



For immediate release

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**Pennington Family Foundation Leads Project to Improve Youth Sports**  
*Foundation hires Aspen Institute to find gaps in access, offer solutions  
to transform how kids play in East Baton Rouge Parish*

The residents of Baton Rouge are passionate about play, yet not all children in the parish have the opportunity to engage in sports and reap the associated benefits—mental well-being, physical health and the simple joy of play. To address this gap, the Irene W. and C.B. Pennington Foundation has started a project to expand access to recreational activities for all children in the parish.

The Foundation has partnered with the Aspen Institute to conduct research on youth sports through Aspen’s Project Play initiative. This initiative has already produced transformative State of Play reports for 12 communities, offering valuable insights that will be applied to Baton Rouge as well.

“The children of Baton Rouge, no matter their socio-economic status, deserve a chance to play the games they want and the lifetime of benefits that come with participating,” said Lori J. Bertman, CEO of the Irene W. and C.B. Pennington Foundation. “Investing in youth sports

benefits the entire region by lowering obesity, fostering inclusivity, and enhancing social and emotional well-being of all children.”

The Foundation has already granted hundreds of millions for improving health and well-being in Louisiana and the world. In the early 1980s, a gift of \$125 million from C.B. “Doc” Pennington and wife Irene Wells Pennington seeded LSU’s Pennington Biomedical Research Center, among global leaders in obesity and nutrition research. Since then, The Foundation’s grants have helped to jumpstart Athletes for Hope, Girls on the Run Baton Rouge, Miracle League, and Leveling the Playing Field.

In its latest civic initiative, the Aspen Institute Sports & Society Program has been contracted to delve deeply into sports and play in East Baton Rouge. A team of Aspen-affiliated researchers will examine census and demographic data, consult with social scientists and youth sports leaders, and, most importantly, conduct surveys and personal interviews with kids who participate in youth sports, as well as those who wish to but are left on the sidelines. The initiative is guided by an advisory group, which is chaired by Bertman.

The report by Aspen, an internationally known nonprofit committed to realizing an equitable society, will feature survey results, 40 findings on strengths and gaps in providing access to sports, and recommendations for improvements, including a game-changing civic initiative. The project commenced in late August with an advisory group meeting organized by The Foundation. Attending the meeting were representatives of LSU and LSU Athletics, Southern University Athletics, BREC, YMCA, East Baton Rouge School System, Pennington Biomedical, Visit Baton Rouge, Baton Rouge Soccer Club, Traction Sports, Louisiana Sports Hall of Fame, and other organizations. Representatives shared their knowledge and insight about youth sports with Aspen researchers, who will use what they heard to design the year-long project.

State of Play reports have sparked improvements in communities that have acted on them. As an example, Washington State now requires all schools to set aside 45 minutes each school day for physical education. Collectively, the reports have guided hundreds of millions of dollars in grantmaking in State of Play communities. As well, several communities have formed active networks to advance play for children, bending toward kids who are underserved and don’t have athletic facilities within a safe and short walk from their homes.

“Baton Rouge is already a community with a deep passion for sports,” said Tom Farrey, Aspen Institute Sports & Society Program Executive Director. “We are thrilled to be working with the Irene W. and C.B. Pennington Foundation to better understand the opportunities and challenges for youth in East Baton Rouge Parish to access sports and physical activity. We look forward to

working with people who work directly with children to develop recommendations for growing access to quality sport experiences for all youth.”

“The Pennington family has been committed to overall well-being since its start more than four decades ago,” said Paula Pennington de la Bretonne, The Foundation’s trustee. “This research will make sure that gains are inclusive and we are working across all sectors to enhance the total health of children.”

**About the Irene W. and C.B. Pennington Foundation:** Seeded by oilman Doc Pennington and wife Irene, The Foundation has granted more than \$300 million, including a \$125 million gift to start LSU’s Pennington Biomedical Research Center in 1982. The Foundation’s focus areas include arts and sciences, the well-being of children, and creating safe and secure communities by funding first responders. Based in Baton Rouge, The Foundation is among the largest family trusts in the Southeast U.S.

**About the Aspen Institute and its Sports and Society Program:** Founded in 1949, The Aspen Institute is a global nonprofit committed to realizing a free, just and equitable society. The mission of the Aspen Institute Sports & Society Program is to convene leaders, foster dialogue and inspire solutions that help sport serve the public interest, with a focus on the development of healthy children and communities. Its signature initiative is Project Play, which develops, applies and shares knowledge that helps build healthy communities through sports. For more information, visit [www.ProjectPlay.org](http://www.ProjectPlay.org).

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