



# STATE OF PLAY

## SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN

ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

THE ASPEN INSTITUTE  
**PROJECT PLAY**  
REIMAGINING YOUTH SPORTS IN AMERICA







# STATE OF PLAY

## SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN

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**Community Foundation**  
FOR SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN



*Report funded by the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation, with guidance provided by the  
Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan*

## THE VISION

**Southeast Michigan communities in which all children have the opportunity to be active through sports**

## WELCOME

Southeast Michigan is one of the most diverse regions in the United States, from any number of perspectives. It covers broad swatches of farmland, suburbs, and urban neighborhoods. The region is also home to both affluent and low-income neighborhoods. Half of the state's population lives in Metro Detroit, where families of many types and ethnicities—African American, Arab American/Middle Eastern, Native American, Hispanic/Latino, whites, and many others—pursue their slice of the evolving, often elusive American Dream. The region features riverfront and inland parks, 17 Fortune 500 corporations, world-class universities, and professional sports teams in four of the major leagues.

Opportunity and diversity of challenge are the defining features of youth sports in the region, as well.

This report offers an independent assessment of the state of play for kids and sports in the seven-county region comprising Southeast Michigan—Wayne, Oakland, Macomb, Washtenaw, Livingston, Monroe, and St. Clair counties. It is anchored in the notion that all stakeholders will benefit if all children in the region, regardless of zip code or ability, are provided access to a quality sport experience. We know this from the body of research that has emerged over the past decade establishing the myriad benefits of physical activity. It's associated with greater cognitive function, positive mental health, better educational outcomes, and lower health-care costs into adulthood. A virtuous cycle gets unleashed, especially if children can be engaged in regular sport and physical activity before age 12.

The Aspen Institute's Sports & Society Program research team produced this State of Play report, analyzing sport programs and facilities in the region through the eight strategic filters ("plays") highlighted in the Aspen Institute's seminal 2015 report, *Sport for All, Play for Life: A Playbook to Get Every Kid in the Game*. Supporting Aspen were the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan, the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation, and a task force consisting of youth sport and other leaders from across the region.

We hope the report informs short- and long-term community strategies, as well as public and private investment in the broad spectrum of sports for youth (birth to 18 years old).

Southeast Michigan has many dedicated organizations and individuals working to provide youth with quality sports activity. We recognize some of them on the pages of this report. But youth recognize, and stakeholders agree, that there are gaps. When we surveyed more than 150 youth sport providers and other leaders in the region on how well they think adults are doing in getting kids active through sports, the average grade was a C+.

We applaud the desire of the region to do better. We encourage you to seize the opportunity to be a national model. It's in the offing, with collective, sustained action guided by our findings.

We look forward to improving the state of play through public and private collaboration and investment.

Sincerely,



Tom Farrey  
Executive Director, Aspen Institute  
Sports & Society Program



Mariam Noland  
President, Community Foundation for  
Southeast Michigan



David O. Egner  
President and CEO, Ralph C. Wilson, Jr.  
Foundation

# THE STATE OF PLAY IN SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN SCOREBOARD

34+

SPORTS OFFERED

2,031

COMMUNITY SPORTS FACILITIES

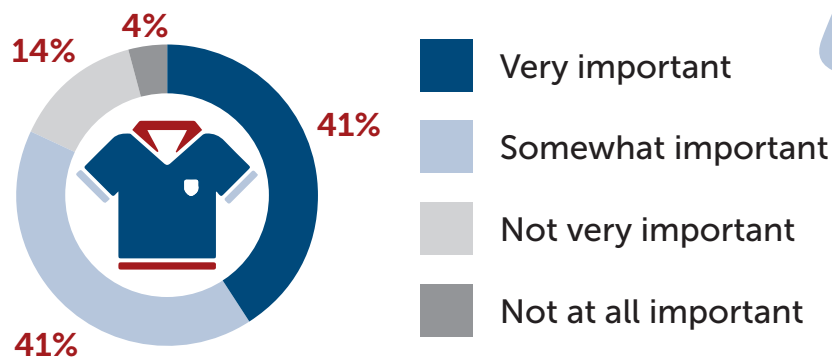
1.1M

YOUTH

The Aspen Institute commissioned the Siena College Research Institute to survey parents in Southeast Michigan on the sport and physical activity patterns of their children. Key findings are below:

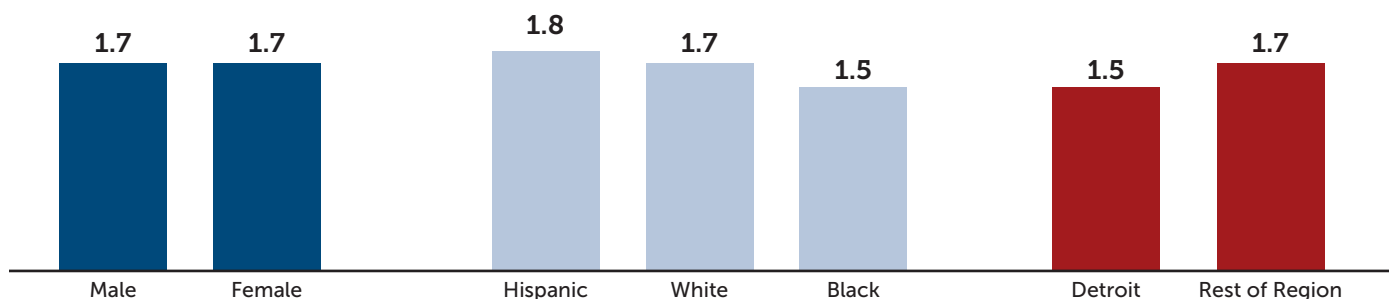
## PARENTS WANT THEIR KIDS IN THE GAME

How important is it to you that your child or children are regularly involved in sports?



## AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPORTS PLAYED

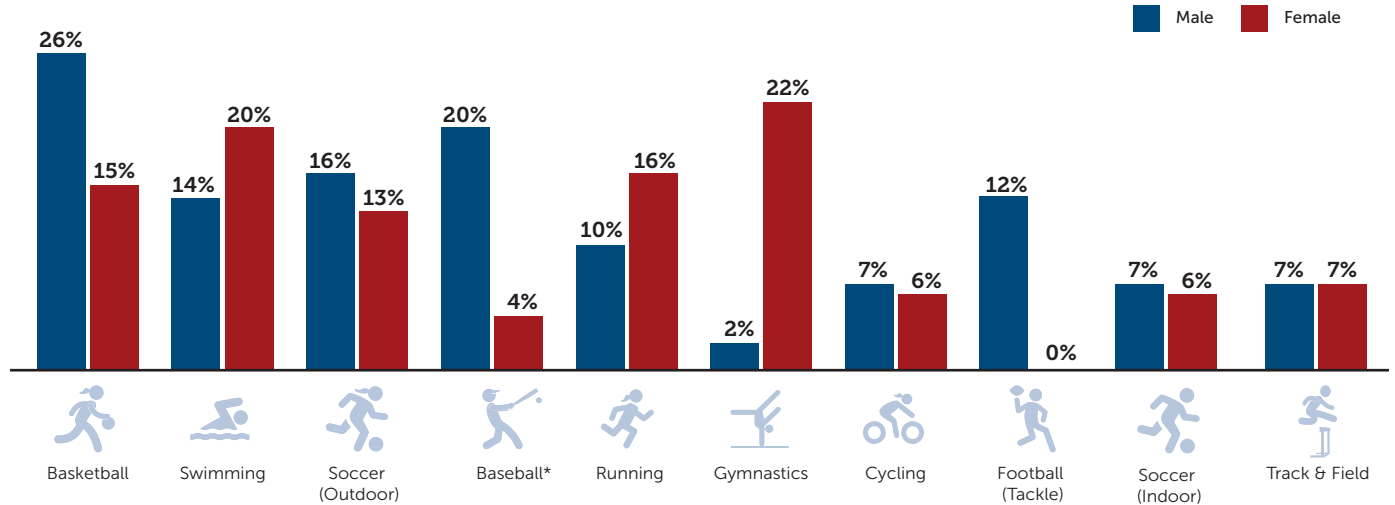
Among youth who participated in any form of a sport at least 12 days in the past year





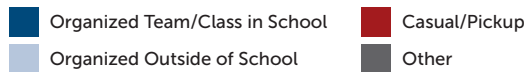
# TOP 10 SPORTS PLAYED BY YOUTH IN SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN

The most popular sports engage boys and girls in both organized and unstructured settings

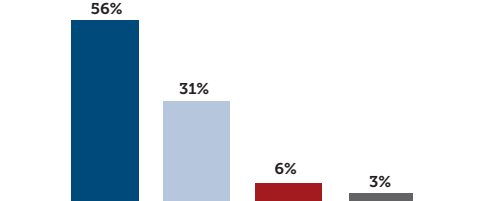
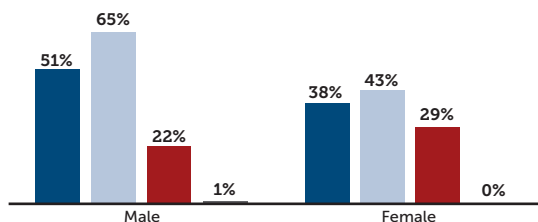
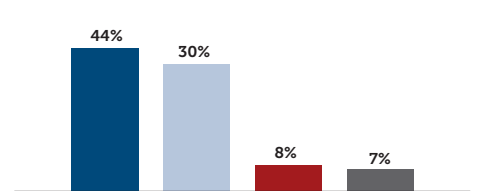
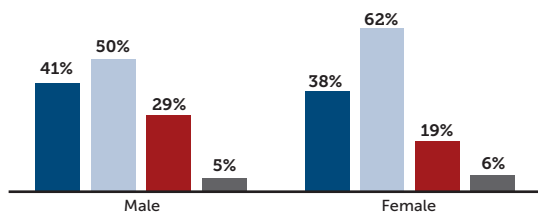
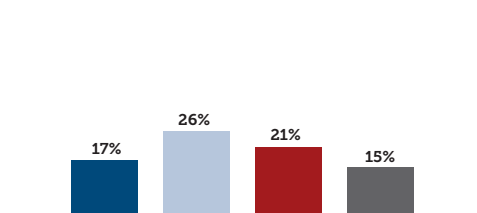
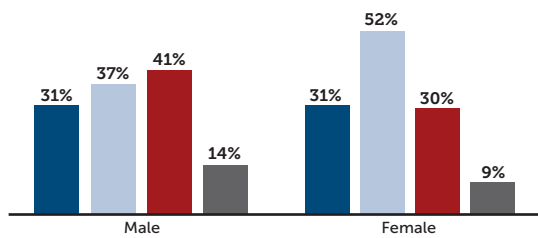
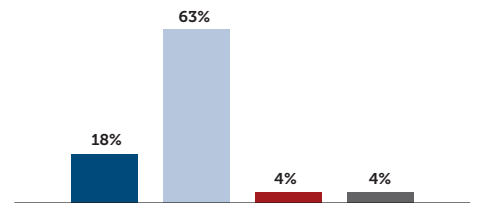
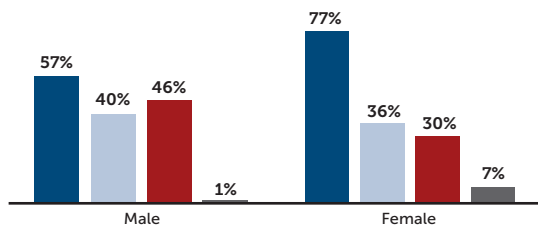


\*Does not include fast-pitch or slow-pitch softball, played by 2% and 4% of youth, respectively, mostly girls

## WAYS YOUTH PLAY



## WHERE YOUTH PLAY

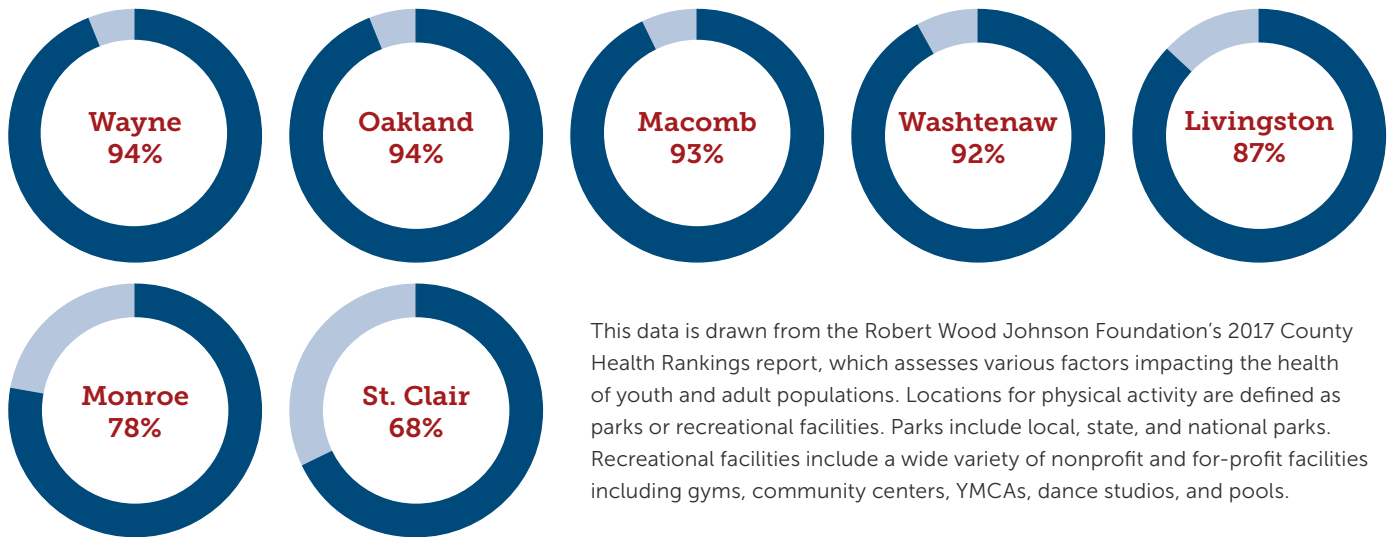


# SCOREBOARD

## PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL POPULATION WITH ADEQUATE ACCESS TO PHYSICAL ACTIVITY LOCATIONS

Individuals have **adequate access** for opportunities for physical activity if they:

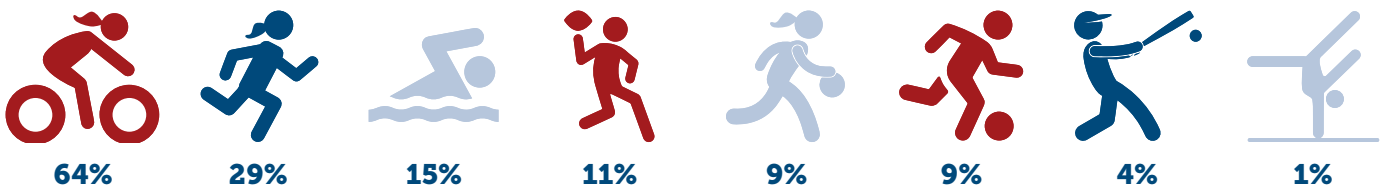
- Reside in a census block within a half mile of a park, or
- In urban census blocks: reside within one mile of a recreational facility, or
- In rural census blocks: reside within three miles of a recreational facility.



This data is drawn from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's 2017 County Health Rankings report, which assesses various factors impacting the health of youth and adult populations. Locations for physical activity are defined as parks or recreational facilities. Parks include local, state, and national parks. Recreational facilities include a wide variety of nonprofit and for-profit facilities including gyms, community centers, YMCAs, dance studios, and pools.

## WHERE DID THE NEIGHBORHOOD GAMES GO?

Sports and activities that kids do near their homes, according to our household survey



## YOUTH WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

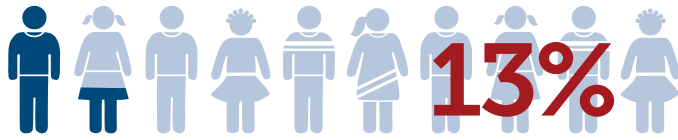
5% of youth in Southeast Michigan have a disability and require assistance to participate in sports. The rate is highest among families making less than \$25k/year (10%) and those living in Livingston County (16%).



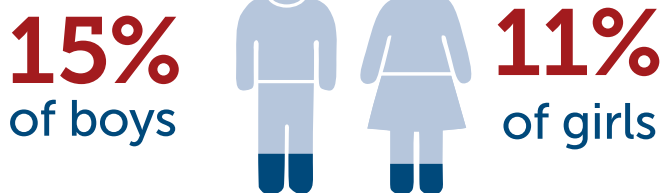
## ON THE WHOLE, FEW KIDS ARE ACTIVE ENOUGH

Percentage of Southeast Michigan youth getting one hour of daily physical activity, as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

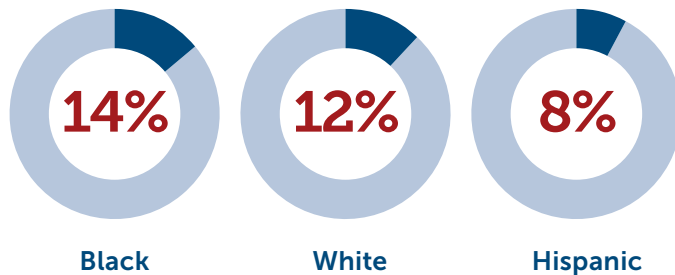
### TOTAL



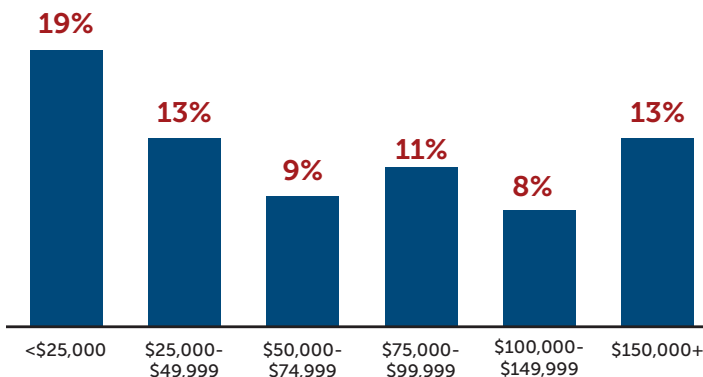
### BY GENDER



### BY ETHNICITY



### BY HOUSEHOLD INCOME



While 19% of youth from the lowest-income households are active to the level recommended by the CDC, kids from that income level as a whole are 3.6x more likely than youth from the highest-income households to be active zero days during the week, and much less likely to be active through sport.

More data in Appendices, p. 30

When asked the question,

**What grade would you give stakeholders in Southeast Michigan in getting kids active through sports?**

168 youth sport providers and other stakeholders in an online survey distributed throughout the region by the Aspen Institute gave Southeast Michigan an average grade of:

2017 State of Play Grade Southeast Michigan:

**C+**

### Report Methodology

Data on sport participation and physical activity rates were derived from a household survey conducted by the Siena College Research Institute, as commissioned by the Aspen Institute. During April 2017, a total of 655 parents of youth under age 18 in Southeast Michigan completed an online survey about their child(ren)'s participation in sports-related activities. Respondents were drawn from online panels maintained and benchmarked by Lucid, a global audience platform. A total of 1,161 children from the seven counties that are the focus of this report are represented in the survey findings. The total panel is maintained to be reflective of the population measured. Oversampling of ethnic groups took place to boost responses from typically under-responding groups.

Other insights in this report were developed by Aspen's research team over the course of eight months in late 2016 and early 2017. Researchers conducted group and individual interviews; hosted focus groups with urban, suburban and rural youth; toured sports facilities; surveyed leaders of sports facilities, athletics directors, coaches and program administrators; conducted a literature search; and created an inventory of community programs and facilities, among other efforts. Throughout the report, "sport" refers to all forms of physical activity which, through organized or casual play, aim to express or improve physical fitness and mental well-being.

# THE 8 PLAYS

*The Aspen Institute's seminal 2015 report, **Sport for All, Play for Life: A Playbook to Get Every Kid in the Game**, identifies eight strategies ("plays") that can get and keep all kids active through sport—regardless of zip code or ability. On the pages that follow are five findings from around Southeast Michigan related to each "play." The report uses the icons below to identify when a finding is most directly applicable to the urban core, suburban neighborhoods, and rural communities, respectively.*

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

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



URBAN



SUBURBAN



RURAL





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

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

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

### Five findings in Southeast Michigan:

- **Schools aren't always asking the right questions to gather feedback.** As part of our survey of the landscape of youth sports, student focus groups were conducted at Voyageur Academy in southwest Detroit, Salina Intermediate School in Dearborn, and Pinckney Pathfinder School in Livingston County. Despite being from very different communities, students consistently felt that while they can choose among a school's offerings, they are not consulted by administrators when introducing new sports. In Pinckney, a student echoed those from Detroit and Dearborn, noting that, "The gym teacher asks... but they ask about what we are already doing, not what we *want* to do." This cycle of offerings is self-reinforcing and can keep kids from sampling a wide variety of sports, whether this includes team sports, where children make friends and develop social skills, or individual sports and unstructured activities that give children the ability, confidence, and desire to be physically active for life. When asked what the first step would be to get more kids to play sports, one student was quick to respond: "Put out a survey to find out what kids like."
- **Survey findings have prompted additional research, creating more opportunities to improve sports programming.** In a 2014 issue of the *Journal of Sport Behavior*, the Institute for the Study of Youth Sports at Michigan State University and research partners published the results of a three-year study on the benefits of youth feedback in urban youth sports programs. The researchers concluded that the participant surveys were effective.<sup>2</sup> It begs the question: Why aren't more organizations surveying their participants?
- **Focus groups have delivered valuable insights about barriers to participation.** When the Skillman Foundation's Good Neighborhoods Initiative conducted focus groups as part of its review of youth opportunities, they found that safety, transportation, lack of access, and fear of judgment from peers and adults were significant barriers to participation.<sup>3</sup> A later biennial review of the Good Neighborhoods Initiative programs expanded the focus group insights: two-thirds of providers operated with two or fewer full-time staff, and nearly one-third had no full-time staff.<sup>4</sup>
- **Post-program surveys in select cases are capturing youth feedback, in partnership with local experts.** Detroit PAL conducts post-program surveys of parents, coaches, and participants in its youth leagues, designed in partnership with the Institute for the Study of Youth Sports at Michigan State University. The surveys distributed to players, mostly via paper forms, give them the opportunity to share open-ended feedback. Respondents from the 2015 spring baseball and soccer program (the most recent year with data) returned perfect 5.0 scores when asked if they had fun. It's good news for PAL, but with less than 50% of participants taking the survey, there are still voices missing.<sup>1</sup>
- **By middle school, youth are keenly aware of the costs of participation—and of a gender gap.** When asked what could be done to make youth sports better, students at all three schools referred to high costs. "There needs to be even more funding," said one student at Voyageur in Detroit. A classmate said of a \$25 fee for track and field: "That's a lot for some people." In Dearborn, a student noted: "There are kids who don't play because it costs too much and they can't afford it." A Pinckney student noted that the challenge increases for larger families, suggesting, "There are people who have a lot of kids and they should get a discount if all their kids are playing." And that's if there are sports offered for one's gender. As one student noted, "Boys get more sports than girls."

"They ask us what we are already playing but not what we want to play."

- Dearborn student




## Challenge: Overstructured experiences

### 2 | THE PLAY: REINTRODUCE FREE PLAY

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

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

#### Five findings in Southeast Michigan:

- **With philanthropic support, schools across the region are expanding and guaranteeing access to recess periods during the school day.** The Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation awarded a \$1.1 million grant to Playworks in Southeast Michigan and Western New York for the 2016-17 school year, the largest gift in the history of Playworks Michigan. The support allows Playworks to expand into 11 new districts, with expanded services coming to 15 new schools.<sup>5</sup> It’s a significant investment, given the research that kids can get up to 40% of their suggested physical activity during recess.<sup>6</sup>
- **The State of Michigan offers a comprehensive toolkit to implement constructive free play.** The 2012 Model Policy on Quality Physical Education and Physical Activity in Schools advises school administration to encourage activity outside of school hours and encourages schools and districts to establish shared use agreements that allow the community to use the school’s facilities. The state’s Active Students Toolbox supports the policy by providing guides for implementing PE, recess, and early childhood programs, including in adaptive settings, based around free play.<sup>7</sup>
- **Communities in outer counties have found simple ways to get kids to just play.** Port Huron turned to free play as a strategy to increase park usage on a limited budget. The city placed bins at four city parks and filled them with balls. Recreation director Nancy Winzer reported an increase in the number of children coming to the parks as a result. “If the balls aren’t returned, that’s a great sign,” she commented. “We’ll just get more balls.” More of these programs are needed, as youth in the outer counties are less active than their peers in Detroit. Only 12 percent of them are physically active one hour day in the region, compared to 16 percent in Detroit, according to an Aspen Institute household survey of parents conducted by the Siena College Research Institute. Livingston County had the greatest need, with just 7 percent active at the level recommended by the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention.
- **Programs are treating the wide streets of the Motor City as an asset for free community space.** The mayor’s 20 Minute Neighborhoods initiative, which prioritizes walkability and bike-riding, includes protected bike lanes on streets and bike trails running through empty lots.<sup>8</sup> In fall 2016, Open Streets Detroit closed nearly four miles of major thoroughfares in Detroit for two afternoons, converting Michigan Avenue and West Vernor Highway into spaces for free community activity.<sup>9</sup> The community responded by organizing bike rides, yoga, even simple activities like hopscotch. This was Detroit’s first time participating in the Open Streets Project, a growing international movement launched in 2010 that sponsors events across the United States and Canada while encouraging communities to imagine their own ways to use the spaces generated. Said event organizer Lisa Nuskowski, “We want to expand Open Streets to connect and celebrate other neighborhoods throughout the city.”<sup>10</sup>
- **Students from the Project Play focus groups noted that while playing organized sports with close supervision is safer and less likely to cause conflicts, loosely organized play is often more fun.** “Playing by the rules is good, but it’s more fun to play without adults around,” said one student in Detroit. Not to mention, “some people don’t know the rules, and that makes it hard,” one Dearborn student noted while amplifying support for free play. Said a student in Pinckney, “When I play with my friends, we don’t play sports. We play stuff like tag and we make up the rules for that. It’s fun.” And maybe most important for childhood development, in the words of one Detroit student, “You can be yourself when adults aren’t watching.”

2017 State of Play Grade  
Southeast Michigan:

C





## YOUTH VOICE

### Sawyer Kemp, 7

Sawyer Kemp had a simple request for friends who attended his seventh birthday party. Bring balls.

The balls weren't for Sawyer. They were donations for the recreation department in Port Huron. Last year, the park system set up bins and filled them with balls for any kid to play with—especially kids who couldn't afford their own. Sawyer heard about the idea and wanted to support it.

"It would be nice for kids that couldn't afford to play," he said, noting that some kids did not play at local Port Huron parks due to lack of equipment.

Friends brought sporting goods instead of presents. The contributions filled three large bags, which were donated to the recreation department in Port Huron to fill the ball-bins.

It was a big gesture for a seven-year-old. But using his birthday party as an occasion to help others doesn't seem like a big deal to Sawyer. "I didn't need that much," he said, adding that he preferred that his birthday benefit the rest of the children who play in the parks. Sawyer lives in the town of Lakeport, on the coast of Lake Huron, but plays soccer in the neighboring town of Port Huron's recreation league.

The ball-bin idea is very simple. The rules are: There are no rules. Kids are encouraged to play as often as they like for as long as they like. There are no check-ins or outs with the recreation department.

Four parks in Port Huron—a city just west of the US-Canada border—have the bins. The idea was the brainchild of Port Huron Recreation Director Nancy Winzer, who was inspired while visiting a Florida beach that offered children free sand toys. Port Huron received a \$2,000 grant to start the program. Contributions like Sawyer's have been a big help, said Winzer.

## Challenge: Sameness and specialization

### 3 | THE PLAY: ENCOURAGE SPORT SAMPLING

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

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

#### Five findings in Southeast Michigan:

- **The average young person plays 1.7 sports in the course of the year, at least 12 times over the year.** African American youth (1.5) play the fewest number of sports. But strides are being made, by connecting less active students to nontraditional sports. Archery has become one of the fastest-growing school-sponsored sports in the state, thanks to the support of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. Nearly 600 schools participate across the state, including 77 in the region. Davison Elementary-Middle School, on Detroit's east side, has a student body that is roughly 60 percent African American and 40 percent Bangladeshi. "We shoot 3,000 arrows a week in gym class, and that doesn't include the archery team," said Tom Barnes, P.E. teacher at Davison. "It's all about the experience. They're meeting new people, different people than they've ever interacted with before."<sup>11</sup> It's meeting the needs of students, who told us in the focus groups that they want to "play more sports and different stuff so it's not so boring." At the top of their lists: flag football, handball, golf, mountain biking, volleyball, and field hockey.



- **Youth feel pressured by parents and the tryout model, which drives specialization and keeps new kids from joining a new sport.** Research has shown that athletes are more likely to remain active into adulthood if they wait until age 12 or later to specialize in one sport.<sup>12</sup> The kids in our focus group recognized this, commenting that playing other sports "can develop different skill sets and not just the ones for your sport." Despite this, they reported that they were already feeling pressure to specialize, facing expectations that they should already know and "be good at" a sport to be able to participate. "Parents need to stop telling kids that they are not good at a sport," said one student in Detroit. A student in Dearborn suggested loosening tryout restrictions, explaining that students "can learn as they play." In Pinckney, students noted that specialization was already a barrier to entry: "By middle school, kids have been playing for years, and if you don't play, it's hard to start." One student summed up the issue simply: "Stop putting so much pressure on kids so that more kids will want to play."



- **A lack of year-round, weatherproof facilities limits access to new sports.** Across the region, the most pervasive need is for indoor spaces used during the fall and winter for basketball, volleyball, wrestling, indoor soccer, and other sports. According to our analysis, every county has a shortage of indoor long fields, which can be used for at least nine different sports. To serve the needs of youth, Project Play research partner Sports Facilities Advisory (SFA) recommends that communities have one indoor long field for every 8,000 youth participants, based on a calculation that takes into account regional and national facility and participation data. Yet, Wayne County's three indoor long fields must serve 42,000 participants each—5.5 times as many youth as recommended. Elsewhere, St. Clair, Monroe, and Washtenaw counties have only one such field each, and Livingston County has none.<sup>13</sup> In all cases, youth living in these communities may by default only have access to outdoor sports programs, and only for six months of the year, when the weather is manageable.







### Claire Vachon, 10

One of the best ambassadors for sport sampling in Southeast Michigan is Claire Vachon, a fifth grader from Walled Lake.

Claire is a three-sport athlete. She plays soccer, but her other “main” sports are not the ones you’d expect a 10-year-old to choose: running and parkour.

Parkour isn’t a common sport for kids. It’s even rarer among girls. Claire’s mom, Liz, saw an ad for the Edge Training Center (the gym where Claire works out) and Claire had seen the “American Ninja Warrior” TV show, which features parkour. She gave the classes a try and loved them.

That’s to be expected, in a way. Parkour requires strength, stamina, and balance. Her mom says that Claire began climbing stairs and furniture when she was two.

Training is fun, Claire says. At age eight, she scaled or “beat” the 10-foot “Warped Wall” at the gym—the youngest person to conquer it. To scale the wall, “You have to learn how to do pull-ups, take big steps, and run really fast,” she says. “Once you get it, you’ll be able to get it every time. It’s scary at first. It’s a mental game.”

Being active and trying different sports runs in Claire’s family. Like her sisters, Ella, 13, and Rosalie, 7, Claire participates in Girls on the Run, and Claire’s mom has been a coach for eight years. Claire says she enjoys the parts of the Girls on the Run program that are about talking and sharing with friends. “Most girls think it’s just running, but it’s not. It’s really about learning about bullies and life lessons.”

It’s hard to say where Claire’s sports passions may lead next. Her favorite sport is soccer. She may also grow up to be a parkour champion. If it’s up to her, she’ll be an adult American Ninja Warrior on her favorite TV show like her hero, Jessie Graff.

- **The Motor City can reposition itself as a city of bikes.** Detroit is becoming one of the most bicycle-friendly cities in the United States. In addition to Detroit’s commitment to bike paths and greenways, the city has a surprising number of resources in bicycle racing. In 2000, Southeast Michigan resident and velodrome, or indoor cycling track, developer Dale Hughes spearheaded a volunteer effort to fundraise and build a new velodrome in Bloomer Park (IVBP) in Rochester Hills to replace the Dorais Park facility that had closed in 1989.<sup>14</sup> Hughes raised \$1 million in private donations, then gave the park to the city, making Rochester Hills one of very few cities to have a municipal velodrome. It is still volunteer-operated. In 2017, Hughes formed the Detroit Fitness Foundation to fund the development of a \$4 million indoor velodrome at Tolan Playfield park, which would be just the second in the United States.<sup>15</sup> Like at IVBP, access and coaching programs for youth will be free.



- **Sports sampling can educate kids about Southeast Michigan’s many cultures.** In addition to the region’s large white and African American communities, the region has vibrant Native American, Hispanic, Middle Eastern, and Southeast Asian communities, making Southeast Michigan the most diverse part of the state. Native American communities identify with the Iroquois sport of lacrosse. “At the start of the year, we ask kids what they want to do, and sports always come up as an interest of the youth, particularly lacrosse, as it is an Indigenous game,” said Christy Bieber, youth services coordinator at American Indian Health and Family Services of Michigan. Detroit’s Hispanic and immigrant communities bring a passion for soccer. Southeast Asian communities participate in court-and-net sports like badminton and *sepak takraw*. Students in our Dearborn focus group noted that soccer would be a good way to engage immigrants. “When we get newcomers, it would be better for them. They don’t know American games, and it would be better if they could play a game they know.” Regardless of sport, an important step to using sport to bridge communities is parent education. The same students noted that parents are unlikely to support their child joining a sport they themselves are unfamiliar with. Parents “say no before the kids can ask to play,” they told us.



2017 State of Play Grade  
Southeast Michigan: **C+**

## Challenge: Rising costs and commitment

### 4 | THE PLAY: REVITALIZE IN-TOWN LEAGUES

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

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

#### Five findings in Southeast Michigan:

- **Southeast Michigan's long-term economic decline has posed significant challenges to in-town leagues and recreation programs.** Private-public partnerships help. Many Detroit recreation centers closed in the early 2000s, and 50 city parks were slated to close in 2013 before being saved by a public-private partnership. That allowed the city parks system to lease its crown jewel, Belle Isle Park, to the state.<sup>16</sup> Some suburban programs, like those in Ypsilanti and Pontiac, fared no better. The Detroit Parks and Recreation Department has fought through the decline of parks and recreation centers to expand opportunities for youth, and in 2016 was awarded the Excellence in Youth Sports Award by the National Alliance for Youth Sports for its diverse, positive, and safe activities, including dodgeball, Frisbee, soccer, and basketball.<sup>17</sup> On the horizon in 2017: a partnership between the city, Police Athletic League, and Detroit City FC to offer a soccer league for children of refugee families.



- **In Detroit, unique barriers exist to playing school sports.** Detroit Public Schools and private partners expanded sports to the K-8 level in 2013.<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately, the long-term financial emergency at Detroit Public Schools has resulted in the loss of many programs and the closures of many school buildings. Michigan state law allows the School Reform Office to close chronically underperforming schools, and the 2016 review identified 38 schools for possible closure, including 24 in the Detroit Public Schools Community District.<sup>19</sup> The Catholic Youth Organization, a longtime leader in organizing youth leagues, still offers a large athletic program in fifth through eighth grades, but it has migrated into the suburbs as many Catholic schools in Detroit have closed. The Detroit Catholic High School League now features just three high schools from Detroit proper: all-male University of Detroit Jesuit and Detroit Loyola, and co-ed Detroit Cristo Rey.<sup>20</sup> Further, our Southeast Michigan task force noted that the school of choice system has created obstacles to participation in after-school programs, as kids may not feel welcome to play at the school nearest their home, don't have transportation available to arrive early or stay late at the school they attend, and don't know the neighborhood kids to self-organize play since they don't attend the same schools. Elsewhere, students who attend private institutions have more options for after-school sports.



- **In the ring of urban-suburban communities around downtown Detroit, there are few opportunities for sport programs organized by municipalities.** Westland and Wayne in western Wayne County, Pontiac in Oakland County, and Ypsilanti in Washtenaw County eliminated community-supported youth sports.<sup>21</sup> In their place, nonprofit organizations have taken over providing sports opportunities. Additionally, public-private partnerships in facility ownership and management have made positive impacts.





## YOUTH VOICE

### Starnisha Ramsey, 16

When Starnisha was in fifth grade, she attended a school assembly that changed her life. The speakers represented RacquetUp, then a new organization in Detroit that uses squash to help kids reach their goals as athletes and students.

“They came to our school with a racquet and a squash ball and talked about forming a team in Detroit,” Starnisha recalls. “We had to be dedicated and willing to be on the team for a while.” Starnisha held a squash racquet for the first time that day. Six years later, now a junior at University High School in Ferndale, she’s still committed to RacquetUp, a program that has opened opportunities for her and hundreds of her peers.

She’s made progress as a squash player and is nationally ranked. But the biggest gains for Starnisha have come away from the court. Her grades have climbed to nearly a perfect 4.0. She’s also part of Best Path, a group of elite students at RacquetUp that mentors younger friends.

“The first things kids realize when they join the program is that this is not an after-school sports team,” said University of Michigan graduate Derek Aguirre, who started RacquetUp in 2010. “They’re working on homework, they’re getting help with literacy. The sport is very important to what we do, but every day they’re with us they’re spending equal time in the classroom as they are on the squash courts.”

For Starnisha, RacquetUp also has been a ticket to travel outside of her neighborhood. Squash has taken her to tournaments around the country and allowed her to visit New York City and Washington, DC, where she and other young athletes met Supreme Court Justice Elena Kagan.

Starnisha’s next challenge is choosing a college to continue her studies and her squash. As usual, she’s aiming high. Her top choices: Vassar College and Columbia University.

- **Single-sport camps increasingly offer children access to a team and nearby games.** Pro sports franchises and university athletic departments sponsor a network of camps and clinics. These camps are hosted around the state, ranging in cost from \$35 to \$200 and lasting from one day to two weeks. Communities have also organized camps at lower costs. The Summer Sports Camp, hosted by the Juvenile Division of the Washtenaw County Trial Court alongside the University of Michigan and Ypsilanti Public Schools, is one of the oldest in Southeast Michigan.<sup>22</sup> The free program was developed in 1988 to give opportunities to kids who could not afford other camps. “We teach the fundamentals and drills, but it is so much more than the sport we try to instill,” said director Bill Malcolm.



- **School coaches and club coaches are increasingly one and the same.** It’s a point of pride for players to make the school team. To improve their chances, kids and parents join the expensive club team also coached by the district’s coach. “At the heart of all of this is money,” said Brian Wardlow, athletic director at Pinckney Community Schools, who has watched as families in neighboring cities pay hundreds of dollars more than is typical for families in Pinckney for a program that is similar. The difference, he says, is that in Pinckney, coaches go unpaid, leaving travel sports fees to go to pay gym rental and tournament fees. That’s not the case elsewhere. “Coaches want to supplement their personal income by coaching travel teams or coaching privately. Parents spend the money and see it as an investment that will be paid back in the form of a [college] athletic scholarship. The true cost, however, is the young athletes that suffer serious sport-related issues at such young ages,” such as injury from overspecialization and the year-round season.





## Challenge: Not enough places to play

### 5 | THE PLAY: THINK SMALL

“If you can’t get a ride or you don’t drive, you can’t play.”

— Pinckney student

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

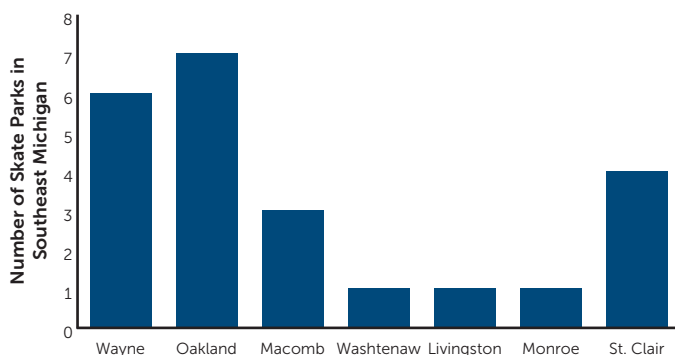
*Growing access to play spaces for most children starts with the small—simple, smart moves that hold great promise. In urban areas, this may mean finding small spaces to develop quarter-sized courts for small-sided play. ... When schools agree to share their playing fields and facilities, it gives families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

#### Five findings in Southeast Michigan:

- **Action sports are succeeding in communities underserved by traditional sports facilities.** Skateboarding and BMX biking fill a void in communities throughout Southeast Michigan that are underserved by traditional sports. They’re dynamic sports that exist outside organized leagues and appeal to kids who want to play their way without being closely supervised by coaches and other adults. Action sports also adapt to their surroundings in ways mainstream sports often do not. In gritty, industrial parts of Detroit, activists like Powerhouse Productions have reclaimed blighted properties to create places for their sports. At the same time, kids participate in action sports in structured, park-based skate parks in suburban and outlying counties. In Southeast Michigan, 23 significant skate parks are currently open. (For more on action sports, see *Call For Leadership*, pp. 24-25, and Appendix C.)
- **Detroit has taken advantage of its large number of vacant land and building properties to become a leader in urban greenspace.** These newly greened spaces are a great opportunity to think creatively about spaces for play. The Detroit Greenways Coalition connects nonprofits, businesses, and governments to maintain sidewalks, install protected lanes, and create new greenways to make the city friendlier for hikers, bikers, joggers, and skaters. Grand-scale projects like Link Detroit and the Inner Circle, as well as smaller projects like the Dequindre Cut rail trail and Midtown Loop, will integrate the city for active transportation. Even unimproved properties can be used for physical activity. In 2013, organizers designed a disc golf course around the abandoned Brewster-Douglass Housing Project on Detroit’s East Side. But community interest in the one-day event was so strong that the Detroit Housing Commission refused to grant a permit for a large gathering, leading to the event’s cancellation.<sup>23</sup> It should be seen as a call to action, reflecting demand for a new sport activity and a location that’s ripe for innovation.



FIG. 2 | SKATE PARKS IN SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN



Source: *Tony Hawk Foundation and SEA*

- **Accessible playgrounds for children with disabilities are becoming more widespread.** Detroit’s Parks and Recreation Department has begun planning playgrounds with adaptive equipment. In new and renovated parks, many swing sets have been converted to include adaptive equipment. Parks also are being designed for every amenity to be wheelchair accessible with a ramp—no steps and no slopes more than five percent. This includes designing extra space next to benches and picnic tables that accommodate wheelchair seating. These developments are complemented by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation’s Able to Play project that has installed barrier-free Boundless Playgrounds in the region over the last decade. According to the Playgrounds for

Everyone project, there are 25 fully accessible playgrounds in Southeast Michigan, mostly in Wayne and Oakland counties but with at least one found in every county in the region. In addition to these free play spaces, nonprofits have formed to provide adaptive recreation and respite programs (see Design for Development on p. 16). Still, safety is an ongoing challenge for families who have children with disabilities.



- **Starved for indoor space, grassroots soccer leagues are creatively reclaiming small spaces like empty lots, industrial sheds, and warehouses.** Chato's Soccer Arena occupies a rusty Quonset hut on a half-empty block in Detroit's Mexicantown, hidden behind a chemical plant. "Chato" is slang for "boring," but inside it features fast-paced, noisy indoor soccer on a miniature field. Although Chato's features adult rec programs, indoor futsal can be appropriate for all ages and genders.



- **Grassroots efforts are successfully adapting aging facilities, but municipalities face barriers to support.** Berkley Dads' Club, in suburban Oakland County, converted the former Studio Ice Space of the Berkley Ice Arena into a baseball training center with indoor turf, batting cages, and nets for pitching and hitting practice. Unfortunately for the Dads' Club and the other tenants, the building was closed indefinitely in October 2016 after a coolant leak at the hockey rink, evicting hockey, skating, and baseball programs.<sup>24</sup> The City of Berkley desires to repair the aging facility through a public-private partnership, having put out a call for bids in late 2016 to renovate, repair, and operate the Ice Arena and rec center.<sup>25</sup> Bidders were urged to be creative with space to identify new ways to generate revenue at the facilities, while increasing their use and expanding recreation options.



2017 State of Play Grade  
Southeast Michigan:

C+



## YOUTH VOICE

### John Gaton, 17

John Gaton runs track and cross country, but you're not likely to see him running near his home in Westland. His mom Windy won't allow that very often.

"My neighborhood is kind of, I guess, dangerous," John says. "I run on the treadmill a lot."

Westland has its problems. Sixteen percent of the city lives in poverty.<sup>26</sup> And the crime rate is above the state average.<sup>27</sup> Two years ago, when John was a sophomore, he was robbed outside his home. Thieves made off with his cell phone. As a result, John is the only one of his high school teammates who often trains indoors.

These circumstances have not slowed John. A senior at Westland Memorial High School, he runs cross country in the fall and track in the spring. He has a strong connection to distance running and especially enjoys getting to run in nature with his teammates—away from the neighborhood where he lives.

But what really draws John to sports is how they help him form connections. In middle school, John, who is of Filipino descent, played basketball with the Filipino American Sports Association of Michigan. As a runner, he is motivated by his older brother Joseph, 20, a former runner, who is his most loyal fan.

John, Joseph, and their sister Jazlyn, 15, also participated in Tae Kwon Do when they were younger. John excelled, reaching second-degree black belt. But when John was 12, his fun in martial arts ended. The cost of lessons and competition were too high for his family.

Next year, John hopes to attend the University of Michigan at Dearborn to study electrical engineering and run cross country and track. For inspiration, he only has to glance at his cell phone. There's a simple message posted as wallpaper: "Dreams don't work unless you do."

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

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

Five findings in Southeast Michigan:

- **Southeast Michigan has a national leader in age-appropriate play in its backyard.** Since the Michigan State University Institute for the Study of Youth Sports (ISYS) was founded in 1978, it has become widely recognized for designing methods of leading youth sports that maximize benefits while minimizing risks. The Institute's director, Dr. Dan Gould, was a guest at a Project Play roundtable in 2013, where he argued, "Kids develop cognitively and socially at different rates... We need to do more to understand them going forward."<sup>28</sup> ISYS has worked with the Michigan High School Athletic Association, Detroit PAL, USA Hockey, the National Federation of High Schools, and many other organizations nationwide.



- **Developmentally-appropriate play got a lift in 2015.** The State Alliance of Michigan YMCAs partnered with the Coordinated Approach to Child Health (CATCH) Global Foundation in 2015.<sup>29</sup> The evidenced-based program gives coaches and educators proven resources to create fun and developmentally appropriate practices. It also trains them in preventative measures and healthy interactions with children and parents. After CATCH methods were implemented by the YMCA of Metropolitan Detroit in 2015, a follow-up survey found that 71 percent of children reported improvements in their activity habits, while 97 percent of parents felt that CATCH had been beneficial.<sup>30</sup>



- **Resources on best practices from national sport organizations have been beneficial to local communities.** Orchard Lake United in Oakland County uses the American Development Model (ADM) promoted by USA Hockey. By using rink dividers to cut the ice into thirds, young athletes play in a space better suited to their size. In Southeast Michigan, the new ADM rules met initial resistance. "Some parents want their kids playing full-ice," said Brandon Kaleniecki, hockey coach at Detroit Catholic Central High School. "But that has started to fade away. People have accepted that it's a good thing." George Atkinson, the president of the Michigan Amateur Youth Hockey Association, credits NHL and USA Hockey videos that

illustrated the benefits of the ADM for players of all skill levels for helping parents buy in to the program.<sup>31</sup> "The misconception out there was that playing half-ice or cross-ice was for lesser players, but that video, and others like it, showed how playing on a smaller surface benefits every 8U player, regardless of where they are in their development." Atkinson noted that ADM-style models have caught on in other sports. Soccer Shots uses US Soccer Association guidelines to develop soccer programs for ages two to eight throughout Livingston and Washtenaw counties. Similarly, Rochester Avon Recreation Authority in Oakland County and the Recreational Authority of Roseville and Eastpointe in Macomb County use the National Alliance for Youth Sports' Smart Start Programming, which teaches three- to six-year-olds motor skills, encourages sport sampling, and allows kids to develop without the threat of competition or fear of injury.



- **Organizations in Southeast Michigan have developed a wide variety of programs for children with developmental disabilities, but the high costs of equipment and trained staff remain a challenge.** Easterseals Michigan and the Detroit Tigers partner to support The Miracle League of Michigan, which sponsors youth league baseball, bowling, and dance programs across the state, as well as league play at the Miracle Field in Southfield. The program is heavily subsidized, but still costs \$80 for a season. Friendship Circle of Michigan, based in Oakland County, offers basketball and soccer, along with open gym, creative physical activity, and respite for families with special needs on a per-program or membership basis. The Greater Detroit Agency for the Blind and Visually Handicapped offer youth goalball leagues, a sport akin to handball. The YMCA of Metropolitan Detroit, the Boys and Girls Club of Southeast Michigan, and the Jewish Community Centers of Southeast Michigan all offer adaptive fitness classes and programs. Special Olympics of Michigan has a presence in every county in the study area, offering sports including speed skating and alpine skiing. Many major providers, like Waterford Parks and Recreation and Oakland University, also offer adaptive programs.





- **Community partnerships have reversed troubling trends.** In the 1990s, Detroit PAL's sports leagues became adult-driven and overly competitive.<sup>32</sup> The organization saw improvement in late 2000 after a merger with Think Detroit and consultation with ISYS put a renewed focus on developmentally appropriate programming. Detroit PAL continues that commitment today through Girls Changing the Game, which has introduced girls' leagues in softball, volleyball, basketball, and cheer, as well as recruited female volunteers and coaches and involved girls in PAL programming at earlier ages. The Future Coaches Leadership Academy recruits high school girls to work as future Detroit PAL coaches. Although two of every three sports opportunities in PAL went to boys, 500 more girls participated in Detroit PAL programs in 2015 than in 2014.<sup>33</sup>



2017 State of Play Grade  
Southeast Michigan:

C+



YOUTH VOICE

## Olivia & Mary Harris, 14 & 11

On game days, smiles are the norm at the home of Olivia (left) and Mary (right) Harris. The sisters play in a Challenger Baseball League near their Macomb home. For the girls and their teammates, the fun begins long before the first pitch.

"They get so excited. Their entire day is consumed with, 'Tonight's baseball!'" said Jackie, the girls' mom and a coach. "You see it on their faces."

Sports and recreation hold special importance for the Harris sisters. Yet participation can be a challenge. Olivia, 14, has Asperger's Syndrome, a developmental disorder characterized by difficulties in social interaction. Mary, 11, has mild developmental delays.

Olivia has participated in Special Olympics, winning medals for cross-country skiing. She also enjoys swimming. Mary wants to try gymnastics soon. She's a big fan of US Olympic gymnast Gabby Douglas.

But their favorite sport is baseball. In Challenger, the playing field and culture are designed for children with special needs. So are rules, some of which are a little different. There are not winning or losing teams. Players position themselves in the field wherever they choose. Every player is teamed with a "buddy," often a student volunteer from a local high school.

"The goal is to keep them comfortable and having fun so they're not stressed or anxious," said Jackie. She praises the league as a community that has embraced her daughters. Olivia, she says, has developed socially and emotionally through Challenger. Both girls have met new friends and enjoyed spending time with their brothers, Joshua, 19, and Alex, 16, who are volunteers.

There's also the sheer fun of baseball. Olivia, who has played Challenger for seven years, says her favorite position is first base, and the parts of the game she looks forward to most are swinging the bat and connecting with a pitch. Mary also likes batting. When she approaches the plate, she feels "excited." Just like every 11-year-old baseball player.

## Challenge: Well-meaning but untrained volunteers

### 7 | THE PLAY: TRAIN ALL COACHES

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

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

#### Five findings in Southeast Michigan:

- **Michigan has some of the nation's best coach training resources.** The Michigan High School Athletic Association offers the Coaches Advancement Program for teaching proper coaching methods. Every new high school head coach is required to pass at least the first two levels of the seven-level program. Individual districts may have higher requirements. Marygrove College, part of the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics, uses the NAIAs Champions of Character model, offering youth coaches the opportunity to take courses online and on campus, free of charge. Still, many coaches go untrained due to high costs, time commitments, or lack of awareness of these programs.



- **Among the largest team sports, the best-trained youth coaches are in football.** According to our household survey, more than half have received instruction in CPR and first aid (79%), physical conditioning (68%), general safety and injury prevention (67%), concussion management (63%), and sport skills and tactics (58%)—five of the six key competencies recognized by Project Play (effective motivational techniques isn't far behind, at 46%). Most coaches in other sports remain untrained in key competencies, but the culture is shifting. Detroit PAL, in partnership with the Michigan State University Institute for the Study of Youth Sports, developed a three-level course (taken in consecutive years) that teaches coaches to be positive role models and mentors. In 2015, nearly 1,200 coaches were enrolled, with 522 trained coaches continuing from previous years. That makes 78 percent of PAL's total volunteers trained coaches, with an average of more than two trained coaches per team. It's good news for PAL participants, but the courses so far have been deemed proprietary.<sup>34</sup>



- **In Southeast Michigan, youth coaches in urban areas receive far less training than coaches in suburban areas.** Analysis of data provided by nationwide organizations Positive Coaching Alliance (PCA) and the National Alliance for Youth Sports (NAYS) shows that Wayne County has 1.5 coaches who have received training in the past five years per 1,000 students

from these national coach training organizations, while Monroe County, a lesser populated county, has 6.16 trained coaches per 1,000 students. This comparison is made with data from PCA and NAYS only, but it points to a potentially important discrepancy. More comprehensive data on youth coach training rates across the region, regardless of provider, can be found in the infographic on the following page.



- **Youth in our focus groups noted that their favorite coaches used positivity to motivate.** Students in Detroit shared that their favorite coaches built their confidence and made sure they had the tools they needed to improve their skills. Students in Pinckney said that the best coaches were involved in their lives off the field, explaining, "They ... also do team bonding and activities with the team away from sports." The Dearborn focus group agreed: "They are interested in what's going on at home." The very best coaches became like family, noted one student. "They are more like aunts and uncles than coaches."



- **Students in all three regions noted differences in the coaching styles of male and female coaches.** "They want us to do better, but they don't push us like the male coaches," said one Detroit student of female coaches. Students perceived their male coaches to be more qualified. In Pinckney, one student noted the gender gap in professional soccer continued into the coaching ranks. "My soccer coach had more opportunities to play at a higher level. He didn't just play in college—he played in Algeria, so he really knows the game. Female coaches don't get those chances, so they don't always know the game." These observations point to an opportunity to grow support available for women coaches, who are underrepresented as leaders of boys' and girls' teams.



2017 State of Play Grade  
Southeast Michigan:

C+

# YOUTH COACHING IN SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN

Key findings from our online household survey, conducted by the Siena College Research Institute  
For purposes of this survey, "parent" refers to an adult living in a home with children; see p. 42 for survey methodology



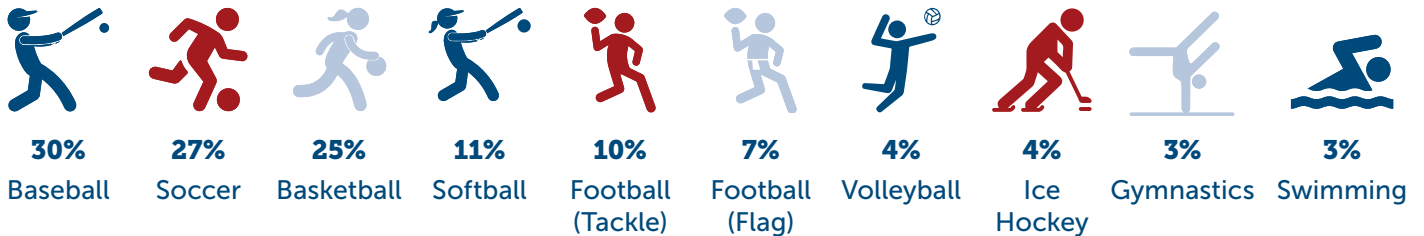
## PARENTS WHO COACH

# 39%

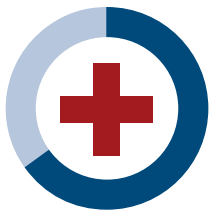
of parents polled have coached at some point in the past five years

## TOP 10 SPORTS THAT PARENTS COACH

The most commonly coached sports among parents who have led or assisted a team



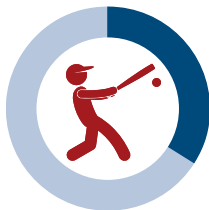
## PERCENTAGE OF PARENT COACHES WITH FORMAL TRAINING/EDUCATION



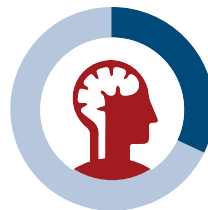
**65%**  
CPR & BASIC  
FIRST AID



**44%**  
GENERAL SAFETY &  
INJURY PREVENTION



**34%**  
SPORTS SKILLS &  
TACTICS



**32%**  
CONCUSSION  
MANAGEMENT



**32%**  
PHYSICAL  
CONDITIONING



**25%**  
EFFECTIVE  
MOTIVATIONAL  
TECHNIQUES



## Challenge: Safety concerns among parents

### 8 | THE PLAY: EMPHASIZE PREVENTION

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

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

#### Five findings in Southeast Michigan:

- **State-level support for better understanding concussions is making a difference.** In 2012, the state passed laws requiring the Michigan Department of Community Health to develop concussion education awareness programs.<sup>35</sup> As a result, the state adopted the Centers for Disease Control’s Heads Up concussion awareness protocol, along with National Federation of State High School Associations training resources. The law also required youth sports coaches to complete the concussion training programs and provide concussion education to their athletes. Since then, the other groups have also become more aware of the dangers of head injuries at the youth level. In 2016, the Michigan High School Athletic Association published the first of a new annual study of head injuries from contact sports. Based on data from the 2015-16 school year, the report found that 11-man football, boys’ ice hockey, 8-man football, girls’ soccer, and girls’ basketball had the highest concussion rates per 1,000 participants.<sup>36</sup> MHSAA plans to use this data to streamline reporting and refine sideline detection methods.



- **Despite the risk of head injury, tackle football remains in demand.** It’s the fifth-most played team sport among boys, with African Americans playing at more than twice the rate (17%) of whites and Hispanics (7%), according to Aspen’s household survey. To minimize injuries, the Detroit Lions Football Education division offers summer camps across the region and state, offering fundamentals training, including safe tackling form, for ages 6-14. Detroit PAL athletic director Dwayne Jones noted what while PAL offers flag football for ages 5-6, the Lions-supported tackle league is available for ages 7 and up. The Lions and NFL have taken many steps to educate parents and ensure safe play. Coaches of the Lions’ programs receive concussion training at the beginning of each season based on the USA Football’s Heads Up Program, the first level of which must be completed annually. Parent-Child and Moms Clinics are offered to teach parents to recognize proper tackling form.<sup>37</sup> Also though NFL Flag lists 130 registered flag

football leagues in the region, Dwayne Jones noted many kids in PAL’s flag program consider flag a “warm-up” for tackle programs. It’s an education challenge. Many parents believe their child will earn a football scholarship, and that playing tackle football at a young age is the path. As hockey found when introducing game modifications, communicating to parents that flag will not hinder a child’s progression is key. The recent disclosure that former Detroit Lions star and community leader Mel Farr suffered from Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy, a brain disease linked to repetitive hits, is yet another opportunity to start a discussion.<sup>38</sup>



- **Trusted community stakeholders are making a difference.** Beaumont Health System, one of the largest hospitals in Southeast Michigan, offers a Concussion Health Awareness and Management Program (CHAMP), which offers pre- and post-concussion screenings for youth age 13 and older. The program also hosts a 24-hour hotline to make scheduling of screenings easy. It’s an important service, but leaves younger players without access to similar support. In September 2016, former Lions offensive linemen Robert Sims Jr. and Dominic Raiola donated \$100,000 to provide Beaumont concussion education and CHAMP services to Detroit PAL football and cheer programs.<sup>39</sup> “We’re hopeful our gift will create greater awareness among players, parents, and coaches,” said Sims, who is on PAL’s Board of Directors.



- Detroit is a city surrounded by water, but many residents have not learned to swim.** This is an issue particularly with African American youth, only 14 percent of whom swim recreationally or competitively, half the rate of whites in the region, according to Aspen’s household survey. The YMCA of Metropolitan Detroit is making a dent in this. The free Detroit Swims program started at Boll Family YMCA in 2010 and has since expanded to six locations in Wayne, Oakland, and Macomb Counties. The goal: teach 1,500 kids annually to swim. Its supporters include Olympian Peter Vanderkaay, who learned to swim at a YMCA. Learning to swim opens a wide range of opportunities for physical activity to Detroiters, as Wayne County is home to 25 of the region’s 50 pools and aquatic facilities. Many of these pools, however, belong to private clubs. Project Play research partner SFA notes that swimming facilities are expensive to develop and maintain, creating costs that are often passed down to visitors through fees and memberships. Public-private partnerships could be explored to ensure swimming is affordable for all.

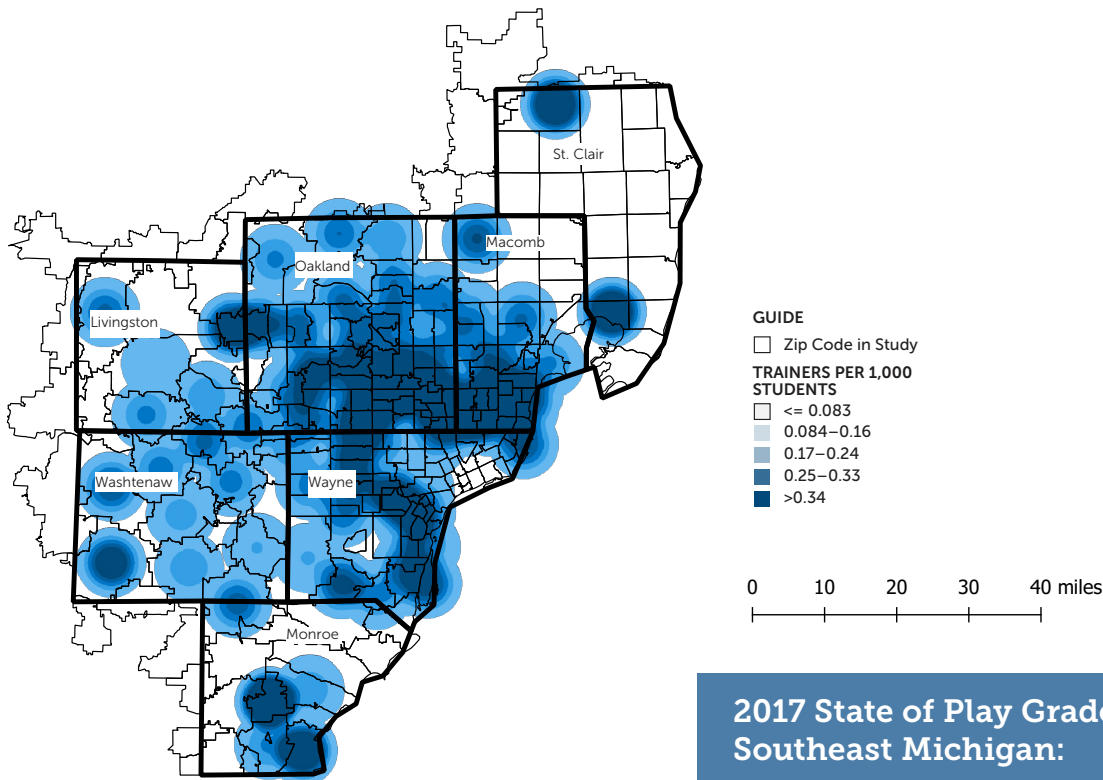


- Access to athletic trainers is greater in suburban schools than in urban and most rural areas.** High school students in suburban Oakland County, where more than half of the county’s 89 high schools have access (18 full-time, 32 part-time), have the best access to on-site attention from a certified athletic trainer. That’s in contrast to students in Wayne County, where only one high school in the city of Detroit retains a full-time athletic trainer: the private, all-male University of Detroit Jesuit High School that is attended mostly by students from affluent suburbs. Indeed, in Wayne County, only 23 percent of the 134 high schools have access to athletic trainers (17 employ full-time trainers and 14 employ part-time trainers), making the ratio of trainers to students nearly 16,000:1. That’s considerably more students per trainer than the rest of the study area, and 6,000 more students per trainer than the average for all seven counties (~9,900). By statistical analysis, Wayne County is a clear outlier, suggesting that the dichotomy of urban and non-urban is more pronounced than the difference between rural and suburban landscapes.<sup>40</sup> (See Appendix D on p. 34 for additional breakdown of this data.)



**FIG. 3 | DISTRIBUTION OF ATHLETIC TRAINERS ACROSS SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN**

The lighter the area, the greater the need





## CALL FOR LEADERSHIP

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

### Connect stakeholder silos

As is commonly the case across the United States, youth sport is a highly disjointed space in Southeast Michigan. The wide array of sport providers and other stakeholders need a venue to identify best practices, share resources and ideas, set community standards, and develop a common voice. That way, community leaders such as Renee Fluker of Midnight Golf and Derek Aguirre of Racquet Up, neither of whom had run a nonprofit before bringing golf and squash programs to Detroit, can learn from each other's experience.

The region would benefit from the creation of a formal cross-sector coalition to drive progress. It should be guided by a charter and supported with a project manager. Effective Collective Impact efforts need such backbone support to convene leaders, broker a shared agenda, capture data that measures success, and foster mutually reinforcing actions by member organizations.<sup>41</sup> The group should meet in person and have established communication channels, including a website. A pioneer in this space is the Philadelphia Youth Sports Collaborative.<sup>42</sup> An initial, three-year commitment should be made and members should align their efforts with those of the coalition, ensuring that any identified necessary improvements are long term.

Such a coalition could be a powerful tool in advocating for policies. In Baltimore, leaders in 2016 pushed through a measure that sets aside a percentage of annual property taxes for youth programs. This year, the initiative is expected to raise \$12 million.<sup>43</sup>

### Bring play spaces closer to where children live

There are two ways to give kids access to sports: Take kids to sports, or bring sports to kids. In Detroit, the latter holds more promise, given transportation challenges and the abundance of vacant lots. After a period of neglect, the city has an overall redevelopment plan and is moving forward. This plan recognizes the importance of pocket parks.<sup>44</sup> Recent investment in these types of spaces is occurring. We applaud that and call for the city to develop smaller play spaces.

An example: Boyer Park, a 1.8-acre space on West Vernor Highway, is smaller than the average Detroit park (2.4 acres). Still, it is a valued neighborhood asset. Boyer is one of 10 city parks upgraded in 2016 under a \$12 million plan that has 30 more neighborhood parks in line for improvements in 2017.<sup>45</sup> At Boyer Park, new amenities include a concrete skate ramp (\$70,000) and a small basketball court (\$15,000).

Even smaller spaces should be considered for pocket parks, defined by the National Recreation and Park Association as a space that is no more than a quarter-acre.<sup>46</sup> In Port Huron in St. Clair County, a small park featured a basketball court that was in disrepair. The park had few visitors until four high school seniors wrote a grant. They raised \$15,000 for renovations.<sup>47</sup> Now the pocket park is a popular place to play. It's an example that proves what

**5 recommendations  
for stakeholders in  
Southeast Michigan**





municipal leaders and funders know but don't always act on: When residents put their stamp on a plan for a park, including equipment design and park aesthetics, the upgrade is more likely to succeed.

A big idea to try on, in places where safety is a concern: Locate pocket parks in proximity to institutions like fire stations and hospitals. These are places where adults are present around the clock. Kids in our focus group liked the idea. One even enthusiastically recommended a vacant lot for sale next to a fire station where the idea could be piloted. "It would work," they said.

The map below shows the location of these community assets layered on top of the population density of youth ages 17 and younger. Additional analysis of the location and walkable access to known parks in Detroit has helped our research team to identify six additional locations for potential pocket parks.

But a solution is needed for winter, when an outdoor pocket park is simply not an option. Enter: school cafeterias, churches, YMCAs and JCCs, and even libraries, all of which could create a network of indoor free play spaces during cold-weather months.

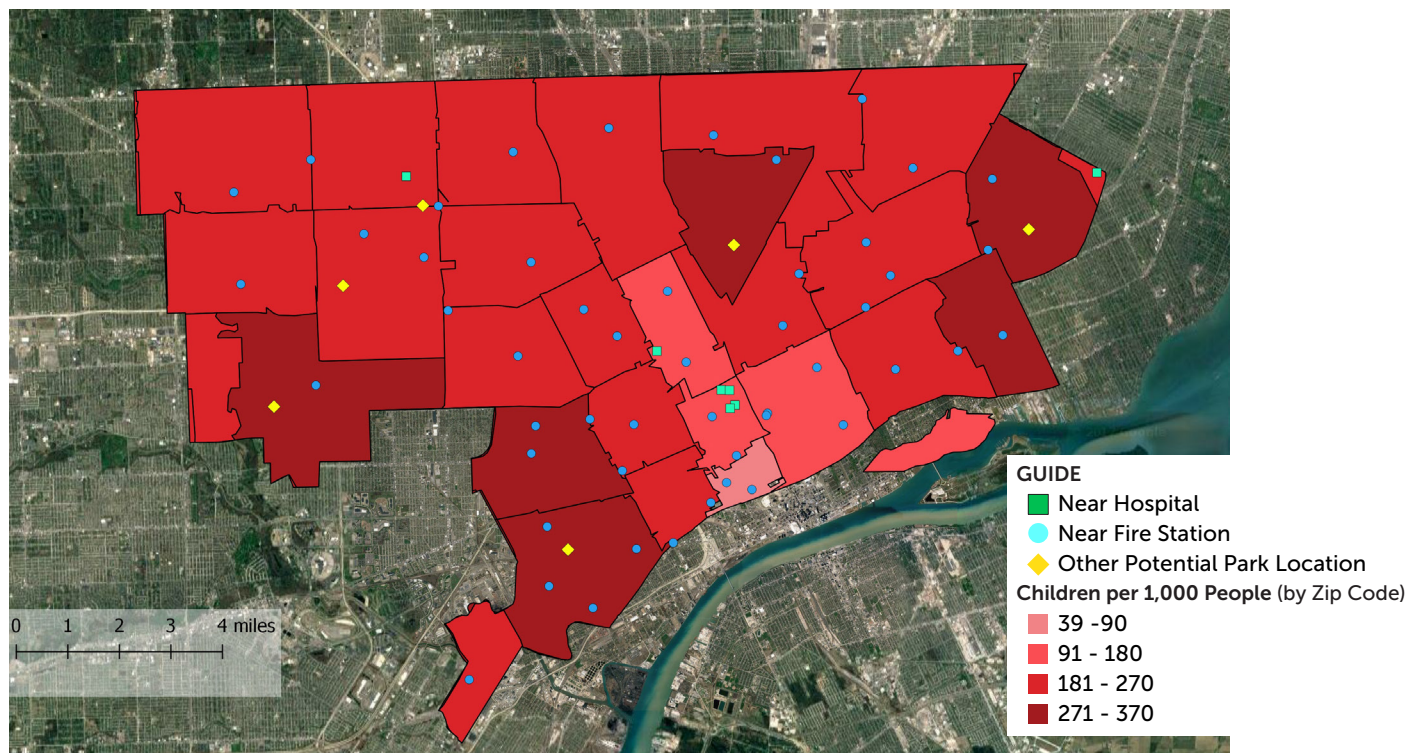
### Connect parents with programs

We know that most parents want their children to play sports—and programs need participants—but the marketplace lacks a digital space to connect those opportunities, truly tailored to user interests. Build or identify an existing digital platform that will align supply with demand, allowing parents and youth to discover the full array of nearby community sport programs and recreation sites, sortable by a range of variables including age group, program cost, and quality standards (user ratings or otherwise).

Encourage the above coalition to populate the portal with content: Program listings, recreation sites streaming coaching clinics, news articles and columns, and guidance for parents on how to demand quality from sport providers. Use the site to recruit umpires and referees and to identify organizations with coaching or funding needs. Connecting silos will foster more collaborations like that of Youth on Course, in which dozens of Michigan golf course operators have committed to offering \$5-a-round golf to youth.<sup>48</sup>

**FIG. 4 | POTENTIAL POCKET PARKS IN DETROIT**

Based on analysis of community assets and parks within walking distance of youth





Any such portal will need to be kept up to date, and it will need a strong messaging campaign at the outset so that families know about the resource. Also, it will be imperative not to forget that many families—especially those who are already facing many barriers to sport—are on the other side of the digital divide, so supplement with in-community initiatives.

Even so, information and options are power. The more parents have access to, the more their kids will, too.

### Grow the availability of trained coaches and officials

The value of coach training is well-documented, and in Southeast Michigan there's a clear need to provide training to more coaches. But some leagues resist making training a requirement because of the cost of education programs. Even \$25 is prohibitive for some in urban and rural areas. Others are concerned that coaches, most of whom are volunteers, do not want to make an extra commitment. Strategies are needed to bring down the price, and grow the quantity of trained coaches.

One way to do that is to recruit from colleges. Southeast Michigan has more than a dozen four-year universities and community colleges within its footprint. That amounts to 4,400 college athletes in more than two dozen sports—at least a quarter of whom cycle out of college each year.<sup>49</sup> From a lifetime playing their sports, these athletes often want to be assets in the communities they came from. They are already experts in the technical aspects of the games. What many lack is training in working with children and a background in safety procedures. A coordinated effort that offers coaching education as part of the student-athlete experience and a plan that transitions new graduates into youth coaches and officials would be innovative.

Statewide and in Southeast Michigan, there are excellent coach education programs. These include the IMPACT Training and Certification Program developed by Detroit PAL and Michigan State University's Institute for the Study of Youth Sports, and the guidelines in place at the YMCA of Southeast Michigan. Further, the MHSAA's Coach Advancement Program is available online and is already offered in person at high schools and community colleges statewide every year, although each level of certification costs \$60. Additionally, the NAIA offers its Champions of Character training program at its six member institutions in the region. Leverage these assets, and the needs around coaching can be met.

### Embrace skateboarding and other action sports

Action sports can happen almost anywhere. They adapt to their surroundings and thrive in areas that are under used, nontraditional, and do not easily support other sports. Increased investment in parks for children who enjoy action sports is needed. And though skate parks are less versatile than other types of sports facilities, they're comparatively low-cost.

Our research indicates that Wayne County has six skate parks, second only to Oakland County's seven in Southeast Michigan. Yet, given Wayne County's population density, it's three shy of meeting the recommended regional benchmark. Macomb and Washtenaw counties also each need a skate park to be up to par.<sup>50</sup>

Despite the relative need, skateboarding has seen a rise in popularity recently in Southeast Michigan.<sup>51</sup> Today, six percent of youth, most of them boys, skateboard, according to Aspen's household survey. In city neighborhoods, the sport has contributed to community cohesion. Many speak of feeling connected to a sport and to a group of like-minded friends for the first time.





For instance, Ride-It Sculpture Park has connected its neighborhood to a skateboarding community within Southeast Michigan. Funding for the park included a \$30,000 grant from The Tony Hawk Foundation. A skating icon, Hawk (who in 2016 bought a house in Detroit) and his foundation have financially supported 14 skate parks in Michigan, including five in Macomb, St. Clair, Washtenaw, Oakland, and Wayne counties. Though there are no BMX tracks in the city parks, and just one mountain bike course in Rouge Park, the action sports culture is strong. And it seems it will only grow when The Hutch finally takes off, a program that plans to rehab an abandoned school to include an office, indoor/outdoor park, skate shop, and event space. If the organizers have their wish list fulfilled, the space will also include a wood shop that will allow youth to design their own boards.<sup>52</sup>

Skate parks are included in the city’s Parks and Recreation Improvement Plan. In addition to the new skate park at Boyer Park (see Pocket Parks on p. 23), a skate park is in the planning and design stage for Riverside Park. Getting creative, a 10-year-old park at Heilmann Recreation Center in Northeast Detroit has ramps laid out on an old tennis court. Ride-It is a model for future projects.

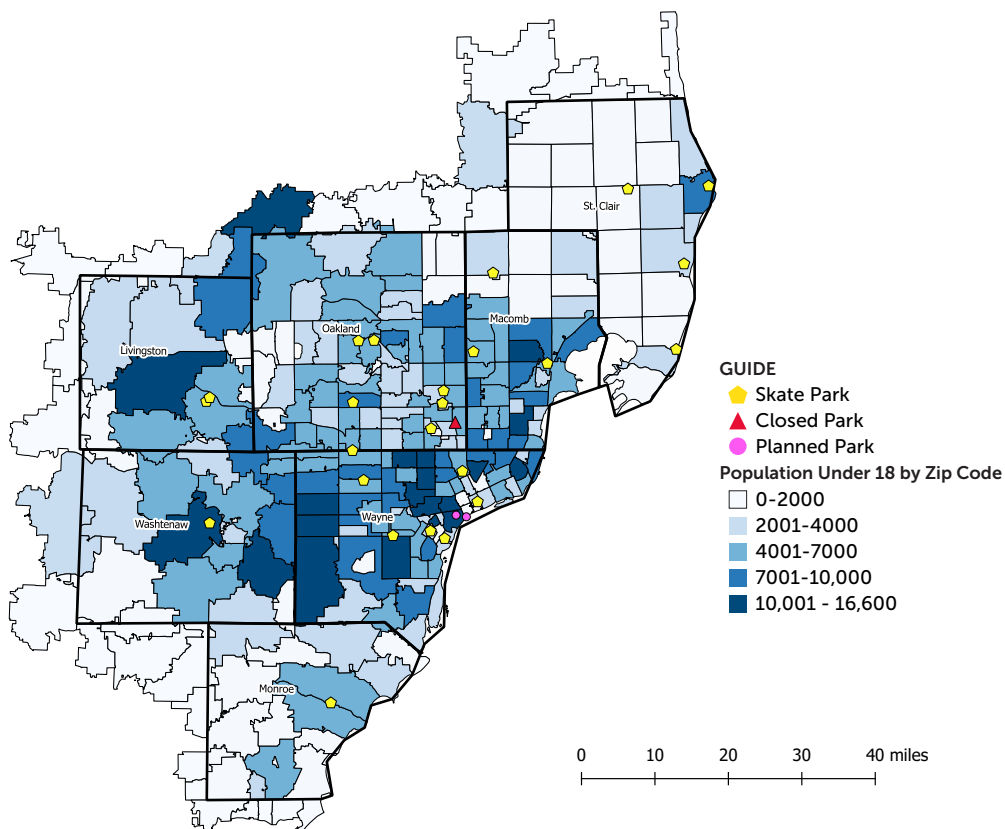
Successful parks draw dozens of young skaters. That sometimes results in pushback from residents who object to noise, so choosing a

proper location is key. Liability issues are also a concern, though state governmental immunity statutes defeat most claims. Many parks also post rules that put skaters on notice. At the Auburn Hills Skate Park, they’re warned: “Use at your own risk.”<sup>53</sup>

Growing the skateboard culture will require care by stakeholders. They must maintain the spaces as Detroit neighborhoods are revitalized, and blighted spaces are reclaimed by the city. Cases in point: A skate park built and maintained by volunteers at Wigle Park in Midtown now is in the hands of the City Planning Department. And the former BMX track at Brush-Adelaide Park—just a few blocks from Comerica Park—that was brought to life by BMX riders is now also under control of the Planning Department.<sup>54</sup> These spaces may find that in time they are redesigned to be housing or commercial use areas, eliminating the skating infrastructure and its green space. It’s a sign of revival for the city and a reminder to skate enthusiasts that they must remain alert if they are serious about maintaining spaces suitable for their use.

There’s also the question of what to do during cold weather months. Snowboarding is the classic winter action sport. It’s not likely to find a home in a city, but neighborhood activists are raising funds to make Ride-It Skate Park a winter destination, too, with the addition of a sledding hill and ice rink.

FIG. 5 | SKATE PARKS IN SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN







## GAME CHANGER: *The Promise of Pro Teams*

Detroit is one of 13 metropolitan areas with franchises in all four major men's professional sports leagues, and one of just three (Denver and Philadelphia are the others) with all four teams located within the physical limits of the same city. After the Pistons move to Little Caesar's Arena, Detroit will become the only city to have all of its teams housed in the same downtown neighborhood, the newly branded District Detroit.

The concentration of teams and elite facilities represents a unique opportunity for the clubs to expand access to quality sports for children across the city and region.

As part of the Pistons' relocation, the NBA franchise has committed \$2.5 million to constructing or renovating 60 basketball courts in Detroit.<sup>55</sup> That's on top of the \$715,000 in annual grants that club provides to community groups, several of which support youth sports. "We want to be all-in on Detroit," said Arn Tellem, vice chairman of Palace Sports & Entertainment. "We want to do right by the city and the community here."

Detroit's other teams also have a record of supporting youth sports. The Lions conduct summer football camps and are stalwart supporters of Detroit PAL through football equipment donations, sponsorship of Detroit PAL football programs, and the Quick Lane Bowl, which connects PAL participants with college and pro athletes.<sup>56</sup> The Tigers donate 10,000 sets of wiffle-ball bats to schools to encourage free play and offer and support a wide range of camps and leagues.<sup>57</sup> The Red Wings fund learn-to-skate clinics across the region and give floor hockey equipment to 115 schools each year.<sup>58</sup>

Still, huge gaps in access remain, as highlighted in this report.

One telling insight: Detroit, home to the 11-time Stanley Cup champion Red Wings, is known nationally as "Hockeytown." Yet, few kids within Detroit's city limits actually play the game, with fewer than 200 registered through USA Hockey-sanctioned programs.<sup>59</sup> Just one percent of youth play the game under any organization in Detroit, one-third the rate outside the city, according to Aspen's household survey. It's an expensive sport to play. Another big reason is that although Southeast Michigan has among the greatest concentrations of ice facilities in the country, most are in the Detroit suburbs. There are just two public places to skate in the city—one indoor (Jack Adams Memorial Arena at Adams-Butzel Recreation Center) and one outdoor (Clark Park).<sup>60</sup> See Appendix C on p. 33 for map of the region's rinks.

Research suggests that kids who play a sport are more likely to become avid fans of sports as they move into adulthood. Thus, pro teams will benefit if they work together to address the gap between sport haves and have nots in Greater Detroit. That starts with meaningful collaboration, building on efforts like that of the S.A.Y. Play Center at Lipke Park. There, the Pistons give more than \$100,000 a year and renovated the facility's gym, the Tigers' contributions included \$40,000 to renovate its baseball and softball diamonds, and Lions quarterback Matthew Stafford's Score7 Charitable Fund committed to renovating the facility's football field.<sup>61</sup>

If Detroit's sports franchises worked together more intentionally and strategically in Southeast Michigan—and in a manner that syncs with best practices in athletic and child development—how much more could be accomplished?

Enough to change the game for kids.



## A few ways Detroit's professional franchises can provide the necessary leadership:

### Promote multi-sport play

Instead of *play our sport*, the public message from Detroit's pro teams to parents and youth could be: *Sample all sports*. It's a message that already has support from more than 40 leading sport organizations from across the country—including the NBA, NFL, NHL, and MLB—in recognition of the athletic development literature showing that multi-sport athletes do better, are less likely to get hurt, and are more likely to play into adulthood.<sup>62</sup> Besides, sport sampling is what a good childhood looks like.

Pro athletes have the credibility to debunk the myth of early sport specialization. So, create a PSA in which stars from each of the four teams are having fun playing sports other than the one they make a living at. The clubs could divvy production costs and allocate equal shares of on-air and in-stadium ad inventory, so no one sport is unilaterally disarming in the race to fill its fan and athlete pipeline.

Build the promotion of sport sampling into grant-making criteria for local programs. Develop and line the basketball courts that the Pistons have promised in a manner that allows them to be used for volleyball, roller hockey, wiffle ball, short-sided soccer, flag football, and perhaps even *sepak takraw*, a sport that combines soccer and volleyball and is popular in the area's Burmese community. Make the hoops adjustable for younger basketball players and suitable for adaptive sports. Thinking across sports and ages will be key to their use, as currently outdoor basketball courts in Detroit are rarely used for organized play. At present, only 55 such courts in Wayne County are regularly used for community programming.<sup>63</sup>

### Grow the quality and quantity of youth coaches

The demand for capable coaches has never been greater. Nor has the need for the training and mentorship that is important for coaches' development. Nationally, 85 percent of parents have concern about the quality or behavior of coaches.<sup>64</sup> Detroit's pro teams can play an important role in supporting efforts aimed at preparing coaches for the important job of teaching and leading the next generation. It's not that expensive: For \$250,000 a year, one NBA team trains 1,500 coaches (while also providing uniforms and rec league play for 12,000 kids).

An Aspen Institute roundtable of national coaching experts identified three key competencies for youth coaches in working with kids: Coaching philosophy (including communication techniques), safety (physical/emotional/sexual, plus background checks, CPR, first aid and concussion management where appropriate), and skills and tactics (in a given sport).<sup>65</sup> Detroit's pro franchises could work together to make available, at no or low

cost, a coaching module that covers the first two competencies. Then, each can direct programs to sport-specific online programs to cover the third. USA Basketball, USA Hockey, USA Baseball, and USA Football all offer guidance on age-appropriate play and safer-play best practices.

That approach would create standards for youth coaching, while reducing costs and potentially creating opportunities to recruit additional volunteers, particularly women and college students, currently under-utilized resources who might want just a bit more guidance before taking the reins.

### Develop a mechanism to fund youth recreation

Unlike many school and community sports programs, professional sports today is a booming industry, awash in escalating media and facility revenues. Today, the Lions are worth \$1.65 billion, the Tigers \$1.15 billion, the Pistons \$900 million, and the Red Wings \$625 million, according to *Forbes* magazine.<sup>66</sup> Stratospheric franchise values and millions in public financing, in turn, have raised public expectations about community give-back.

One way to effectively demonstrate that franchises are doing enough: Create a fund to support youth and school programs throughout the region. Follow the example of the Detroit Auto Dealers Association Fund, which in 1998 brought together more than 200 automobile dealers in metropolitan Detroit to establish a multimillion dollar endowed fund that supports youth-serving charities.<sup>67</sup> Another compelling model, from the outdoor recreation industry: In 2002, Patagonia, introduced the 1% For The Planet foundation, seeding, then inviting independent organizations to donate one percent of their annual sales directly to approved environmental nonprofits. Since then, more than 1,200 member businesses have donated more than \$150 million.<sup>68</sup> Member benefits include visibility, networking, advice, and association with a widely respected nonprofit.

So how about a 1% for Play equivalent? Detroit's four franchises could seed the fund by dedicating one percent of their annual revenues—that's \$9 million alone.<sup>69</sup> Recruit the University of Michigan athletic department for another \$1.5 million, and invite corporations, foundations, and individuals to join.<sup>70</sup> Offer matching dollars for municipalities, like Pontiac, whose voters in 2016 approved a millage (or tax) expected to raise up to \$900,000 a year for youth sports programs.<sup>71</sup> Very quickly, a region that believes in the power of sports has the resources to tell one of the greatest stories in sports and the ability to make strategic, sustainable investments in everything from coaches to facilities.

## That would be an accomplishment on par with winning a championship.





## IDEAS

A few short, crisp ideas to pump into the bloodstream of Southeast Michigan, to stimulate new thinking among the eight sectors that touch the lives of children:

### Community Recreation Organizations

**Youth leagues:** Form an equipment exchange. The Oakland Reds baseball club in Farmington Hills started one in 2017. Parents drop off gently used pants, fielder's mitts, helmets, balls, and other items that children have outgrown or don't want. Parents of younger kids claim the items. At the Oakland Reds exchange, equipment not claimed was donated to Detroit PAL.

**Local leagues:** Try new field dimensions and new rules to fit the ages and skill development of players. If young pitchers struggle to throw strikes in the first month of the season, adopt a rule for that: No walks in month 1.

**Youth-serving organizations:** In communities where local leagues are not prevalent—or perhaps where only a few sports are offered—host “pop up” sports activities. Launch a monthly disc golf tournament at various “courses” in the region. “Holes” can be trash bins, lamp posts and fire hydrants—anything that defines a streetscape. The only equipment that's needed: A Frisbee. Partner with a school, a pediatrician's office, and a local business. Start with a one-time event to build an audience, then host it on a monthly basis until a critical mass emerges that can spin off into a league.

### Pro Teams

See GAME CHANGER on p. 26

### Education

**Elementary schools:** Prioritize recess and PE offerings. At recess, use Playworks' best practices to help students to organize themselves into free play or more traditional sports games. In PE, focus on teaching fundamental movement skills that are transferable across sports. BOKS, a Reebok-funded program, offers free curricula that can provide ideas and lesson plans.

**Middle and high schools:** Make sport sampling an option for for all children, including those with special needs. The Oakland University Center for Autism offers children on the autism spectrum opportunities to swim, golf, practice judo, and play soccer. School Unified Sports teams in these sports that pair youth with and without disabilities as teammates is a good place to start.

**School boards:** Offer your facilities to community programs through shared use agreements that prioritize programs that foster in-town recreation leagues. Start by taking district-wide surveys of schools to understand which ones have such agreements and what they provide, and make that inventory available as a public resource.



## Civic Leaders & Policymakers

**Elected officials:** Build on Mayor Duggan’s support for pocket parks, mini-play spaces in neighborhoods. Kids need recreation places near where they live. Seek out local artists, gardeners, and other activists to ensure that these parks make a signature statement about the neighborhood.

**Local leaders:** Create open-access cultural competency trainings to prepare coaches for real issues like how to interpret the body language of a child from Bangladesh or elsewhere. Coaches connect more effectively when they’ve been trained.

**City government:** Use the power of the permit. Youth leagues that want access to city-owned fields must play by the rules, including appropriate coach training and updated equipment.

## Tech & Media

**Regional and city news:** Start a kids’ sports blog that serves as a forum for youth players, about youth players. Include survey tools that capture the opinions of youth in quantifiable forms.

**Local hacktivists:** Develop more apps to help coaches and parents improve sports safety. Return2Play, developed by the Pediatric Trauma Program at C.S. Mott Children’s Hospital in conjunction with Michigan NeuroSport, tracks recovery of young athletes from concussions.

**Makers:** Create an Ideas Lab dedicated to improving access for children with physical disabilities. Beeping balls for vision-impaired children have opened new opportunities. There’s room for lots of innovation.

## Business & Industry

**Sports apparel retailers:** Make youth sports a beneficiary of corporate social responsibility. In 2016, Patagonia donated 100 percent of global Black Friday sales to environmental causes, totaling \$10 million.<sup>72</sup> This year, a Meijer Black Friday donates to girls’ sports or sports in refugee communities? Or, year-round subsidizing of baseline concussion testing for players in sports known for high concussion rates—football, ice hockey, lacrosse, and soccer. Staff at Nike’s Detroit Community Store volunteer with the Diehl Boys & Girls Club. The store also offers minigrants through the Nike Community Impact Fund.

**Local business:** Expand workplace volunteer programs to include financial rewards for coaching, officiating, keeping up fields, managing finances, and serving on league boards in underserved communities. Youth sport organizations need help in these areas.

**Trophy companies:** Hold a “Trophy Giveback” Day. Accept gently used trophies (and monetary donations). Refurbish them and donate or sell at low-cost to leagues that are financially strapped.

## Public Health

**Hospitals:** Partner with high schools to screen athletes for heart disease and other cardiac issues. Heart-check programs for student athletes are becoming more common after high-profile incidents of athletes passing away while playing their sports. Students at West Bloomfield High School receive heart checks performed by doctors from the Henry Ford Health System as part of pre-season physical exams.

**Doctors:** Promote water over sports drinks as a hydrator of choice. Sports drinks add calories and have no health benefit until children exercise continuously for more than an hour. As the Michigan State University Extension advises: “The most important thing that you can send with your child to a sporting event is water.”<sup>73</sup>

**Organizations:** Create a “Safe Sport” certification program as a guide for parents choosing a league for their child. Accreditation would be based on coach training, field conditions, and policies that promote age-appropriate play.

## Parents/Guardians

**Adopt “Sandlot Day.”** Schedule a day each season when coaches and parents step aside and allow players to run the show. They make the lineups, decide on substitutions, and manage the show like in the days of sandlot sports. It’s a lesson in problem-solving.

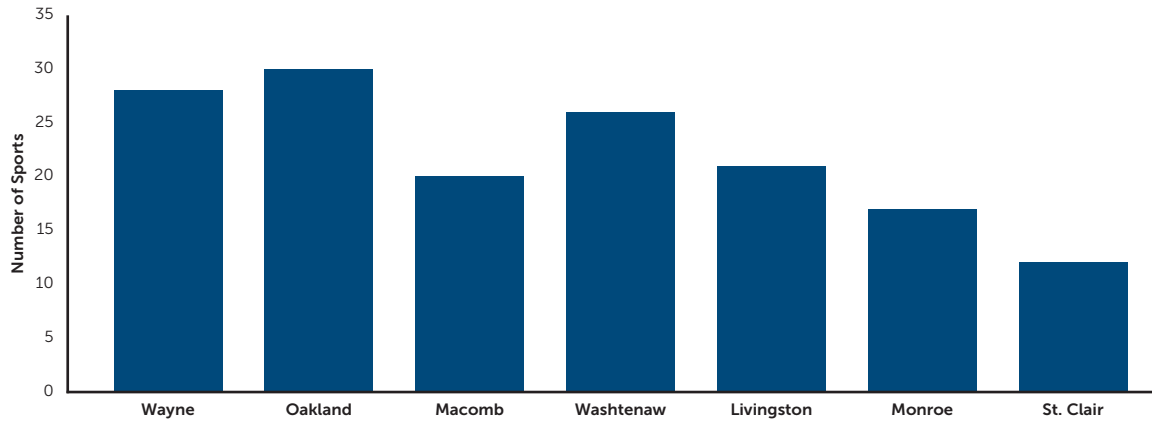
**Embrace rules that calm the sidelines.** On Silent Saturdays, only coaches are allowed to give encouragement and instructions. Parents, guardians, and others simply watch.

**Choose leagues that play by safer rules.** USA Football, the national governing body of the sport, recently took a constructive step by creating a format for modifying games for kids: No more kickoffs, fewer players on a team, and a smaller field. Encourage your local league to add that option.

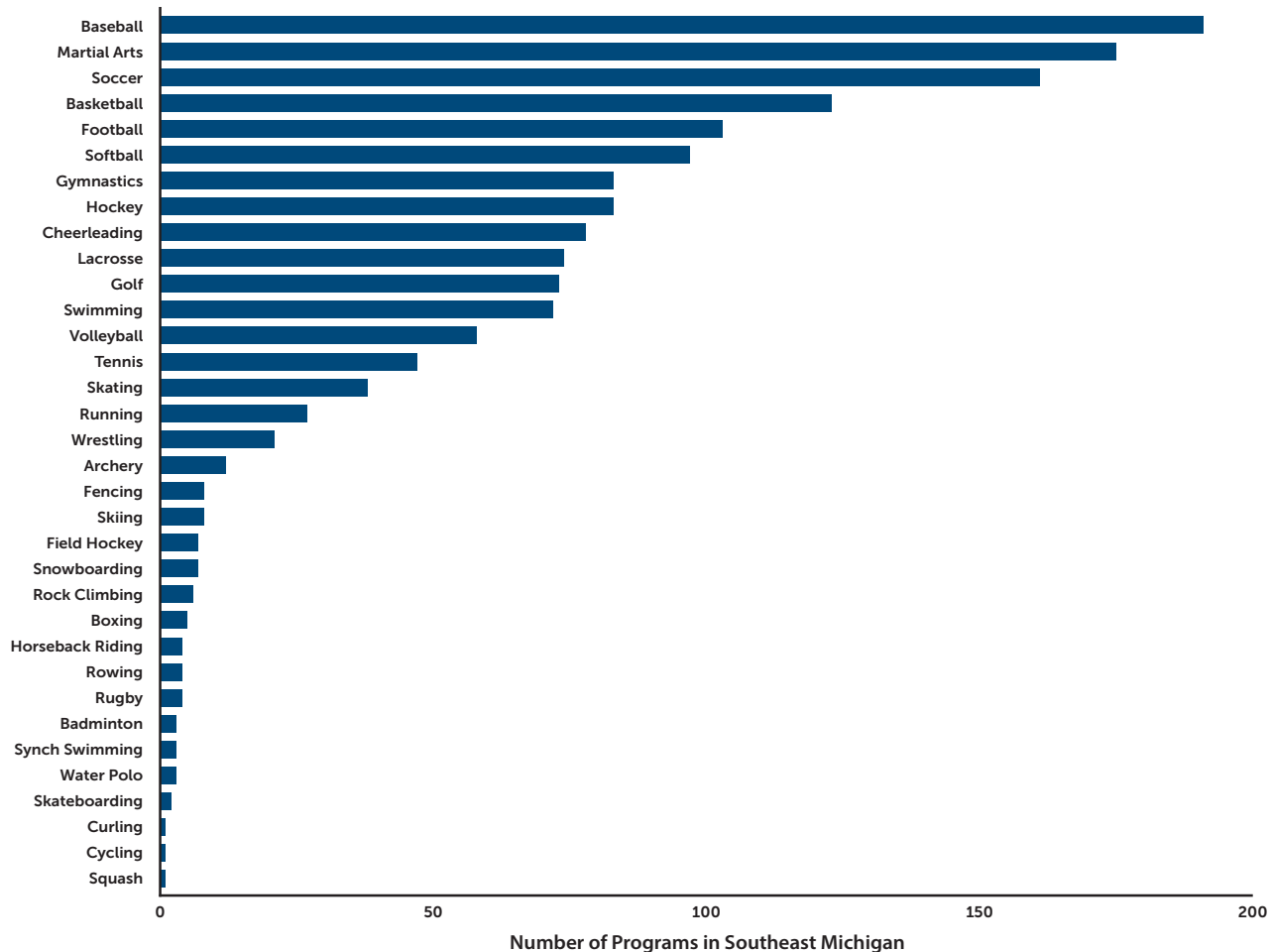
# APPENDIX A

The list of sports programs in Appendix A was created through an internet search by ActivityTree.com, supplemented by Aspen’s research team and the region’s task force members. The list does not represent the full universe of programs offered across the region, due in part to the fact that some grassroots programs do not have an online presence or are not registered with umbrella organization. These lists should be viewed as representing the minimum number of available offerings.

## SPORTS OFFERED BY COUNTY

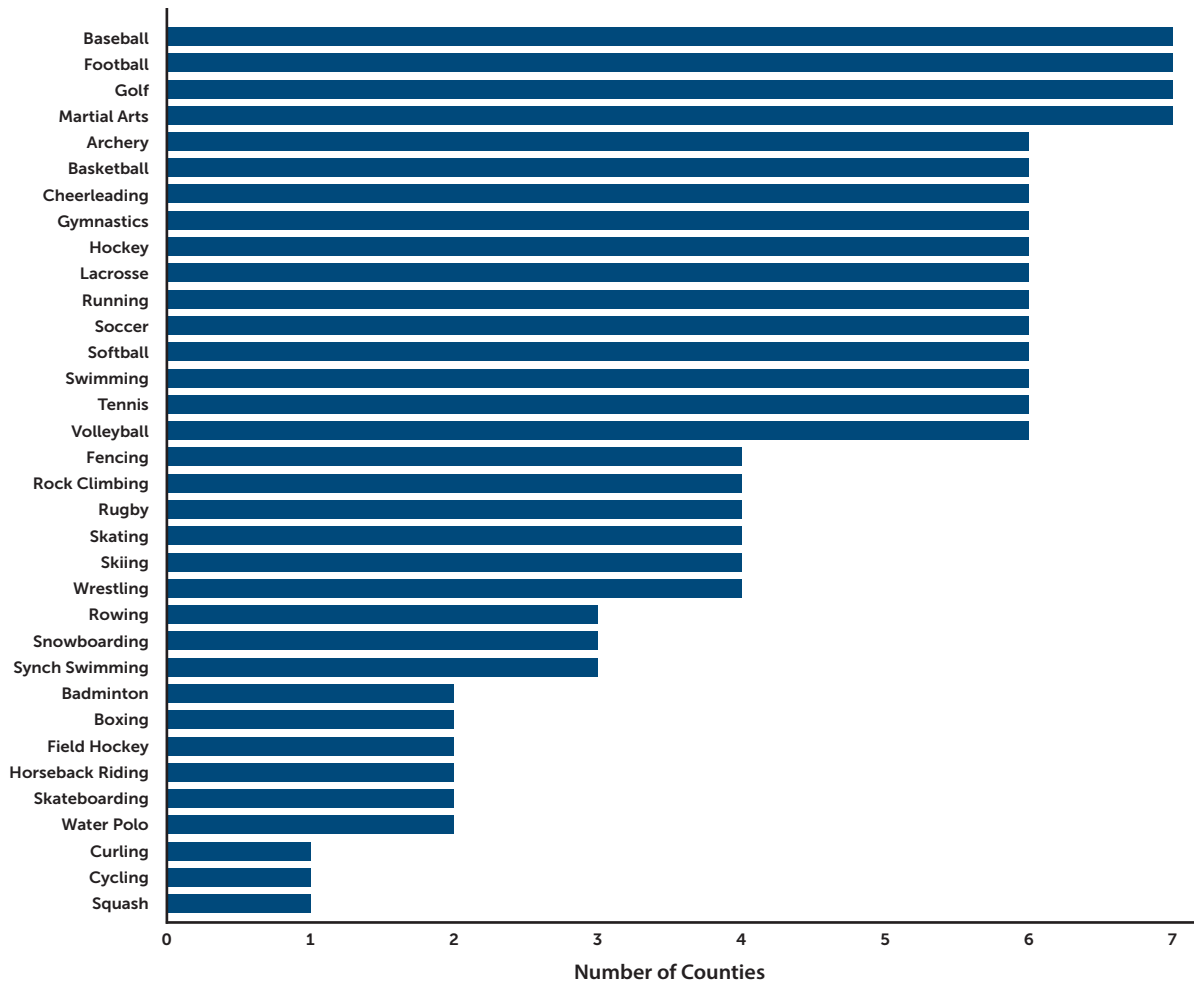


## PROGRAMS OFFERED BY SPORT



# APPENDIX A (continued)

## NUMBER OF COUNTIES IN WHICH SPORTS ARE OFFERED

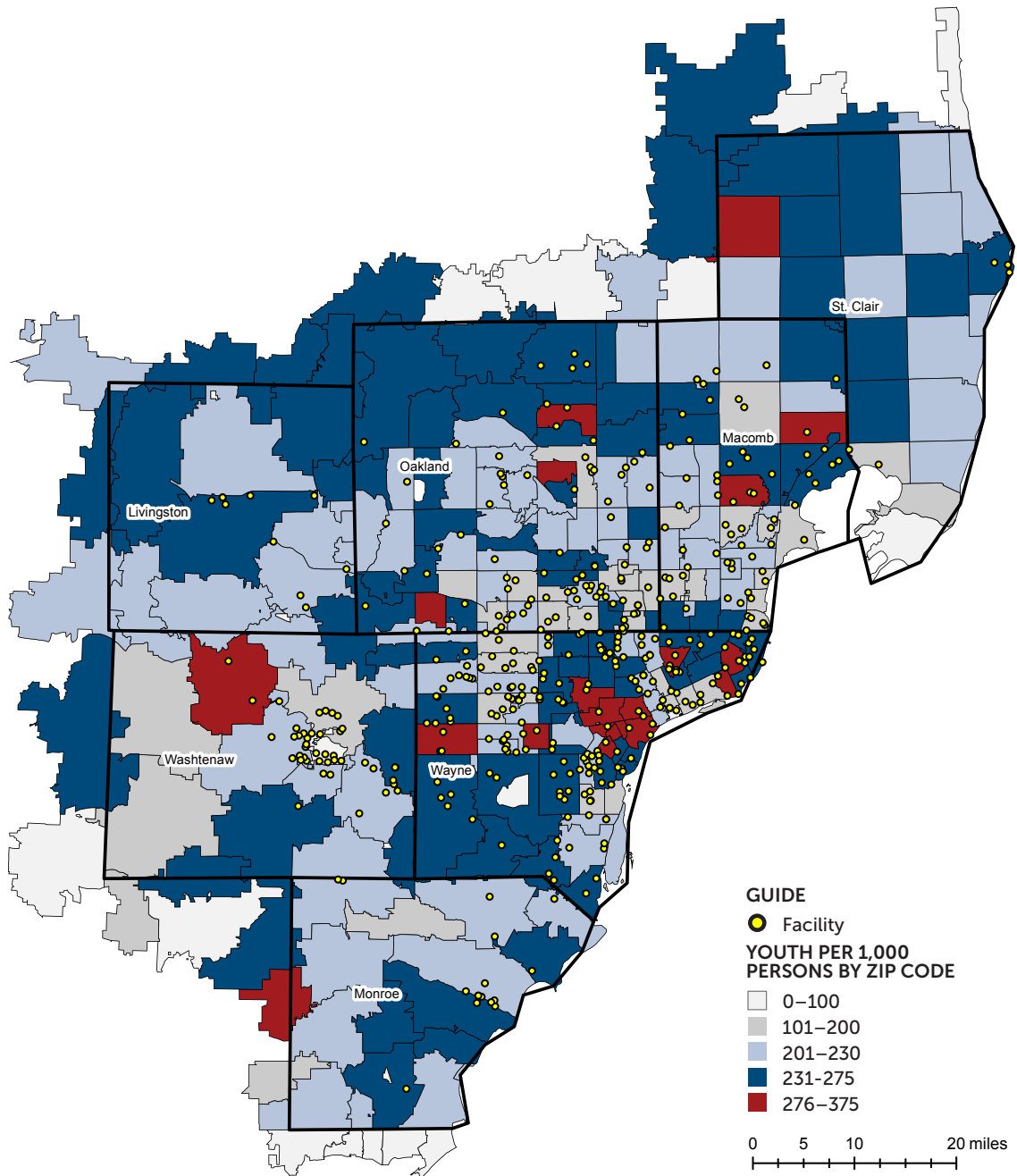




# APPENDIX B

## FACILITY LOCATIONS AND DENSITY OF YOUTH POPULATION

Many rural zip codes have a high ratio of children but have few or no sports facilities located within their boundaries—or even close. Elsewhere, facilities are clustered around areas with low youth ratios.

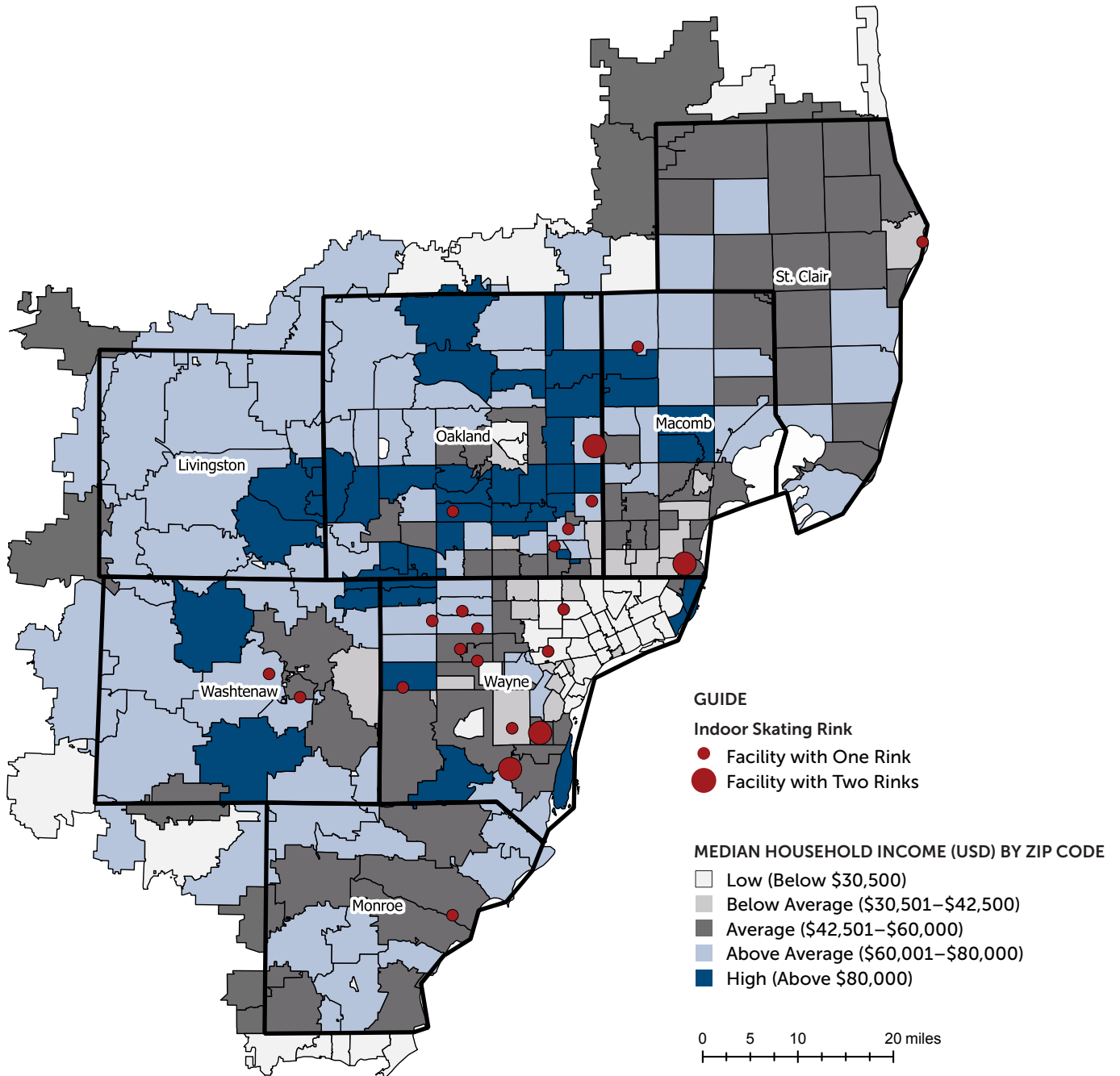


Source: Sports Facilities Advisory | Sports Facilities Management and the US Census Bureau. Facilities defined as venues regularly used for organized sports with open community registration; this map excludes schools.

# APPENDIX C

## SKATING RINKS AND INCOME IN SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN

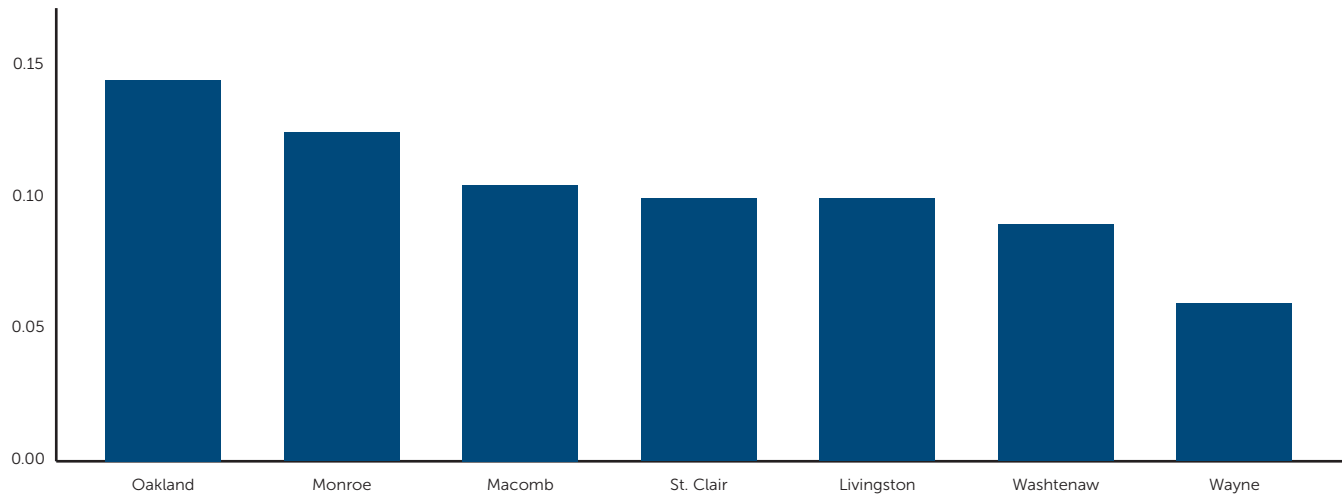
Skating rinks are located in zip codes with above-average income levels. The median income in a community that has a skating rink is \$62,987.



Source: Sports Facilities Advisory | Sports Facilities Management and the US Census Bureau. Skating rinks defined as rinks regularly used for organized sports programs with open community registration.

# APPENDIX D

## HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETIC TRAINERS PER 1,000 STUDENTS



The figure and table below show Wayne County is a statistical outlier. Students in the county have the lowest ratio of trainers to students.

	STUDENTS	TRAINERS (FULL- OR PART-TIME)	STUDENTS PER TRAINER	TRAINERS PER 1,000 STUDENTS
OAKLAND	316,857	46	6,888.2	0.145
MONROE	36,490	5	7,298.0	0.137
MACOMB	213,507	24	8,896.0	0.112
ST. CLAIR	38,128	4	9,532.0	0.105
LIVINGSTON	47,701	5	9,540.2	0.105
WASHTENAW	123,919	11	11,265.4	0.089
WAYNE	476,942	30	15,898.1	0.063
AVERAGE	179,077	17.86	9,902.6	0.110

Source: Data from Michigan Athletic Trainers Society Secondary School Committee, with help from the Michigan High School Athletic Association and the Korey Stringer Institute.



# APPENDIX E

## DAYS PER WEEK THAT STUDENTS IN SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN GET P.E. IN SCHOOL

	TOTAL	AGE 6-12	AGE 13-17
ZERO	13%	5%	24%
ONE	17%	25%	6%
TWO	20%	28%	8%
THREE	13%	16%	8%
FOUR	4%	3%	5%
FIVE	30%	20%	44%
UNSURE	4%	4%	5%

Source: Siena College Research Institute household survey of parents, for the Aspen Institute, 2017. See endnotes for methodology.

# APPENDIX F

## TOP 10 SPORTS PLAYED BY YOUTH IN SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN | DEMOGRAPHICS

	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	AGE 6-12	AGE 13-17	WHITE	HISP	AFR AMER
BASKETBALL	21%	26%	15%	17%	25%	15%	25%	35%
SWIMMING	17%	14%	20%	20%	13%	19%	15%	9%
SOCCER (OUTDOOR)	15%	16%	13%	18%	10%	16%	21%	8%
BASEBALL	13%	20%	4%	14%	10%	15%	18%	5%
RUNNING	13%	10%	16%	13%	12%	12%	10%	13%
GYMNASTICS	12%	2%	22%	15%	6%	13%	11%	11%
CYCLING	7%	7%	6%	6%	7%	7%	5%	4%
FOOTBALL (TACKLE)	7%	14%	0%	4%	11%	6%	5%	11%
SOCCER (INDOOR)	7%	7%	6%	6%	7%	6%	11%	5%
TRACK & FIELD	7%	7%	7%	4%	11%	6%	6%	7%

## TOP 10 SPORTS PLAYED BY YOUTH IN SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN | HOUSEHOLD INCOME

	TOTAL	<\$25,000	\$25,000-\$49,999	\$50,000-\$74,999	\$75,000-\$99,999	\$100,000-\$149,999	\$150,000+
BASKETBALL	21%	23%	26%	20%	17%	17%	15%
SWIMMING	17%	5%	14%	17%	21%	24%	25%
SOCCER (OUTDOOR)	15%	6%	15%	15%	19%	22%	7%
BASEBALL	13%	5%	11%	14%	13%	22%	7%
RUNNING	13%	11%	18%	10%	13%	12%	12%
GYMNASTICS	12%	11%	12%	10%	10%	12%	22%
OTHER	10%	11%	5%	14%	11%	13%	10%
CYCLING	7%	5%	7%	8%	6%	7%	3%
FOOTBALL (TACKLE)	7%	9%	7%	7%	4%	10%	4%
SOCCER (INDOOR)	7%	7%	6%	6%	5%	13%	3%
TRACK & FIELD	7%	4%	7%	5%	8%	6%	13%

## APPENDIX F (continued)

### TOP 10 SPORTS PLAYED BY YOUTH IN SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN | COUNTIES & DETROIT

	TOTAL	WAYNE	OAKLAND	MACOMB	WASHTENAW	LIVINGSTON	MONROE	ST CLAIR	DETROIT
BASKETBALL	21%	24%	17%	20%	18%	14%	33%	18%	32%
SWIMMING	17%	12%	26%	15%	21%	18%	17%	11%	10%
SOCCER (OUTDOOR)	15%	16%	11%	14%	24%	16%	6%	21%	14%
BASEBALL	13%	10%	9%	17%	22%	12%	22%	16%	5%
RUNNING	13%	13%	13%	8%	18%	10%	33%	11%	10%
GYMNASTICS	12%	11%	14%	12%	4%	14%	6%	16%	9%
CYCLING	7%	8%	5%	4%	13%	8%	8%	0%	4%
FOOTBALL (TACKLE)	7%	9%	6%	6%	3%	6%	3%	8%	13%
SOCCER (INDOOR)	7%	6%	8%	9%	7%	4%	3%	0%	5%
TRACK & FIELD	7%	6%	8%	5%	9%	12%	8%	3%	7%

Source: Siena College Research Institute household survey of parents, for the Aspen Institute, 2017. See endnotes for methodology.



# APPENDIX G

## COUNTY COMPARISON OF FACILITIES AND YOUTH

COUNTY	% OF REGION'S YOUTH POPULATION (UNDER 18)	% OF REGION'S SPORTS FACILITIES	% OF SPORTS FACILITIES MINUS % OF YOUTH POPULATION
WAYNE	39.9%	57.5%	<b>17.5%</b>
OAKLAND	25.5%	21.0%	<b>-4.5%</b>
MACOMB	17.7%	6.9%	<b>-10.8%</b>
WASHTENAW	6.5%	7.3%	<b>0.8%</b>
LIVINGSTON	4.0%	2.8%	<b>-1.2%</b>
MONROE	3.2%	4.1%	<b>0.9%</b>
ST. CLAIR	3.3%	0.4	<b>-2.9%</b>

Source: US Census Bureau and Sports Facility Advisory

Facility: Location regularly used for organized sports/programs with open community registration

There's a geographical imbalance among locations of the community sports facilities in the study area. The chart above shows each county's share of the youth population and the share of the sports facilities. This inventory focuses on the quantity of community facilities by location, without judging the quality of each. However, across Southeast Michigan, it is clear that a lack of high-quality, high-performing public facilities exists. The need is especially acute in Wayne County, where economic shifts have eroded quality; the need for venues there may be significantly higher than the data suggest. (See Appendix B on p. 32 for a map that shows location of sports facilities and youth population density.)

# APPENDIX H

## HEALTH AND ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF PROGRESS

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

### 13%: SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN YOUTH CURRENTLY ACTIVE DAILY

IF...	Fewer Overweight and Obese Youths	Direct Medical Costs Averted	Productivity Losses Averted	Years of Life Saved
<b>25% OF YOUTH</b> GET AND STAY ACTIVE INTO ADULTHOOD	34,227	\$579 MILLION	\$613 MILLION	45,397
<b>50% OF YOUTH</b> GET AND STAY ACTIVE INTO ADULTHOOD	105,106	\$1.8 BILLION	\$1.9 BILLION	139,700
<b>75% OF YOUTH</b> GET AND STAY ACTIVE INTO ADULTHOOD	175,066	\$3 BILLION	\$3.2 BILLION	233,993
<b>100% OF YOUTH</b> GET AND STAY ACTIVE INTO ADULTHOOD	246,970	\$4.2 BILLION	\$4.4 BILLION	327,990

#### Fewer Overweight and Obese Youths:

Number of additional youths dropping below the 85<sup>th</sup> BMI percentile, which is the CDC's definition of overweight. Currently, 15.6 percent of Southeast Michigan youth fall into this category; another 18.5 percent are obese (at or above the 95<sup>th</sup> BMI percentile).

#### Direct Medical Costs Averted:

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

#### Productivity Losses Averted:

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

#### Years of Life Saved:

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

Source: Global Obesity Prevention Center, Johns Hopkins University, [www.globalobesity.org](http://www.globalobesity.org)

GOPC director: Bruce Y. Lee, MD, MBA, [brucelee@jhu.edu](mailto:brucelee@jhu.edu)

**See Scoreboard on p. 5 for a demographic breakdown of the current state of youth activity levels**

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## HOUSEHOLD SURVEY

The Aspen Institute commissioned the Siena College Research Institute to conduct an online household survey across the seven counties that are the focus of this report: Wayne, Oakland, Macomb, Washtenaw, Livingston, Monroe, and St. Clair. Respondents represented 655 households (445 white, 125 African American, 48 Hispanic, 17 Asian, 3 Native American, 17 other) and 1,161 youth (746 white, 235 African American, 89 Hispanic, 38 Asian, 7 Native American, 46 other). Respondents were drawn from online panels maintained and benchmarked by Lucid, a global audience platform. The total panel is maintained to be reflective of the population measured. Oversampling of ethnic groups took place to boost responses from typically under-responding groups. The survey was created with the guidance of Sports Marketing Surveys, which annually conducts a similar national survey of sports participation rates. Statistics on pages 2-3 reflect percentages of youth who played a sport a minimum of 12 times during the past year. Throughout the report, “parent” refers to an adult living in a home with children.

## FIGURE CITATIONS

Fig. 1: Data and analysis provided by Sports Facilities Advisory | Sports Facilities Management, for the Aspen Institute.

Fig. 2: Data courtesy of the Tony Hawk Foundation and Sports Facilities Advisory | Sports Facilities Management, for the Aspen Institute.

Fig. 3: Data courtesy of Michigan Athletic Trainers Society Secondary School Committee, with the help from the Michigan High School Athletic Association and the Corey Stringer Institute, provided to research team.

Fig. 4: Parks, zip code, fire station, and hospital data procured from Open Data Detroit. Demographic data from the US Census Bureau. Imagery from Google Satellite.

Fig. 5: Data courtesy of the Tony Hawk Foundation and Sports Facilities Advisory | Sports Facilities Management, for the research team; population data from U.S. Census Bureau.

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## ABOUT THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

The Aspen Institute is a nonpartisan forum for values-based leadership and the exchange of ideas. Based in Washington, DC, the Institute also has campuses in Aspen, CO, and on the Wye River in eastern Maryland, and maintains offices in New York City and several other cities.

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## ABOUT SPORTS & SOCIETY

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

[www.sportsandsociety.org](http://www.sportsandsociety.org)

## ABOUT THE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION FOR SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN

The Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan is a full-service philanthropic organization leading the way to positive change in our region. As a permanent community endowment built by gifts from thousands of individuals and organizations, the Foundation supports a wide variety of activities benefiting education, arts and culture, health, human services, community development and civic affairs. Since its inception, the Foundation has distributed nearly \$892 million through more than 59,579 grants to nonprofit organizations throughout Wayne, Oakland, Macomb, Monroe, Washtenaw, St. Clair, and Livingston counties.

[www.cfsem.org](http://www.cfsem.org)

## ABOUT THE RALPH C. WILSON, JR. FOUNDATION

The Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation is a grant making organization dedicated primarily to sustained investment in the quality of life of the people of Southeast Michigan and Western New York. The two areas reflect Ralph C. Wilson, Jr.'s devotion to his hometown of Detroit and greater Buffalo, home of his Buffalo Bills franchise. Prior to his passing in 2014, Mr. Wilson requested that a significant share of his estate be used to continue a life-long generosity of spirit by funding the Foundation which bears his name. The Foundation has a grant making capacity of \$1.2 billion over a 20-year period, which expires January 8, 2035. This structure is consistent with Mr. Wilson's desire for the Foundation's impact to be immediate, substantial, measurable, and overseen by those who knew him best.

[www.rcwjrf.org](http://www.rcwjrf.org)

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