

STATE OF PLAY

Oakland

ANALYSIS AND
RECOMMENDATIONS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Aspen Institute Sports & Society Program analyzed the landscape of youth sports in the city of Oakland from June 2021 to June 2022. *State of Play Oakland* offers a snapshot of how well adults are serving youth through sports and other physical activities, regardless of race, gender, income or ability.



Findings for this report were guided by local Oakland experts in the fields of sports, finance, and physical activity and obtained through multiple methods: individual interviews with a broad collection of stakeholders and community members; focus-group discussions with youth, coaches, and parents and caregivers; youth surveys; media accounts; and existing reports, policy analyses, and publicly available data.

Some key findings in the report:

- **Oakland youth are less physically active than the nation.** Only 14% of youth in Oakland meet the 60 minutes of physical activity per day recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, below the national average of 23%. Oakland girls (9%) are less likely to be sufficiently physically active than boys (19%). Physical activity decreases as youth get older.
- **Access to quality parks is unevenly distributed.** Residents in Oakland neighborhoods where people most identify as a person of color have access to 66% less park space per person than those in predominantly White neighborhoods. Although 89% of Oakland residents live within a 10-minute walk of a park, the amenities and investments are much lower than comparable U.S. cities. In a study by Oakland Parks and Recreation Foundation, 55% of respondents said poor park maintenance was a barrier to visiting or fully utilizing Oakland parks. Most children don't use rec center spaces, and those that do often are in wealthier areas.
- **Oakland lacks equitable access to recreational sports league opportunities.** White children are three times more likely than Latino/a youth and two times more likely than Black and Asian kids to play on a recreation center team. In the Montclair, Dimond and Laurel neighborhoods, 41% of youth have played sports on a rec center team. In Deep East Oakland, that figure is just 13%. Boys are more likely to play on rec center teams than girls.
- **Youth want to try different sports and need more sustainable opportunities.** Oakland youth identified 24 sports that at least 10% of them said they want to try. That's far more interest than youth expressed in Baltimore or Columbus, Ohio, where the Aspen Institute produced previous community reports. Oakland youth don't have a sustained way to play new sports because the city lacks the capacity to create lasting infrastructure for continued participation.
- **There's strong interest in trying individual sports.** Archery is the No. 1 sport both Oakland boys and girls said they most want to try. Karate/mixed martial arts, roller

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

