
How Community- Based Organizations Can Support in Reimagining Schools Sports

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Summary

For decades, community-based organizations (CBOs) and schools have partnered to provide greater sports opportunities for students and support school efforts in sports. If done right, these partnerships can amplify efforts to provide scalable and replicable solutions that expand sports access and quality to all students. Successful CBOs and school partnerships can re-imagine and enhance what school sports will look like in the future. However, best practices among schools and CBOs are often siloed within each organization. Through conversations with school leaders and CBOs, this report hopes to disseminate what are shared best practices resulting in sustainable, quality partnerships between schools and CBOs.

5 Ways CBOs Can Partner with Schools

Facility and Equipment Use Agreements

- Allocate resources to ensure youth have equitable access to recreational facilities and equipment through their school or in their community.

P.E. and School Support

- Help develop more well-rounded athletes by plugging in CBO providers into P.E. to build interest in a variety of sports and allow students to explore non-traditional sports.

Coach Training and Staff Support

- Support the work being done on campus by athletic officials and others to build a positive culture, such as making explicit the academic and life benefits of sports.

Opportunities Through Sports

- Increase pathways to sports that might not be offered at every school in a district. Use these sports opportunities through CBOs to develop skills beyond athletic expertise such as academic support, college access, and job skills.

Recreational Activities Access

- Partnering with non-traditional sports and recreational programs such as yoga, hiking, and other forms of life-long exercise.

Best Practices from the Field

This report through interviews with CBOs and school leaders helps establish greater clarity on what makes a quality relationship. Below are six ways both CBOs and schools can best collaborate. While there are more ways to best work together mentioned in the report, these six have been chosen as essential for effective and lasting partnerships.

How Schools Can Partner with Community-Based Organizations



Effective Communication

- Formalize agreements by outlining the frequency of meetings, contact information, and programmatic needs that will sustain beyond the current staff.
- Find out what the needs and wants are at the school level.



Go Beyond Transactional

- Connect the staff of both the CBO and school, so they know about each other's culture and what gets taught on and off the field.
- Include the CBO in important school meetings and family nights. Invite the school to attend important CBO events.



Partnership Transparency

- Develop time for school staff to collaborate with CBO staff and coaches to build a united culture.
- Communicate honestly about capacity for the program, time for students and school staff, cost, funding, and long-term goals.



Make it Co-Curricular

- Explore ways sports can tie in classroom and on-the-field learnings to develop quality social emotional skills.
- Use sports as the bridge between education and career development opportunities beyond school.



Expand the Partners

- Invite other local government organizations, including parks and rec or the local health department, to collaborate.
- Get local and bring in partners who can lead a national initiative at the local level.



Explore the Possible

- Find ways that make physical activity fun and offer nontraditional routes to healthy lifestyles.
- Use PE to create a place where youth identify with sports and physical activities they might not traditionally be exposed to that meet their needs.

This project was done in collaboration with community-based organizations (CBO) and school officials to understand and explore the important relationship between community sports and schools. Will Aubin, a graduate student researcher at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, interviewed leaders in organizations and school sites who are focused on building greater access and opportunities for youth to participate in sports and recreation. The school is often a hub to connect youth to outside organizations and programs such as community sports. Many sports-centered CBOs partner with schools to expand sports, share facilities, and build relationships to expand access to sport and recreation. The goal of this report is to shine more light on what makes a quality CBO and school relationship, ways these organizations collaborate and report out important points to highlight related to sustainability and replicability. It is our hope that this report helps to clarify how CBOs and schools can better work together to expand equitable sports access and provide important takeaways from the field on how these partnerships can develop in schools and communities to meet the needs of youth.

About Reimagining School

Sports

Launched by Project Play in 2020 with a focus on high schools, “Reimagining School Sports” recognizes the essential role that schools play in preparing young people for life – and the cognitive, educational, and health benefits that flow to students whose bodies are in motion. The initiative aims to make quality sport and physical activities accessible to all students by identifying strategies that administrators and other leaders can adapt, aligned with the mission of schools and within the context of a comprehensive education.

About Project Play

Project Play is an initiative of the Aspen Institute’s Sports & Society Program, the mission of which is to convene leaders, facilitate dialogue and inspire solutions that help sport serve the public interest. Since 2013, Project Play has shepherded the national conversation around what good looks like in youth sports. Hundreds of organizations have used Project Play frameworks and ideas to introduce programs, expand grantmaking, shape government policy, advance research, and develop tools to train coaches, empower parents and mobilize leaders.

What is a community-based organization (CBO)?

As defined by Cornell Law School, “The term ‘community-based organization’ means a public or private nonprofit organization of demonstrated effectiveness that— (A) is representative of a community or significant segments of a community; and (B) provides educational or related services to individuals in the community.”¹ The connection between people and across organizations is often at the core of a CBO’s work. This is no different in how outside organizations partner with schools to provide expanded sports, recreation, health, and wellness opportunities. Some examples include organizations like The Boys and Girls Club, YMCA, and Girl Scouts. The Aspen Institute’s Project Play initiative has alternately called these entities Community Recreation Groups, one of the eight sectors that touch the lives of children.

How Community-Based Organizations Can Support in Reimagining Schools Sports

CBOs Expanding Sports Opportunities

Sports, when done right, can support a sense of belonging. Maria Gerana, community program manager at Asphalt Green, a New York City-based non-profit focusing on “providing access to sports and fitness opportunities to all New Yorkers”, understands deeply the needs of the community her organization serves. When she was growing up, P.E. was not offered at her elementary school. Recess was 15 minutes for the whole school. Picture a free-for-all of positive kid chaos. Students running around, playing games, laughing with friends. Then a whistle or song signals the end of recess. Students switch from exuberant joy to being ushered back into class to sit and learn.

Her first experience with sports did not happen until she was in high school. Her high school was co-located, meaning there were four schools located in one school building. They shared the same athletic facilities and had only one gym for the four schools. The high school did have sports, or only two sports: boys’ basketball and baseball. Maria felt like her role in sports was just watching the boys. She wanted a sport to do after school, too. There was an organization just down the block from her high school that did offer softball and baseball. It was a recreational league and sparked her interest in athletics. It was nice, but because it was only recreational it was not something she felt that she could showcase on her college application like other kids who played a sport through their school. When she went on to college in a different city, she realized all the sports and recreation opportunities she did not have access to as a child (lacrosse, kayaking, hiking, and just being outside) and all the benefits that come with being active.

Just 10 blocks from where Maria grew up was another high school that had a girls’ softball team. In fact, this school had a whole menu of sports and recreational opportunities for kids who were her age. The students there could engage with a diversity of sports and position their participation as a stepping-stone into college and careers. School-based sports were tied directly to the means of attaining a healthy and successful life. But those 10 blocks separating those communities were impenetrable. Inside the walls of her school were only boys’ basketball and baseball, while limitless opportunities for sports awaited on the other side. She wondered what it would be like growing up if she had equitable access to quality sports through high school.

Her mission now at Asphalt Green is to make sure that the term “underserved” gets retired. Worn out, aged, and tossed aside like a dirty gym sock. No longer does a child have to go through two different systems: one with limitless opportunities for sports and one with limited opportunities. She believes community-based organizations (CBOs) can help in retiring “underserved.” No longer will communities lack equitable sports access in school. CBOs can bring their expertise and increase capacity at a school to meet the needs of every child. As Maria said, “When you have an organization whose sole purpose and passion is to deliver (sports and recreation), why not come into my school's community and help us out in this area? Let's provide a liaison to help walk you through how you can bring this resource and teach (the school) how to be able to continue this education when (the organization) is not here.” This toolkit aims to do just that: demonstrate to schools the expertise of CBO sports organizations and provide ways CBOs help to reimagine a more equitable high school sports system. Organizations who are trying to retire the word “underserved.”

Five Ways CBOs & High Schools Can Partner to Promote Equitable Access to Sports

Facility and Equipment Use Agreements

Allocate resources to ensure youth have equitable access to recreational facilities and equipment through their school or in their community.

“Schools can receive an equipment kit that’s valued at about \$1,000 if their local USTA office was able to connect the school and an external partner. We have a digital document where three parties sign it, and say, this is the relationship, here are the expectations. It helps lessen the dissonance and tighten the relationship.”

Elliott Pettit, U.S. Tennis Association (USTA) Director of Grassroots Tennis

Example 1: Using Equipment to Connect Schools to Local Resources

Based on the wisdom of Arthur Ashe, USTA has focused on using the school-site to grow the number of youth in tennis because simply schools are where children are located. The USTA has long worked to expand access to tennis in schools by providing free equipment, curriculum, and trainings to P.E. teachers. Completion of the training provided curriculum and equipment for schools to use. It was big step for a national governing body aiming to expand and grow youth’s opportunity to play the sport. However, after review, the USTA noticed a major problem in its plan: often a USTA representative would check-in with the school and noticed a surprising amount of equipment that was never used.



Fortunately, USTA officials did not give up on their mission to grow the game by partnering with schools, but they did adapt their tactics in 2017. They realized the school needed more support. They also realized as a national organization, their reach was limited at the local level. They decided to recruit local USTA sections and clubs to connect with the school directly and tailor the resources the school might need to meet their needs to introduce the sport. No longer

was USTA giving equipment away and hoping it would be used. Instead, it was offering equipment and resources that came with a relationship to a local tennis partner. The school and the local tennis organization could figure out what they might need to make sure youth played the sport, whether that was attending a school assembly, supporting the P.E. tennis unit, and/or providing the school with additional coaching and tennis court access. Since 2017, USTA has had 5,700 teachers take the steps needed to partner with an outside tennis provider and receive free equipment. With oversight from USTA, this local relationship has improved students access to a sport they can play for a lifetime.

“The program fills an essential gap in addressing the city’s need for more parkland and additional recreational opportunities in our communities, particularly in the older urbanized communities where there is little available land for new parks.”²

San Diego’s Park and Recreation and School District Collaboration

How to solve the need for physical space?

Eventually, physical space can lead to limits of when sports teams can practice and how many roster spots are available. Some schools in urban areas have little to no physical space to provide a large menu of sports. This problem can be confounded when multiple schools are sharing the same facility. San Diego realizes the challenges that many of the schools have and attempts to bridge the gap between the parks and school district to provide better access to important physical spaces.

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San Diego does this by creating clear agreements between the parks and recreation department and the school district. City officials also look specifically for schools that historically have struggled with access to quality recreation spaces. Then they seek out ways students can be linked to an existing park. If none are in their

area that meets the needs of the school and students, they build or repurpose a park in the surrounding community. Another innovation is around using the power of the permit. Parks and recreation agencies can be strategic in only allowing organizations who have trained and qualified staff and specifically seek out equitable sports solutions for youth across the city to use city parks and recreation spaces. A potential place to start for a CBO or parks and recreation department is the Children’s Bill of Rights in Sports to ensure organizations and schools are effectively creating positive places for youth. The city and school district are strategic about mapping out and charting what school has what agreement and documenting how many acres a school and park partnership provides to the students. If a school has an abundance of recreational space, it can provide some of it to the park system to share with other schools and the community. It truly takes collaboration across the

school, parks and recs, and other community organizations, even creating schedules and providing permit priorities to schools and organizations seeking to provide recreation and sports access to youth. The ability to systematize and institutionalize with a lens towards equitable access makes sure these relationships are sustainable and last beyond a personal relationship.

Takeaways from Facilities and Equipment Use Agreements

1. Find out what the needs and wants are at the school level.
2. Get local and bring in partners who can take on and lead a national initiative at the local level.
3. Formalize agreements by outlining the frequency of meetings, ways to contact each other, and important programmatic needs that will sustain beyond the current people.
4. Map out the whole landscape of a city or community to understand what schools and communities will need more equitable supports in providing quality facilities and equipment.
5. Invite other local government organizations, including parks and recreation or the local health department, to collaborate and support greater youth access to sports and recreation.
6. Use the power of the permit to promote equitable sports access and quality partnerships.



P.E. and School Support

Help develop more well-rounded athletes by plugging in CBO providers into P.E. to build interest in a variety of sports and allow students to explore non-traditional sports.

“I have limitations on my budget, like, what am I going to do? I want to introduce tennis, golf, lacrosse, dance, yoga, all that kind of stuff. Well, I'm not gonna ask the principal for money because they don't have any money. So, I specifically was intentional about creating strong partnerships from the get-go and then bringing them in. I'm not a golf expert. But I know that if I develop a partnership with a golf organization, like First Tee, they can come in, they can provide the funding, they can provide resources, and then it's also just another resource to have. So that's what I did. We've got everything from snowboarding, surfing, skateboarding, lacrosse, rugby, golf, tennis. If you send a kid to us, they will do everything K through 12.”

Lisa Finegan, ICEF Public Schools Director of Physical Education

ICEF View Park Prep: Beyond the Budget

Whether you are a CBO or a school, limited resources mean a limited number of programs, roster spots, equipment, and sports. ICEF View Park Prep, a charter school located in South Los Angeles, knows these limits but does not let it limit the opportunities for its youth in pursuing sports or recreational opportunities. Lisa Finegan used her opportunity to attend a local youth sports conference to begin building connections with local CBOs to expand sports opportunities beyond what the school could offer. She went in with a plan, knowing some of the sports her students were interested in. She began making a list of CBOs, talking to them during breaks, and following up with them after the conference to understand how their organization could specifically partner with her schools.

Another key factor in expanding sports opportunities for ICEF students was the mandate and support from the administration. The director of schools and athletic director encouraged Lisa to bring in CBOs to provide additional sports and recreational opportunities to youth. With this mandate came the understanding that Lisa could spend some of her time meeting, connecting, and planning opportunities through P.E. and beyond to provide a menu of sports for her students. While this may have required more of her time on the front end, it reduced time trying to find equipment and organize lessons on certain sports because she could pass these tasks off on partner CBOs. P.E was the jumping-off point for these opportunities, providing introductions to the sports and physical activities. The CBO could also link to the school and understand the school staff and school culture, the guiding beliefs and values of a school that determine how it operates and engages students, by being connected through P.E. Then if the student wanted to continue to pursue the sport beyond

P.E., they had a direct route beyond the school day to pursue. The best part: many of the CBOs offered these opportunities free of charge to the school and the students to grow the game and recruit players.

“The kids have a lot of exposure to sport (through P.E.) and hopefully find a lot of enjoyment in just participating in playing sports. So, I think leaving middle school and going on to high school, there are a lot of kids who normally wouldn’t have thought of playing high school sports that go on and try to participate, and they found that they enjoyed it. We instill in them that being involved in high school is a recipe for success. So, if you are not choosing to play a competitive sport in high school, then you are hopefully choosing to be in a club or a program that keeps you engaged and wanting to go to school every day.”

David Hastings, Los Angeles Unified School District Middle School P.E. Teacher

P.E. Essential to Growing School Culture

Why is a middle school in this report? Every organization interviewed talked about how starting robust physical activity and sports opportunities at the high school level is far too late. By the end of middle school, many students are done trying out sports and have determined which ones are for them. Many youth are giving up on sports altogether in middle school. By the time a student reaches high school, if they have not been exposed to a sport they like, then most likely they will not participate in sports at all. That is why all the CBOs interviewed for this report have programming developed to connect to P.E. before high school. This is so each child, upon arriving on the first day of high school, is willing to give any sport a try.

In most schools, P.E. is a polarizing time for youth, especially in middle and high school. Some students see it as a moment of relief from being cooped up at a desk all day. Some dread the possibility of embarrassment lurking in every movement or changing into gym clothes. P.E can either be an opportunity to engage all students in the benefits of physical activity and meet them at their level of engagement or further a student’s belief that physical activity and sports are not for them. David Hastings sees P.E. as an opportunity for students to explore a physical outlet that works for them and drive a positive, inclusive culture at his school. In middle school, P.E. can be an opportunity to make all kids true believers in physical activity and sports.

David does this by introducing students to multiple sports throughout the year, including pickleball, rugby, indoor rowing, running, volleyball, team handball, spikeball, and floorball. Many of these sports are supported by community partners such as the national governing bodies of these sports and local rugby leagues. The CBOs provide equipment, training, curriculum, and other resources to

help David and his school provide sports that go beyond the typical offerings. It also includes a connection to University of California, Los Angeles, so students can be provided insights into the student-athlete experience.



Project Play partnered with Mission Tiger for *The Great Middle School Sports Search*, the first national search for the best middle school sports programs that aimed to find inclusive, quality programs that schools can adopt, regardless of available funding. Through the search, we identified innovative strategies used by middle schools across the country for educators and coaches to deploy in their schools in our downloadable best practice guide at as.pn/mssports

What is the importance of all these different sport offerings? For David, kids can see themselves as athletes and someone who enjoys being physically active, which they might not be able to see with traditional sports offerings. With the help of CBOs providing equipment, national sports bodies bringing new sports to his students, and college athletes serving as mentors, David can expose kids to sports experiences many of them cannot have without these partnerships. This means the student who may not be as good as her peers in baseball might find a sport she

can excel in when everyone is learning for the first time together. It also creates an inclusive culture. No longer are kids sitting on the sidelines because they know flag football is not for them. They are all participating in a sport at their level. David frequently makes adaptations and provides different skill-level groups to make sure each kid finds the right amount of engagement. Then, when a child is in high school, they see sports as an opportunity for them to continue to develop their athletic skills, instead of something that is not for them.

Takeaways from P.E. and School Supports

1. Use P.E. to drive school culture and create a place where youth get a chance to identify with sports and physical activity that meet their needs.
2. Use CBOs to build a broad base of sports and physical activities within P.E.
3. Communicate honestly about your organization or school needs and capacity.
4. Go beyond transactional. Connect the staff of both the CBO and school, so they know about each other's school culture and what is being taught both on and off the field.

Coach Training and Staff Support

Support the work being done on campus by athletic officials and others to build a positive culture, such as making explicit the academic and life benefits of sports.

“Sports can build character, everyone agrees, but how you make sure you have the best structure for that is important and necessary for a successful community partner. It's one thing to have this great idea, and this pie in the sky thought of, ‘Hey, you know high school sports, if you do it [correct] build character.’ But you have to be deliberate. And you have to tell people how. You can't just say, ‘Well, if kids are playing sports, then they're developing character.’ They're not unless the coaches are deliberate, and the leadership is putting a focus and an emphasis on [youth development].”

Jason Sacks, Positive Coaching Alliance Chief Development Officer

Developing a Positive Sports Culture

Developing the right coaching culture at a high school is essential for both athletes and adults. The pursuit of excellence in sports is an opportunity for youth to develop important life skills that translate far beyond the field and the classroom. Positive Coaching Alliance (PCA) supports schools in developing that essential culture that allows sports to be a path-changing opportunity for youth. One of the most important aspects PCA provides is additional resources to coaches, athletic departments, and school staff to make sure sports deliberately build strong character in individuals.

Some schools might be limited by the number of staff available to fully support coaches. PCA provides additional capacity to intentionally train coaches in character development through sports, develop a positive culture of growth among staff, and develop student leaders through sport. The coach and athletic director can focus on making sure kids have uniforms, practices are coordinated, and buses arrive on time. Meanwhile, PCA can provide what it specializes in: providing the tools to coaches to make social and emotional skills in sports deliberate.

CALLS FOR COACHES

Coaching Social and Emotional
Skills in Youth Sports

Calls for Coaches report offers tips to help youth sports coaches develop personal growth in their players. Learn more at as.pn/callsforcoaches

“City Year is an instrumental partner in helping our schools create supportive environments so that our students thrive. The personal connections, support with school work and focus on the possible helps our students realize their fullest potential.”

Susan Cordova, Superintendent of Denver Public Schools & City Year Denver board member

City Year’s Ability to Support School Culture

CBOs can help effectively translate what happens in the classroom to all aspects of the school day. School culture is at its best when all people on campus, both adults and kids, come together to achieve success in the classroom and beyond. According to a recent study on school culture performed by Harvard University, school culture effects what adults and students believe and how they act towards these beliefs. Culture is “5 interwoven elements” on campus including beliefs/assumptions, shared values, norms, patterns/behaviors, and tangible evidence.³ Every school has a slightly different culture. If a school can make its culture explicit to both the adults and youth on campus and package it in a way that brings buy-in from everyone who steps foot on campus, it can be a powerful skill for success. That is what City Year, an education nonprofit that provides extra supports to schools by providing tutors and mentors, does best. City Year integrates its organization into the school’s culture by attending meetings and creating time to collaborate with school staff that meets the needs of teachers and staff. Most importantly, City Year makes these meetings fun and student-centered, not just another meeting that school staff must rush to attend.

The ability for City Year to effectively collaborate with teachers and school staff creates a special school culture that emanates through every interaction a child has with an adult on campus. This includes interactions before school, during school, and after school. For many after-school providers, City Year’s ability to meet with school staff and understand the culture creates an invaluable ability to build connections with youth that invite students into the best parts of the school’s culture.

Takeaways from Coach Training and Staff Support

1. CBOs can expand and enhance the expertise on campus.
2. Develop time for school staff (coaches, teachers, etc.) to collaborate with CBO staff and coaches to build a united culture.
3. Include the CBO in important school meetings and family nights, and have the CBO include the school in important events and community work.

Opportunities through Sports

Increase pathways to sports that might not be offered at every school in a district. Use these sports opportunities through CBOs to develop skills beyond athletic expertise such as academic support, college access, and job skills.

“When talking to people in schools, if I’m saying I’m a lacrosse coach, I’m in sports, a lot of doors close. When you say you do sports-based youth development and can expand upon that, people start to connect the dots.”

Aron Lipkin Homegrown Lacrosse Founder and Executive Director

Connecting the Dots Between Sports, a Quality Education, and Positive Life Outcomes



At Homegrown Lacrosse, a community-based sports organization based in Minnesota, connecting sports to the school day is key. Homegrown Lacrosse builds connections to the classroom and supports the development of its athletes’ future career skills. When Homegrown Lacrosse was started, it had some difficulty in expanding its programming and working with schools. Recently, the

organization's leaders found success in connecting the dots between lacrosse, education, and job training. They developed a partnership with a local school district and city employment agency to develop career paths for their athletes into youth development. Starting next fall, some participants in Homegrown Lacrosse can learn skills in teaching youth development through sports as coaches for middle school youth. The students will get college credit and be paid for their work. This creates an explicit link between what happens in school, on the lacrosse field, and life after high school, so every child can be physically active for many years to come.

"We have a lot of programming that has nothing to do with lacrosse, that creates opportunities for kids to excel and be leaders. But I think the biggest thing is culture. Does every kid feel a sense of belonging like no matter the athletic talent? And (do they feel) that this is a safe place where they can be themselves and where they're going to be successful? "

Mike Levin, Harlem Lacrosse Chief Executive Director

Harlem Lacrosse: Beyond Sports

For many community-based sports organizations, it is misleading to say that they only expand sports opportunities beyond what the school currently offers. It is more than just adding additional roster spots or opportunities to go to a recreational facility off campus. Community-based sports organizations are often a bridge that connects what is going on in school to their larger community and helps develop important life skills. Harlem Lacrosse tries to exemplify this bridge between school and life.

One of the ways it does this is by providing a full-time staff member during the school day who attends the school's professional development and is steeped in the school's culture. Mike Levin describes this role as a "guidance counselor, coach, and mentor." Harlem Lacrosse's program director coaches youth in lacrosse and provides a quality sports experience, but it is more than just sport aptitude. The effort is also about developing them as people. This means supporting them academically during the school day and designing practices that are more than just an opportunity to improve sports-specific skills. Harlem Lacrosse tries to foster an atmosphere where every person in the program feels a part of the community, regardless of their lacrosse skills. Coaches design practices for varying abilities and leave space to build a team across these different levels. Harlem Lacrosse also has a staff member who attends school meetings, meets with families, and checks-in on athletes in the classroom. This shows athletes that they are more than just their ability to succeed in the sport. Because the program director has developed skills as a guidance counselor and mentor, practices appeal to all types of athletes.

Takeaways from Opportunities through Sport

1. Create a sports community on and off campus that is tied towards valuing the athletes as people, not only athletes who perform well at the sport.
2. Connect the value of sports to enhancing life after graduation and personal development.
3. Explore ways sports can tie in what is learned in the classroom and on the field to develop quality skills for employment.
4. Use sports as the bridge between education and career development opportunities.

Recreational, Fitness, and Wellness Activities Access

Partnering with non-traditional sports and recreational programs such as yoga, hiking, and other forms of life-long exercise

“Health, wellness, and fitness are not necessarily part of the school day, in the same way, that reading, science, and math are. It's never the teachers, the parent coordinators, or the principals that prevent it from being a part of the school. It's about the systems that we work in. And so hopefully, having seen success with community partners, school districts will say, ‘Kids want to come to school when they have Wellness in the Schools. Kids do better when they play with Asphalt Green. After recess, it helps calm all sorts of behaviors during the day.’ They can become a part of the system we’re trying to evolve.”

Arlen Zamula, New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene Director of Nutrition and Physical Activity

New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: Creating a More Equitable Approach

With the advent of high-stakes academic testing, schools many schools have focused their spending on investments tied directly to tested academic outcomes. This is particularly true in urban areas. The high school has evolved from a holistic education approach to more frequently solely focused on increasing student academic standards. In many ways, this has had negative consequences in developing quality education for youth. However, fighting the system is often difficult for additional learning opportunities like sports, wellness, and fitness to find space during the school day. The New York City Health Department has put together a coalition of local organizations represented by Arlen Zamula. This coalition has tried to reimagine what the system supporting youth through education might look like. It can be a system where school staff focus on academic success and community partners provide holistic support in sports, wellness, nutrition, and health. It can be a system where the school is still a hub of holistic development while additional community partners provide support beyond traditional academic opportunities.

The Healthy Schools Network, consisting of nearly 150 organizations across the city, was originally formed in 2016 to better understand what support CBOs provided schools across the city in areas of mental and physical well-being. One meeting brought all the organizations together and allowed each one to talk about their programs, what their mission was, and where they were located. Instantly, organizations were commenting, “Oh, that is what you do” or “I didn’t know we worked in the same school.” This network led to deeper collaboration, coordination of efforts, and opportunities to coordinate efforts across schools and the district more broadly.

Eventually, all the organizations deliberately mapped out where they were located across the city and what programs they were offering at each school. This allowed the network, as Arlen put it, to see “in real-time where all the partners work in schools and see where there were gaps and opportunities” to collaborate.

From this work, the network was able to form a smaller subcommittee to focus decisions, prioritize areas of focus, and communicate directly with the school district and other stakeholders. At the center of the work done by the Healthy Schools Network is the belief that through the collaboration of the 150 CBOs and government, the needs of youth in their city will be heard and met equitably.

“We are all about inspiring kids to get out, be active, have fun and get fit. It’s never too early to set new goals, which is more important than ever since obesity rates have tripled for U.S. kids in the past three decades. This curriculum will empower students to step outside of their comfort zones and learn how to overcome obstacles both on and off the course.”⁴

Joe De Sena, Spartan Founder and CEO

BOKS and Spartan: Creating True Collaboration to Develop Fitness Opportunities

Traditional sports offerings do not always meet the needs of every student. However, there is an endless list of opportunities for high school youth to get moving. BOKS, a research-based physical activity program that can help children of all ages, abilities, and nationalities improve their physical and mental health, and Spartan, the company that annually puts on hundreds of famous obstacle course races, realized there was an opportunity to provide a fun way for youth to set goals and get more physically fit trying to accomplish these goals. BOKS knew it had the resources and knowledge to support youth, and Spartan knew it had a fun, engaging opportunity that was unique and may spark interest in physical fitness in students that lacked this before. They decided to team up to get kids moving and created the BOKS X SPARTAN high school curriculum.

The ability to include multiple partners to promote fitness is at the core of the collaboration. BOKS and Spartan made sure to develop a curriculum for high school P.E. departments that was easy to use either during school or after school. Most importantly, it is also aligned with physical fitness standards and Spartan obstacles races to offer a fun way to get physically fit. The true magic of the BOKS curriculum is the ability to tie expertise from all the participants from students to P.E. teachers to volunteers to create something that is incredibly engaging for youth. The spirit of collaboration by national organizations to tie in locally at the school level has allowed high school youth to access

more than 250 obstacle events that Spartan organizes annually. It's a great opportunity to get students outside and get fit.

Takeaways from *Recreational, Fitness, and Wellness Activities Access*

1. Find ways for organizations to effectively partner with and connect across the city to understand the wider impact and target specific areas of need.
2. Communicate constantly across CBOs and to schools, and when possible, use a united voice to enhance communication with key stakeholders like the school district and city government.
3. Find ways and partners that make physical activity fun and offer nontraditional routes to physical fitness and a healthy lifestyle.

Creating School-CBO Partnerships Built to Last

A long-lasting, sustainable relationship between CBOs and high school sports is the goal. However, sometimes these relationships can be limited in their ability to last beyond the people in their roles or expand past a handful of schools in a city. To expand equitable access to sports beyond a relationship or one community, building a partnership that can sustain and be repeated is vital. Through the interview process, we were able to identify four structures that can enhance the ability to establish long-lasting partnerships that expand equitable access to sports. The examples below better define ways to build partnerships that are built to last.

These four examples are not a complete list. Other types of structures can be put in place beyond the four examples listed to sustain these partnerships. More research and understanding are still needed to explore how both funding, community engagement, and replicable models can best be created to support quality CBO and high school sports partnerships.

National Governing Body — U.S. Tennis Association (USTA)

USTA provides support to local tennis organizations with regional offices to connect directly with schools. Initially, it began to provide grants to schools that wanted to provide tennis in P.E. It quickly realized that these grants sometimes bought equipment that was never used. The USTA began to adapt its strategy by linking a school to a local tennis organization that can help support tennis programming at or outside of the school and rewarding the school with equipment for the connection. This provides accountability in a couple of important ways when it comes to CBO and high school partnerships. The partnership looks like this:

- Bring CBOs and high schools to the table to establish contracts that provide the essential conditions for schools and CBOs mentioned above.
- Provide resources, trainings, and curriculums to schools or local clubs that want to start a tennis program that has been developed across the country by local tennis clubs.
- Provide funding with expertise in equipment and building/improving facilities.

City Government — New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

The Department of Health and Mental Hygiene has utilized the power of creating a strong network between CBOs to make an impact on children at the school site. City officials are trying to build an organization that is filled with collaboration and problem solving to end the disparities not only in access to quality sports and recreation, but also in health and nutrition for youth across the city.

Some tips:

- Provide a place for all CBOs to come together to collaborate, focus on programming across the city, and build CBO to CBO connections.
- Focus their energy on scaling solutions, problem solving, and breaking down silos for CBOs.
- Provide staff from organizations a small stipend for their time spent collaborating outside of their normal role.
- Facilitate and focus connections between schools and CBOs.

National Nonprofit — Harlem Lacrosse

With Harlem Lacrosse's reach across the country, the national organization can take on the role of providing accountability to its local CBO chapters and schools. It provides support to these partnerships in these three ways:

- Provides oversight and space for collaboration for local sites and schools with quality checks and meetings with all stakeholders.
- Identifies important qualities and conditions for expanding to a new school/city.
- Provides a network of collaboration with other sites to source ideas and support.

Local Developed Nonprofit — Row New York

Row New York is a CBO that supports youth by providing quality rowing programs and academic support to develop youth. Row New York's ability to sustain funding and develop a professional management staff has created an institution that can sustain beyond the founder or initial relationships. By establishing a broad base of donors, creating relationships with local city officials, and building lasting trust with school communities, Row New York has created a mature and lasting organization. Some best practices:

- Diversify funding sources to create a sustainable organization.
- Establish strong relationships with those at the ground level, such as schools and families, based on trust.
- Build strong relationships with key players outside of the school site to create accountability at the city level.

Row New York, How to Become an Intentional Sports Community

At their core, sports can be a builder of community. Picture everyone cheering on the local team, youth learning from adult mentors in their community, and student-athletes building community with their teammates. Sports can uplift and unite a community. They can tie a city together. It makes for great television, but it looks a lot different in real life. Sports do not always end with a nice, beautiful, triumphant scene and the rolling of credits. The work to build community is constant, perpetual work. In the sport of rowing, the local boathouse is often called a “community” boathouse. The concept of sports being a place to meet, build, and foster community is implied with this naming. However, without being intentional, this community can perpetuate the few people who have had access to the sport historically. It will not reflect the diverse economic and racial backgrounds that make up the communities in many cities across the country.

The boathouse, like many physical spaces and facilities in sports, is a gateway. Who is invited to the gate? How are they invited? How do they get to the gate? And who is seen on the other side of the gate? These are all questions that matter when designing a sports community. Community-based sports organizations can design a space that can help expand access to quality sports for everyone in the community if they can adequately address these questions.

The intentional community is a key part of the design of many of the CBOs that were interviewed for this toolkit. Row New York especially exemplifies fostering an inclusive community that might not have existed without the organization. Row New York is a nonprofit in New York City with the mission of using rowing to develop youth and build community. It puts building a boathouse community that reflects the youth of their city at the center of its mission.

Row New York knows gateways to rowing are limited in the city, so it makes sure to be intentional about who is invited to the space and what can be done so historically marginalized people can take on meaningful roles in the organization and build a space centered on inclusion and belonging. Row New York Executive Director Rachel Cytron said the power of building an intentional community, centered around sport, is that it ties together groups across the city who might never interact with each other without their community boathouse. In its simplest form, Row New York provides a space for high schoolers to be someone different than they might be at their high school. Their program is built on belonging, and the sport of rowing is a space for them to belong to something outside of their school community.

Rachel mentioned sports as being a place where youth “who are potentially having trouble finding their place in school, can find a place where they belong, and they're respected, and they feel like they're part of a team in a community-based sports organization. And there's tremendous value to that.”

For CBOs, this takes intentionality and close ties with both the local community and schools. Many schools in urban areas remain segregated, which puts up artificial fences around communities and prevent youth from interacting with other children who might come from different racial and economic backgrounds.

Row New York tries to use its boathouse as a gateway to open connections across the racial and economic divide in the segregated city schools. Rowing is a sport that can cost a family thousands of dollars a year. Row New York had to throw out this outdated funding model to be a true community boathouse. Row New York caps the percentage of youth who can afford to pay fully for the program at 30%. Most of the youth participating do not pay anything. The organization's mission to build community matches its funding model.

But solving high costs and transportation, often the main initial barriers to playing sports, is only part of what a community sports organization can do. If a program stops there, it might continue to perpetuate less obvious barriers of entry. The gateway may become open, but people from historically marginalized communities might not feel invited inside.

Row New York is intentional about providing a team that does not perpetuate stereotypes, win-at-all-cost mentalities, or other more invisible barriers that continue to keep out communities of color from the sport of rowing nationally. While this is still a work in progress, Row New York seeks out adults who are driven to designing an inclusive space, come from the community, and provide them with resources so they can be explicit about how to make sure everyone feels included and everyone feels like they belong. Most importantly, they know that community is a constant work in progress, not just the title of a boathouse. For many community-based sports organization community is also something that must be constantly pushed for and reimagined with each group of athletes.

Work Cited

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Methodology:

For this project, we interviewed 11 community-based organizations, government, and school officials to better understand the relationship between a CBO and schools. We talked to varying sizes of CBOs, from those in a single community, city-wide, all the way to national organizations across the country. We also interviewed educators located at a school, who provided a varied and quality sports experience for their students enhanced by partnerships with CBOs. CBO and high school partnerships are often viewed as ways to reimagine what high school sports can look like. But often what a CBO is, how it can help, and how this relationship can develop into a quality partnership to support youth through sports and recreation is unclear. This project aims to make these relationships clearer. We aimed to get information on the following five areas CBOs can support high schools in reimagining sports:

1. Facility and Equipment Use Agreements
2. P.E. and School Support
3. Coach Training and Staff Support
4. Opportunities Through Sports
5. Recreational, Fitness, and Wellness Activities Access

For this project we interviewed the following organizations:

Staff Member	Organization	Example(s) of CBO High School Partnership
Rachel Cytron, Executive Director	Row New York	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Shared Facility and Equipment Use Agreements 2. P.E. and School Support 4. Opportunities Through Sports
Lisa Finegan, Director of K-12 Physical Education	ICEF Public Schools (Los Angeles, CA)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Shared Facility and Equipment Use Agreements 2. P.E. and School Support 3. Coach Training and Staff Support 4. Opportunities Through Sports 5. Provide Recreational, Fitness, and Wellness Activities
David Hastings, Teacher	Middle School, Los Angeles Unified School District	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. P.E. and School Support 4. Opportunities Through Sports 5. Provide Recreational, Fitness, and Wellness Activities
Mike Levin, CEO	Harlem Lacrosse (Harlem, NY)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Shared Facility and Equipment Use Agreements 2. P.E. and School Support 3. Coach Training and Staff Support 4. Opportunities Through Sports

Elliott Pettitt, Director of Grassroots Tennis	United States Tennis Association	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Shared Facility and Equipment Use Agreements 2. P.E. and School Support 3. Coach Training and Staff Support 5. Provide Recreational, Fitness, and Wellness Activities
Caleb Coats, Director of Athletics and Activities	STRIVE Prep Schools (Denver, CO)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Opportunities Through Sports 5. Provide Recreational, Fitness, and Wellness Activities
Arlen Zamula, Director of Nutrition and Physical Activity	New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene	Other: Coalition building and policies
Wendy Siskin, National Program Director	Wellness in the Schools	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Provide Recreational, Fitness, and Wellness Activities
Jason Sacks, Chief Development Officer	Positive Coaching Alliance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Coach Training and Staff Support
Maria Gerana, Community Program Manager	Asphalt Green (New York, NY)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Shared Facility and Equipment Use Agreements 2. P.E. and School Support 5. Provide Recreational, Fitness, and Wellness Activities
Aron Lipkin, Executive Director & Co- Founder	Homegrown Lacrosse (Minneapolis, MN)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Shared Facility and Equipment Use Agreements 2. P.E. and School Support 4. Provide Recreational, Fitness, and Wellness Activities