



STATE OF PLAY WESTERN NEW YORK

ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

THE ASPEN INSTITUTE
PROJECT PLAY
REIMAGINING YOUTH SPORTS IN AMERICA





STATE OF PLAY

WESTERN NEW YORK

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THE ASPEN INSTITUTE
PROJECT PLAY


Community Foundation
for Greater Buffalo

MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR GENEROSITY.

 RALPH C. WILSON, JR.
FOUNDATION

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

THE VISION

A Western New York region in which all children have the opportunity to be active through sports

WELCOME

Western New York is experiencing a renaissance. Cranes across the skyline of Buffalo. Home values rising in many communities across the metropolitan area. Talent flowing into medical centers and corporations motivated by the Buffalo Billion, an investment in the economic future of a proud, diverse region.

Question is: Who in the next generation will fill those jobs and continue this upward trajectory?

If we want the region's youth to develop the skills to grow into those jobs, and sustain the momentum, then more needs to be done to prepare them for the 21st century economy. That means more than just developing competencies in reading, writing, and arithmetic—the so-called 3 Rs that traditionally have dominated the concept of quality youth development.

School matters. But so do competencies like physical literacy. Over the past decade or so, research has established the myriad benefits of physical activity over the lifespan. It's associated with greater cognitive function, positive mental health, better educational outcomes, and lower health care costs in adulthood. A virtuous cycle gets unleashed, especially if children can be engaged in regular sport and physical activity before age 12.

This report offers an independent assessment of the state of play for kids and sports in the eight-county region comprising Western New York—Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Erie, Genesee, Niagara, Orleans, and Wyoming 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.

The Aspen Institute 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 Greater Buffalo, the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation, and a task force consisting of youth sport and other leaders from across the region.

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

Western New York 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 140 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



Clotilde Perez-Bode Dedecker
President and CEO,
Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo



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

THE STATE OF PLAY IN WESTERN NEW YORK SCOREBOARD

31+

SPORTS OFFERED

853

COMMUNITY SPORTS
FACILITIES

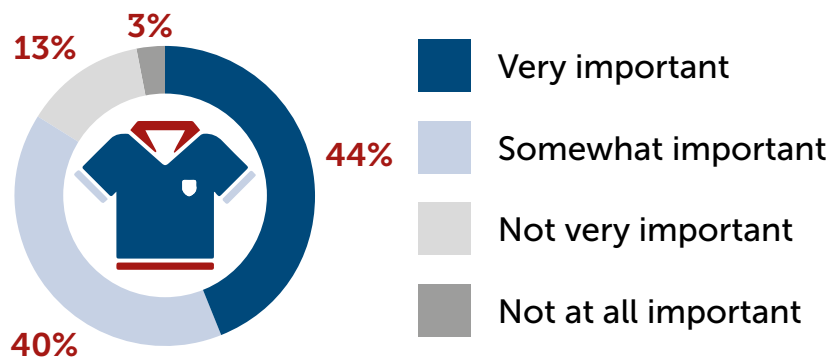
309K

YOUTH

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

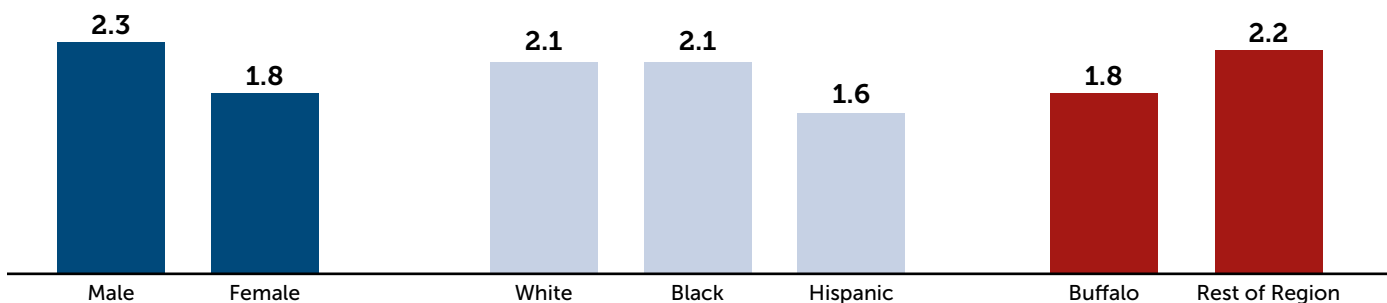
PARENTS WANT THEIR KIDS IN THE GAME

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



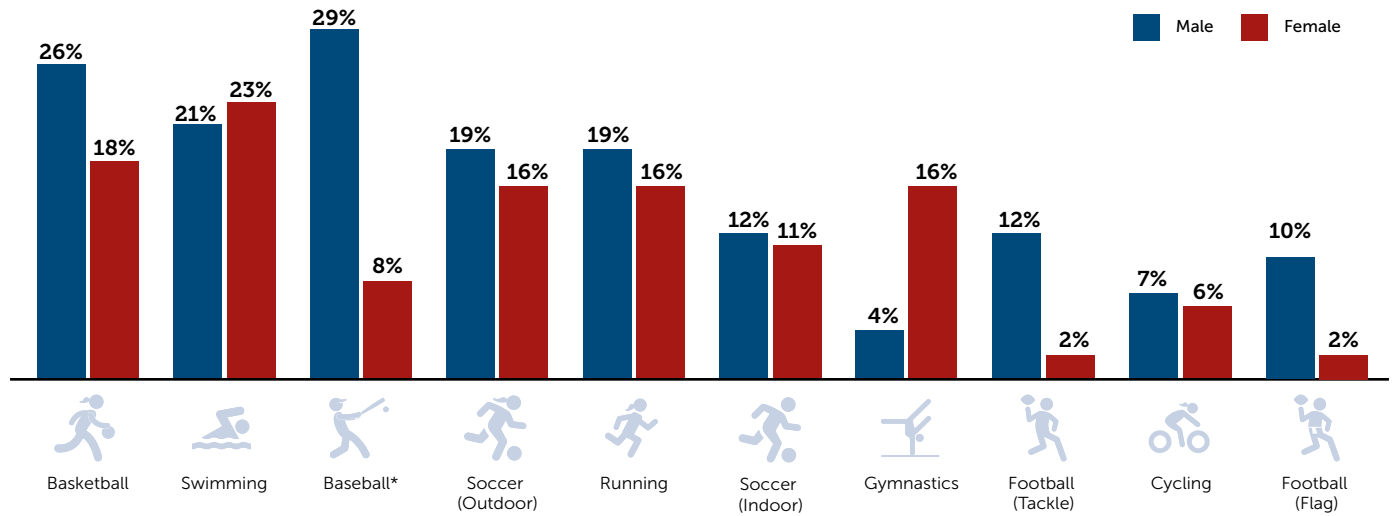
AVERAGE NUMBER OF SPORTS PLAYED

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



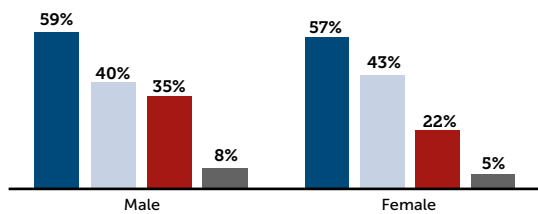
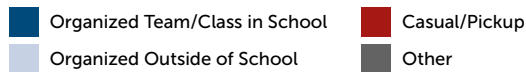
TOP 10 SPORTS PLAYED BY YOUTH IN WESTERN NEW YORK

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

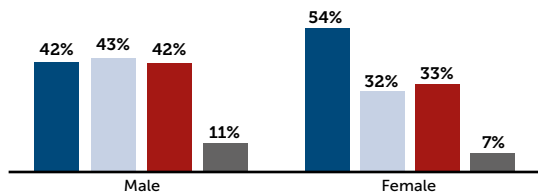


*Does not include fast-pitch or slow-pitch softball, played by 2% and 3% of youth, respectively, mostly girls

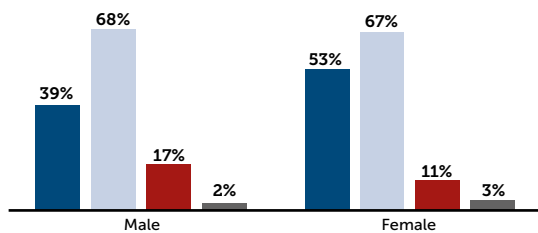
WAYS YOUTH PLAY



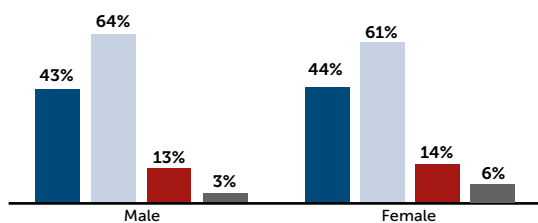
BASKETBALL



SWIMMING

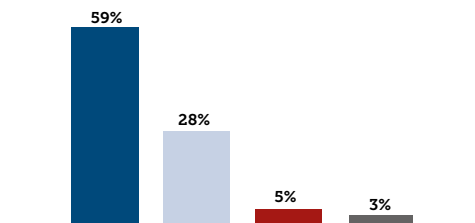
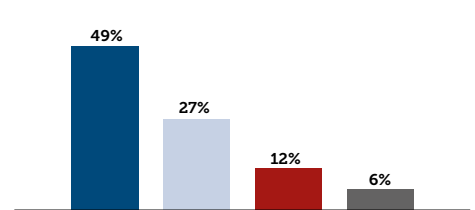
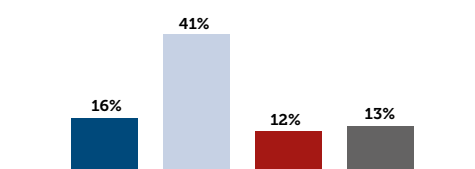
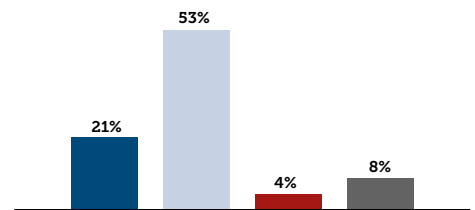


SOCCER
(outdoor)



BASEBALL

WHERE YOUTH PLAY

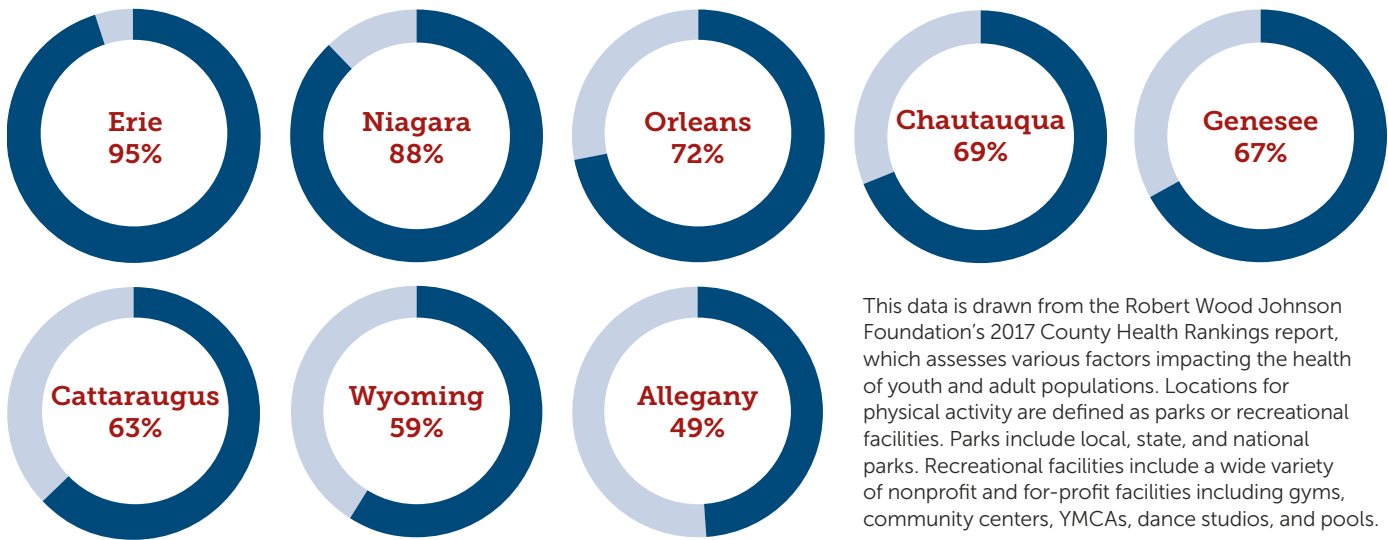


SCOREBOARD

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



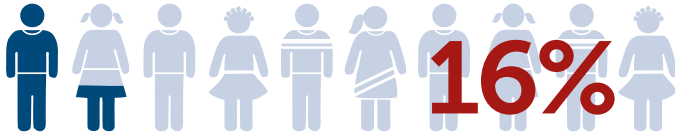
YOUTH WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

6% of youth in Western New York have a disability and require assistance to participate in sports. Families from Allegany and Orleans counties are 3x as likely to have a child with special needs.

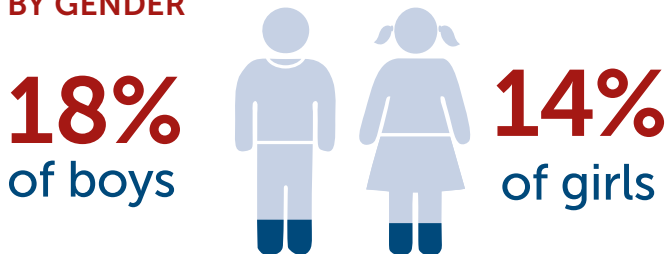
ON THE WHOLE, FEW KIDS ARE ACTIVE ENOUGH

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

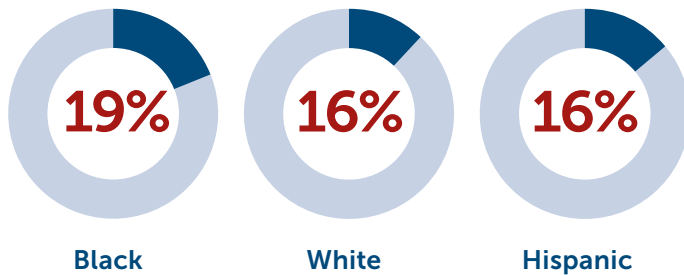
TOTAL



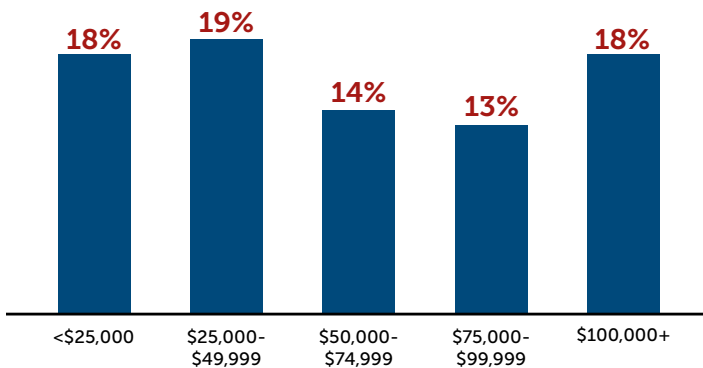
BY GENDER



BY ETHNICITY



BY HOUSEHOLD INCOME



While 18% 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 7x 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 Western New York in getting kids active through sports?

140 youth sport providers and other stakeholders in an online survey distributed throughout the region by the Aspen Institute gave Western New York an average grade of:

2017 State of Play Grade Western New York: **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 617 parents of youth under age 18 in Western New York 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 1,065 children from the eight 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 big ideas ("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 Western New York related to each "play." The report uses the icons below to identify when a finding is most directly applicable to the area's urban core, suburban areas, 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 Western New York:

- **Youth want more safe spaces to try more sports.** In our focus groups with middle school students from across the region, we heard a recurring theme. “I want to play everything,” said one student in Buffalo. Said another: “It’s more of a challenge to play more than one sport.” A student in Grand Island expressed the sentiment as a philosophy: “I think everyone should play everything!” As much as the students were enthusiastic about participating in sports, they were also aware of the hazards, including bullying. “Some of the kids get picked on,” said one student in Warsaw. Students in Buffalo have seen the same phenomenon unfold, with one noting, “If [kids] come, and they aren’t good, some of the other kids make fun of them.”
- **The region’s youth value the inclusion of classmates.** In all three focus groups, students expressed the desire to design activities to make room for others. “We need to play soccer more so that people from other countries can feel like they are a part of the school,” said one Buffalo student. “We need sports that kids with disabilities can play so they feel a part of the school, too,” said another. In Warsaw, students emphasized the need for scholarships to offset costs. And on Grand Island, students noted that youth with less access to transportation off the island have limited sport options.
- **Few youth sports organizations in Western New York systematically capture the opinions of youth.** An exception, the Youth Forum of Niagara Police Athletic League (PAL) bridges the divide between participants and adults. The Forum teaches leadership skills and promotes community service to Niagara PAL participants of all ages. In some instances, Youth Forum members are coaches and referees for the summer instructional soccer program, using age-appropriate guidelines developed and supervised by adult coaches. National PAL recognized it with an award for superb merit and mentorship programs—and modeled a national program after the local initiative.¹ Having youth involved with the implementation of the program is just the first step to incorporating youth voice.
- **A federal survey of students provides useful, if limited and incomplete, information about sport participation rates.** As mandated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, school districts administer biennial youth risk behavior surveys that collect data on a wide range of health-related habits. The 2015-16 survey of students in Buffalo Public Schools found that 60.5 percent of middle schoolers and 55 percent of high schoolers participated in organized school or community sports teams. While these numbers are above the state averages from 2013-14, the most recently-available data, they also represent decreases in participation rates (from 61.3 percent and 58.2 percent, respectively).² These biennial surveys are a start, but results are collected only for states and large cities and they gather minimal data from students below ninth grade.
- **Hispanic youth who want to play are likely to find the support of parents.** In our household survey of parents of children ages six to 17 from across Western New York, we asked, “How important is it to you that your child or children are involved in regular sports?” Hispanic parents were the most enthusiastic, with 57 percent saying it is “very important”—more than white parents (44 percent) and African American parents (36 percent). A full 95 percent described sports involvement as at least somewhat important. It is one of the survey’s more promising findings, given anecdotal information shared with our research team that parents from Hispanic communities were sometimes less involved with their children’s sports than parents of other backgrounds and that research on Latino families elsewhere in the country found a key barrier to engaging Hispanic youth, particularly girls, to be a lack of appreciation by some parents about the benefits of playing sports.³ The survey highlights the need for a larger-sample study focused on ways to engage more Hispanic children in sports.

“Teachers and parents just ask us what we are playing, and if we are good.”

— Warsaw Central School District student

2017 State of Play Grade
Western New York:

C

“When we play outside of school and leagues there is less yelling and it’s more fun.”

— Buffalo School District 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 Western New York:

- **Local leaders are focused on reaching, empowering, and activating some of the region’s hardest-to-reach youth—rural children and teens.** In 2016, the Rural Outreach Center, founded by Dr. Frank Cerny to address growing poverty in southern Erie County, hired area high school students as part-time mentors and sent them to mobile home parks to help organize loosely structured physical activities themed around the summer’s Rio Olympics. Cerny, former chairman of the University at Buffalo Department of Exercise and Nutrition Sciences, noted that access to free play is critical for every child’s development, but youth living in mobile home parks without neighborhood parks or playgrounds face unique barriers.⁴ Activities were selected strategically to ensure that youth would be able to run the games themselves after the mentors had moved on. With hundreds of mobile home parks across the region, the model is scalable.⁵
- **School-based fitness programs with loosely structured activities have proved effective in reducing childhood obesity in some urban and rural communities.** In 2007, the Lockport City School District in Niagara County received a Carol M. White Physical Education Program (PEP) grant from the US Department of Education that allowed the district to purchase new equipment, including rock climbing walls. In the years that followed, researchers at D’Youville College and the University at Buffalo found obesity rates in the district decreased significantly.⁶ Hoping to match the success of Lockport, Buffalo Public Schools launched Get Fit—Get Healthy Buffalo in 2016 with the support of a \$2 million PEP grant.⁷
- **School recess programs are crunched by space constraints, challenging weather, and state education requirements that don’t prioritize the free play period.** Task force members noted that in the region’s long winters, outdoor recess is challenging for much of the school year. This puts heavy pressure on indoor space, as many schools only have one gym. And without state requirements to offer recess, there’s little formal incentive for schools to solve the complex problem. The Williamsville Central School District, in suburban Erie County, which added 20 minutes of mandatory recess at the elementary level in September 2016, sees it differently. “Every child [has] a right to recess,” said Cathy Mihalic, Maple East Elementary School principal.⁸
- **Statewide initiatives that promote free play and the outdoors can fill needs at the local level.** The Connect Kids to Parks Transportation Grants Program, part of Governor Andrew Cuomo’s New York Parks 2020 initiative, reimburses transportation expenses to take students to state-owned parks. The program’s \$500,000 budget from its first year in 2016-17 will double for FY 2017-18.⁹ It’s good news for Western New York youth, who have 30 state parks in the region from which to choose, including Buffalo Harbor State Park in the heart of downtown Buffalo and Allegany State Park, the state’s largest, in Cattaraugus County.¹⁰ “Expanding opportunities for our children to spend time in parks and nature is one of the best things we can do to help them build mind and muscle,” said Rose Harvey, commissioner of New York state parks.¹¹



- **The expansion of community schools in Buffalo has increased support for physical activity.** Community schools, which function like community centers outside of school hours, offer gyms and fields that foster out-of-school and weekend play. The Buffalo chapter of Say Yes to Education, the nonprofit that manages the community schools program, partnered with Buffalo Public Schools to create out-of-school programs that promote physical activity, health, and wellness alongside tutoring and leadership training.¹² For more on the promise of community schools, see Game Changer on p. 26.



2017 State of Play Grade
Western New York:

C+



YOUTH VOICE

Nia Caver, 17

In the halls of Tapestry Charter School, Nia Caver is known to friends and teachers as the Basketball Girl.

It's a fitting nickname for someone who plays two positions, holds the school's single-game scoring record, and dreams of playing professional basketball as a ticket to seeing the world.

If that happens, Nia will have beaten the odds. If it doesn't, basketball still will have shaped her life in positive ways.

Shy and soft-spoken, Nia has found her voice through the game. "Playing basketball gave me an opportunity to make friends," she said. At Tapestry Charter, where she is a senior, her team is her community and support system. "I like the coach and the players. Everyone helps everyone," she said.

Basketball is Nia's sport now. But she also enjoyed playing soccer at Buffalo Soccer Club, spurred by a rivalry with her sister Nicole, 19. "My sister was doing it, and I thought I could do it better," she said.

Soccer remains part of Nia's life. Each summer she is a volunteer coach with the club, assisting with drills and scrimmages and handing out healthy snacks when it's time to stop for the day. She's a good listener and enjoys hearing what the young players learned. That relationship pays off. Her players, who are in grades three through eight, look up to her.

A soccer-coaching basketball player is as good a role model as there is.

“The seasons overlap. If seasons were shorter, kids could play different sports.”

— Warsaw Central School District student

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 Western New York:

- **On average, Hispanic youth and those living in Buffalo have the least diversified set of sport activities.** Despite the strong interest from Hispanic parents for sports, the average number of sports their kids play regularly* is 1.6, well below the 2.1 sports white and African American children play regularly, according to the household survey. That suggests supply may not be meeting demand. Kids across the city of Buffalo also trend lower than elsewhere in the region, at 1.8 sports per child. Buffalo is certainly home to a variety of sports, for instance *sepak takraw*, a ball-and-net sport in which participants guide a softball-sized wicker ball into their opponent's court without using their hands—which is especially popular in Buffalo's vibrant Burmese community.¹³ But in the region, youth who play the widest variety of sports can be found in rural Cattaraugus County, where the average youth plays 5.1 of them—not surprising for a smaller population center where schools are smaller and kids are asked to play multiple sports to fill out team rosters. For more data, see Scorecard on p. 2.
- **The demise of the Empire State Summer Games removed opportunities to showcase a smorgasbord of sports.** Founded in 1978 by Buffalo native Herbert Mols, the Empire State Games have been the proving ground for many prominent New York athletes, including women's basketball player Sue Bird, baseball player Andy Van Slyke, and boxer Mike Tyson.¹⁵ While the Empire State Winter Games, Senior Games, and Games for the Physically Challenged are still held, the flagship Empire State Summer Games disbanded in 2014 after years of financial struggles.¹⁶ The Games' scholastic division, for participants ages 17 and under, supported sports as diverse as fencing, rowing, shooting, and lacrosse.



*Regularly defined as 12 or more times in the past 12 months



- **Nonprofit organizations are introducing nontraditional sports in Buffalo.** The WNY Lacrosse Foundation launched its out-of-school Buffalo Youth Lacrosse program to expand access to the popular suburban sport into the inner city. A partnership with Buffalo Public Schools (BPS) makes the program free for students and has grown to include lacrosse camps and clinics at BPS facilities.¹⁴ Algonquin Sports for Kids, the supporters of the inner-city Buffalo Soccer Club program, has plans to launch squash and tennis programs at the Nardin Academy Athletic Center in 2017. Another example: Hašek's Heroes, founded by longtime Sabres goalie Dominik Hašek, partnered with Journey's End Refugee Services to create a free learn-to-skate program for Buffalo's newest residents. The catch: programs need space to operate, which has limited the growth of these new initiatives.
- **The region's abundance of Olympians and Paralympians is a key community asset that can inspire youth to try less-popular sports.** Some examples: Jenn Stuczynski-Suhr, gold medalist in pole vault at the 2012 London Olympics, from Fredonia in Chautauqua County; Adam Page, two-time Paralympic gold medalist in ice sledge hockey and Buffalo native; Matt Anderson, of West Seneca, who won bronze with the men's volleyball team in the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio; Jake Kaminski, two-time silver medalist in archery, from Elma in Erie County; and Emily Regan of Buffalo, part of the 2016 gold-medal-winning women's eight rowing team. The rowing team's head coach, Tom Terhaar, whose women's eights have not lost an Olympic or World Championship final since 2006, is also from Buffalo. Many of these athletes are active in the community, serving as role models in a wide variety of nontraditional sports.



- **Youth sport leaders are encouraging kids to sample new sports through creative techniques.** Case in point: Buffalo PAL began pairing high-demand sports with nontraditional ones in its community schools programs in 2016—without telling participants. Youth who sign up for a familiar sport like basketball end up participating in both that sport and a new one, like lacrosse. “You have to trick them a little bit,” said Buffalo PAL Executive Director Nekia Kemp, who first tried the stealth move while starting a volleyball program at a new location. “We had a group of 10 to 12 youth come in for a basketball program and we’d hung the volleyball nets. Turns out, they loved it, and now 60 kids are doing it.”¹⁷



2017 State of Play Grade
Western New York:

C+



YOUTH VOICE

Caleigh Alvarez, 14

Caleigh Alvarez is disciplined. She’s determined. But as a synchronized swimmer, she’s also having fun.

Her schedule is daunting. Practices at the Town of Tonawanda Aquatic and Fitness Center are from 4 to 7 p.m., six days a week. Occasional double practices last until 9 p.m.

Caleigh, who is in the eighth grade at Central School District in Lockport, doesn’t see the hours of practice as a sacrifice. She loves her sport and her teammates. The best part of synchronized swimming, she said, is “traveling with your friends and making new ones along the way.”

Caleigh, who had previously taken swimming lessons and enjoyed them, began synchronized swimming when she was seven years old. Her second grade class received a flyer announcing registration at a local pool. She was hooked.

Now she’s a member of the Town of Tonawanda Aquettes, an all-girls team. Training in synchronized swimming is arduous and exacting. “It’s applying dance and gymnastics skills in the water,” Caleigh explained. Coaches choose music for their performances and create routines. Months of training and rehearsals follow before the Aquettes are ready for competition.

For Caleigh, fun is being with her teammates, mastering a routine, and sometimes winning medals. It’s all made possible by her parents, who are able to afford the nearly \$3,000 annual cost for membership fees and headpieces.

Competing in the Olympics is a dream for some dancers her age, but not for Caleigh. She has seen the difficult choices that teammates have made to pursue that goal. “A girl from my team recently went to the Olympics,” she said. “She moved to California, left her family and friends. She couldn’t go to the prom.” That’s missing out on too much, Caleigh said.

“Have a league where the whole town can play.”

— Grand Island Central School District student

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 Western New York:

- **Based on participation rates, five sports offer the greatest opportunity for forming and sustaining local rec leagues.**

Across the region, our household survey identified the most commonly played sports as basketball (34 percent of youth), swimming (33 percent), running (27 percent), baseball (24 percent), and soccer (23 percent). In-town leagues in team sports require scale, enough bodies to populate multiple rosters. Forming or revitalizing these leagues is easier with the most popular sports and in areas of population density. Swimming and running are individual sports, more flexible in roster size and competition structures, and thus represent a valuable opportunity to engage kids, especially those who lack interest in team sports.



- **Counties outside Niagara and Erie have fewer places to host in-town leagues.**

Just over 26 percent of the region’s youth live in outlying counties, yet only 11.9 percent of the region’s facilities are located there, according to a survey by Project Play research partner Sports Facilities Advisory (SFA) of locations regularly used for organized sports with open community registration.¹⁸ The data syncs with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s 2017 County Health Rankings, which shows that many residents in outlying counties lack access to nearby parks and recreation facilities. Allegany County ranks lowest—only 49 percent of its residents have access to nearby parks.¹⁹ Without opportunities to play near their homes, kids must rely on transportation provided by parents and schools. The lack of facilities also limits the sports available, as SFA found few pools, ice rinks, tennis courts, and indoor fields. Indeed, while youth in Erie County have programs in more than 30 different sports, and Niagara County youth can choose from more than 20, the remaining counties had fewer options, with as few as nine different sports offered in Allegany and Orleans counties.²⁰



- **Erie County has the greatest concentration of pools in Western New York, with 29 of the region’s 33 aquatic facilities, sites for competition and training with friends.²¹**

But there’s a need to grow participation among minorities. Across Western New York, only 28 percent of black youth and 21 percent of Hispanic youth swim, according to our household survey of parents. The challenge goes beyond interest levels and regional characteristics. Nationwide, a 2010 survey found that 70 percent of African American children could not swim, and only 16 percent had received a swim lesson from a qualified instructor.²² Mike Switalski, founder and head coach of Buffalo City Swim Racers, hopes to grow numbers in Buffalo.²³ Since launching in 1998, the program has expanded from 15 participants to more than 160 by adding locations and growing the volunteer base. Notably, the club’s membership makes up 2.5 percent of African American swimmers nationwide who are registered with USA Swimming.²⁴ Switalski, who by day is a PE teacher at McKinley High School, plans to continue expanding the program, which grew from one pool to three in 2016.²⁵



- **Private donors are helping to create new in-town leagues.**

Algonquin is a fast-growing, Buffalo-based professional services company. It is also becoming a leader in youth sports in inner-city Buffalo through its nonprofit arm, Algonquin Sports for Kids. In 2005, Algonquin partnered with Buffalo Niagara Soccer (now part of Empire United) to provide soccer clinics at Johnnie B. Wiley Field in central Buffalo. After the success of the clinics, Algonquin launched Buffalo Soccer Club (BSC) in 2007 to provide free soccer opportunities in the city of Buffalo. BSC's Soccer for Success program, an iteration of the US Soccer Foundation's national initiative, has since grown to more than 1,800 participants in 14 schools, nine Boys & Girls Clubs, six community centers, and five parks. Plans for 2017 and beyond only include further expansion, including diversifying sport options.²⁶



- **Western New York's sports heroes provide opportunities for disadvantaged kids.**

Jim Kelly Inc., founded by the Bills legend, supports Jim Kelly Football Camps, the Kelly for Kids Foundation for low-income youth and those with disabilities, and the Hunter's Hope Foundation for kids with leukodystrophy. Patrick Kaleta, an Erie County native and fan favorite Buffalo Sabre, where he now is a youth hockey ambassador, supports low-income families and individuals with special needs through his HITS (Helping Individuals to Smile) Foundation.²⁷ Willie Hutch Jones Educational and Sports Programs have grown from a free basketball clinic launched by its namesake, the Buffalo native and NBA player, in 1984 into a year-round organization with free clinics in a dozen sports, among other academic and sport programs. Jones is among the 2017 inductees into the Greater Buffalo Sports Hall of Fame, which supports in-town programs through its Amateur Sports Development Fund.²⁸ The dedication and reputation of these former athletes is invaluable in bringing attention—and funding—to in-town youth programs.



YOUTH VOICE

Brenton Baker, 9

Brenton Baker, a local track athlete, and his peers expect to be winded during workouts and races. But for Brenton, who was diagnosed with chronic asthma three years ago, it's different.

"Every time I run I get a chance to prove to people that yes, I get sick, but I recover, and when I recover I am stronger, faster, and even more alive than before," said Brenton.

Brenton, who is in the fourth grade at Forest Elementary School, and his family take his asthma seriously. Several times, he has dropped out of meets. On a few occasions, he has been admitted to the hospital. Brenton's parents were concerned that running might be making their son's condition worse. Despite the doctor's assurance that wasn't the case, they asked Brenton to consider other sports.

But Brenton says running is part of him. "The first time I ran, I ran so fast my chest felt like it was going to explode, but I felt alive," said Brenton, who runs on local tracks at the University at Buffalo and Williamsville High School South.

He's only gotten faster. In 2016, he ran the mile in just under 5:30. He also turned in a notable performance at the US Track and Field Niagara Association Junior Olympic Championships, winning the 800 meters and 1,500 meters.

Sports are at the center of life for parents Melodie and Derek Baker and their five children. In their home, parents and siblings push one another to be their best. For Derek, a former sprinter himself, that means coaching Brenton by studying YouTube videos for training tips. And always monitoring his asthma.

"I used to be afraid of losing," said Brenton. "My dad told me never be afraid of losing. Be afraid of not being in the race."

“What we need is a place to play indoors during the winter.”

— Grand Island Central School District student

Challenge: Not enough places to play 5 | THE PLAY: THINK SMALL

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 Western New York:

- **Despite the relative abundance of recreational spaces in Erie County, many are in need of revitalization.** As noted in The Scoreboard section of this report, 95 percent of residents in the county live near a park or recreational facility, according to the 2017 County Health Rankings. In the region, only Niagara (88 percent) approaches that level.²⁹ However, especially in Buffalo, many are older public spaces in need of repair. Community-led efforts have shown promise in addressing this deficiency. Several nonprofit partners and the city came together to redevelop Massachusetts Avenue Park on Buffalo’s ethnically diverse and dense west side. Tucked in the center of a double city block, the park’s playground equipment was dated and its basketball courts had been cracked by weeds. The redeveloped park has been transformed with a new basketball court, a multipurpose field, handball courts, and a playground.³⁰



- **Placement of parks and transportation barriers are impairing access.** Reservoir State Park in Niagara Falls, along with the other state parks of the Niagara Gorge, received multi-million-dollar improvements as part of a relicensing agreement between the State of New York’s parks office and its power authority.³¹ In Reservoir State Park, the agreement led to the construction or renovation of seven baseball/softball fields, four basketball courts, two floor hockey courts, two tennis courts, an ice rink, and an adaptive playground. Though the park’s attendance has doubled since the renovation,³² its location above the massive Niagara Power Station on the shores of Lewiston Reservoir is on the far side of Interstate 190 from Lewiston and Niagara Falls, rendering it inaccessible for any youth who don’t have automobile transportation.



- **Public-private partnerships are proving to be win-win scenarios—financially sustainable initiatives that increase community access to sport.** A good example is Batavia Sports Park (BSP), a 15-field, natural-grass, long-field sports complex in Genesee County, where only 67 percent of residents live near a park or recreational facility.³³ Batavia Turf, a field management company, partnered with the Town of Batavia to convert private farmland into a community asset, suitable for heavy use by youth leagues, high schools, and local colleges. Originally envisioned as a soccer facility, the site has grown to host kickball, lacrosse, and rugby events as well local and regional soccer tournaments. How can the efficiencies be scaled to Williams Park, Kibbe Park, and Batavia’s other neighborhood parks? And how can the model be introduced to Allegany, Wyoming, and Cattaraugus counties, where between 49 and 63 percent of residents live near a park or recreational facility?³⁴



- **Community-led projects have shown promise in the region—though they are not without challenges.** Algonquin Sports for Kids has identified small spaces to construct small-sided soccer pitches for its youth soccer programs. But when it comes to making it happen, any number of obstacles have emerged. “Like many field projects, it’s not the initial startup, but the long-term upkeep of the space that is a challenge,” explained the organization’s executive director, Anna-Lesa Calvert.³⁵ The city parks budget is already stretched thin maintaining its current parks, according to Buffalo Deputy Commissioner for Parks and Recreation Andrew Rabb, leaving the city unable to take on more park spaces. Yet Algonquin cannot afford to purchase, construct, or operate its own space. Local youth are left underserved as a result of this impasse.



- **Buffalo’s community schools initiative has opened up new spaces for out-of-school-hours youth sports programs.** Lafayette, a community school campus on the city’s west side, transforms into a community center on Saturdays. That includes hosting youth sports. West Side International Soccer, as part of its mission to help introduce immigrant and refugee children to the community through soccer, uses Lafayette’s basketball courts for five-on-five indoor futsal leagues and clinics. Said program co-founder Amanda Escobar, “We’ve really wanted to find a way to partner with the schools, and this was a great way to do that.”³⁶



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YOUTH VOICE

William Lucas, 9

William Lucas is always ready with a pun.

“What do you give a sick bird?”

“TWEET-ment!”

Humor and sports help William stare down the obstacles in his life. He was born four months prematurely. At birth, he weighed one pound, four ounces. That start has resulted in multiple health issues. He has undergone 16 brain surgeries. Among his challenges are impaired hearing and sight and a weakened immune system.

For William, sports are a refuge and a point of connection with friends and neighbors in Tonawanda, where the Lucas family lives. “For us, it’s allowing him to fit in. He’s socializing with peers, taking turns and being part of a team,” said Kerri, William’s mom.

William, who attends third grade at Edison Elementary School, plays multiple sports. For the past four years, he has played baseball in the Miracle League of Western New York. “I swing really hard and it goes right in the sky,” he said. He also participates in Challenged Athletes Participating in Sports, where his sports are basketball, floor hockey, and a program in fundamentals of football.

Each sport is modified to accommodate the special needs of the players. In William’s case, safety is key. After so many surgeries, a head injury could be life-threatening. “From a parent perspective, the cool thing is having him be able to be out of my arm’s reach and still knowing he’s safe. It’s great watching my kid just being a kid,” said Kerri.

But there will always be challenges. Temperature regulation is a concern. Extremes in weather can trigger symptoms such as migraine headaches. When it’s time to play, though, William is always ready to go. “He’s so motivated and excited to be with teammates and coaches,” said his mom.

“A lot of athletes have to pass a test to get on a team. Most people can’t pass and then they don’t end up playing.”

— Grand Island Central School District student

Challenge: Too much, too soon

6 | THE PLAY: DESIGN FOR DEVELOPMENT

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 Western New York:

- **Some youth sports programs in Buffalo are sensitive to the importance of developmentally appropriate play.** The Sabres’ Learn to Play Hockey program, developed in partnership with the NHL, USA Hockey, and Hockey Canada, uses age-appropriate instruction for children ages four through eight, who are taught by certified coaches and NHL alumni. Youth Advantage Buffalo leverages its affiliation with the Wellness Institute of Greater Buffalo & WNY to ensure that its free and reduced-cost basketball, flag football, and hockey programs are led by coaches trained in age-appropriate practice methods. Programs in the Buffalo and Western New York Junior Soccer League, which is affiliated with the United States Youth Soccer Association, offer teams in a wide range of age brackets, with rules designed to ensure teams play at a developmentally appropriate level. These programs remain the exception, as many teams don’t have the resources to field teams in multiple age brackets, according to sports leaders we interviewed.



- **Although more adaptive sports programs are needed in the region, opportunities have increased.** The Miracle League of Grand Island and Western New York was founded in 2010 to bring baseball to children with disabilities. The organization built an adaptive field on Grand Island in Erie County and added new playground equipment that is appropriate for children with disabilities in southern Erie County.³⁷ Another Grand Island organization, WNY Adaptive Water Sports, offers sailing, scuba, and even waterskiing around the region. In southern Erie County, Cradle Beach hosts adaptive and active summer camps for youth with disabilities. And SABAH, a 40-year-old organization founded as the Skating Association for the Blind and Handicapped, has grown to provide year-round, adaptive, in-school and out-of-school ice skating, ice hockey, and turf-based programs for special needs athletes of all ages. Still, these programs’ organizers noted that serving special needs children is resource intensive, and it is difficult to integrate with programs serving youth without disabilities. Buffalo has a pronounced need, as 11 percent of kids there require special assistance to play sports, more than twice the regional average (6 percent), according to parents replying to our household survey.



- **In some cases, youth with and without disabilities participate alongside one another.** Unified Sports, launched by Special Olympics in 1989, combines athletes with and without special needs to learn new sports and skills together. Though New York boasts one of the largest Unified Sports programs, Western New York lagged behind until a unified basketball event for elementary-aged students was introduced at St. Bonaventure University in 2013. The New York State Public High School Athletic Association’s Section V, which oversees Orleans, Genesee, Wyoming, and Allegany counties, introduced co-ed unified basketball in 2015 as part of the Special Olympics Unified Schools initiative. Section VI, which oversees Niagara, Erie, Chautauqua, and Cattaraugus counties, did the same in 2016. Games are regulation length, although rules are loosely enforced. “You will smile for four quarters,” said Hamburg Frontier Central High School Athletic Director Richard Gray.³⁸ Future plans include expanding to additional schools and sports, such as cross-country running and bowling.



- **The region has made strides in growing opportunities for girls, but they remain inconsistent.** WNY Girls in Sports was founded in 2006 by Mary Wilson to improve the lives of girls through physical activity. Through partnerships with the Buffalo Bills, the United Way of Buffalo and Erie County (UWBEC), and the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation, WNY Girls in Sports has reached thousands of girls over the past decade. The average number of sports that girls in Western New York now play regularly is 1.8, below that of boys at 2.3, according to our household survey. A recent study of girls' opportunities commissioned by UWBEC shows that girls in Western New York are still less active than boys and remain underrepresented in regional sports programs.³⁹ In response, UWBEC convened community leaders to develop a long-term plan that scales the WNY Girls in Sports program, which currently hosts clinics twice yearly, into a year-round effort. The first steps: identifying funding resources, available facilities, and trained coaches.⁴⁰



- **Some of the region's best sport facilities serve children of the Seneca Nation of American Indians.** The establishment of the tribe's Niagara Casino (opened 2002), Allegany Casino (opened 2004), and Buffalo Creek Casino (opened 2007) spurred economic development on the reservations.⁴¹ In 2011, the Nation opened community centers in its Allegany and Cattaraugus territories. "Over the years, we heard requests for more recreational needs for health- and sports-minded community members," noted Seneca Nation Council Chairman Richard Nephew upon the opening of the centers. "Our health professionals have stressed the need for opportunities for diabetes prevention recreational programs. The goal is healthier and happier communities for generations to come."⁴² The \$23 million complexes feature indoor lacrosse arenas, gyms, workout facilities, pools, and classrooms. Membership is free to enrolled Seneca and discounted for employees, seniors, students, people with disabilities, and active military.



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YOUTH VOICE

Shayla Scanlan, 17

Shayla Scanlan is preparing for a major transition in her life. In the fall, she'll leave home on the Seneca Nation reservation in Cattaraugus County to start her first year of college at the University of Louisville.

Shayla, who will attend college on a lacrosse scholarship, is believed to be the first woman from Seneca Nation ever to play lacrosse at a Division I college.

"Lacrosse isn't just a game to me, it's a way of life and *my* life," said Shayla, a senior at Lake Shore High School. "Lacrosse is a big part of my heritage and where I come from."

Growing up on the reservation, Shayla can't remember a time when she was not playing lacrosse. Her parents still play. So do many of her nine brothers and sisters, one of whom helps coach a high school team.

Some tribal elders do not approve of girls playing lacrosse, Shayla said. They hold to traditional views and associate the sport with a ritual "medicine game," which some elders believe women shouldn't participate in.

While she respects tribal leaders, Shayla said, "I disregard what people are saying. I'm not playing the medicine game. I'm playing lacrosse for myself and the Creator."

That spirit also guided Shayla's decision to venture as far as Louisville, Kentucky. "Make your own path. You don't have to be like everyone else," she said.

Shayla certainly isn't. "When you fall in love with the game, it's not playing a game," she said. "It's meant for you."

“Let the big kids come in and help teach the little kids how to play.”

— Buffalo School District student

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 Western New York:

- **Most parent coaches are not trained in key competencies in working with youth.** The best-trained youth coaches are in tackle football, which has started to move to more of a development-focused environment. Still, in our survey of community leaders, respondents consistently characterized coaches as overly concerned with winning and that such priorities were a negative influence on sports participation. To continue to improve the culture, baseball and soccer need to be involved, given they have by far the most parents involved (see chart).



- **Hard-and-fast standards around background checks can inhibit growth.** Buffalo PAL Executive Director Nekia Kemp noted that programs that wish to have diverse coaching staffs must be flexible. All Buffalo PAL staff and volunteers must pass a criminal background check, but Kemp argues that background checks should be used as one part of a holistic approach when evaluating volunteers. “When people want to volunteer, we should look at those people wholeheartedly,” she argued, “because these can be learning opportunities for children.” Potentially allowing adults with criminal records from the distant past to be involved expands the pool of available volunteers and gives youth a variety of role models.



- **Cultural barriers mean that coaches may require extra training to best serve children of immigrant and refugee families.** Parents often acclimate to the new community more slowly than their children and, unfamiliar with American youth sports, can be reticent to become involved. “One of the most important things a provider can do is build trust with parents,” said Chelsey Kelso, who spearheaded a refugee-focused skating initiative. Understanding the experiences of the youth is also critical. “It was a challenge to figure out how girls could put on a hockey helmet over a hijab,” said Kelso. “We ended up needing to unscrew the helmet’s visor.”⁴³ At West Side International Soccer, co-founder Mateo Escobar echoed the critical nature of relationships and noted the importance of body language. “It’s harder to monitor how kids are

communicating when you don’t understand the language,” he said, before underscoring that “cultural isolation, inter-cultural mistrust, and logistical challenges create real barriers. But the baseline need is a human need.”⁴⁴



- **All coaches of Western New York public school sports teams must be certified by the state.** The New York State Education Department requires all non-teacher coaches at a minimum to obtain a one-year Temporary Coaching License (TCL), which is renewable up to four times while coaches complete requirements for the Professional Coaching License (PCL). The TCL curriculum includes training in first aid, CPR, and identifying child abuse, as well as a three-step program in philosophy and principles, theory and techniques, and health sciences. The PCL requires maintaining those certifications, as well as fingerprint clearance and at least three years of good standing.⁴⁵ These self-regulated programs are administered by local Boards of Cooperative Educational Services. To further grow the pipeline of coaches, Millard Fillmore College offers a coaching certificate program for UB students. It includes the TCL for students who hope to coach in grades seven through 12, and plans to launch an online program to the community next fall.⁴⁶



- **Recognizing that a child’s first coach is often a parent, organizations are taking steps to improve parent education.** The COACHES program (a near-acronym for Coaching our Children: Heightening Essential Skills), run out of the University at Buffalo School of Education, uses soccer clinics to give parents resources.⁴⁷ UB Associate Dean Greg Fabiano and his staff teach parents new strategies while coaches teach their kids soccer. After the classes, the kids scrimmage while parents (most often dads) put the newly learned strategies into practice. Other local programs include the Buffalo Bills moms’ clinics that teach mothers about Heads Up Football techniques.



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YOUTH COACHING IN WESTERN NEW YORK

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. 40 for survey methodology



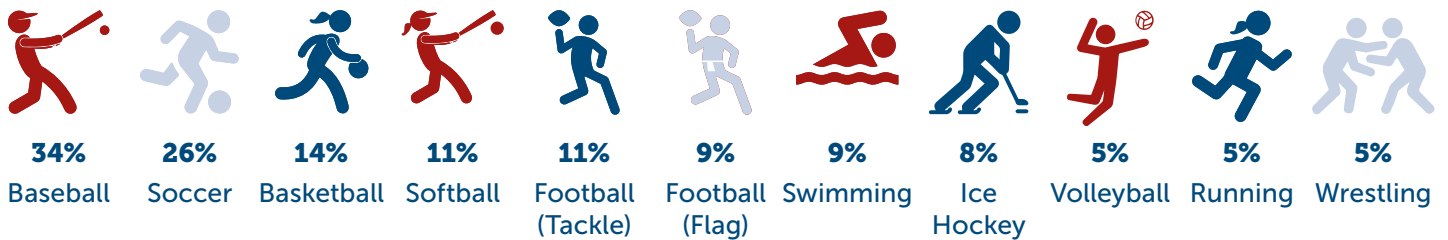
PARENTS WHO COACH

43%

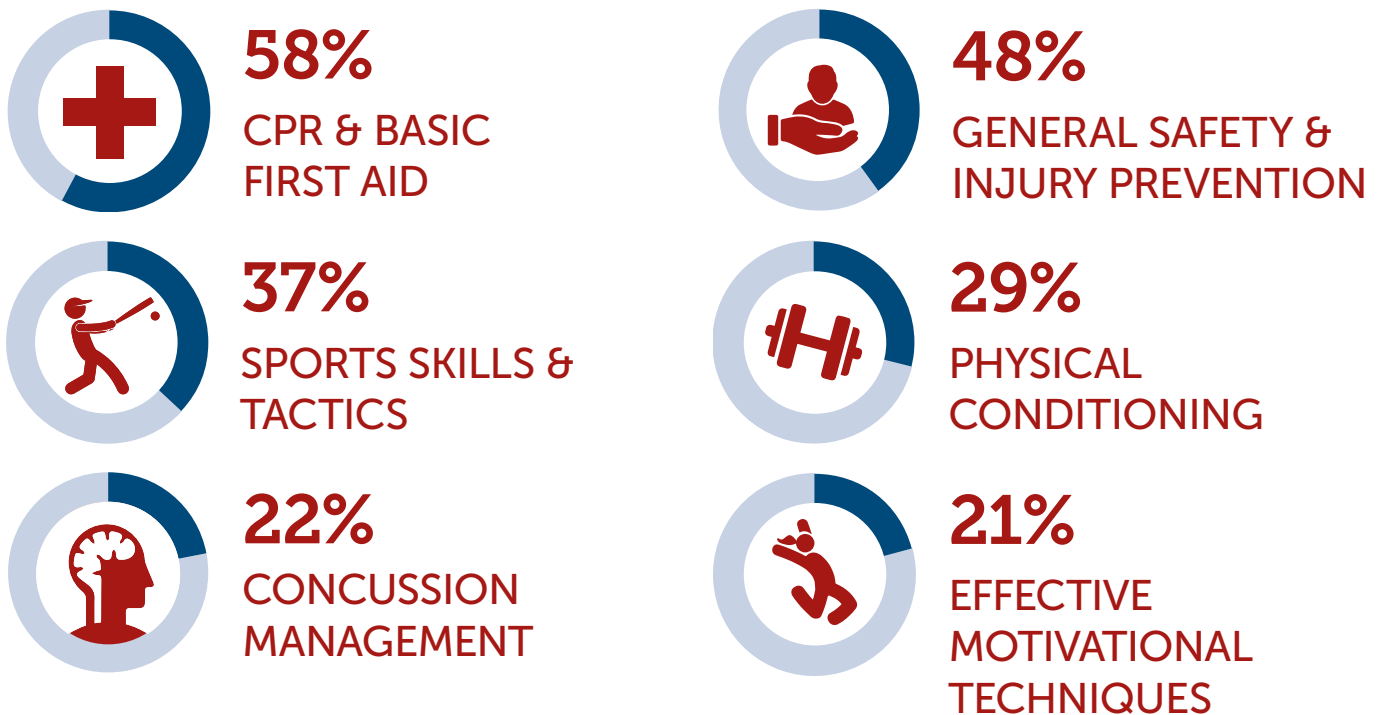
of parents polled have coached at some point in the past five years

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



“Kids don’t want to get hurt.”

— Warsaw Central School District student

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 Western New York:

- **Local laws are promoting injury prevention.** In 2016, the Erie County Legislature passed a law that made concussion safety courses mandatory for all coaches of youth “contact or collision” sports.⁴⁸ Under the law, youth sports organizations can be fined up to \$200 if they cannot prove on request that all their coaches have received safety training. The need is there: Our household survey found that fewer than four in 10 parents coaching pre-high school youth in any sport, including football, are trained in concussion management. That’s below the national average. In an effort to make training widely available, the Erie County Health Department will offer courses. The HEADS UP to Youth Sports course, offered online by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, is also accepted. Said legislator Patrick Burke, who introduced the bill, “Anyone who is unwilling to do this shouldn’t be coaching in the first place.”⁴⁹ The challenge now is to define which sports fall under “contact or collision” and to ensure that training is a reasonable time commitment so as to not be an undue burden on grassroots programs that rely on volunteers with limited resources.



- **The region is now a research hub focused on the effects of concussions in young athletes.** The Program for the Understanding of Childhood Concussion and Stroke (PUCCS) was founded in 2011 by Dr. Elad Levy, a professor of neurosurgery and radiology at the University at Buffalo, to raise awareness and generate funding to advance concussion research. With the support of the Buffalo Sabres and other community partners, PUCCS has conducted several studies at UB Neurosurgery.⁵⁰ The efforts were further bolstered in 2015 when the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation donated \$4 million to UBMD Orthopaedics and Sports Medicine as part of the foundation’s first round of Transitional Legacy grants. The investment established the Center of Excellence in Sports Medicine, which expands research and education in traumatic brain injuries and other sports-related injuries.⁵¹ Together in 2015, the Wilson Foundation and PUCCS funded a clinical study led by Dr. John Leddy and researchers at UBMD Orthopaedics and Sports Medicine, along with the University of Manitoba, on the potential benefits of exercise when recovering from concussions.⁵² The study continues through 2017.⁵³



- **National journalism has prompted local culture change, if slowly.** In 2015, Taylor Wood, a girls’ soccer player for the Hamburg Monarchs in Erie County, collided with an opponent while leaping for a header. She was concussed for the third time in her soccer-playing days, although this was the first time she experienced long-term symptoms. Her story was featured on HBO’s *Real Sports*.⁵⁴ “When someone gets a header and gets hit in the back of the head, nothing happens,” said Wood. “There’s no trainers there. They don’t get examined.”⁵⁵ Many teams have started using protective headbands, although research has not shown them to be effective in preventing concussion. Coaches have also adjusted their teams’ strength and conditioning programs. “I’m definitely more conscious with our strength and conditioning to make their necks strong, their cores stronger,” said Ron Sporyz, who coached Wood at Frontier High School. “I put an emphasis on the neck and try to take some of that risk out of the game.”⁵⁶



- **Awareness of the need for athletic trainers in football has grown, though gaps remain.** Western New York was forced to confront safety protocol and the role of athletic trainers after Damon Janes, a 16-year-old running back for the Westfield-Brocton football team, passed away after a game in 2013.⁵⁷ Janes’s death became part of the national conversation⁵⁸ about head injuries in youth sports when Janes’s parents filed a wrongful death lawsuit against the school, athletic association, and medical providers, arguing they failed to ensure a safe playing environment,⁵⁹ and Westfield-Brocton cancelled the remainder of the 2013 season’s games out of respect.⁶⁰ In 2014, the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation and the NFL Foundation made matching \$25,000, two-year grants to provide athletic trainers for football games at 12 varsity programs in Chautauqua and Cattaraugus counties, including Westfield-Brocton.⁶¹ It was an important move, though a temporary solution. Athletic trainers on sidelines below the high school level remain uncommon, as they are elsewhere in the United States. (See Appendix C on p. 32 for availability of trainers by county.)



- **One of the region’s most powerful football organizations has taken a stand.** The WNY Amateur Football Alliance (WNYAFA) is the region’s largest organizing body for youth tackle football and cheerleading programs, overseeing eight leagues, 74 organizations, 280 teams, and more than 13,000 participants across all eight counties of Western New York. In 2015, WNYAFA received a \$500,000 endowment from a Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation Transitional Legacy grant to benefit youth football player safety, which has been used to create a grant program to supply pads and helmets for youth participants.⁶² One of the organization’s largest leagues, the Niagara Erie Youth Sports Association, provides at all games athletic trainers from UB Orthopedics and Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center.⁶³ Across the region, WNYAFA spreads the message of prevention beyond its own participants, opening safety clinics and coach training to nonmembers for \$25 (members can attend for free).⁶⁴





CALL FOR LEADERSHIP

The focus of this report has been on providing stakeholders with the state of play for youth in Western New York. Based on our analysis of the unique characteristics of Western New York, 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:

Invest in more and better parks

Public parks make a bold statement about priorities and community values. They're places of civic engagement and hubs of recreation. An integrated and fully resourced parks system elevates life for everyone, particularly children. More of them are needed in Chautauqua, Genesee, Cattaraugus, and Wyoming counties, where at least three out of 10 residents do not live near a recreational facility.

The challenge is different in the region's largest population center, Buffalo, which must tend to more than 1,900 acres of park space,⁶⁵ including Frederick Law Olmsted's first park system.⁶⁶ After years of flawed planning and underfunding, there are signs of a comeback. Park maintenance and safety have improved. Recently, the city completed its Green Code for zoning and land use that paves the way for future planning. But for the momentum to continue, more resources are required. The current operating budget of \$8 million, funded by tax dollars, isn't adequate for a system of Buffalo's size and potential.⁶⁷ Minneapolis, which has an exemplary system, spends \$4 per resident on city parks for each dollar spent in Buffalo. Baltimore, Cleveland, and Oakland, California all have higher per-capita spending.⁶⁸

Given the needs across the region, it's time to look to a largely untapped source: naming rights.

The business community of Western New York already supports the parks. Each year, the Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy raises \$3 million from private sources, nearly 60 percent of operating expenses for the Olmsted parks.⁶⁹ Corporate donors account for a significant part of that. BlueCross BlueShield sponsors the splash pad at Martin Luther King Park, paying \$1 million over 10 years.⁷⁰ Delaware North underwrites the Olmsted Conservancy's forestry program, contributing \$100,000 annually.⁷¹ Neither deal buys the sponsor permanent signs in the park.

A limited program of naming rights for public parks across the region, including the Olmsted Conservancy, should be considered. Nothing garish. No neon lights or flashing signs to detract from pastoral settings. Instead, a program that allows individuals, corporations, and foundations to quietly announce their support to park-goers.

Naming rights in parks are not unusual. In 2013, the Houston parks system named a garden pavilion for the wife of a local oil magnate—an agreement worth \$5 million.⁷² The Miami-Dade County parks system sold naming rights to a youth football field for \$1 million in 2015 and is considering a plan for naming of community centers, bike trails, marinas, and dog parks.⁷³ Even New York's Central Park—an Olmsted Park—has a program of naming rights: \$5 million to attach the name of a person or family to a Central Park playground for 25 years.⁷⁴

A proposal involving naming rights for parks may face scrutiny from public boards. Similar proposals have faced opposition in the past. But creative sources of funding are necessary if Buffalo's parks are to shine again and youth elsewhere in the region are to be given the opportunity to play near their homes.

5 recommendations for stakeholders in Western New York



Build indoor complex in Buffalo

In Buffalo, another pressing need is for an indoor sports complex for basketball, volleyball, soccer, lacrosse, and other sports during winter months. Right now, there isn't one. The city is responsible for 30 community centers,⁷⁵ but, as with parks, some buildings are faltering and need extensive repairs. The Lincoln Community Center on Quincy Street is more than a century old.⁷⁶ Access to school gyms has expanded in community schools (see Game Changer on p. 26). But there are too few of them.

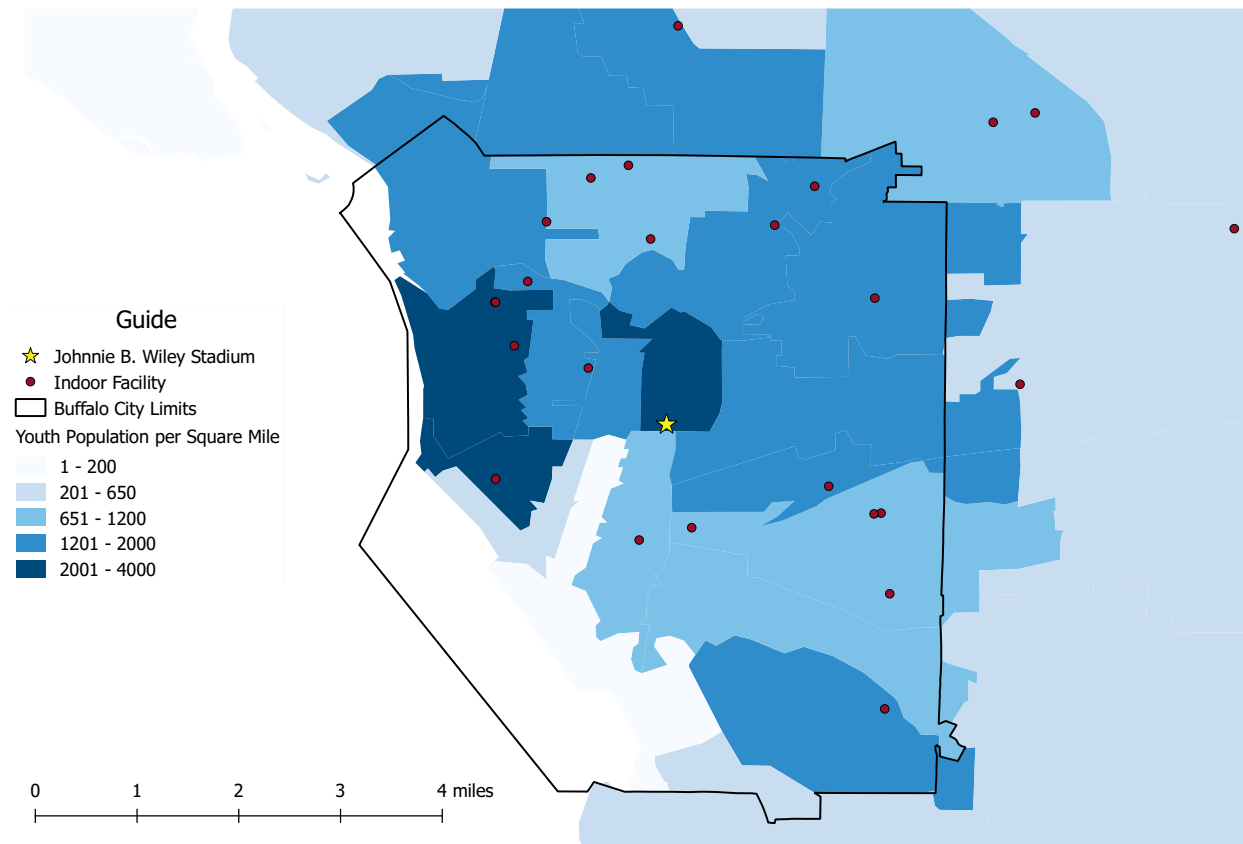
One option is placing such an indoor sports complex at the site of some of the most illustrious chapters in Buffalo sports history. For the better part of a century, the corner of Jefferson Avenue and Dodge Street has been a gathering place to play sports and to root for sports heroes.⁷⁷ It was Civic Stadium, War Memorial Sta-

dium, and unofficially, The Rockpile, the scene of great moments in Buffalo Bills history. The Bisons played minor-league baseball there, and Robert Redford trotted around the bases at War Memorial in the classic film *The Natural*.

Since 1997, the historic property has been the Johnnie B. Wiley Amateur Athletic Sports Pavilion. On nearly 12 acres, it features a football stadium with turf field, a baseball park (soon with lights for night games), four outdoor basketball courts, and an outdoor multi-purpose field.⁷⁸ Next door is Masten Park, which offers another nine acres of city parkland, and down the block is City Honors High School, where a community group is trying to restore Fosdick Field for soccer and lacrosse.

FIG. 1 | INDOOR FACILITIES WITHIN THE CITY OF BUFFALO

The Johnnie B. Wiley sports complex exists within an area of Buffalo that has a high population density and that is poorly served by existing indoor sports facilities. Were an indoor sports facility to be constructed on Johnnie B. Wiley's grounds, the local population would benefit from significantly better access to indoor sports spaces.



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



An indoor complex at or near the Wiley Sports Pavilion would not come cheaply. Construction alone likely would top \$10 million and could go much higher, depending on the size of the facility and amenities.⁷⁹ A 70,000-square-foot athletic center in a Chicago suburb opened this year at a cost of \$18 million.⁸⁰ Then there's the expense of operations. That's money that isn't in the budget of Buffalo Parks and Rec, which struggles with upkeep of the community centers on its ledgers now. So, new sources of fundraising or financing would need to be developed.

It's likely worth the effort. At a minimum, deeper planning should be commissioned regarding the site's potential, both in general and in regards to the addition of an indoor facility.

Engage more racially diverse leaders

Diversity is the strength and the future of Western New York. The region's evolving demographics tell that story, and community leaders have embraced it. Thirty-eight percent of Buffalo city residents are African American; 10 percent are Hispanic.⁸¹ In the city alone, nearly 10,000 refugees have arrived from Burma, Somalia, and Bhutan in recent years.⁸² Thousands more refugees have settled across the region.

Issues of diversity are on the agenda when community leaders meet to discuss youth sports. But are leaders from African American, Hispanic, and refugee communities represented in those discussions? Are voices from all communities being heard?

Leaders of organizations who are African American, who serve African American communities, say they're often not at the table in a significant way. They speak of looking around the room at leadership meetings and seeing few black and Hispanic faces. Organizations that have important roles in their communities aren't there. And leaders serving immigrant and refugee communities speak of feeling similarly disenfranchised, overlooked by community institutions. The consequence is that decisions are made affecting kids in underserved neighborhoods without insights from leaders with the most to offer.

More minority voices are needed in the high-level policy discussions that guide youth sports in Western New York. That alone would build trust and foster cooperation. Other recommended steps for larger nonprofits: Start or expand Listservs for sharing information about community meetings, grants, and other opportunities. Offer grant-writing workshops and mentorship for small organizations that serve kids through sports, most of which don't have full-time grant writers.

Turn college athletes into youth coaches

Western New York is a national leader in higher education, with nearly two dozen universities and colleges. Of these, 17 offer intercollegiate athletics—a remarkable asset to the region.⁸³

The athletic departments often aim to serve their communities. Many offer summer sports camps and clinics, run by student-athletes and coaching staffs. Kids Days are a popular promotion, where hundreds of local elementary school students receive free tickets to a game, and halftime pickup games are organized on the big arena floor. Many area colleges are integrated with WNY Girls in Sports programming.

Athletes at Medaille work closely with the Boys & Girls Club and Big Brothers Big Sisters. Canisius athletes have volunteer and paid opportunities as coaches in Buffalo and the sur-



rounding suburbs, and student groups volunteer with local youth groups to provide safe places to play and learn about sports. Daemen College stages sports-themed Night Out events for children at which student-athletes, coaches, athletic administrators and sport management students host free play at Daemen's gym. And at St. Bonaventure in Cattaraugus County, athletes volunteer at annual Special Olympics and WNY Girls in Sports field days. "We recognize the value of our impact in the local community," said Heather McDivitt, St. Bonaventure assistant athletic director. "Athletics already has a lot of connections in the area and we want to help encourage the local youth to be engaged in sports."⁸⁴

Across Western New York in 2015-16, 4,820 athletes participated in college athletics.⁸⁵ That's up to 1,200 athletes who are cycling out every year, with expertise in their sport and a proven record of service in their community. Put programs in place to engage these young people and harness their potential as youth coaches, administrators, and officials. The athletic coaching education program offered at the University at Buffalo's Millard Fillmore College (see Train All Coaches on p. 18) is a good place to start, but a two-semester, 12-credit program may prove too time-consuming and costly to attract most athletes. Youth sports organizers should work with schools and coaching organizations to develop a coaching module that supplements existing resources.

College athletes may think their sports career ends if they don't go pro. With a pipeline in place for them to give back, Western New York can create a virtuous cycle to grow youth sports.

Educate and empower parents

Let's do the math on just one sport, boys' hockey.

Approximate number of scholarships up for grabs in a given year at a Division I men's college hockey program: 4.⁸⁶

Approximate number of inquiries from youth players that a Division I hockey coach receives in a year: 500.⁸⁷

Some parents understand that youth sports are their own reward, that there's little hope of payback in the form of an athletic scholarship. Many have dreams that are big and unrealistic. A survey of 376 parents by a Wisconsin pediatrician found that 40 percent hoped their child would play in college. Twenty-two percent of parents said they expected their children to become pro athletes.⁸⁸

Those parents have a disproportionate impact on the structure and culture of youth sports. They distort priorities throughout the pipeline. They're more likely to buy into the myth of early sport specialization, year-round organized competition, and early-forming travel teams that sort the weak from the strong before children grow into

their bodies, minds, and interests. They're also more likely to be poor sports. At a recent youth hockey game at Holiday Twin Rinks, a dad angered by an injury to his son hurled insults at a game official then followed the referee into the locker room where the altercation continued until police stepped in.⁸⁹

Dreams come true sometimes. There's proof in the more than three dozen hockey players from Western New York who were on Division I hockey rosters last season.⁹⁰ Be happy for them and their families. But parents need to recognize that elite athletes cannot be manufactured.

The Bills and Sabres, as well as the Bisons and university athletic departments across the region, can play an important role in improving the decision-making by parents, the gatekeepers of youth athletes. They can create public-service announcements on the need for age-appropriate play featuring players from the Bills and Sabres. They can create or distribute simple checklists that help parents understand what to ask of youth programs, and themselves. They can distribute materials on best practices, such as USA Hockey's American Development Model. They can do a lot to empower parents and reset the culture, if they make it a priority.





GAME CHANGER: *The Promise of Community Schools*

Community schools, as they are called, are laboratories of self-discovery. More than places to go, they're places to belong. They push out boundaries and redefine what being in school means, as Buffalo has learned. In its first year in 2016, the city's community schools initiative has been widely praised. With the aid of state funding, 13 schools adopted the model that opened their doors to students and to communities after hours and on weekends. About 8,100 students attended community schools. Next year, plans call for one more school to participate.⁹¹

Sports aren't the driver of the community-schools movement. But in assessing year one, policy makers would do well to note the positive effects on kids and play. They include:

Wise use of available space. Community schools are petri dishes for partnerships with youth sport programs. They bring stakeholders together and provide conditions for sharing existing infrastructure in innovative ways.

That strategy shouldn't stop at the school gym. Similar agreements are possible with other community stakeholders, including civic groups and religious institutions. There are 333 churches, 11 mosques, and four synagogues in Buffalo.⁹² Many have playgrounds or gyms.

Look for deeper collaborations with long-term payback. The U.S. Soccer Foundation's Safe Places to Play program builds mini pitches approximately the size of a tennis court.⁹³ The foundation picks up the cost—roughly \$150,000. Buffalo community schools have the play spaces, some of which are in need of repair. Algonquin Sports for Kids, which runs programs in community schools and has received support from the U.S. Soccer Foundation, has ties to the grantor.⁹⁴ What can they do together?

Ability to walk to activities. That's especially important in underserved neighborhoods, where often parents are looking for safe places for their kids to play and nearby, affordable sport options. Community schools address these needs. Take Saturday Academy, a free program that runs at least two Saturdays per month from 9 a.m. to noon at every community school.⁹⁵ It is open to all youth, whether or not they attend the school. Its coaches are hired and trained by respected local programs like Algonquin, Buffalo PAL, and First Tee, which in turn enhances quality.

Sport sampling. Community schools run on a decentralized model. Say Yes Buffalo manages the 13 schools designated as community schools. Each school subcontracts with community-based organizations like Buffalo Lacrosse Club or First Tee to provide programs. Programming choices differ across schools, but the guiding principles are teaching, learning, and having fun. Exposing kids to a variety of sport is prioritized, as opposed to chasing championships in one sport. In a few months, a child may play games in three or four sports.



At PS 80 Highgate Heights, Buffalo PAL is the sport provider for Saturday Academy.⁹⁶ PAL started the year with basketball, because many students have played it and the program leaders knew that many would sign up. Later, kids switched to lacrosse, volleyball, and then flag football. During the year, almost all played at least one sport they'd never before tried.⁹⁷

At Lafayette High School and several community schools with indoor pools, PAL has learn-to-swim programs. It also offers classes in lifeguard certification during Saturday Academy. This year, that's been a job-training program for 42 Buffalo schools youth. Many will go on to positions at city pools in the summer, where the going rate for a lifeguard is \$13 an hour.

Kid input. At some community schools, program leaders ask students to choose the sports they want to play. At PS 97 Harvey Austin School, they chose lacrosse even though most had never played. They'd heard about the sport and wanted to try it.⁹⁸ In the fall, they started with clinics and instruction followed by more instruction and games.

More choices are planned for Saturday Academy. An intramural program is in the works, connecting students across the city in soccer, lacrosse, and basketball leagues. Also being discussed, at the suggestion of students: a 10-week golf program with First Tee at each of the community schools.⁹⁹

These are just a few attributes of community schools, though it's worth noting that other facilities in a community can provide the same benefits. The key is having access to a space dedicated to serving the community above all, apart from any pressures to move kids through turnstiles to build their own programs. At such a place, an array of key activities can unfold. Local coaches can be trained in CPR and other skills. Parents can be educated on what good looks like in youth sports. Stakeholders can gather to evaluate the community's state of play, then set shared goals around growing the quality and quantity of youth sport opportunities.

Western New York communities just need a neutral space to connect, and build strength across, its silos.





IDEAS

A few short, crisp ideas to pump into the bloodstream of Western New York, designed to stimulate new thinking among the eight sectors that touch the lives of children:

Community Recreation Organizations

League boards: Reach out to experts in the community. Appoint a pediatrician or sports-medicine physician to the board. Include older parents who can look back at their experience with perspective. And add youth.

Youth leagues: Start an equipment exchange, modeled after the one that Jamestown Area Youth Soccer holds an annually.¹⁰⁰ Families drop off used, unwanted soccer shoes, shin guards, and soccer balls. Others scoop them up for the coming season. Anyone can claim any item in the exchange—there's no requirement to bring an item. Leftovers get donated.

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, there should be a rule for that: No walks in month one.

Pro Teams

In-season: Add an activity tracker giveaway to the promotion schedule. Anyone attending the game under the age of 20 receives a free pedometer. On the team website, kids can compare their results with the players'.

Out-of-season: Stage a kids' media day. Invite kids to be the journalists while players and front-office personnel squirm as they answer the questions. The program ends with kid reporters challenging players and staff to a race around the field. Teams have just created a fan for life, and maybe an athlete, too.

Year-round: Make sport sampling cool. Create public-service announcements that feature players reflecting on their favorite memories playing a sport they didn't go pro in. A Bandits lacrosse star recounts long winter days playing hockey at the neighborhood pond, for example.

Education

Schools: Reintroduce intramurals. Partner with community organizations to allocate on-site fields, gyms, and other spaces after school to leagues that are open to all students. Add bus options for participating youth to return home.

Middle and high schools: Set expectations for player behavior. In its code of conduct, Hinsdale Central Schools in Cattaraugus County notes that it's "an honor and privilege to represent one's school on an athletic team." Another reminder from Hinsdale Central: "An athletic contest is only a game, not a matter of life or death."¹⁰¹ Each player commits to observing the code with their signature.

School board: Disallow sponsorships that promote soda and junk food—products that contribute to diabetes and childhood obesity. Accepting money from these sources sends mixed messages to young players about diet and exercise.

Civic Leaders & Policymakers

Mayors and county managers: Establish youth advisory councils that can provide diverse perspectives on community issues—from school activities to sport spaces. Consider the youth to be experts on the way they engage with the community’s services—and your greatest potential champions for initiatives that affect them.

Local leaders: Build support for pocket parks, mini play spaces in neighborhoods. The Kensington, South Ellicott, and Fillmore-Broadway areas on Buffalo’s East Side are at least a half mile from the nearest play space. Consider a pocket park—typically the size of a few house lots—for these communities. Seek out local artists, gardeners, and other activists to ensure that these parks make signature statements about the neighborhoods.

Municipal government: Use the power of the permit to promote safety and quality standards. Youth leagues that want access to city-owned fields must agree to provide protections for youth, including appropriate coach training and updated equipment.

Tech & Media

Buffalo news: Start a kids’ sports blog that would be a forum for youth players about youth players. First post: a point-counterpoint. One kid says rock climbing is more fun than baseball. The other says baseball is more fun than rock climbing. Youth learn about new sports, and adults learn about what makes sports fun.

Local hacktivists: Develop apps to help coaches and parents improve sports safety. Start with an app for youth pitchers. Enter a child’s height, weight, and age and learn her/his recommended pitch limit. Also, allow adults to easily track pitch counts.

Makers: Enter 43North, a “shark tank” start-up competition that comes to Buffalo in October.¹⁰² The winner gets \$1 million to pursue their idea. Any concept that improves access to sports could be a winner.

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. This year local businesses donate a percentage of revenue from Black Friday sales to girls’ sports or sports in immigrant communities?

Local business: Expand workplace volunteer programs to include coaching, umpiring, 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 local youth leagues—particularly in football, ice hockey, lacrosse, and soccer—to offer baseline cognitive tests, as Courage Kenny Rehabilitation Institute currently does for all players in Buffalo Youth Lacrosse.¹⁰³ If a player suffers a concussion, a second test is given and the results compared so a child doesn’t return too soon.

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. Children need six to eight cups of water a day, particularly when playing on a hot day, notes Dr. Mary Emborsky, a pediatric emergency medicine specialist at Women and Children’s Hospital of Buffalo.¹⁰⁴

Organizations: Come together to 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

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 game situations like in the days of sandlot sports. For youth, it’s a lesson in problem-solving. For adults paying attention, it’s a lesson in what kids want from sport.

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 modifying games for kids: no more kickoffs, fewer players on a team, and a smaller field.

APPENDIX A

FACILITY LOCATIONS AND DENSITY OF YOUTH POPULATION

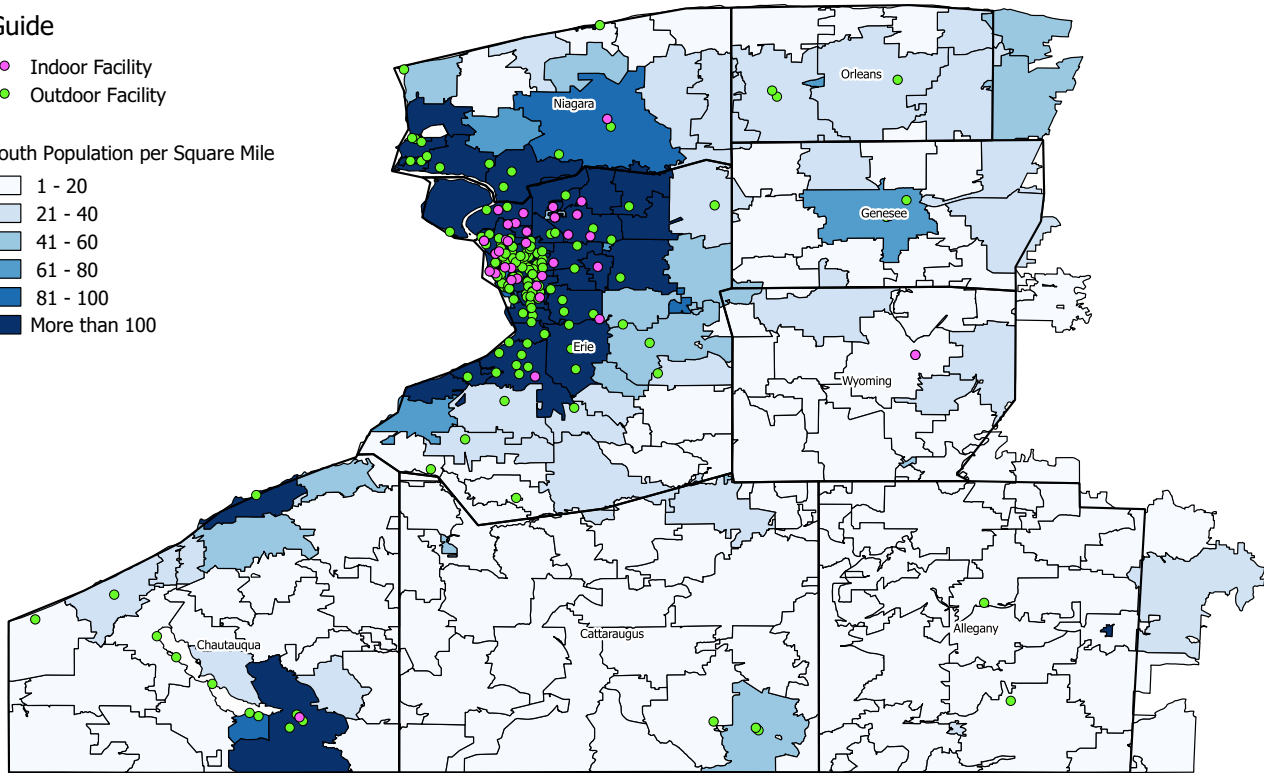
Distribution of facilities across the region shows a concentration of facilities around the city of Buffalo. Rural counties have fewer facilities, though they tend to be in areas with higher youth population densities.

Guide

- Indoor Facility
- Outdoor Facility

Youth Population per Square Mile

- 1 - 20
- 21 - 40
- 41 - 60
- 61 - 80
- 81 - 100
- More than 100



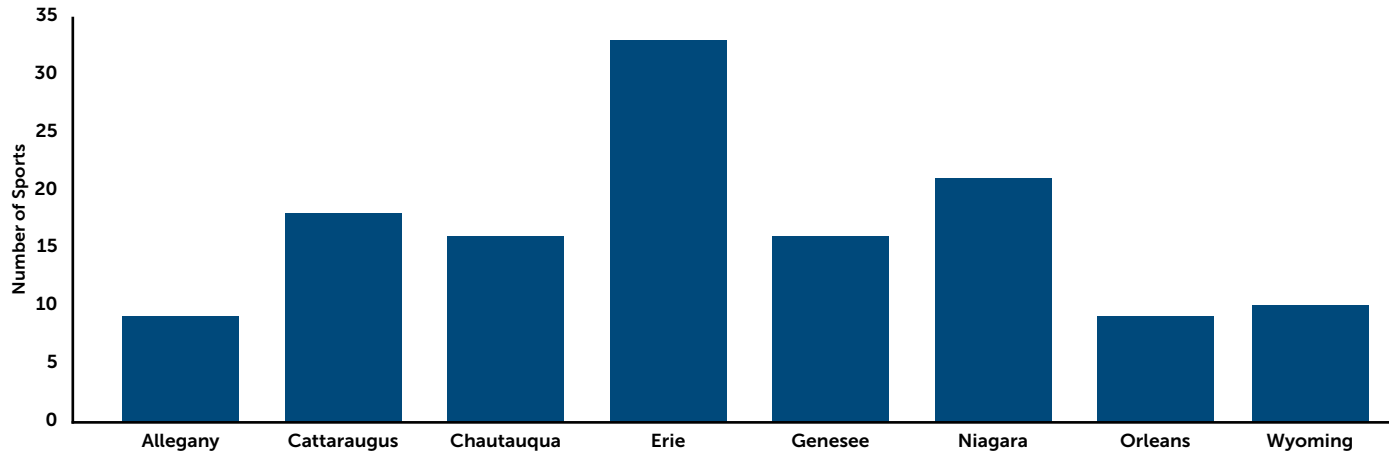
Sources: SEA and US Census Bureau

Facility: A venue regularly used for organized sports/programs with open community registration; this map excludes schools

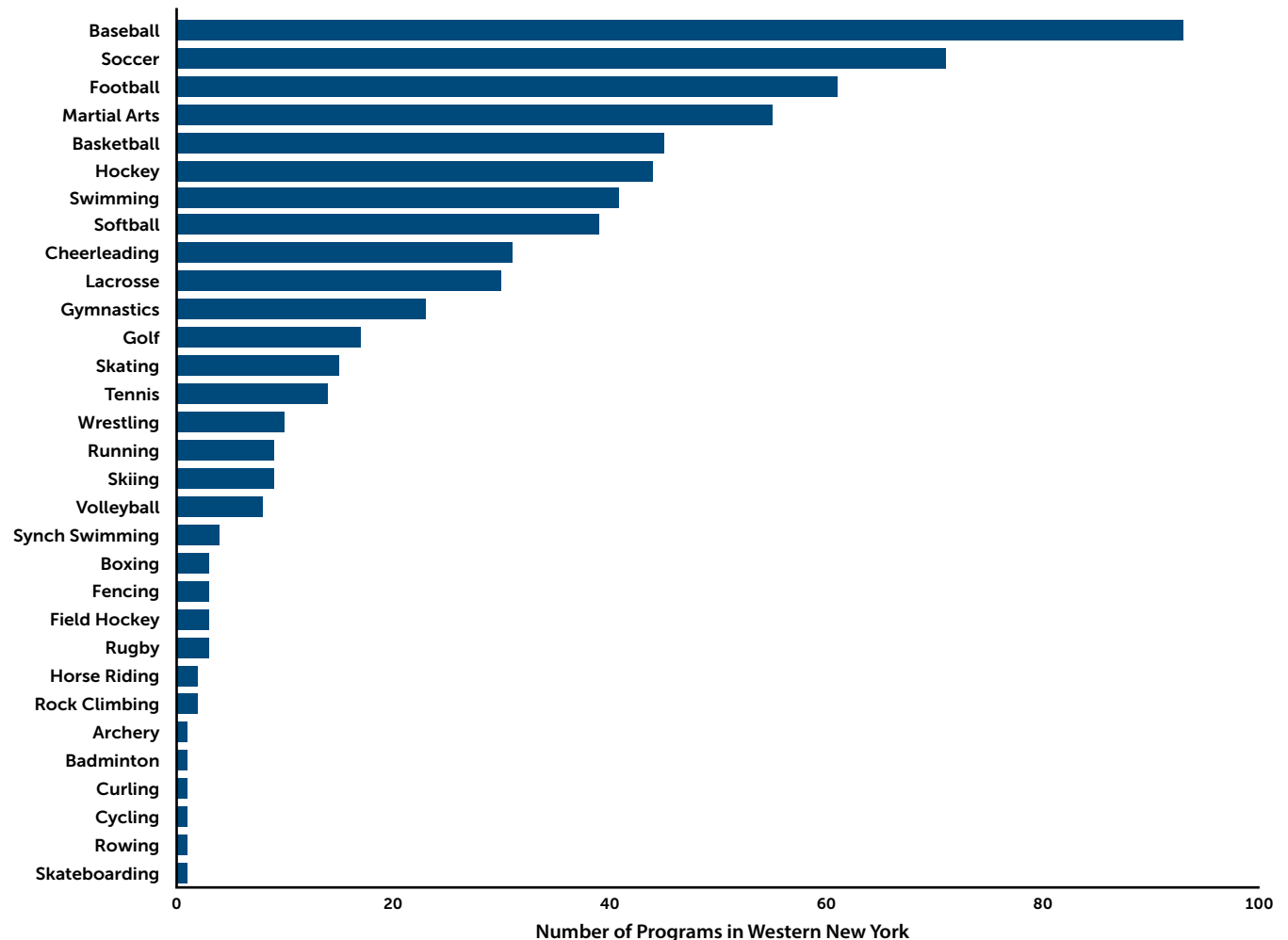
APPENDIX B

The list of sports programs in Appendix B 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 AVAILABLE BY COUNTY

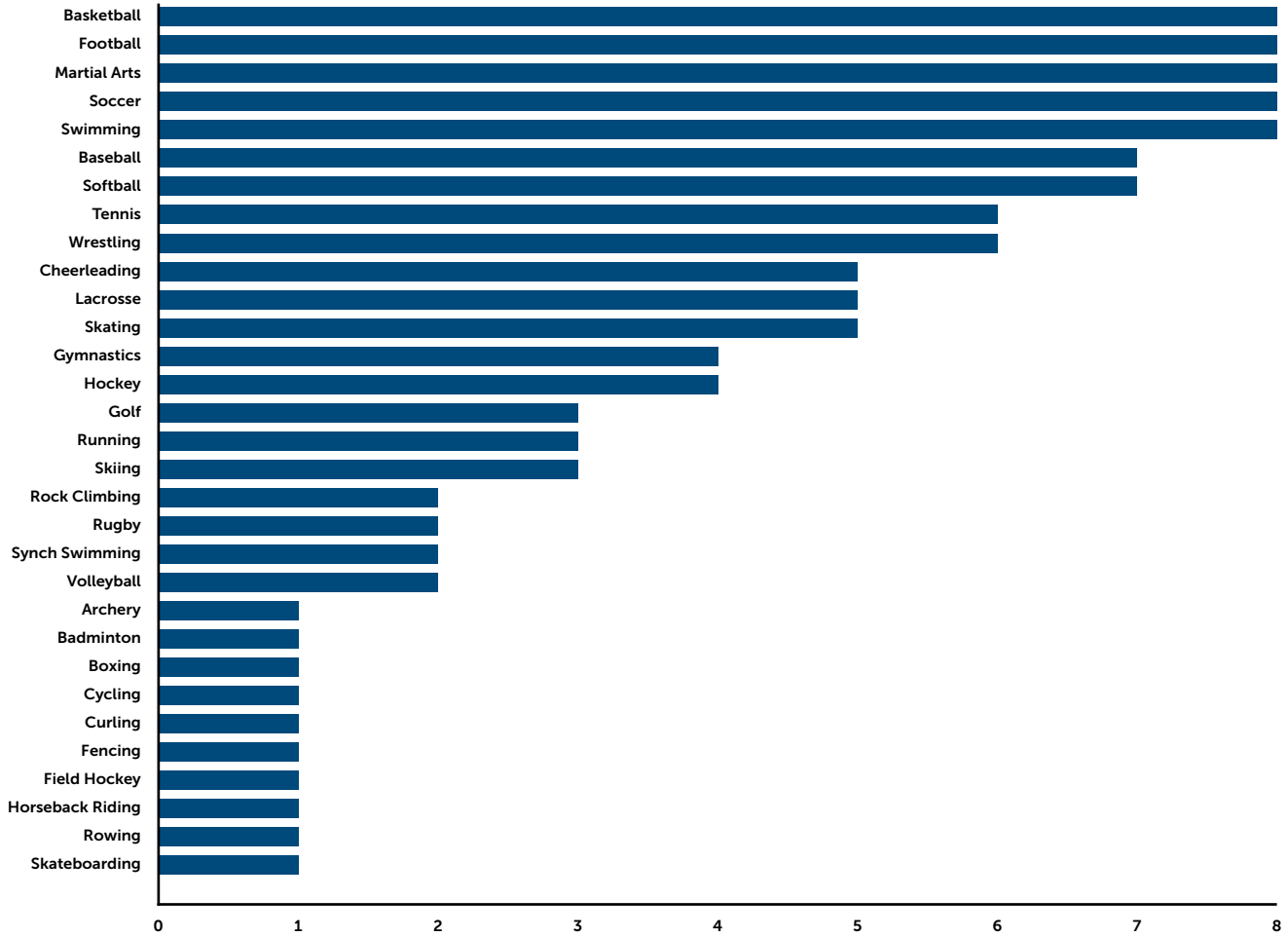


PROGRAMS OFFERED BY SPORT



APPENDIX B (continued)

NUMBER OF COUNTIES IN WHICH SPORTS ARE OFFERED

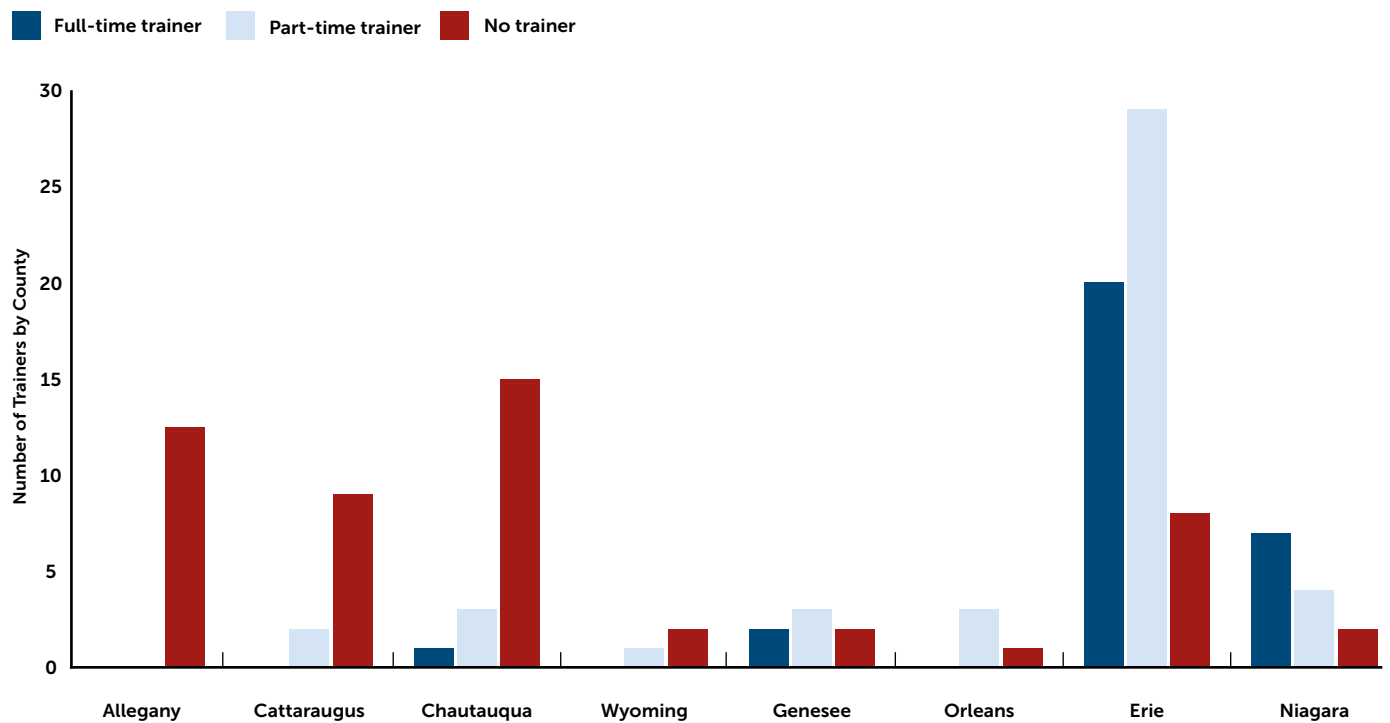


APPENDIX C

ATHLETIC TRAINERS IN HIGH SCHOOLS

As a whole, the region has room to improve when it comes to providing access to athletic trainers. The rural counties of Allegany, Cattaraugus, and Chautauqua are critically low on athletic trainers in schools.

	FULL-TIME TRAINER	PART-TIME TRAINER	NO TRAINER	TOTAL SCHOOLS	% WITH FULL-TIME TRAINER	% WITH SOME TRAINER
ALLEGANY	0	0	13	13	0.00%	0.00%
CATTARAUGUS	0	2	9	11	0.00%	18.18%
CHAUTAUQUA	1	3	15	19	5.26%	21.05%
WYOMING	0	1	2	3	0.00%	33.33%
GENESEE	2	3	2	7	28.57%	71.43%
ORLEANS	0	3	1	4	0.00%	75.00%
ERIE	20	29	8	57	35.09%	85.96%
NIAGARA	7	4	2	13	53.85%	84.62%
TOTAL	30	45	52	127	23.62%	59.06%



Sources: Korey Stringer Institute

APPENDIX D

TOP 10 SPORTS PLAYED BY YOUTH IN WESTERN NEW YORK | DEMOGRAPHICS

	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	AGE 6-12	AGE 13-17	WHITE	HISP	AFR AMER
BASKETBALL	22%	26%	18%	20%	26%	18%	32%	39%
SWIMMING	22%	21%	23%	24%	18%	22%	20%	19%
BASEBALL	19%	29%	8%	22%	14%	22%	12%	10%
SOCCER (OUTDOOR)	18%	19%	16%	19%	15%	20%	11%	9%
RUNNING	18%	19%	16%	17%	18%	16%	20%	23%
SOCCER (INDOOR)	11%	12%	11%	13%	8%	12%	11%	12%
GYMNASTICS	9%	4%	16%	11%	5%	9%	9%	8%
FOOTBALL (TACKLE)	7%	12%	2%	6%	9%	7%	3%	9%
CYCLING	7%	7%	6%	7%	6%	7%	5%	5%
FOOTBALL (FLAG)	6%	10%	2%	8%	3%	6%	11%	8%

TOP 10 SPORTS PLAYED BY YOUTH IN WESTERN NEW YORK | HOUSEHOLD INCOME

	TOTAL	<\$25,000	\$25,000-\$49,999	\$50,000-\$74,999	\$75,000-\$99,999	\$100,000+
BASKETBALL	22%	28%	22%	24%	13%	22%
SWIMMING	22%	16%	22%	28%	21%	22%
BASEBALL	19%	15%	14%	24%	23%	27%
SOCCER (OUTDOOR)	18%	9%	17%	21%	24%	22%
RUNNING	18%	26%	18%	16%	11%	15%
SOCCER (INDOOR)	11%	9%	12%	10%	15%	14%
OTHER	9%	6%	11%	8%	8%	11%
GYMNASTICS	9%	3%	9%	12%	17%	8%
FOOTBALL (TACKLE)	7%	8%	7%	8%	2%	8%
CYCLING	7%	5%	8%	6%	7%	6%
FOOTBALL (FLAG)	6%	10%	4%	8%	6%	5%

APPENDIX D (continued)

TOP 10 SPORTS PLAYED BY YOUTH IN WESTERN NEW YORK | COUNTIES & BUFFALO

	TOTAL	ALLEGANY /ORLEANS	CATTARAUGUS	CHAUTAUQUA	ERIE	GENESEE	NIAGARA	WYOMING	BUFFALO
BASKETBALL	22%	13%	27%	23%	25%	24%	13%	14%	29%
SWIMMING	22%	27%	45%	20%	21%	30%	21%	8%	21%
BASEBALL	19%	27%	16%	20%	17%	38%	17%	33%	14%
SOCCER (OUTDOOR)	18%	23%	30%	15%	18%	14%	13%	24%	9%
RUNNING	18%	19%	16%	27%	17%	24%	14%	14%	21%
SOCCER (INDOOR)	11%	21%	18%	8%	11%	11%	8%	16%	8%
OTHER	9%	15%	16%	8%	7%	3%	13%	16%	4%
GYMNASTICS	9%	6%	11%	8%	11%	3%	8%	4%	9%
FOOTBALL (TACKLE)	7%	4%	7%	11%	7%	0%	8%	4%	6%
CYCLING	7%	2%	11%	14%	6%	3%	6%	0%	4%
FOOTBALL (FLAG)	6%	4%	2%	3%	8%	3%	7%	2%	10%

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

APPENDIX E

DAYS PER WEEK THAT STUDENTS IN WESTERN NEW YORK GET P.E. IN SCHOOL

	TOTAL	AGE 6-12	AGE 13-17
ZERO	1%	1%	2%
ONE	6%	8%	4%
TWO	24%	27%	19%
THREE	46%	44%	51%
FOUR	4%	4%	5%
FIVE	15%	15%	16%
UNSURE	2%	2%	2%

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

APPENDIX F

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 Western New York 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:

16%: WESTERN NEW YORK YOUTH CURRENTLY ACTIVE DAILY

IF...	Fewer Overweight and Obese Youths	Direct Medical Costs Averted	Productivity Losses Averted	Years of Life Saved
25% OF YOUTH GET AND STAY ACTIVE INTO ADULTHOOD	7,488	\$127 MILLION	\$135 MILLION	10,015
50% OF YOUTH GET AND STAY ACTIVE INTO ADULTHOOD	27,845	\$472 MILLION	\$500 MILLION	37,101
75% OF YOUTH GET AND STAY ACTIVE INTO ADULTHOOD	48,240	\$819 MILLION	\$866 MILLION	64,312
100% OF YOUTH GET AND STAY ACTIVE INTO ADULTHOOD	68,596	\$1.2 BILLION	\$1.2 BILLION	91,304

Fewer Overweight and Obese Youths:

Number of additional youths dropping below the 85th BMI percentile, which is the CDC's definition of overweight. Currently, 15.3 percent of Western New York youth fall into this category; another 18.4 percent are obese (at or above the 95th 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 85th 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

GOPC director: Bruce Y. Lee, MD, MBA, brucelee@jhu.edu

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HOUSEHOLD SURVEY

The Aspen Institute commissioned the Siena College Research Institute to conduct an online household survey across the eight counties that are the focus of this report: Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Erie, Genesee, Niagara, Orleans, and Wyoming. Respondents represented 617 households (509 white, 61 African American, 37 Hispanic, 6 Native American, 4 other) and 1,065 youth (809 white, 134 African American, 81 Hispanic, 8 Asian, 7 Native American, 26 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. Over-sampling 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 courtesy of Sports Facilities Advisory and US Census Bureau

PHOTOS

Unless otherwise noted below, photos were provided by Bobby Kirkham, for the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo.

Cover (tennis): Emily More, United Way of Buffalo and Erie County

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The research would not have been possible without the support of the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo, led by Betsy Constantine and Brigid Doherty, with support from Laura Schwamborn. The research team further benefited from the expertise of the Western New York Youth Sports Task Force:

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The report was generously funded by the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation, under the guidance of Jim Boyle.

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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.

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The Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo, a 501(c)(3) organization, was established in 1919 to enhance and encourage long-term philanthropy in the Western New York community. The Community Foundation's mission is: Connecting people, ideas and resources to improve lives in Western New York. Since 1919, the Community Foundation has made the most of the generosity of individuals, families, foundations and organizations who entrust charitable assets to the Community Foundation's care.

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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 Western New York 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.

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