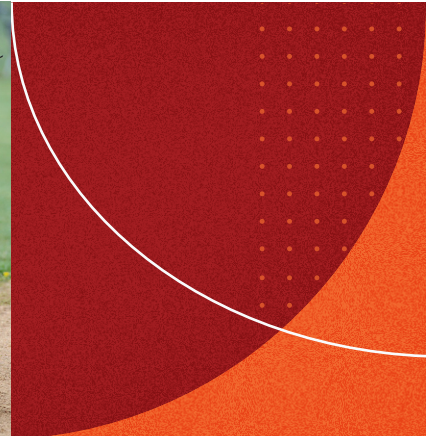




# The Great MIDDLE SCHOOL SPORTS Search

powered by



## 2020

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# BEST PRACTICES GUIDE

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# Welcome to The Great Middle School Sports Search!

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The Aspen Institute’s Project Play and Kellogg’s Frosted Flakes® Mission Tiger™ celebrate the inspiring schools identified through *The Great Middle School Sports Search*. Their exemplary ideas and strategies can also be adopted by other schools to build more inclusive, high-quality sports programming. Our hope is that by learning about their successes you will be inspired to adopt and adapt ideas that are right for your school. Together, we can create more opportunities for kids to participate in middle school sports.

This work is as important now as it has ever been. From resource shortages to a public health crisis, middle school sports face significant challenges that make it difficult to help kids stay active and explore new activities. However, over the past year, *The Great Middle School Sports Search* has discovered that middle schools across the country have been inventive with their in-person and virtual programming, despite the challenges they face.

We’ve seen dedicated middle school educators and coaches creating developmentally appropriate school-based sports experiences, which get students physically active and engaged in sports. These sports experiences build critical lifelong skills such as teamwork, confidence, and leadership. By embracing partnerships, re-imagining schedules, creatively using technology, and exploring new play spaces and programming, these middle school sports programs are overcoming challenges to continue and even expand sport opportunities.

Together, Project Play and Mission Tiger hope these strategies will guide your efforts to ensure that all middle school students have access to high-quality sport opportunities.

**Our hope is that by learning about these schools’ successes you will be inspired to adopt and adapt ideas that are right for your school, and together, we can create more opportunities for middle school sports.**

Sincerely,



Project Play and Mission Tiger



# Promoting Quality Sports Programming

Sports are good for kids. They give young people opportunities to develop physical literacy and fundamental movement skills. But they give kids much more than physical skills. Sports provide environments where kids learn important social and emotional skills, such as responsibility, goal-setting, teamwork, and perseverance.

When kids have access to environments with trained coaches, age-appropriate curricula, and supportive teams, they are more likely to develop habits that lead them to stay active and healthy for life. Middle school sports play a particularly critical role in helping kids grow physically, socially, and emotionally at a pivotal time in their development.

However, the landscape for middle school sports is fragmented. Schools often struggle with facility space, attracting and retaining coaches, uniform

and equipment costs, and more. Some schools and districts focus more on high school sports, and have limited opportunities for middle school kids to explore new sports and physical activities. Many struggle to coordinate activities with community-based programs, which contributes to high attrition rates.

Showcased in this best practices guide are innovative school models and best practices that are low-cost or no-cost, which increase the opportunities for middle school students to access and benefit from participation in sports. These practices can work at all levels, not just in middle schools. Adoption of these best practices to increase access to sports can help middle school sports to serve as a catalyst that will build capacity in our youth to be physically, mentally, and emotionally healthy not just in their middle school years, but for life.

Read [Calls for Coaches](#) to learn how you can help build healthy, safe environments for kids to develop social and emotional skills.

## Process

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The Aspen Institute's Project Play works to develop healthy communities through sports by ensuring that all kids, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, zip code, or ability, have access to high-quality sport opportunities.

To identify schools that have implemented innovative strategies to increase access to middle school sports, Project Play partnered with Mission Tiger to launch *The Great Middle School Sports Search*. Together, an advisory group of middle school educators and coaches, leading sport providers, and Project Play partners developed criteria by which to assess middle schools, focusing on four key areas:

### Access

Given that many schools struggle to provide kids with access to sports, we wanted to understand how applicants tackled these challenges and supported all students' involvement in sports. Since access is a wide-ranging, critical topic, these best practices have been subdivided into three categories that impact access: *cost*, *partnerships*, and *on-ramps* (pre-middle school sport opportunities to get kids involved).

### Quality

We also know that *how* a program is executed affects kids' experiences and learning in sports. We focused on the quality of programs and practices in schools with an emphasis on training of coaches and opportunities given for youth leadership.

### Youth Leadership

We know that when kids have more ownership and opportunity to lead, they remain more engaged in the activity, more likely to continue participating, and more likely to continue being physically active

after the sport ends and in other aspects of their lives. Intentionally asking for kids' feedback and scaffolding leadership roles for them keeps the focus on the skills kids want to learn, centers the activity on the needs and wants of kids in playing sports, and offers coaches opportunities to help kids develop those skills.

### Innovation

Since middle schools play an important, if often underfunded and underutilized, role in kids' development, we also wanted to highlight schools that displayed particular innovations in expanding access to sports. These innovations are broad and could take a variety of forms.

### Note:

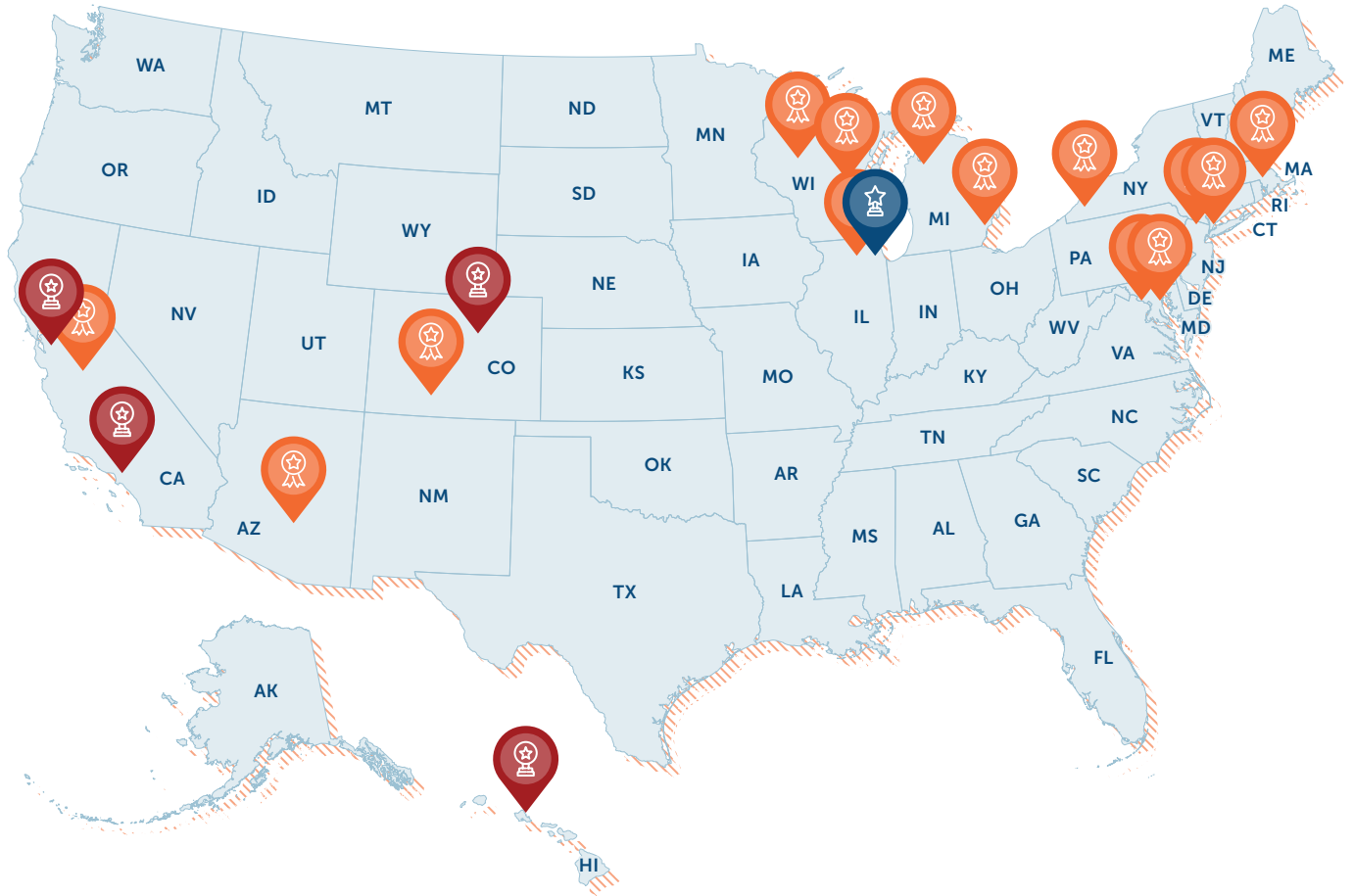
We know that some young people have more opportunities or support than others in accessing youth sports, and that inequities exist along demographic lines including race and ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status, as well as in ability. Equity was woven into the framing of the criteria and discussed during the interviews, so that we could highlight schools that are not only aware of, but actively addressing, inequities in access in their school and community.

## The Search

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With these criteria, the team executed a national search over the course of a year that attracted applicants from across the country. This best-practice guide represents the culmination of our efforts to search the country for low-cost, replicable, and innovative middle school programs, and then to codify and disseminate those practices. We appreciate all schools that applied, and their innovations are reflected in this guide. As per the national search rules, one school was selected as the overall winner along with four finalists, each of which is profiled in this guide.

# The Great Middle School Search Schools



**Grand Prize**



**Finalist**



**In Report**

## Participating Schools

School Name	Acknowledgment Level	City	State
Jamieson School	 Grand Prize	Chicago	IL
Coliseum College Prep Academy	 Finalist	Oakland	CA
Girls Athletic Leadership School	 Finalist	Panorama City	CA
King Intermediate School	 Finalist	Kaneohe	HI
STRIVE Prep Schools	 Finalist	Denver	CO
Brocton Central School	 Included in this report	Brocton	NY
Calvert School	 Included in this report	Baltimore	MD
DREAM Charter School	 Included in this report	New York	NY
Granton Area School District	 Included in this report	Granton	WI
Green Bay Trinity Lutheran School	 Included in this report	Green Bay	WI
Kennedy Middle School	 Included in this report	Natick	MA
Michael M. Byrne Elementary School	 Included in this report	Chicago	IL
Notre Dame Preparatory School and Marist Academy	 Included in this report	Pontiac	MI
Ortega Middle School	 Included in this report	Alamosa	CO
PS / IS 76	 Included in this report	New York	NY
St. Ignatius Loyola Academy	 Included in this report	Baltimore	MD
Traverse City East Middle School	 Included in this report	Traverse City	MI
Val Vista Academy	 Included in this report	Gilbert	AZ
Warren E. Hyde Middle School	 Included in this report	Cupertino	CA

See Appendix A for a full list of schools in this guide, as well as the advisory group members who made this work possible.



# WINNER

## Jamieson School Chicago, Illinois

**Jamieson** is a diverse Chicago public school serving kids in pre-K through 8th grade, 69% of whom receive free and reduced lunch. Jamieson is a long-standing high-performing neighborhood school that values authentic community-parent partnerships and actively celebrates diversity. Jamieson focuses on educating the whole child by building environments where kids can develop physical skills through sports, as well as social and emotional skills they need to succeed in life. Jamieson demonstrates creativity and ingenuity in finding low cost strategies for scheduling, use of space, and technology innovation to increase access to sports for their middle schoolers.

Like many other middle schools, Jamieson faces a variety of challenges in engaging the broadest number of students in quality sport and play opportunities, including limited funding, facility space, and transportation. With one non-regulation sized gym, physical education teachers—who are also often the coaches—deployed other spaces in the school, like the cafeteria, for PE activities during the school day.

One unique strategy adopted by Jamieson is scheduling when middle school sports practices take place. “We have our middle school sports in

the morning, so the kids can get their practice in before school, and then it won’t conflict with the clubs or anything else they have in the afternoon,” said Joseph Nakanishi, a PE teacher at Jamieson. The teams compete with other schools during the traditional afterschool block, but by hosting morning practices, more students can join the teams while still participating in a range of afterschool commitments, both on and off campus.

The PE department also discussed their focus on using technology to connect with kids and their families. They used an app called Remind, which allowed teachers to communicate with kids and parents on school and homework matters. They also discussed the use of this app to allow coaches to communicate with athletes and parents to keep in touch about schedule changes, practice updates, and other helpful reminders.

During COVID-19, Jamieson successfully moved PE classes online and expanded virtual training and exercise opportunities when kids could not physically be in school. As Nakanishi said, “With all the virtual programming we have up now, we’ll never have a snow day again. There will be no reason that kids can’t be connected and active anymore.”



## Fast Facts

**School type:** Public

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**Grades:** PreK-8

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**Free and reduced lunch:** 69%

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**Demographics:** Asian: 26.4%, Black: 8.4%, Hispanic: 31.6%, White: 30.4%, Other: 3.1%

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**Gender:** Female: 48%, Male: 52%

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**Sports Offered:**

**Girls & Boys:** Basketball, Cheerleading, Cross Country, Soccer (Outdoor), Track and Field, Volleyball

**Co-ed:** Field Hockey, Flag Football, Volleyball



“When we lined up to go down to the gym, I was always super excited because no matter what we were doing, the gym teachers were always inclusive and helped everyone.”

66

**Jamieson School Student**  
Chicago, Illinois



# ACCESS

Sports and physical activity are important to keep kids physically active and healthy. Project Play's **Sport for All, Play for Life** playbook emphasizes that, in order to increase youth sport participation, we must facilitate **broad access** to sports for all kids, regardless of age, race, ethnicity, zip code or ability. We can do so by lowering the barriers to access that many kids face, including cost, lack of diverse programming and age-appropriate play.

## Cost



### Barrier

Among the obstacles that prevent kids from participating in middle school sports opportunities, families struggle to cover registration fees and other costs, such as equipment and transporting their kids to and from practices, games and tournaments. Kids are also cut from teams because schools lack funding and resources to provide equipment, coaching, and opportunities for every student.



### Solution

Develop mechanisms to ensure low-to-no-cost-for-kids access to play sports.



## School-Based Strategies

- **Adopt hybrid models that combine intramural and extracurricular activities to help kids explore multiple sports opportunities.**

**Traverse City East Middle School** develops a range of sport opportunities to diversify kids' sport experiences through school-based intramural and extracurricular sports, which are lower cost as a result of being school-based, all the way to competitive, traditional sports.

- **Institute no-cut policies.**

**Jamieson** instituted a no-cut policy for students who try out for a middle school sports team, with the result that all students who try out are automatically on the team. This allows all kids opportunities and access to new sports and creates an environment where the focus is on fun and learning, rather than simply winning.

- **Pass along fees through a mechanism where families can increase their financial commitment to cover others.**

**Traverse City East Middle School** established a “suspended registration system,” which allows families to increase their registration payment to cover the registration fees of other students who might need support with payment.

- **Conduct fundraisers to offset registration and equipment fees.**

**Michael M. Byrne Elementary School** hosts a family movie night fundraiser to raise money to defray equipment and registration fees.



## District-Based Strategies

- **Small grants and donations.**

**Coliseum College Prep Academy** provides all uniforms and equipment that kids need to play at no cost.

**Girls Athletic Leadership School (GALS)** partnered with athletic apparel provider Oiselle’s [Bras for Girls](#) initiative and received sports bra donations, ensuring that the girls have necessary equipment to play.

- **Treat sports as co-curricular by requiring participation in at least one sport, as capacity allows, sponsored by the school.**

**St. Ignatius Loyola Academy** requires students to be involved in sports whether through a team sport or an intramural team. With a smaller student body, St. Ignatius can nimbly support students in exploring a variety of activities, helping students to find which sports they enjoy.





**FINALIST**

# Coliseum College Prep Academy

Oakland, California

Coliseum College Prep Academy (CCPA), a public school in Oakland for kids in grades 6-12, serves a racial and ethnically diverse population of kids on free and reduced lunch. CCPA integrates sports into an extended school day model, where students are encouraged to participate in sports during their choice activity period held at the end of the school day.

Though CCPA lacks physical play spaces and is located in an area with poor air quality, its extended-day model opens up opportunities for kids to access sports during the school day. The model allows students to use onsite facilities, though limited, for these activities in addition to walking to district and city-owned facilities.

At CCPA, there is no cost for students to participate in sports and equipment is provided by the school. CCPA school leaders have diligently established a sports equipment inventory through donations and small grants.



## Fast Facts

**School type:** Public

**Grades:** 6-12

**Free and reduced lunch:** 95%

**Demographics:** Hispanic: 83%, Black: 12%, Asian: 2%, Other: 2%

**Gender:** Male: 44%, Female: 56%

**Sports Offered:** Girls & Boys: Basketball, Cross Country, Soccer (Outdoor), Track & Field, Volleyball, Badminton

**Co-ed:** Bowling, E-Sports

# Partnerships



## Barrier

Kids are unable to learn about new sports or activities without diverse programming, equipment, and coaches. As a result of cost and resource barriers, including lack of sufficient equipment for every student or enough coaches to staff activities, many middle schools struggle to provide a variety of opportunities.



## Solution

Develop community partnerships to augment and expand school offerings.



## School-Based Strategies

- **Partner with local businesses.**

**PS/IS 76** partners with local businesses and restaurants to sponsor teams and provide more sport opportunities, which increases the diversity of activities and reduces cost barriers for participation.

- **Add play spaces through partnerships with local recreation facilities.**

**Calvert School** partners with universities and other providers to expand practice spaces for middle schoolers, giving them space and dedicated time to learn new skills.

- **Sync up with other local providers.**

**Ortega Middle School** partners with its local Boys & Girls Club to sponsor activities for the school, including sports the school does not offer and other afterschool programming, expanding the opportunities it can offer to kids.

- **Support students' holistic health needs through partnerships with physical and mental health providers.**

**PS/IS 76** works to bring in mental health experts or school psychologists, based on the needs of students, to promote holistic health, including social, emotional and mental health.



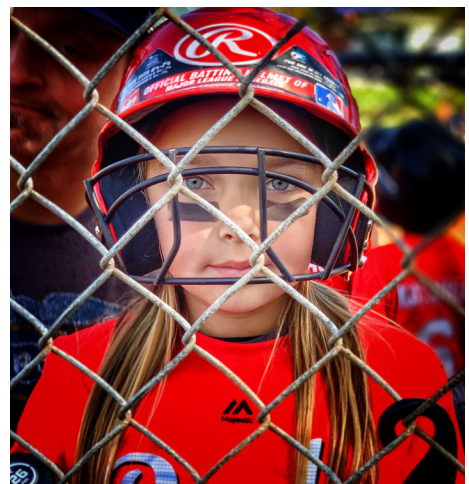
## District-Based Strategies

- **Allow summer programs to continue to provide kids with year-round sport opportunities.**

**Granton Area School District**, located in a farming community, plans summer programming around the farming schedule, to ensure that all kids can participate while dedicating time to supporting their families during the planting and harvest seasons. The summer programming also includes busing so that families are not responsible for transportation.

- **Combine programs/teams across schools.**

**Brocton Central School** partners with other schools to combine teams for girls sports in which they lack enough players to field a team. Girls from different schools are allowed to play on the same team against schools from other districts.





**FINALIST**

# Girls Athletic Leadership School

Panorama City, California

GALS is an all-girls public charter middle school serving a majority Latinx population of girls in 6th-8th grade, all of whom are engaged in physical activity during the school day. GALS has created a model in which physical activity is embedded throughout the school day, not just as one PE class or afterschool activity.

GALS' version of PE, called Morning Movement, helps students sample different sports and fitness modalities during the year. Students also have the opportunity to rotate as a Wellness Team Leader and to lead Morning Movement, which helps build leadership skills in a low-risk environment. To further integrate movement into the academic school day, teachers build movement into the classroom lesson to enhance learning through "brain-boosts" such as answering a question using body movement (for example, squat if you think the answer is A, stand on one leg if you think the answer is B), walking and reading with partners, or a song and dance that teaches kids how to multiply fractions.

GALS has worked with local partners to increase the breadth and depth of activities for their students. These partners often supplement the Morning Movement curriculum, adding new activities like Team Bully Buster, an anti-bullying program taught through self-defense classes. GALS also partnered with Oiselle, a fitness and women's empowerment brand, whose [Bras for Girls](#) initiative donates free sports bras to girls in late elementary and middle school, and eliminates a significant cost barrier. Together, the partnerships help kids to sample multiple sports and get access to the equipment they need to participate.



## Fast Facts

**School type:** Charter

**Grades:** 6-8

**Free and reduced lunch:** 81%

**Demographics:** Hispanic: 86%, White: 6%, Asian: 4%, Black: 3%

**Gender:** Female: 100%

**Sports Offered:** Girls: Basketball, Cheerleading, Volleyball, Wrestling, Intramural Softball



# On-Ramps



## Barrier

Kids need developmentally appropriate programs to engage them in physical activity and sports prior to middle school, to allow them to develop and build on fundamental movement skills.



## Solution

Develop pre-middle school opportunities, or “on-ramps,” to involve kids in sports before more formal middle school offerings, as lack of experience or background in a sport intimidate some young people from trying out.



## School-Based Strategies

- **Try new sport models.**

**Michael M. Byrne Elementary School** and **Val Vista Academy** established mixed gender programs for specific sports, like basketball, to expand access to all kids to play together, ensuring that students have access to a significantly larger number of sports.

- **Start with basic physical activity skills in PE to build foundational movement skills.**

**Warren E. Hyde Middle School** incorporates functional movement skills and various types of activity into its PE opportunities, such as dancing and stretching. This helps to build on basic movement skills that provides a foundation for students to feel more comfortable in a variety of sports.

- **Scaffold teams and programs within middle school. Divide teams into smaller, developmentally similar sub-teams to encourage age-appropriate play.**

**Green Bay Trinity** divides its middle school teams into A, B, and C mixed-grade teams based on skill level, allowing more kids an opportunity to play with others at their own skill levels. Other schools in their conference have done the same, creating the opportunity for students of similar ability to compete.

- **Develop lead-in programs, a junior sports program that officially begins in middle school, to give kids low-risk opportunities to try new sports.**

**Michael M. Byrne Elementary School** and **Brocton Central School** started introductory programs for kids prior to middle school, which allows kids a low risk opportunity to learn sport-specific skills and the rules of the sport. Once students enter high school, they are familiar with both the sport and the coach, making it less intimidating to try out for the team.



## District-Based Strategies

- **Use all-school events to raise awareness of sport opportunities and registration options.**

**Kennedy Middle School** hosts an all-school fall orientation for students and parents to discuss the sports and activities offered at the school, answering questions about the sports and the upcoming seasons and offering on-site registration.

- **Develop new leagues.**

**STRIVE Prep** organized a middle school league to expose kids to competition and teamwork opportunities outside their own school and neighborhood.







**FINALIST**

# King Intermediate School

Kaneohe, Hawaii

King Intermediate is a public school serving 50% free and reduced lunch students in 7th-8th grade through whole child development and nontraditional physical activity. The majority of the school's students are Native Hawaiian, a minority population in Hawaii. King Intermediate's programming stresses, as integral of its educational program, the development of mental and physical abilities that contribute to the development of positive character. The PE curriculum emphasizes non-traditional physical activities, such as ultimate frisbee, speedball and pickleball, enabling all students to participate. This broadened definition of an "athlete" allows all kids to see themselves as athletes for life. King Intermediate's partnership with afterschool programs providers creates additional opportunities for students to participate in physical activities that are not offered in PE.

At King Intermediate, the culture of sports participation has been embraced by staff, too. They help at competitions by working at concession and scoring tables, taking pictures and videos, and cheering on their students. Every October, King Intermediate hosts a cross country meet, the "unofficial state championships for cross country for middle/intermediate public schools," with 20 schools and more than 400 runners from across the state participating. School staff volunteers for the event help to make it a signature event for the entire King Intermediate community.



## Fast Facts

**School type:** Public

**Grades:** 7-8

**Free and reduced lunch:** 50%

**Demographics:** Native Hawaiian: 47%, Asian: 24%, White: 11%, Hispanic: 10%, Other: 8%

**Gender:** Male: 48%, Female: 51%

**Sports Offered:** Girls & Boys: Basketball, Cross Country, Track & Field, Volleyball, Wrestling

**Co-ed:** Soccer, Intramural Flag, Football, Volleyball



# QUALITY

Coaches are essential to providing quality youth sport programming, but many **lack sufficient training and education** on how to create an environment that allows kids to develop physical skills or to gain social and emotional skills. In addition, middle schools struggle to recruit, retain, and compensate coaches, and rely heavily on volunteer coaches with disjointed coach training curriculums.

**Research shows** that kids whose coaches are trained in age-appropriate skill development, as well as social and emotional development, are more likely to be comfortable making mistakes and learning. This keeps kids participating in sports.



## Barrier

Due to challenges in recruiting and retaining coaches, as well as developing or finding appropriate youth sport curricula, some schools struggle to develop high-quality youth sport programs.



## Solution

Coach training and middle school sports curricula must be grounded in quality to ensure that they effectively teach kids physical movement skills and foster a supporting, caring environment to help kids develop socially and emotionally.

Want to learn more about high quality, age appropriate coach training curricula?  
Visit **[How To Coach Kids](#)** for modules and resources for a variety of ages.



## School-Based Strategies

- **Develop a relationship-based culture with coaches, administrators and kids.**

**Calvert School** focuses on a relationship-based culture with kids and coaches and facilitates open lines of communication between coaches and school staff through check-ins and conversations, in order to share best practices and troubleshoot challenges.

- **Conduct interviews with coaches after their programs conclude to gather feedback and recommendations.**

**Michael M. Byrne Elementary** conducts an interview process with coaches to gather feedback on their season and interactions with kids. This has helped to retain coaches by demonstrating respect for their experience and giving them voice in addressing the program’s needs.

- **Collect feedback continually from students to facilitate student engagement.**

**Girls Athletic Leadership School (GALS)** surveys their students every year about their experiences and uses the survey feedback to improve or modify sport experiences to better serve students.



## District-Based Strategies

- **Pilot an assessment to observe coaches and make recommendations on how to improve coaching techniques to ensure high-quality instruction.**

**DREAM Charter School** uses a tool called “Program Quality Observation” to assess effective coach practices through structures, engaging activities, and quality of interactions between youth and staff. This data-driven approach helps focus the coaches on continuous improvement.

- **Develop a student advisory committee to allow students an opportunity to make recommendations and learn leadership skills.**

**Calvert School** developed a student advisory committee through which kids could have a direct impact on programming and start to practice leadership skills in a structured environment.



# YOUTH LEADERSHIP

Most kids just **want to have fun** when they play sports, but stress related to external pressure to win can take the “fun” out of sports. When kids have more ownership and opportunity to lead and participate in sports, they are more engaged, more likely to continue participating, and more likely to continue being physically active later in life.

Kids often lack opportunities to practice leadership skills or ownership over their youth sport experience because of how sports have been organized by adults. Centering kids in youth sports brings the focus back to development of the skills that kids want to learn and the opportunities coaches have to help kids learn those skills.



## Barrier

Many young people lack opportunities to explore leadership opportunities in sports.



## Solution

Develop small, bite-sized leadership opportunities where kids can practice leadership and teamwork skills in a safe space, building skills for later in life.



## School-Based Strategies

- **Select kids to lead movement or warm-up exercises at the beginning of PE or practice to get them used to small leadership opportunities.**

**Girls Athletic Leadership School (GALS)** ensures that students have the opportunity to lead Morning Movement activities for their classmates, providing them with small opportunities to lead. In addition, when in-person classes were suspended due to stay-at-home orders, students led workouts for their classmates over Zoom.

**Michael M. Byrne Elementary** selects team captains to help kids move through stretches or warmups, which gives them small, discrete opportunities to practice leadership skills.

- **Develop middle school captains to get kids used to leadership and teamwork.**

**Jamieson** gives kids the opportunity to be a team leader or captain in middle school, allowing them to learn leadership skills in a low-stakes environment.

- **Create a program for team “leaders” or “captains” at each grade level. Students apply to the leadership positions and express why they want to lead their activity or team.**

**Calvert School** offers kids an opportunity to apply to be a student leader on each of their teams. They write an essay to their coaches explaining why they would like to be a student leader, and the coach initiates a one-on-one conversation with the student before finalizing the role, to ensure it is a good fit.

- **Rotate captains to give all students on the team an opportunity to be a leader.**

**Notre Dame Preparatory School** and **Marist Academy**, coaches not only choose team captains but also rotate the captains, to allow all students to learn skills that are needed to lead teammates.



## District-Based Strategies

- **Involve middle schoolers in coaching younger classes and activities, to further foster leadership skills and to provide kids with a feeling of ownership of their program.**

**Val Vista Academy** works to involve middle schoolers in coaching elementary school students. This fosters community across grades, keep kids physically active, and allows them to build leadership skills. In addition to coaching, middle schoolers are encouraged to mentor younger students, which fosters a culture built on relationships throughout the school.





**FINALIST**

# STRIVE Prep Schools

## Denver, Colorado

STRIVE Prep is a community of free, open enrollment, public charter schools in Denver. Among the 3,500 students in 10 schools, spanning elementary, middle and high school, STRIVE Prep serves an ethnically diverse population, 90% of whom qualify for free and reduced lunch and 15% of whom receive special education services.

STRIVE Prep schools support their students holistic well-being through building social and emotional learning instruction, including in their sports teams. Throughout the season, coaches deliver lessons focused on a range of skills, including teamwork, perseverance, and emotion management. Teachers reinforce these same skills in the classroom, drawing parallels on and off the playing field.

In its commitment to providing low-cost, high-quality activities with an intentional focus on social-emotional health and athletic development, STRIVE Prep was instrumental in collaboratively creating a middle school sports league, the Denver Metro League. The league is comprised of seven STRIVE Prep middle schools and includes an additional seven area middle schools that serve similar populations. The league provides an opportunity for schools to address various shared needs, such as facility and field space, professional development for coaches, and transportation costs while providing fun and positive experiences for students through competitive scheduling and organized events.



### Fast Facts

**School type:** Public

**Grades:** PreK-8

**Free and reduced lunch:** 100%

**Demographics:** Asian: 26.4%, Black: 8.4%, Hispanic: 31.6%, White: 30.4%, Other: 3.1%

**Gender:** Male: 48%, Female: 52%

**Sports Offered:** Girls & Boys: Basketball, Cheerleading, Cross Country, Soccer (Outdoor), Track & Field, Volleyball

**Co-ed:** Field Hockey, Flag Football, Volleyball



# INNOVATION

We know that **active kids do better in life**. But middle schools often struggle to ensure that all kids can access sports. Given the variety of constraints faced by middle schools, innovation is key to expanding access to sports.



## Barrier

Middle schools face a myriad of barriers to offering sport opportunities, including access to diverse programming, access to necessary facilities, and managing schedule conflicts.



## Solution

Consider innovative ways to expand kids' access and opportunity to explore sports and engage in physical activity.



## School-Based Strategies

- **Expand the idea of where play can happen through use of nontraditional school spaces such as lunchrooms, unused hallways, etc.**

**Jamieson** developed a system to share a small gym space with other classes and to use the cafeteria during non-lunch hours for specific kinds of activities.

- **Schedule sports programs in the morning to avoid conflicts with afterschool clubs and activities.**

**Jamieson** schedules middle school sports before school. This leaves kids time for other clubs and activities after school. The morning sports also allow the kids to wake up, move, and get ready for the day.

- **Consider scheduling sports during lunch time to accommodate wider participation by kids.**

**Granton Area School District** designates lunchtime as "intramural time," and organizes an athletic committee student group that helps to coordinate certain programming. The group provides kids with a sense of ownership over intramural time and the intramural time offers another opportunity for kids to be physically active during the school day.



## District-Based Strategies

- **Share free apps that allow schools, PE teachers, and coaches to easily communicate with parents and kids related to sports updates (rescheduling, reminders, cancellations, etc.).**

**Jamieson** had been using specific technology to allow students, teachers, and parents to communicate, and added its coaches to the same technology to communicate practice locations, cancellations, rescheduling, and other notes.

- **Build up a repertoire of online tools to continue connecting with kids virtually during snow days and stay-at-home orders.**

**Jamieson** created a robust store of virtual resources and a technology mechanism to communicate with kids during the COVID-19 shelter-in-place orders, working to help kids stay active.





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# Appendix A

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## Advisory Group

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**Marlene Dixon**, [Texas A&M University](#)

**Betty Edwards**, [Special Olympics](#)

**Corinne Farneti**, [Mount St. Mary's University](#)

**Joe Janosky**, [Hospital for Special Surgery](#)

**Chad Jones**, [Special Olympics](#)

**Thomas McKenzie**, [San Diego State University](#)

**Jennifer Paulett**, [ESPN](#)

**Patsy Taylor**, [Special Olympics](#)

**Ericka Uskali**, [National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform](#)

**Hal Wilson**, [Georgia Southern University](#)

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## Schools Included in the Guide

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### **Brocton Central School**

Brocton Central School is a public school in Brocton, New York, serving 64% free and reduced lunch students in K-12th grade. Brocton Central partners with other schools in its district to provide more sports offerings and opportunities for girls.

### **Calvert School**

Calvert School is a private school located in Baltimore, Maryland, serving students in K-8th grade. Calvert School fosters a relationship-based culture with coaches and kids through transparent communication and providing opportunities for all students to be leaders.

### **DREAM Charter School**

DREAM Charter School is located in New York, New York and serves 83% free and reduced lunch students in PreK-12th grade. DREAM uses a tool to assess effective coach practices through structures, engaging activities, and quality interactions, allowing for an environment of consistent feedback and program improvement.

### **Green Bay Trinity**

Green Bay Trinity Lutheran School is located in Green Bay, Wisconsin, and serves students in K-8th grade. Green Bay Trinity offers A, B, and C teams for middle school sports based on skill level, allowing more students opportunities to play at their own skill level.

### **Granton Area School District**

Granton Area School District serves 46% free and reduced lunch students in 6th-8th grade in Granton, Wisconsin. The district aims to serve its students by providing summer programming that ensures they have year-round sport opportunities.

### **Kennedy Middle School**

Kennedy Middle School is a public school in Natick, Massachusetts serving students in 5th-8th grade. It hosts an all-school fall orientation for students and parents to explore the sports and activities offered and provide on-site registration.

### **Michael M. Byrne Elementary School**

Michael M. Byrne Elementary School serves students in K-8th grade in Chicago, Illinois. Byrne Middle School established mixed gender sports programs to expand access for all student to play together.

### **Notre Dame Preparatory School and Marist Academy**

Notre Dame Preparatory School and Marist Academy is a private school in Pontiac, Michigan, serving students in PreK-12th grade. Notre Dame Prep gives all students an opportunity to be a leader by rotating team captains, creating a safe space for students to take healthy risks as a young team leader.

### **PS / IS 76**

Public School 76, Asa Philip Randolph School for the Humanities, is a public school in New York, NY, serving 100% free and reduced lunch students in K-8th grade. PS/IS 76 partners with local businesses to sponsor kids and provide more sport opportunities for students.

### **St. Ignatius Loyola Academy**

St. Ignatius Loyola Academy is a tuition-free independent school for low-income boys in 5th-8th grade located in Baltimore, Maryland. St. Ignatius Loyola Academy integrates sports into school curriculum, ensuring all students participate in physical activity by requiring them to either join a school or intramural sport team.

### **Traverse City East Middle School**

Traverse City East is located in Traverse City, Michigan and serves students in 6th-8th grade. It developed a program entitled LEAP (Learning, Enrichment, and Athletic Program) for kids of all ability levels and experience, to provide increased opportunities for engagement beyond the school day that improve learning, health, and wellness.

### **Ortega Middle School**

Ortega Middle School is a public school in Alamosa, Colorado, serving 100% free and reduced lunch students in 6th-8th grade. Ortega Middle School partners with its local Boys & Girls club to sponsor certain activities for the school, providing more opportunities for students to engage in physical activity.

### **Val Vista Academy**

Val Vista Academy is a charter school located in Gilbert, Arizona, serving students in K-8th grade by encouraging a school culture built on relationships and camaraderie. Middle schoolers are involved in coaching, giving them opportunities to participate in sports and build leadership skills.

### **Warren E. Hyde Middle School**

Warren E. Hyde Middle School is a public school located in Cupertino, California, serving students in 6th-8th grade. Hyde Middle School builds students' fundamental movement skills by incorporating various types of activity and functional movement skills into its PE classes.



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## The Aspen Institute

The [Aspen Institute](#) is a global nonprofit organization committed to realizing a free, just, and equitable society. Since its founding in 1949, the Institute has been driving change through dialogue, leadership, and action to help solve the most critical challenges facing communities in the United States and around the world.

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## The Aspen Institute Sports & Society Program

The mission of the [Sports & Society Program](#) is to convene leaders, facilitate dialogue, and inspire solutions that help sports to 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.

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## Project Play

An initiative of the Aspen Institute Sports & Society Program, [Project Play](#) develops, applies, and shares knowledge that helps stakeholders build healthy communities through sports.

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## Kellogg's Frosted Flakes® Mission Tiger™

[Mission Tiger](#) is an initiative from Kellogg's Frosted Flakes to give more middle school kids access to sports, by supporting middle school sports programs across the country with needs big and small. Tony the Tiger® and Mission Tiger have helped kids nationwide by repaving courts, refurbishing sports facilities, providing new training equipment and more, all while helping kids build critical lifelong skills like teamwork, confidence and leadership.

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