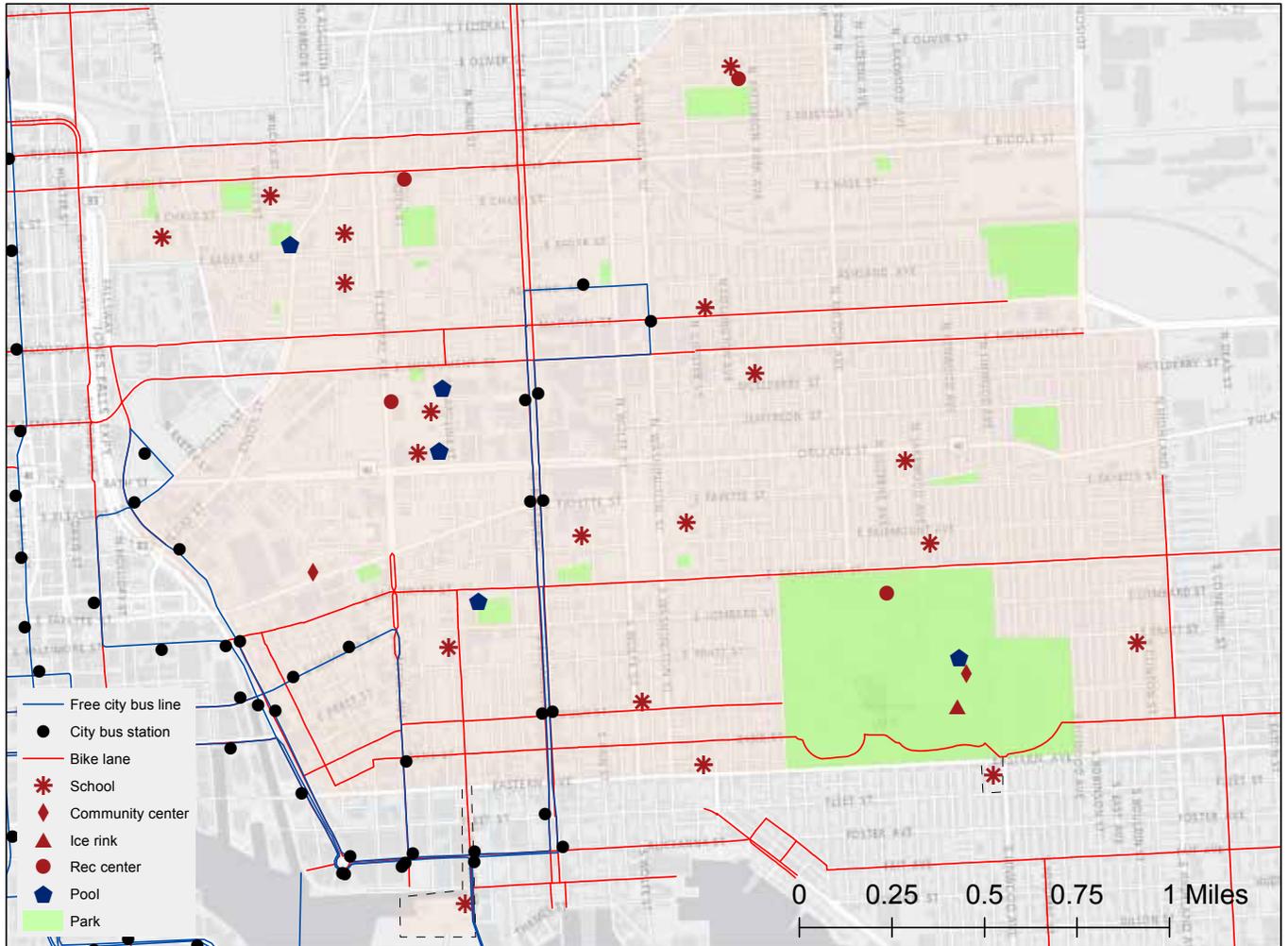
REC CENTERS OPEN TODAY

- COLLINGTON SQUARE REC CENTER
- CHICK WEBB REC CENTER
- MADISON SQUARE REC CENTER
- VIRGINIA S. BAKER REC CENTER

APPENDIX B

TRANSPORTATION ROUTES – BIKE LANES AND CHARM CITY CIRCULATOR

In our survey of youth, 12 percent told us that they do not have a way to get to and from sports practices and/or games. Others make do with limited options. The below map shows that while some bike lanes lead to parks, the Charm City Circulator—a free shuttle—does not.

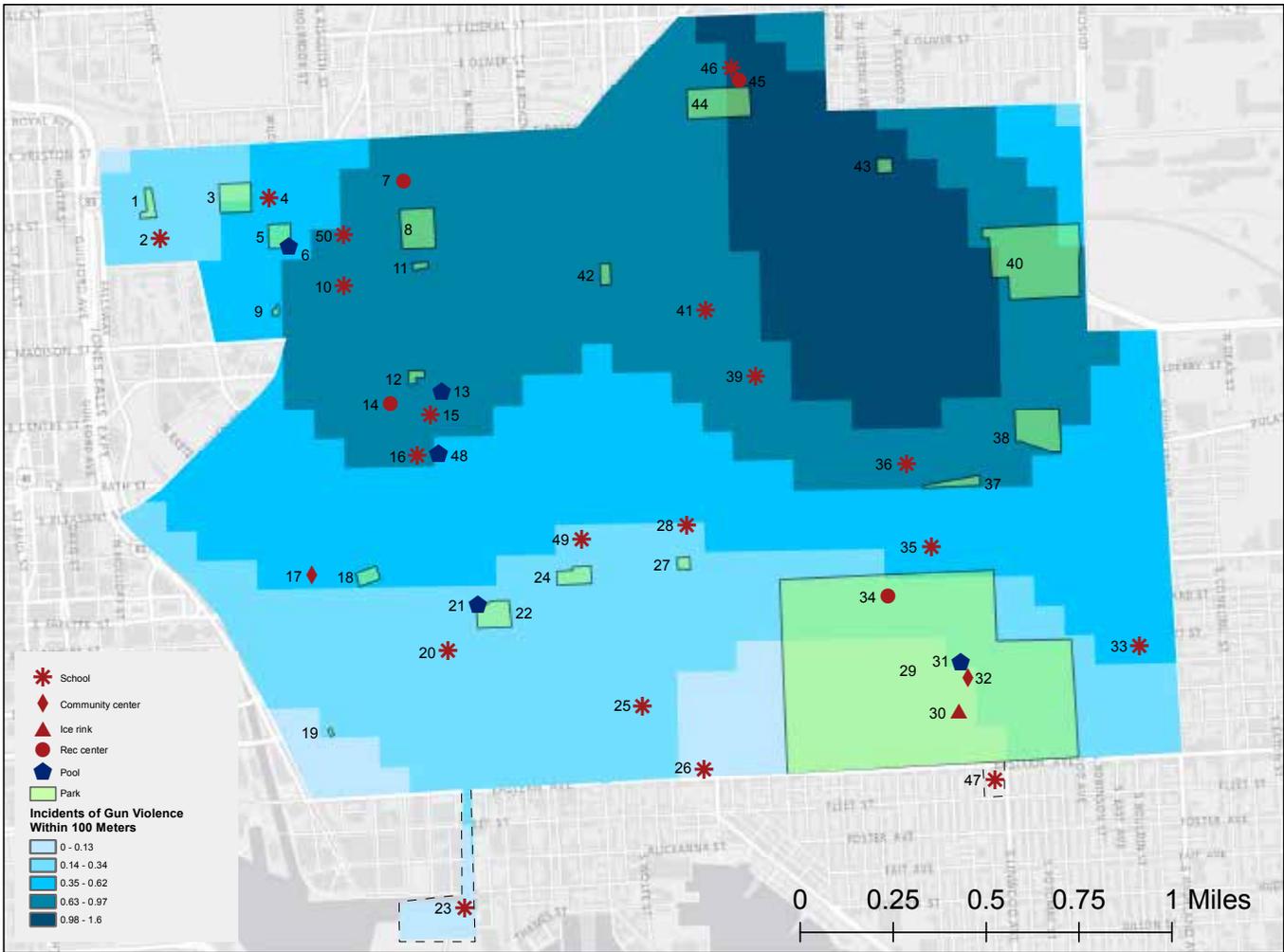


Data sources: Open Baltimore (City of Baltimore) and Open Street Map.

APPENDIX C

CRIME – GUN VIOLENCE

In our survey of youth, 36 percent told us they did not have or did not know of a safe place to play in their neighborhood. The heatmap below shows that Madison-Eastend, Milton-Montford, Middle East, Johnston Square, Old Town, Dunbar-Broadway, and McElderry Park neighborhoods have the highest incidences of gun violence—an average of .77 incidents per 100 meters in 2014. Note: Prior maps in this report show that these areas are among those with the least access to recreation centers, bike lanes, and free transportation.



Data source: Open Baltimore (City of Baltimore), 2014

APPENDIX D

HEALTH AND ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF PROGRESS

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

21% OF BALTIMORE YOUTH CURRENTLY ACTIVE DAILY

IF...	Fewer Overweight and Obese Youths	Direct Medical Costs Averted	Productivity Losses Averted	Years of Life Saved
25% OF YOUTH GET AND STAY ACTIVE UNTIL THEY ARE 18 YEARS OF AGE	2,876	\$47.9 MILLION	\$51 MILLION	3,723
50% OF YOUTH GET AND STAY ACTIVE UNTIL THEY ARE 18 YEARS OF AGE	15,526	\$262.3 MILLION	\$277.9 MILLION	20,556
75% OF YOUTH GET AND STAY ACTIVE UNTIL THEY ARE 18 YEARS OF AGE	28,108	\$475.9 MILLION	\$504 MILLION	37,349
100% OF YOUTH GET AND STAY ACTIVE UNTIL THEY ARE 18 YEARS OF AGE	40,700	\$689 MILLION	\$729.6 MILLION	54,068

Fewer Overweight and Obese Youths:

Number of additional youths dropping below the 85th BMI percentile, which is the CDC’s definition of overweight. Currently, 17.4 percent of Baltimore youth fall into this category; another 17 percent are obese (at or above the 95th BMI percentile).

Direct Medical Costs Averted:

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

Productivity Losses Averted:

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

Years of Life Saved:

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

Source: Global Obesity Prevention Center, Johns Hopkins University, www.globalobesity.org

GOPC executive director: Bruce Y. Lee, MD, MBA, brucelee@jhu.edu

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PHOTOS

Unless otherwise noted below, photos were provided by Christin Rose, for Under Armour. Youth profile photos were taken by Rodney Nesbitt, Under Armour.

Page 7: iStock Photo

Page 24: Special Olympics of Maryland

Page 26: Special Olympics of Maryland

Page 27: Special Olympics of Maryland

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The mission of the Sports & Society Program is to convene leaders, facilitate dialogue, and inspire solutions that help sports serve the public interest. The program provides a venue for thought leadership where knowledge can be deepened and breakthrough strategies explored on a range of issues. Its flagship initiative Project Play is a multi-stage effort to provide stakeholders with the thought leadership to help sport build healthy communities, starting with access to quality sport activity for all children.

www.sportsandsociety.org

ABOUT PROJECT PLAY: BALTIMORE

Project Play: Baltimore is a multi-year initiative designed to help city stakeholders grow the quality and quantity of sport options available to local youth. It is the first model community initiative organized by the Aspen Institute's Sports & Society Program. Supported by Under Armour, it is a bold experiment designed to serve and inspire Baltimore's communities.

baltimore.projectplay.us

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