

STATE OF PLAY

MOBILE COUNTY

ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

THE ASPEN INSTITUTE
PROJECT PLAY





STATE OF PLAY

MOBILE COUNTY

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THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

PROJECT PLAY



The Aspen Institute thanks the Community Foundation of South Alabama, the Jake Peavy Foundation and the Caring Foundation of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Alabama for their support of this report

THE VISION

A Mobile County in which all children have the opportunity to be active through sports

WELCOME

Youth in Mobile County grow up declaring “Roll Tide” or “War Eagle” before they pick their first sport to play. Football dominates the sports scene. The area’s rich history includes more than 100 years of baseball tradition, having produced five Hall of Fame players — more than any city except New York and Los Angeles. Athleticism can even be found each summer at the Dauphin Street Vault, where if attendees at this downtown Mobile event are lucky enough to grab a seat on the balconies that are used during Mardi Gras parades, they will see professional pole vaulters fly over their heads.

People here love their sports. But there’s room for improving the quality and quantity of the experiences available, especially for those who will shape the future of the region — today’s children. The Aspen Institute aims to support Mobile County in identifying opportunities to build healthier kids and communities through sports. In partnership with the Community Foundation of South Alabama, the Jake Peavy Foundation and the Caring Foundation of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Alabama, this report offers an assessment of the current state of play for kids and sports in the county.

Our work is anchored in the notion that all stakeholders will benefit if all youth are provided access to a quality sport experience, regardless of zip code or ability. We know this from the body of research that has emerged over the past decade establishing the myriad benefits of physical activity. It’s associated with greater cognitive function, positive mental health, better educational outcomes, and lower health care costs in adulthood. A virtuous cycle gets unleashed, especially if children can be engaged in regular sport and physical activity before age 12.

The Sports & Society Program of the Aspen Institute produced this State of Play report by analyzing sport programs and facilities in Mobile County through the eight strategic filters (“plays”) highlighted in our seminal 2015 report, *Sport for All, Play for Life: A Playbook to Get Every Kid in the Game*. Guiding our findings is the State of Play: Mobile County Task Force consisting of local leaders across several key sectors.

We hope the report informs short- and long-term community strategies related to the broad spectrum of sport opportunities for youth (through age 17) and serves as a tool for organizations to develop new partnerships and programs. Should stakeholders create the conditions to get and keep all county youth physically active, the projected downstream benefits are huge: \$666 million in direct medical costs saved and economic productivity losses averted, according to the Global Obesity Prevention Center at Johns Hopkins University (see Appendix G on page 40).

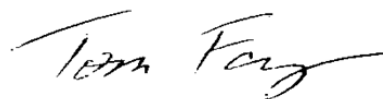
We applaud the desire of Mobile County stakeholders to improve the lives of youth through sports. We encourage you to seize the opportunity to be a national, regional and state model by taking collective, sustained action guided by our findings.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Aspen Institute Sports & Society Program analyzed the landscape of youth sports in Mobile County from January through July 2018. *State of Play: Mobile County* offers a snapshot of how well adults are serving youth through sports, regardless of zip code or ability.

Findings for this report were guided by a task force of local leaders and obtained through several methods: individual interviews with a broad collection of stakeholders, focus group discussions, youth and adult surveys, existing reports and data, and media accounts.

Some key findings in the report:

- One in three children in Mobile County is overweight, twice the national rate. Nearly 20 percent of youth in Mobile County are overweight and another 22.5 percent are obese. The total number of overweight children exceeds Alabama's already high numbers for adults.
- Mobile County private school sports start young, shaping the landscape of youth sports broadly. Parents with resources pump money and their volunteer time into travel ball or private school sports, where a feeder system maps out the athletic path for kids from pre-kindergarten through high school. This pathway impacts the viability of public programming and creates sport haves vs. have-nots based on financial resources.
- Girls have fewer sports opportunities than boys in Mobile County. Girls told us that their lack of interest and belief they're not good enough are keeping them out of sports, but that they want to try volleyball, gymnastics, cheerleading/dance, swimming, and track and field.
- Children here begin playing organized tackle football at very early ages, in contrast with national trends. Among Mobile County youth who play the game, 36 percent started tackle by the age of 6. Half of African-American youth who play tackle football started by the first grade, compared to 30 percent of white children. Some medical experts believe tackle should start in middle school or high school to reduce the number of hits to the head.
- Twenty-six percent of youth surveyed said they have played in a game where adults bet money on who won or the final score. Children who have played tackle football, basketball and baseball were by far the most likely to say adults gambled on their games. Adult gambling on youth games has been witnessed by both boys (33 percent) and girls (19 percent).
- The county has relatively few recreation and fitness facilities. In 2015, there were 7.75 such facilities per 100,000 Mobile County residents — slightly better than the state average (7.66) and where the county stood in 2010 (6.78), but still well behind the national average (10.46). Many of Mobile County's sports facilities are in need of repair.
- Eighty-two percent of county youth said adults encourage them to play sports and/or be physically active. On the other hand, 10 percent said they don't receive that encouragement (and 8 percent said they don't know).
- About one-third of Alabama families who have a child with a disability reported it's "very hard" to obtain recreational opportunities. The City of Mobile's indoor recreational facilities need more than \$600,000 in repairs to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act, according to a 2017 analysis by a consultant. Nationally, youth who have disabilities are 4.5 times less active and have obesity rates that are 38 percent higher than other youth.

Our recommendations — located in the Call for Leadership, Game Changer, and Ideas sections starting on page 24 — offer ideas based on the unique characteristics of Mobile County and are designed to stimulate new thinking. Our major recommendation focuses on setting a new standard for youth sports in Mobile County through the strategic use of public facilities.

Solutions start with shared values that can be applied through the power of the permit, where public oversight over the use of taxpayer-funded facilities is one of the most effective ways to improve the safety and enjoyment of youth in sports. We offer examples of ways to apply the power of the permit.

The Aspen Institute’s youth survey drives much of the analysis in this report. The survey was distributed to 17 elementary, middle and high schools across the county for geographic balance — both in public and private schools — and was taken by 1,721 youth.

Children, as the consumers of youth sports, carry a valuable voice that too often is not reflected in coaching and programming. The No. 1 strategy that can get and keep kids active through sport, as recognized by the Aspen Institute’s Project Play, is Ask Kids What They Want. When children have some measure of control over physical activity,

they are more inclined to enjoy themselves and thus continue to move their bodies, becoming athletes for life. In Mobile County, what youth most like about sports is playing with friends (64 percent) and having fun (53 percent). Winning was not in the top five reasons Mobile youth told us they like to play sports.

State of Play: Mobile County is the Aspen Institute’s first assessment of a single U.S. county, and the sixth overall community report. The Aspen Institute has produced regional reports on Southeast Michigan, Western New York, and Greater Rochester and the Finger Lakes, and hyperlocal reports on Harlem and Baltimore. Stakeholders in those communities have taken actions based off our recommendations and are seeing results.

With a passionate sports culture, Mobile County has the opportunity to take action and provide greater quality sport options for all children.

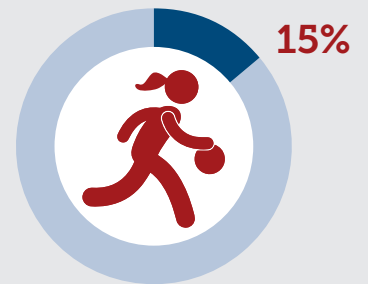
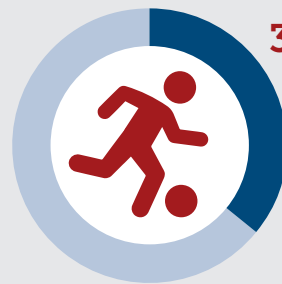


THE STATE OF PLAY IN MOBILE COUNTY

SCOREBOARD

ON THE WHOLE, FEW YOUTH ARE ACTIVE ENOUGH

Only **36% of males** and **15% of females** met the CDC's recommendation of 60 minutes of physical activity daily*

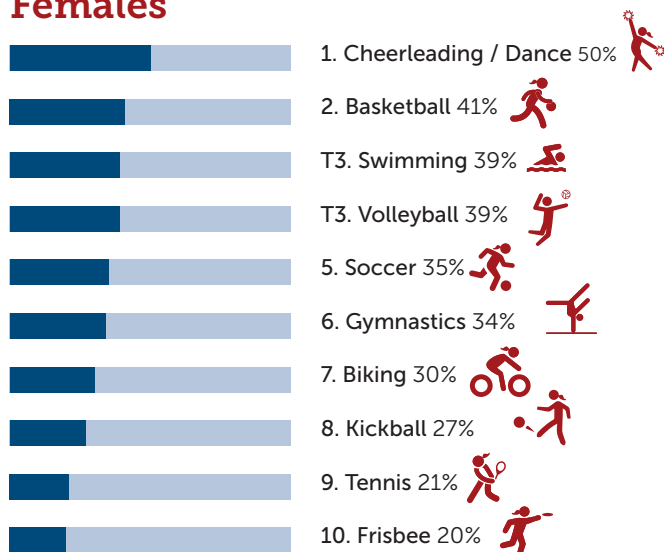


**Nationally, 36% of males and 17% of females met the CDC recommendation for physical activity*

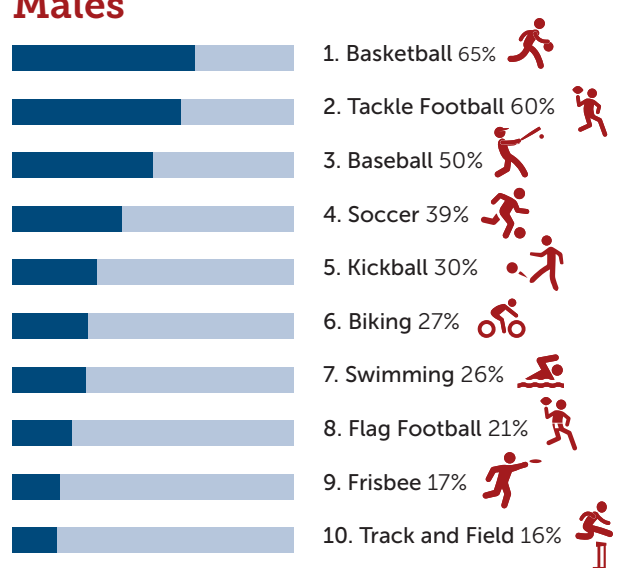
THE TOP TEN SPORTS IN MOBILE COUNTY

Results from Aspen Institute's survey of 1,721 youth when asked what sports they have ever played, in order of popularity

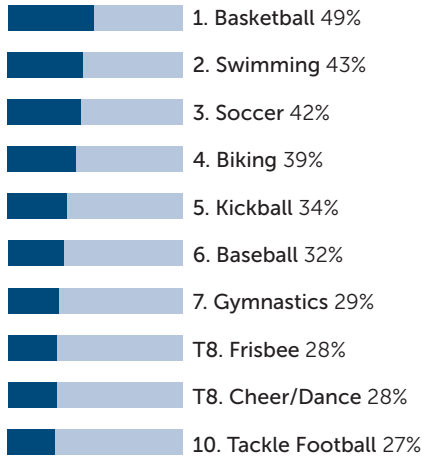
Females



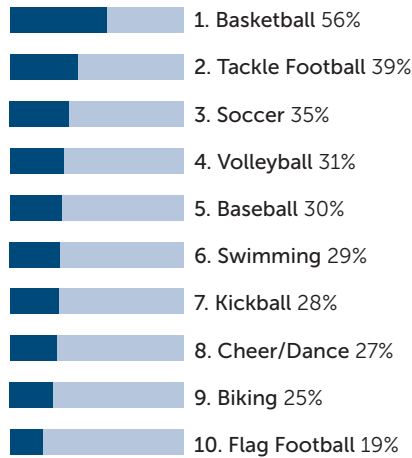
Males



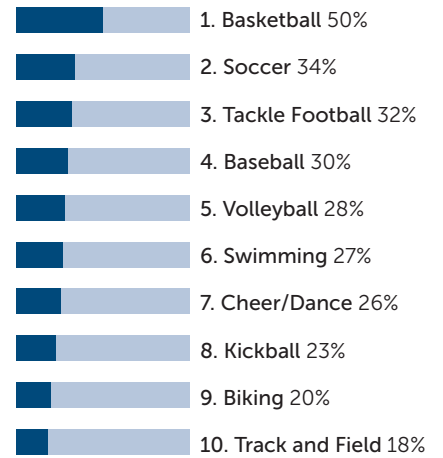
Kindergarten-Grade 5



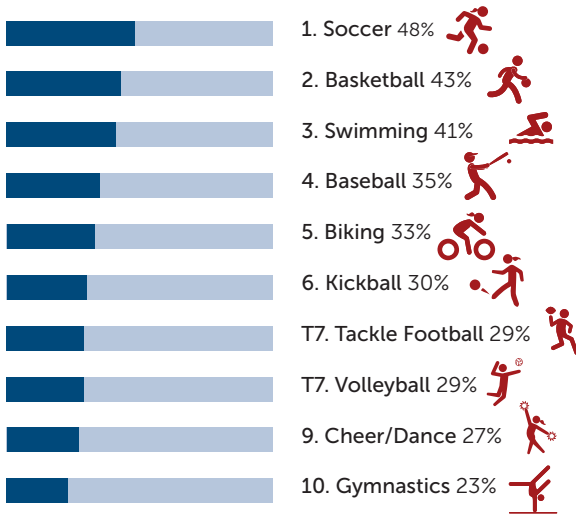
Grades 6-8



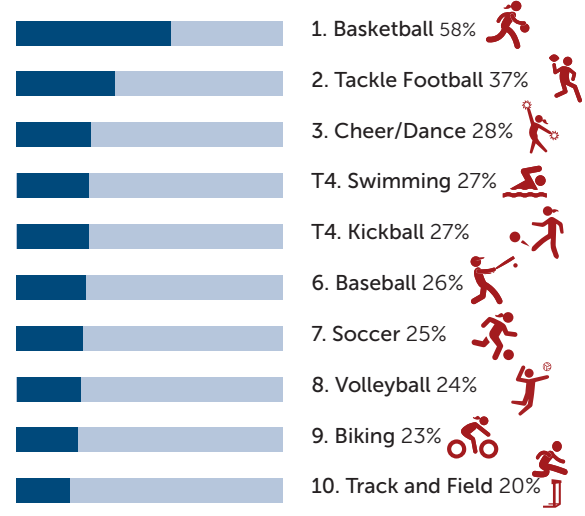
Grades 9-12



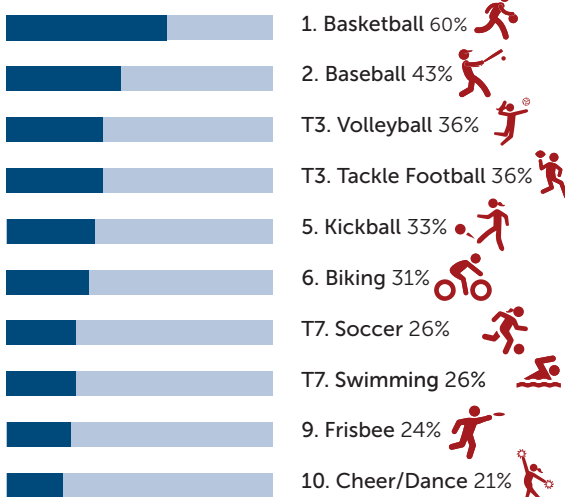
White



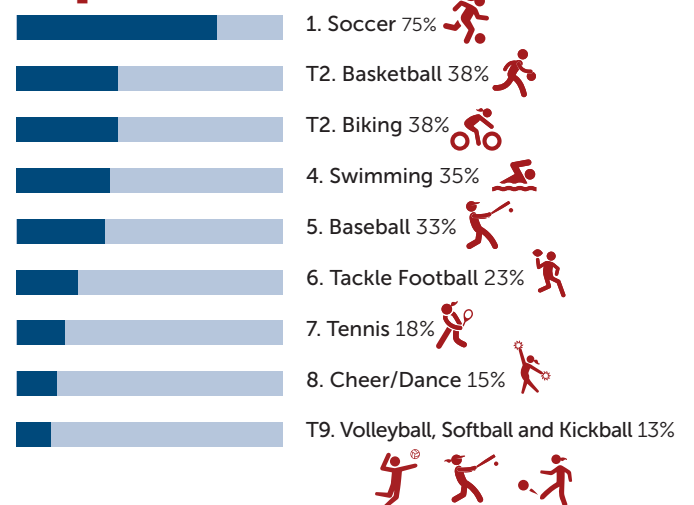
African-American



Native American*



Hispanic/Latino(a)**



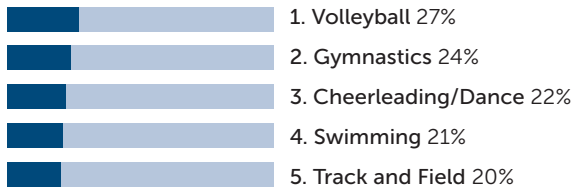
*Fewer than 3% of the survey respondents identified as Native American

**Fewer than 3% of the survey respondents identified as Hispanic or Latino(a)

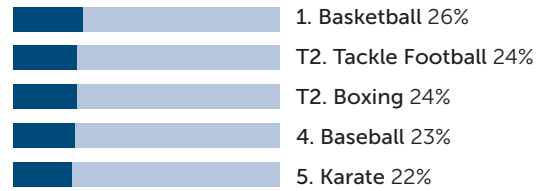
TOP 5 SPORTS YOUTH WANT TO TRY

From our survey of Mobile County kids and teens

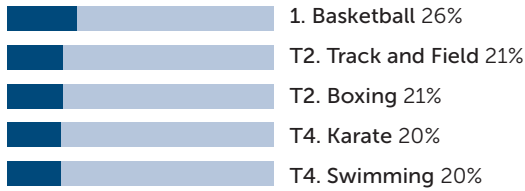
Females



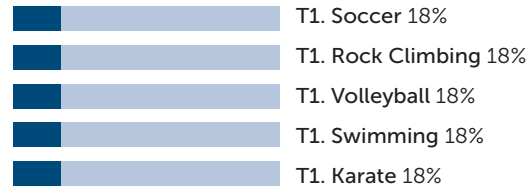
Males



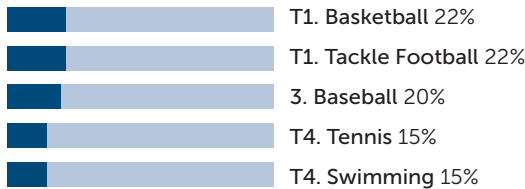
African-American



White



Native American*



*Fewer than 3% of survey respondents identified as Native American

Hispanic/Latino(a)**



**Fewer than 3% of survey respondents identified as Hispanic/Latino(a)

When asked the question,

What grade would you give stakeholders in Mobile County in getting kids active through sports?

137 local youth sport providers and other stakeholders in a survey conducted by the Aspen Institute gave themselves collectively an average grade of:

2018 State of PlayGrade: **C-**

Report Methodology

Data on sport activity patterns of youth in Mobile County were derived from youth surveys conducted by the Aspen Institute. During May 2018, a total of 1,721 youth from kindergarten to grade 12 completed a paper-based or online survey about their interest and participation in sports. Responses came from 17 schools across the county, both public and private. Survey responses by demographic:

- Gender: 52% Female, 47% Male
- Race: 47% African-American, 38% White, 6% Two or More Races, 2.5% Native American, 2% Hispanic/Latino(a), 2% Asian
- Grade: 36% Elementary School, 42% Middle School, 23% High School

The surveys allowed us to understand the current landscape of youth sports in our focus area of Mobile County. Other insights in this report were developed by Aspen's research team over a seven-month period in 2018. Researchers conducted more than 70 group and individual interviews, surveyed 137 adult stakeholders, hosted focus groups with community providers, toured recreation facilities and outdoor play spaces, and reviewed many public documents, existing literature and media articles, among other efforts. Throughout the report, "sport" refers to all forms of physical activity which, through organized or casual play, aim to express or improve physical fitness and mental well-being.

THE 8 PLAYS

*The Aspen Institute's seminal 2015 report, **Sport for All, Play for Life: A Playbook to Get Every Kid in the Game**, identifies eight strategies ("plays") that can get and keep all kids active through sport, regardless of zip code or ability. On the pages that follow are five findings from Mobile County related to each "play."*

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>



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 Mobile County:

Youth here play sports to be with friends and have fun. Of the 1,721 county youth surveyed by the Aspen Institute, 64 percent said being with friends and 53 percent said having fun are their primary reasons for playing sports. Other highly ranked reasons included learning new skills (40 percent), making new friends (38 percent), and getting better at sports (35 percent). Winning was the ninth-most frequent response (30 percent). Boys (35 percent) were more likely than girls (26 percent) to cite winning for what they like most about sports.

There's unmet demand for swimming. In our survey, swimming ranked fourth among all youth as a sport to try, behind basketball, karate, and track and field. But there are limited swim options. The City of Mobile owns just five outdoor pools: Figures Park, Trinity Gardens Park, John Kidd Park, Taylor Community Center and Pool, and Hillsdale Park.¹ The city also offers a summer swimming program at LeFlore High School's indoor pool. Elsewhere in the county, Chickasaw, Saraland and Satsuma have pools. The area also has at least eight club-owned pools with 25-yard short courses for competitive swimming. "The facilities (throughout the county) are underutilized because their physical attributes are out of date or not working," said Gina O'Neill, president of the Mobile Swimming Association. Pools are also available at Bishop State Community College and Providence Hospital, but O'Neill said the only indoor pool for competition is the 50-meter, six-lane pool at Bishop State that "is in significant need of repair." Twenty percent of African-American youth in Mobile County want to try swimming. Nationally, 64 percent of African-American children have no or low swimming ability.²

Football is king, but basketball has the most players. Almost one-third of county youth said they play basketball at least 20 days during the year. Boys (42 percent) are far more likely to play basketball regularly than girls (24 percent). The City of Mobile, which owns 18 basketball courts,³ recently built a new court in the parking lot of Herndon Park, also known as Sage Park. That court is regularly packed with youth and young adults. In early 2018, Mobile City Council approved building a court at Figures Park thanks to a \$253,000 donation by NBA All-Star DeMarcus Cousins.⁴ City Parks Superintendent Dan Otto said Mobile doesn't have courts

at every park because of the perception that basketball leads to rowdier crowds and complaints by residents. "It kind of makes you think: Are we thinking about basketball players differently because they're young males without supervision?" Otto said. A lack of courts is a concern raised throughout the county, including in rural areas.

Girls have fewer sports opportunities. Our survey showed that the sport activity girls participate in most often is cheerleading/dance (50 percent). "The exposure (to sports) isn't there for girls," said Susan Shaw, who recently stepped down as Mobile Sports Authority director of marketing and sports events. "Every city I've lived in or consulted for was much easier to put programming around girls' sports than it is here." Girls told us that their lack of interest and belief they're not good enough are keeping them out of the game, but that they also want to try volleyball, gymnastics, swimming, and track and field. Thirteen percent of girls who don't play sports very often said they are not interested in sports — slightly more than boys (11 percent). Azure Daly, a 13-year-old at Phillips Preparatory School, said girls often refer to P.E. as "pointless exercise" because they think gym won't affect their future. More girls participate when they influence each other by committing to change clothes for gym, Daly said. Only 15 percent of high school girls in Alabama meet the recommended 60 minutes of physical activity per day.⁵

Most youth don't have much say in designing their sport activities. Just 39 percent of county youth surveyed said they are often or sometimes asked by P.E. teachers what they want to do in gym class. "I encourage P.E. teachers to change units and find out what kids are interested in, because kids are so different," said Brad Lowell, Mobile County Public School System P.E. supervisor and athletic director. "Trying to keep kids motivated is the most daunting task." Lowell estimated that half of the county's P.E. teachers introduce new sports, such as disc golf, floor hockey, discus and shot put. Thirty-seven percent of youth said they are often or sometimes asked by a coach what they want to do at practice. Girls are more likely to be asked for input by P.E. teachers and coaches than boys.



YOUTH VOICE

Breighanna Vigor, 16

The last thing a runner wants after running several miles in the heat is to drink water from a dirty, hot hose. But that's the only option on the running route for the Mary G. Montgomery High School cross-country team. So Breighanna presented an idea to the Semmes City Council: Build two water fountains along the running path that intersects the city's three schools. Estimated cost: \$1,200 each.

"The city approved it, but our (Mobile County) school system rejected it because they didn't want the water bill and to have to fix it if someone breaks it," Breighanna says.

This is just one example Brieghanna notices about how different sports are treated. She notes the football team received new helmets at the start of the 2017 season, yet they went unused until the team won a game. She sees the football and baseball players enjoying a fieldhouse with showers. She has reached the state championship in cross-country and track, yet doesn't hear her name on the school announcements, which she says focus on baseball, softball and football.

"Honestly, I hear the statement around school that track isn't a sport because you're running in circles, but I think it's the hardest sport," Breighanna says.

Breighanna runs 30 miles a week. She hopes to get a NCAA Division I athletic scholarship, but mainly she loves running because it's a stress reliever and she can determine her own result.

"I don't like to lose, it's obvious," she says. "And I know what I'm capable of, and if I set my mind to it, I'm going to do it one way or the other. If someone's like, 'I'm better than you,' I'm like, 'OK, prove it. We don't have stats to go by. I can race you face to face.'"

Brieghanna says girls at Mary G. Montgomery are receptive to trying new sports, "but nobody's pushing them to try." Brieghanna keeps pushing ahead — for her own goals, for the joy of running, and for girls who are still to come.

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 the neighborhood 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. 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 Mobile County:

Mobile Bay is underutilized by youth. All that water along the county coastline offers an opportunity to introduce a variety of sports and activities based in free play. And there’s demand for such activities, even the less traditional ones. For instance, 6 percent of youth in our school survey said they want to try rowing. The obstacles to participation include cost (programs, equipment) and transportation, which is a challenge related to most sports. Eleven percent of youth said they don’t have a way to get to practices and games. Like much of the South, Mobile County does not have well-developed public transit. Our survey showed that most youth (80 percent) get driven to sporting events by their parents or guardians. Traffic congestion adds to the challenge, along with how spread out the county is: Mobile County has 336 people per square mile.⁶

Childhood obesity is much higher here than nationally. More free play could help youth health in Mobile County, where the obesity rate for children is double the United States average.⁷ Nearly 20 percent of youth in Mobile County are overweight and another 22.5 percent are obese, according to a 2016 study. The total percentage of overweight children (42.3 percent) exceeds Alabama’s already high percentages of overweight and obese adults. In the 2018 Robert Wood Johnson Foundation County Health Rankings, Mobile County ranked 31st out of 67 Alabama counties in overall health outcomes for all ages.⁸ Neighboring Baldwin County ranked third. Baldwin’s population grew by 16.7 percent from 2010 to 2017, making it the fastest-growing county in the state, while Mobile County increased by 0.2 percent.⁹

Crime limits free-play opportunities in some communities.

Thirteen percent of county youth said they don’t have a safe place to play in their neighborhood. More white youth than African-American youth expressed concern with safe play spaces. In the first three months of 2018, crimes in the city were on pace to be the highest in five years.¹⁰ Youth in the impoverished Maysville neighborhood feel so unsafe that they try to carry guns into the Boys and Girls Club, which now restricts backpacks that could conceal weapons, said program director Nikeland Nichols. “Many of these children suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder,” Nichols said. “It’s an environment of

war outside here.” Said Juanita Morgan, a Maysville parent: “Different areas (in the neighborhood) have different risks. We don’t have anywhere to take them out and practice. We want something for our kids to not only feel safe inside, but also outside the club as well.”

In time, Three Mile Creek could turn degraded communities in Mobile and Prichard into a destination for kayaking, biking, walking, and running.

In 2017, the first trail opened to kick off the Three Mile Creek Greenway, which plans to reconnect the city to a creek that was once its lifeblood and provide a multi-use pedestrian and cycling path. The 12-mile stretch would tie the city together, from the University of South Alabama to the Mobile River.¹¹ A new public-private partnership, the 3MC Partnership, was formed for funding. The Mobile County Health Department announced \$9.2 million from RESTORE Act funds for the trail, and the city announced a \$55,000 grant.¹² Many years and more funding are needed to complete the project, which would open recreational access between Langan Park, Bush Park, Mill Street Park, McLean Park and Tricentennial Park. “From a community perspective, it connects rich to poor, white to black, college kid to 90-year-old,” Mobile Baykeeper Executive Director Casi Callaway told *AL.com*.¹³

Some youth sit out sports and don’t have time for free play because they help their families.

Among county youth who don’t play sports often, family responsibilities (19 percent) were cited as one of the biggest reasons, with no significant differences by race or gender. The median income for county households is \$43,809 — similar to the state figure but substantially lower than the nation’s (\$53,889).¹⁴ Almost one in five county residents live in poverty. Scott Redding sees the impact as baseball coach at 800-student Citronelle High School, which has only 13 varsity players. Several quit the team in 2018 to get jobs to pay family bills. “That’s not their job, in my opinion,” Redding said. “I see that a lot now.” Another 28 percent of kids told us they don’t play sports due to schoolwork demands.



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 Mobile County:

Mobile County's focus on college and pro sports dreams can be a detriment to explore different sports. Phil Savage, a former NFL general manager and ex-Senior Bowl executive director, is concerned that Mobile County residents focus children too much on chasing college scholarships and professional sports opportunities, which in turn limits their sport options and the life lessons they can glean from participation in any sport. "It's all or nothing," he said. "Our focus is on the big stuff instead of getting on your hands and knees and playing catch with kids. It's part of the reason why I think kids walk away from sports in the middle-school-age bracket, because they don't see a future at Alabama, Auburn, the NBA or NFL. Instead of it being the enjoyment or fitness or camaraderie of sports, it's become more goal oriented. We have to change our perspective on what sport can be."

Lacrosse is gaining popularity. Although only 2 percent of county youth said they have played lacrosse, 7 percent said they want to try the sport. Founded in 2010, the Mobile Youth Lacrosse League has grown from one under-13 team to more than 100 players from elementary-school age into high school, including two girls' teams. Lacrosse is not sponsored by the state in high schools. The challenge for Mobile County youth lacrosse players is they often must travel to other areas of the region for games, said Zack Pall, a Mobile resident who owns Parallax Lacrosse, which is trying to grow the sport on the Gulf Coast. Pall, a former Hofstra University lacrosse player and current member of Israel's national team, said Mobile County needs a recreational league with less travel and costs. "There are a lot of parents who don't want their kids playing football, so kids are picking up a stick and not putting it down," he said. Worth noting: High school lacrosse has one of the highest injury rates nationally.

Mobile County has one of the nation's largest public tennis facilities. The Copeland-Cox Tennis Center boasts 60 courts in West Mobile that attract traveling tournaments and local play. The tennis center is one of the larger economic engines for Mobile tourism.¹⁵ In recent years, some Mobile City Council members questioned if capital

money should be put into the tennis center when other city parks need upgrades.¹⁶ The tennis center needs \$487,000 in short-term maintenance repairs, according to a 2017 assessment by a city consultant.¹⁷ The consultant recommended Mobile consider leasing underutilized parks for alternate uses and look into leasing city-owned land adjacent to the Copeland-Cox Center for a boutique hotel or small community retail center. The proceeds from leasing the land next to the tennis center could be used for operating and maintenance costs for the complex, the consultant wrote.

A recent skateboard park added opportunities for an activity that youth want. Three years ago, the City of Mobile added a skatepark on the north side of Memorial Park. "It's very well used," said Dan Otto, the city superintendent of parks. "I've been surprised by the demographics. I thought it would be largely young white males. There's been a fair amount of African-Americans use it, which is a great thing." Skateboarding ranked 19th for sports that Mobile County youth have tried, but it's a sport 14 percent want access to. Almost equal percentages of white and African-American youth have tried skateboarding; more boys (13 percent) than girls (7 percent) have participated.

Niche sports receive less attention but can inspire youth. Fifty-nine percent of youth sports programs promoted in the county on a national platform are football, baseball, basketball and softball programs, according to an analysis by SportsEngine, an online youth sports portal (see Appendix F on page 39). There are other options. Mobile is a big running community, and the Port City Pacers stage the annual Azalea Trail Run 10K, which has existed for 41 years. The Mobile Sports Authority organizes about 35 sporting events a year, including in rugby, volleyball, golf, gymnastics, cycling, cross-country, and track and field. At Chickasabogue Park, there's a championship 27-hole disc golf course available for all ages and more than 17 miles of hiking and biking trails. The city has disc golf courses at Medal of Honor, McLean and Municipal parks.



YOUTH VOICE

Braxton Byrd, 11

Braxton dreams of becoming an orthopedic doctor or NFL quarterback. He's preparing for both, having made the headmaster's list each quarter at St. Paul's Episcopal School while he's being tutored twice a week by a personal quarterback coach. "I love being able to tackle and hit people and be able to throw the ball and be the leader of the team," Braxton says.

Life is busy for Braxton and his family. He plays football in the fall, basketball in the winter, travel baseball half the year, and gets quarterback training year round with David Morris at Quarterback Country, which encourages multisport play. Braxton plays about 12 baseball tournaments from February to June, sometimes making trips to Florida and Mississippi.

"I'm usually on the road every other weekend," Braxton says. But he loves the competition to improve his skills. "And I definitely like winning baseball (championship) rings. We have 13 rings."

Braxton estimates spending at least 12 hours a week on sports. His parents, Elsworth and Pamela, put most of their extra money into Braxton's sports. Pamela says they have never calculated how much they spend, but "it's a lot." Braxton says he sometimes gets tired and tells his dad he doesn't want to play. He stays home in those cases, according to father and son.

Braxton started football at age 5 and also plays defense, allowing him to enjoy hits that "make the other team cry," he says. What does Braxton know about concussions? "I know they affect your life pretty well, and if you do get one, it will really hurt you, and that might cause you to not be able to play football or play other sports for the rest of your life. That's why my parents make sure my helmet is secured tightly."

A properly fitted helmet can help, but it's not a cure for all of football's risks. Says Pamela: "I'd love to see him be a doctor, but he's got a brother and daddy who want to see him be a football player."

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 neighborhood 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. ... 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 Mobile County:

Private school sports start young, leading to haves vs. have-nots. Parents with resources pump money and their volunteer time into travel ball or private school sports, where a feeder system maps out the athletic path for kids from pre-kindergarten through high school. Private schools make up 29 percent of all schools in Mobile County.¹⁸ Between 2015 and 2017, private schools won 37 of the 39 high school state championships captured by schools located in Mobile County.¹⁹ Over that period, St. Paul's Episcopal, UMS-Wright, McGill-Toolen and Mobile Christian combined to win boys and girls state titles in 10 sports. Now, an attempt to create competitive balance is being contested.²⁰ Since 1999, the Alabama High School Athletic Association has classified private high school teams by counting a student as 1.35 students, requiring most private schools to play in a higher classification. The AHSAA recently approved another rule change that would further reclassify successful private school teams. St. Paul's, which under the new rule will play Class 6A teams while having a Class 4A enrollment size, sued the AHSAA in May 2018. A federal judge denied the school's motion for an injunction as the lawsuit continues. "We have (public-school) kids who don't even know what a volleyball looks like until the seventh grade, and they're already five years behind the private schools," said Brad Lowell, Mobile County Public School System athletic director and P.E. supervisor. "You can't compete."

Communication issues exist over public and private responsibilities at public parks, where many in-town leagues play. Mobile's parks are run by elected boards voted on by their communities. The parks vary on how much maintenance they need from the city, since some raise their own money for improvements. One example is Westside Park, which has seen some of its baseball teams advance to national competition. The land is oddly configured: The baseball complex is owned by the county, while other adjacent parcels are owned by the city and a private developer, according to Matthew Capps, the city's senior parks and recreation director before he left in April 2018. "When I call up (the city's) public works to cut the grass or do maintenance (on land near the city-owned baseball fields), they say, 'Well, that's out in the county, we can't do that,'" Capps said. "Then I call up the county public works and they say, 'That's not a problem, but we have to find a way to move some funds around.'"

After Westside made renovations without a permit, Capps said the city found infractions of the Americans with Disabilities Act. "Our citizens want to get involved, but on their terms, not our terms," said Capps, who wants the city to create clear memorandums of understanding for facility use so conversations occur on the front end and benefit kids. (See *Game Changer* on page 28.)

The City of Mobile may consolidate community centers and recreation centers and outsource programming to the YMCA or Boys and Girls Club.²¹ City officials are considering the shift due to limited staffing, rising maintenance costs and the desire to have outside staff with more health knowledge leading program initiatives. The City of Mobile owns 12 currently open community and rec centers that collectively need \$1.4 million in short-term maintenance (see Appendix E on page 38), according to recommendations by a city consultant after site inspections in 2017.²² The most expensive recommendations were at two of the most popular centers, Springhill Recreation Center and Seals Community Center (which needed a new roof immediately due to recurring leaks). Many years ago, Seals was open on the weekends; now it's open Monday to Friday from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m., with two full-time staffers. "If you had staffing, you could do a lot more," said Rhonda McDaniel, the facility supervisor at Seals. "We're down on basketballs, so you have to bring an ID to use one. We want to do (summer) field trips to the skating rink, bowling alley and library, but I'm not sure we can."

Non-city rec basketball teams can't use city gyms after hoops season ends. The policy is to protect youth who might not have the chance to play travel basketball and would be displaced by other organized practices, City of Mobile Recreation Superintendent Shadrach Collins said. At a City Council meeting in March 2018, local coach Theris Howard said that though he understands the policy, the rule hurts the 40 kids he mentors at the Robert Hope Community Center because his team now lacks a gym to play in.²³ The city also forbids rec league players from playing travel ball during the regular season. "It's for competitive purposes," Collins said. "If you're playing every day, you're going to have more experience than the child playing once a week. It's a disadvantage to the child who wasn't picked to travel."



More Mobile County youth play organized sports on a recreation center team than a travel team. The travel-ball culture undeniably plays a significant role in the Mobile County youth sports scene. Many parents spoke about tryouts at young ages, plus costs and time commitments that add up. But according to our survey, only 16 percent of all county youth play on a travel team, compared to 28 percent who play on a recreation center team. Boys (17 percent) travel for sports slightly more than girls (15 percent). The most common years for travel-team sports in the county are from seventh through 11th grades, though even at those ages, more youth play on a rec center team than a travel team. This should serve as an important reminder: Many children in Mobile County cannot afford the costs and transportation needs associated with travel teams, reinforcing the need to develop more quality, lower-priced leagues that serve all children.



2018 State of Play Grade
Mobile County:

C

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. ... Funding enables, but so do small gestures of other types of support. Which is another way of saying: be creative.

Five findings in Mobile County:

The county has fewer recreation and fitness facilities than the national average. In 2015, there were 7.75 recreation and fitness facilities per 100,000 Mobile County residents.²⁴ It's slightly better than the state average (7.66) and up from where Mobile County stood in 2010 (6.78), but still well behind the national average (10.46). The need for access to recreational facilities outside the city, in the heavily rural county, is particularly great. Semmes, located about 30 minutes from downtown Mobile and with a growing population of about 3,800, wants to build a sports complex with a pool. In June 2018, Semmes opened a 5K running trail to host cross-country events for youth and young adults from middle school to college. "Children west and north of Mobile are not going to drive downtown for practice," said Cricket Vigor, a realtor and mother of youth athletes. "There's demand in Semmes for soccer, volleyball, swimming and track."

Mobile needs better facilities. "It's 30 years of neglect here," said Matthew Capps, the city's recent senior director of parks and recreation. "Almost everything is in pretty bad shape." Mayor Sandy Stimpson, who supports building more turf fields, said the city has about a \$240 million deficit and faces \$83 million in deferred maintenance for all facilities. Meanwhile, the county-owned parks "are so far behind it's ridiculous," said Sherri Mims, who oversees parks and recreation for Mobile County. "We're not going to catch up within a year or two. That would take a lot of funding. We need to think outside the box." Because so many opportunities exist for improvements, Mobile leaders sometimes find it difficult to prioritize what changes are needed, but improvements are obtainable with the right people coming together, said Susan Shaw, who recently stepped down as Mobile Sports Authority director of sports marketing and events. One area with new facilities is the Saraland public school system, which is building a \$3.2 million athletic facility at its high school that will include a 35-yard turf practice field, batting cages and a weight room.²⁵ The funding comes from a \$7.5 million property tax passed in 2015.

A new county soccer complex is coming. In April 2018, the Mobile County Commission approved a smaller version of a youth soccer complex that has been debated for several years.²⁶ The soccer community advocated for more fields and for them to be in one

central location to attract tournaments that currently go to Foley, Fairhope and other coastal cities. The complex, which could open as early as 2019, will start with four tournament-quality fields and two practice fields. The Mobile United Futbol Club will manage the complex, which will be located at the intersection of Interstates 10 and 65. In 2016, County Commissioner Connie Hudson unsuccessfully proposed borrowing \$20 million for a larger soccer complex with a swimming pool that would be paid through lodging taxes.²⁷ This time, Hudson won approval by using only funds already assigned to her district (about \$3.7 million) to buy the land and start the first phase of work. If more funding is found, the complex will expand to 10 fields. Our survey showed soccer is the second-most popular sport among county youth.

Old warehouses provide opportunity to innovate play spaces. In 2013, Nicole Keshock rented an old warehouse distribution center and turned it into a facility with five volleyball courts. Her Mobile Storm Volleyball Club shares the space with a taekwondo business. "Our facility isn't perfect," Keshock said. "The ceilings are right at the minimum. But parents love that their kids can be dropped off at 3 p.m., stay until 9 if they have to, and do homework or hang out. There's a lot of abandoned warehouses that could be used for sports." Keshock, a former volleyball coach at the University of South Alabama, has teamed with former South Alabama men's basketball coach Ronnie Arrow to try to build a volleyball/basketball indoor facility. Arrow estimates the cost would be \$4-5 million for 10 basketball courts and 20 volleyball courts. Volleyball is the No. 1 sport Mobile County girls want to try, and basketball is first among boys.

Facilities are especially lacking in the southern part of the county. Twelve communities make up the southern part of Mobile County: Alabama Port, Bayou La Batre, Belle Fontaine, Coden, Dixon Corner, Dauphin Island, Grand Bay, Heron Bay, Irvington, Mon Louis Island, St. Elmo and Theodore. Between them, they have one basketball court, one walking/running trail, two football fields, two gymnasiums, four community centers, nine parks and 10 baseball/softball fields.²⁸ "This is a very poor reflection of what is being made available to our children," said Mike Magnoli, a member of the South Mobile County Community Development Corporation.



Levi Lewis, 18, and Brien Orso, 16

At the northern tip of Mobile County lies Citronelle, a small, rural city of 3,900 located 45 minutes from downtown Mobile. Unlike Mobile, Citronelle lacks many parks to choose from. Nobody comes north to play baseball in Citronelle. But they do come south from Washington County.

What they find at Citronelle High School is surprising for a small community: a gorgeous indoor baseball facility with four batting cages, two bullpens, a weight room, two locker rooms, and coaching offices. The father of Citronelle baseball star Allen West built the facility in honor of his son, who died in a car accident in 2008.

"People think down on little old Citronelle," says Levi, who was a senior first baseman and third baseman on the 2018 baseball team. "But we've got the heart. If there are hardships, people pull together. It's a small town, but everybody knows everybody."

Levi had a cancer scare his freshman year when he was diagnosed with lymphoma. It turned out he was actually cancer free. Now Levi and his mom collect more than 100 gifts each year for kids at the University of South Alabama Children's and Women's Hospital.

Brien, a junior catcher at Citronelle, is also inspired by a health issue. His younger brother Tate was born with heterotaxy syndrome, a rare condition in which the internal organs are abnormally arranged in the chest and abdomen. Doctors say he can't play contact sports.

"I love to have him come out and watch me play," Brien says. "I'd do anything for him to take my spot just for a few years."

In a football-mad state, Brien used to play football but stopped due to knee injuries. Levi got spooked when one of his best friends, who was scheduled to be Citronelle's starting shortstop, missed consecutive seasons due to knee injuries from football.

"He loved baseball, too," Levi says. "I didn't want to be in the same footsteps as him. I love baseball too much."

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.

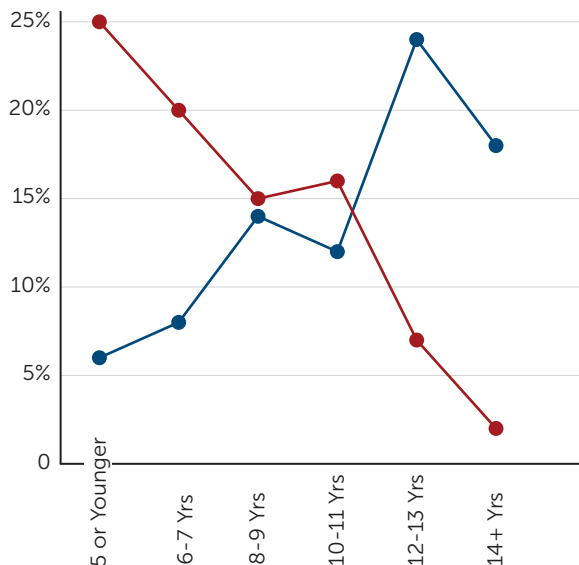
Five findings in Mobile County:

Football starts at young ages; some question when to start tackle. Football is in the DNA of Mobile County, where 66 percent of all boys and 16 percent of girls said they have played organized tackle football. Almost one-third of boys who play tackle said they started at 5 years old or younger. Among adult stakeholders, 24 percent said tackle should start at ages 12 or 13. The Catholic Youth Organization fielded four tackle teams for second-graders in 2017, down from eight teams a decade ago. CYO Executive Director David Weems wants to gradually move the tackle starting age back — he prefers age 14 — and begin to offer flag. “People around here don’t want to hear it,” Weems said. “I’ve told them either we’re going to have to do it, or we’re not going to have a football league in the future.” Nationally, flag surpassed tackle football in 2016 as the most commonly played form of the game for children ages 12 and under.²⁹

Recreational opportunities for youth with disabilities are limited. Youth who have disabilities are 4.5 times less active and have obesity rates that are 38 percent higher than other youth.³⁰ About one-third of Alabama families who have a child with a disability reported it’s “very hard” to obtain recreational opportunities.³¹ Many Mobile County stakeholders said lack of awareness about how to engage with children with special needs is a barrier for more opportunities. Special Olympics Mobile County, Goodwill Easter Seals of the Gulf Coast, and Alabama Jags are among the options for sports activities.³² One model for success is the Bambino Buddy Ball League, in which youth with disabilities play baseball with help from someone without a disability. The league moved its games at Westside Park from Saturday mornings to under the lights throughout the week, allowing the public to see the games. “We have more kids just stop by to watch and then volunteer,” said Joe Gaston, a Buddy Ball coach. “That’s really neat.”

THERE IS A LARGE DISPARITY BETWEEN WHEN ADULTS THINK IT IS OK TO START PLAYING TACKLE FOOTBALL AND WHEN KIDS ACTUALLY DO PLAY

- Age football players in Mobile County actually start tackle football
- Age adults in Mobile County say it’s OK to start tackle football



Mobile is one of the wettest cities in America, creating challenges to design quality programming on frequently used sports fields. On average, Mobile gets 64 inches of rain per year; the U.S. average is 39 inches.³³ Many of the county’s parks reside in low-lying areas and stay wet. Fields get torn up since few sports providers want to turn away kids on sunny days, and the rain plays havoc on the city’s once-a-week mowing schedule. Mobile’s native grass is Bahia, which is “awful” for fields because of its texture and rapid growth, said Dan Otto, the city’s superintendent of parks. The city unsuccessfully tried seeding Bermuda grass. Otto said there was no budget to treat fields until allocating \$200,000 a couple years ago, but then it was cut to \$40,000 the next year and hindered efforts. “That (amount of money) won’t get you far,” Otto said. “You have to stay on top of it each year.” In 2018, the city spent \$20,000 on attempted improvements by sprigging three fields — that is, acquiring solid sod and chopping it into small pieces for use. Otto said county-owned fields are in much better shape than the city’s because there are fewer to care for, the county better controls programming to avoid overuse, and the county spends more money to treat the grass.

Sources: Aspen Institute survey of 1,721 Mobile County youth ages 6-18; Aspen Institute survey of 137 Mobile County parents, coaches, administrators, program directors and other stakeholders of youth sports.



YOUTH VOICE

DaLaney Green, 7

Culturally sensitive programs need to accommodate homeless, refugee and immigrant populations. As of April 2018, 7,100 students in Mobile County schools were identified as homeless, accounting for about 12 percent of the student body.³⁴ Mobile County Public School System considers a student homeless if he or she lacks a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence. Aided by Catholic Social Services in Mobile, which assists all refugees that settle in Alabama, families from Bosnia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Somalia, Liberia and other countries have resettled in Mobile County. At the Soccer4Life youth program, about 40 of the 120 players are refugees who find soccer to be therapeutic after the war atrocities they experienced, said Zenzo Ndlovu, the program director. Many refugee parents don't believe in putting children in any sport, creating a barrier for physical activity, Ndlovu said. In Bayou La Batre, a fishing community of 2,500 in south Mobile County, 32 percent of residents are Asian.³⁵ Most came from Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia — all with different cultures and needs. Because adults from those cultures weren't embraced when they moved to Mobile more than 40 years ago, their kids rarely play organized sports, said Mike Magnoli of the South Mobile Community Development Corporation. "That wall needs to be broken down, so they feel comfortable."

Creative approaches are overcoming space constraints to increase physical activity in schools. Mary B. Austin Elementary School Principal Amanda Jones implemented a new approach in 2018: Every classroom had two pieces of flexible seating, such as bouncy balls or teeter-totter seats. The school uses the digital platform GoNoodle, which offers interactive videos and kid-friendly entertainment for in-room physical activity "brain energizers" and includes sports-themed activities. Also, Jones encourages teachers to add unstructured play time on top of the 30 to 45 minutes of P.E. each day. At Dodge Elementary School, a classroom exists where kids can ride a stationary bike while reading a book.

There is no gym for DaLaney Green and her classmates at Prichard Preparatory School, a private elementary school in Mobile. P.E. class means always going outside, unless rain forces them inside to dance to GoNoodle songs. When the weather heats up, running around outside isn't always fun for DaLaney.

"We have these little tires and we play in them and pull each other sometimes, but sometimes we just put them down and sit on them in the shade," DaLaney says.

DaLaney is a second-grader who wants to be a scientist and can count to 20 in Spanish. At school, she meticulously follows the rules. At home, she breaks one important rule: No jumping on the sofa. "I like to do flips," DaLaney says.

So, the girl who drives her mom crazy with flips started gymnastics. "The first time I saw Gabby Douglass do it, I wanted to do it," DaLaney says about the first African-American to win Olympic gold in the all-around.

DaLaney joined Nasser Gymnastics Academy, which was founded by Nasser Parvinrouh, a 1964 Olympic gymnast from Iran. DaLaney likes the bars and the balance beam most, while cartwheels and cut jumps off the beam are the hardest part. She doesn't worry about getting hurt, since there are nets underneath her if she falls.

She will start competing soon and wants to learn how to cross from one uneven bar to the other. "It looks easy," DaLaney says matter-of-factly. The camaraderie of gymnastics appeals to DaLaney. Her coaches sometimes make funny jokes, though she's learning a new reality about physical activity. "I don't like it whenever your muscles get real sore."

After school and homework, DaLaney often plays outside with her sister and cousin. DaLaney gets about 30 minutes to first unwind before math and reading most days. Then it's outside to play tag or hide-and-seek with a doll, temporarily sparing a house that hasn't yet been damaged by DaLaney's flips.

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 Mobile County:

State law now requires annual coach training. The Alabama legislature recently passed a law requiring youth sports coaches to take injury prevention and response training each year.³⁶ At a minimum, the Coach Safely Act calls for annual training to include emergency preparedness for traumatic injuries, concussions and head trauma, heat and extreme weather-related injuries, physical conditioning and training equipment usage, and heart defects and abnormalities leading to sudden cardiac death. The law applies to all paid and unpaid coaches of athletes 14 and younger, and mandates that all youth sports associations that use public property provide a free training course. One example: The Coach Safely Foundation created a course based on content from the STOP Program developed by the American Orthopedic Society of Sports Medicine.

Coach training is available for free. For example, the University of South Alabama (USA) Children's and Women's Hospital, which is the lead organizer of Safe Kids South Alabama, holds several free safety workshops to train football coaches on concussions. More than 600 coaches are required to attend, and they receive a small card listing concussion symptoms. USA Children's and Women's Hospital teaches concussion education to about 25 public and private schools and is in discussions about gaining access to all Mobile County public schools, said Brandi Purvis, who leads the hospital's community engagement. The hospital plans to offer concussion training and other sports injury prevention in 2019 for baseball, soccer, cheerleading, softball and lacrosse coaches. Catholic Youth Organization chapters and others also offer coach training.

Most Mobile County coaches appear to lack training in key competencies. This is in line with the national trend, in which fewer than four in 10 youth coaches are trained in any of the following areas: general safety and injury prevention, sports skills and tactics, concussion management, effective motivational techniques, CPR/basic first aid, and physical conditioning.³⁷ "One friend of mine who coaches says if a kid gets hit in the head with a baseball, you just wait five seconds to see if he cries," said Matthew Capps, the city's former senior parks and recreation director. Andrew Thomas, a former Mobile Youth Football Conference coach, said too many kids whose skills are not advanced by age 7

get left behind by coaches who are looking to win. "The state of coaching is sad," Thomas said.

Background checks raise questions on how to handle coaches with past felonies. Sherman Williams was a star University of Alabama running back in the 1990s who won a Super Bowl with the Dallas Cowboys. Then he served 15 years in prison after his 2000 conviction for counterfeit and distributing marijuana.³⁸ Since returning to Mobile, Williams joined former Alabama teammate David Palmer to form the Palmer-Williams Group and assist socially disadvantaged children. Williams coaches the Prichard Cowboys football team in one of the poorest cities in the state. "I know when kids come from situations like me and David, it's hard to break the cycle they face on a continuing basis, so I want to help them," Williams said. Sherri Mims, who oversees Mobile County's parks, said Williams' story reflects the challenges of allowing people with felonies to coach kids. "I see you want to make a difference, and there are some people in it for the right reasons," Mims said. "But there are questions that have to be addressed, and honestly, I don't have the answer for (how to handle situations like) Sherman."

Girls on the Run trains coaches at schools to prepare girls for 5K run. Twenty percent of girls in Mobile County told us they want to try track and field, and 10 percent are interested in cross-country. A national program in all 50 states, Girls on the Run inspires girls to be healthy and confident using a 10-week curriculum that creatively integrates running. The South Alabama chapter of Girls on the Run started three years ago and in spring 2018 had 71 third- to fifth-grade girls participating at St. Paul's Episcopal, St. Ignatius, Corpus Christi, Fonde Elementary and Bayside Academy (Baldwin County), said Anna Katherine Ray, the South Alabama chapter organizer. The cost is \$150 per girl, though scholarships are available, and running shoes are donated. It's up to the school to run the program, aided by weekly emails and occasional site visits. The goal is to get the girls mentally and physically ready to run a 5K. Birmingham and Montgomery have developed larger chapters.



YOUTH VOICE

Owen Norwood, 11

The power of a good coach is evident when talking to Owen, a sixth-grader at Clark-Shaw Magnet School. Owen likes playing travel baseball to face good competition. But every year, he keeps returning to Rock Spears, his YMCA basketball coach since he was 5 years old.

“He teaches you to just go have fun and teaches you good fundamentals,” Owen says. “He does different drills and lets us play. He doesn’t yell.”

Don’t get Owen wrong; there’s a lot he enjoys about baseball, too. His favorite player is Clayton Kershaw because “he has a nasty curveball.” Owen’s baseball team at Matthews Park reached the Cal Ripken World Series in 2017 and traveled to Hammond, Indiana. The cost for each child to attend the World Series: about \$3,000. Owen’s mom, Kimberly Gordon, wasn’t prepared for fees this high, so fundraisers helped them.

“It’s very crazy. It’s ridiculous,” Owen says of the costs. “Maybe make sports not cost so much. Like, why can’t we not pay for the uniforms? Maybe the park can pay for the uniforms.”

When he gets older, Owen thinks he may be a TV sports broadcaster. He appears on the video announcements at school and likes watching ESPN.

Owen has played football, baseball, soccer and basketball. Playing sports “can help kids by maybe getting off video games, getting them fit and healthy,” he says. Basketball is his favorite sport. He enjoys the interaction with other kids in basketball, the strategy around the game, and the ability to pretend to be an NBA player. Sometimes he envisions he’s LeBron James; other times it’s Steph Curry or Kevin Durant.

Owen’s mom thinks her son’s passion for basketball comes from Rock Spears — the coach who knows how to grab the kids’ attention, be hard on them when necessary, and make the game fun.

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. The espnW/Aspen Institute Project Play survey showed that nine out of 10 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 Mobile County:

Fear of injury is limiting sports participation. One of the most common reasons youth said they don't play sports was injuries (19 percent). Girls were more likely to be concerned than boys about injuries. Girls nationally have higher rates of knee injuries and concussions in sports that are played by both genders, such as soccer and lacrosse. The Aspen Institute youth survey results underscore the need for programs to embrace policies — such as no or limited heading of a soccer ball and the use of soft sticks in lacrosse before the teen years — that help build confidence for youth and their families to sign up for sports, knowing their kids will be safe.

Unfit county recruits affect military preparedness. Male recruits from Mobile County suffered training-related injuries at a rate of 21.2 percent — more than recruits from the rest of Alabama (17 percent), the country (15.8 percent) and Washington State (13.8 percent), according to a study by Daniel Bornstein at The Citadel.³⁹ Washington State was used as a comparison because it produces a high rate of physically fit recruits. Female recruits in Mobile County fared slightly better than the national average. The study showed that fitness was highly correlated with training-related injuries, even when accounting for body-mass index, age and race. Each recruit lost to injury costs the Department of Defense about \$32,000. After gender, physical fitness is the strongest predictor of training-related injuries, Bornstein said. Mobile County males in basic training completed the two-mile run in an average of 16:24. That's about the same as the male average across Alabama and slower than the national and Washington State averages for males. (See Appendix D on page 37.)

Football locker-room assault raises questions of hazing pattern. In May 2018, a graphic 35-second video went viral showing a locker-room assault of a Davidson High School football player.⁴⁰ Rodney Kim Jr., a 14-year-old quarterback, suffered a broken arm after several students pummeled him while on the ground and two jumped on top of him. Nine students were charged with third-degree assault. The parents of Kim sued the Mobile County Board of Education and school administrators, claiming a “fight club called hazing” was allowed to exist for years on the Davidson team. Parents of two

more Davidson students joined the lawsuit, alleging their children were also assaulted by football players. One parent claimed that coach Fred Riley observed a beating in 2016-17, ordered that the players “break it up,” and walked back into his adjacent office as the attack continued. In August 2018, Riley was placed on administrative leave with pay. The Kim family has called for the firing of Riley, who had not commented publicly as of August 2018.

Learn-to-swim programs are needed. Alabama ranks 11th nationally in drownings with 1.5 deaths for every 100,000 people, according to WorldLifeExpectancy.com.⁴¹ Even though Mobile is surrounded by water, “it's never been a priority that water safety is paramount to any segment of the population,” said Gina O'Neill, president of the City of Mobile Swim Association. African-American kids ages 5 to 14 are three times more likely to die from unintentional drowning than their white counterparts, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.⁴² African-Americans make up 36 percent of Mobile County's population.⁴³

Flag football is an emerging sport for both boys and girls. Twenty-one percent of boys in Mobile County said they have played flag football, and 11 percent want to try. The results are much different for girls — 9 percent have played flag and 6 percent want to try — even though nationally it's a game that fosters boys and girls playing together. Nationally, flag is now the preferred form of football among children ages 6 to 12.⁴⁴ Flag is promoted by the NFL and USA Football as an entry-level alternative to tackle. The Senior Bowl runs NFL Flag in Mobile and Baldwin counties, and participation has grown from 12 to 30 teams for kids ages 6 to 12, according to Phil Savage, who departed in 2018 as Senior Bowl executive director. “I would have hesitancy with youth tackle football because of safety and some of the coaching out there, though I'm sure there are some amazing coaches,” he said.





CALL FOR LEADERSHIP

Based on our analysis of the unique characteristics of Mobile County, here are five recommendations of systems-level interventions that can help leaders grow access to quality sport options for children.

Connect great Mobile athletes to youth

One of Mobile's greatest assets is how many college and professional athletes once called the city home. The birthplace of five baseball Hall of Famers, including Hank Aaron, has lately produced Major League Baseball MVP Josh Donaldson, Cy Young Award winner Jake Peavy, NBA All-Star DeMarcus Cousins, and NFL players such as C.J. Mosley, Rodney Hudson, AJ McCarron, Mark Barron and Captain Munnerlyn, among many others. In 2016, 26 of the 90 players on NFL rosters from Alabama high schools came from the state's coastal counties, Mobile and Baldwin — more than any other part of the state.⁴⁵

Some athletes give back to Mobile through donations and visits with kids, but they're often one-off contributions to their old high school or neighborhood. What if Mobile could regularly connect these athletes to more youth in a meaningful way to teach and inspire? What if there were a way for Mobile to build relationships so pro athletes would feel inspired to donate money for a major project that benefits youth? Year-round clinics could occur with athletes in many sports, not just football, baseball and basketball. Find athletes who can connect with girls, and gymnasts, golfers and swimmers who can inspire Mobile youth in sports that get less attention. For instance, there's University of Virginia swimmer Paige Madden, a Mobile native who was a 2016 U.S. Olympic Trials qualifier. And there's homegrown golfer Susie Redman, who spent 20 years on the LPGA Tour and won more than \$1 million in her career.

The culmination could come each April, when the Mobile Sports Hall of Fame holds its annual banquet. Returning athletes could fan out across the community for clinics. Among families with resources, overspecialization is one of the bigger challenges in youth sports in Mobile; too many youth suffer overuse injuries or burnout by focusing on one sport at too young an age. Imagine Mobile multisport clinics with successful athletes teaching the sport they became famous for and the sports they played as children. McCarron was a baseball pitcher while also tossing footballs; Mosley did basketball and track while playing football; Donaldson was an all-state in football and baseball. Call them Multisport in Mobile clinics.

Relationships with former Mobile athletes would need to be nurtured over time so they relate to the need to give back to youth. One organization — perhaps the Mobile Sports Authority, Mobile Sports Hall of Fame, Senior Bowl or a new organization consisting of local sports providers — would need to run point and have a dedicated funding source. There would need to be a clear vision for how athletes can help youth in a coordinated way. Perhaps it's a project that pays for recreation center staffing, a new Boys and Girls Club, a multipurpose sports facility, or funding to transport kids to practices and games. Inspire pro athletes to give back, and they can inspire the next generation of kids to be physically active.

Plan the future of major Mobile sports facilities to revitalize youth sports

Ladd-Peebles Stadium is 70 years old and, according to the city, faces \$33 million in deferred maintenance as the home of the Senior Bowl, University of South Alabama (USA) football games, the Dollar General Bowl and high school football contests. Hank Aaron Stadium was built in 1997 but will be without a tenant when Mobile's minor league baseball team departs

**5 recommendations
for stakeholders in
Mobile County**



for Madison in 2020. Both venues could help increase access to sports and physical activity for youth, especially if USA accomplishes its goal to build a new on-campus football stadium. In June 2018, USA approved a resolution authorizing construction of a \$73 million, 25,000-seat football stadium, though securing much of the funding is still needed. The university asked for \$5 to \$10 million from both the city and county, primarily to be used for debt service, according to *AL.com*.⁴⁶ Mobile Mayor Sandy Stimpson proposed that USA receive \$10 million from the city over 20 years for its new stadium, and USA would provide \$2.5 million in renovations at Ladd-Peebles, which would be replaced with a 5,000-seat multipurpose stadium.⁴⁷ In August 2018, the City Council voted against the \$10 million deal after many residents near the stadium voiced their displeasure about possibly losing a local landmark and the money associated with sporting events. USA said it remains committed to building a stadium.

A scaled-down Ladd-Peebles could offer space for football, lacrosse, soccer and nontraditional long-field sports, including ultimate frisbee. That idea now seems politically dead after the August 2018 vote. Another option could be to transform Hank Aaron Stadium into a facility that houses multiple youth and high school sports events. Any new sports facility using public dollars should be designed with the needs of the community in mind, and not solely as a home for college sporting events or as a tourism engine for youth tournaments. One drawback of sports complexes around the country is that they can fuel overspecialization. Youth end up playing too many games for their own good, and parents end up spending more money traveling for these games. The design of upgrades or a facility and corresponding business plan should be proactive to avoid this easy pitfall.

In the short term, Ladd-Peebles could be used for programming youth sports games, practices and clinics. The stadium lacks amenities that fans now expect when watching college football. But Ladd-Peebles has one of only four turf fields owned by the city, and it's rarely used outside of football season. (The other three turf fields are at Herndon Park, also known as Sage Park.) Turf is important for Mobile given how much it rains. Ladd-Peebles has 100 yards of turf that could be turned around for small-sided games in flag football, lacrosse, soccer, kickball, field hockey and other activities for the community. Put Ladd-Peebles to greater use in the short term even as its future remains in doubt.

Leverage military veterans to repair and program parks

The staffing ratio to maintain city parks is 28.9 acres per employee, according to Matthew Capps, who left in April 2018 as Mobile's senior parks and recreation director. Though there is no concrete standard, Capps said best practices by agencies show a lower basis of park acreage per employee. According to a review by the city, the





The Project Play Parent Checklists offer 10 simple questions that parents can ask themselves, their child and their sports provider to make sports a great experience:

as.pn/checklists



International City/County Management Association and the National Recreation and Parks Association recommend nine to 12 acres per employee as best practice for park maintenance. Capps said viable options for Mobile would be to decrease the service levels at a significant number of parks to increase the level of service at other parks, hire additional staff, or create a robust adopt-a-park program.

There's an untapped resource of volunteers who could help: veterans. They make up 9 percent of the city's population — and 35 percent of them are between the ages of 18 and 54.⁴⁸ With many, their self-value comes from helping other people. For veterans who are in recovery from substance abuse problems, post-traumatic stress, and mental health issues, “the solution is always community and getting connected with everybody,” said John Kilpatrick, a 30-year military veteran who leads Veterans Recovery Resources in Mobile. “It just makes sense: We have a community of youth that lack adult leadership and a group of folks who need leadership opportunities to get adjusted back into life.”

Once veterans make it past mental hurdles and rehab, they can go back into the community to serve. Maybe they build batting cages, mow and line fields, coach teams, design park programming, or handle park maintenance. Through work organized by Jeremy Fletcher of Veterans Recovery Resources, some veterans plan to assist at Medal of Honor Park, such as picking up tree branches and leaves, inspecting the tennis courts and fencing for missing parts, and distributing mulch around trees. Added bonus: The presence of veterans at parks could make the community feel safer at a time when crime is a concern in Mobile.

Create a new model of investment from sports betting

The gap between the haves and have-nots in Mobile County is large. Families with resources often put their children in private schools. That means more private money and the best coaches often go to kids who start in feeder programs for private schools, leaving fewer options for public programs. More dollars for community recreation — and other public needs in the state, including higher education — would be available if Alabama legalized sports gambling. That's now allowed by states after a recent Supreme Court decision. Neighboring Mississippi immediately had legislation ready to allow sports bets. Stakeholders in Mobile County could make their voices heard on opening up this new revenue source, while also identifying activities they explicitly do not want to allow gambling on, such as high school and youth sports.

Undoubtedly, sports betting would be tough politically to get passed in Alabama, which is one of only six states without a lottery. In 2018, Alabama voters in both major parties nominated candidates for governor who favor a vote on creating a state lottery. But religious beliefs have posed a barrier in Alabama. Steve Marshall, the state's attorney general, said in May 2018 that he believes a constitutional amendment would be needed to implement sports betting.⁴⁹ Alabama Athletic Commission Executive Director Jody McCormick said underground sports betting exists throughout the state, but he doubts the general public would have an appetite for legalizing it.⁵⁰

The fact is, some forms of gambling are already legal in Alabama, such as at casinos and horse and dog racetracks. The state just doesn't offer the most popular forms of gambling: pro and college sports. In the meantime, Alabama fails to capture revenue from both illegal gambling in its state and legal betting that will now go elsewhere. *The Birmingham Business Journal* wrote an editorial in 2018 advocating that Alabama voters deserve a say in sports

betting.⁵¹ If Mobile County stakeholders want to go this route, they could advocate for such a statewide vote.

Give equal playing time to all kids

Parents, coaches and administrators in Mobile County described a hyper-competitive youth sports culture — drafts for T-ball players based on skill level, kids starting competitive sports at age 4 and feeling left behind within three years, and children at young ages rarely playing. Fourteen percent of county youth told us they don't play sports because they're not good enough, with girls (16 percent) more likely to say this than boys (11 percent). That's a by-product of a culture that too often treats kids as mini pro athletes in the chase for championships, college scholarships, and pro contracts. This is not the case for all youth sports providers in the county, nor does this happen only in Mobile. It's a national concern. What's necessary is age-appropriate instruc-

tion that delivers to kids what they need in order to grow as both athletes and people.

Based on its review of research in athletic and child development, Project Play recommends that sports programs provide equal playing time for every child through at least age 12.⁵² Too often coaches assign playing time based on player skill level and the score of the game. There's nothing wrong with competing. But kids who quit sports often do so because of lack of playing time, which can be a result of lack of confidence. Kids gain confidence and learn skills only by having the chance to make mistakes. As Michael Jordan famously said, "I have failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed."

There's a time to sort the weak from the strong in sports. It's not before kids grow into their bodies, minds, and true interests. Invest in all kids equally.





ChangeLab Solutions is a great resource on how to manage shared-use agreements.

Customizable templates can be found at:

www.changelabsolutions.org/publications/model-JUAs-national



GAME CHANGER: *Set New Standard for Youth Sports with Power of the Permit*

The power of the permit, involving public oversight of taxpayer-funded facilities, is one of the most effective ways to improve the safety and enjoyment of youth in sports. The Mobile County Parks and Recreation Department put that power on display recently by banning the Mobile Youth Football Conference (MYFC) from using county fields in 2018, citing reports of drugs and alcohol in the stands, parents and coaches fighting with one another, gambling on youth football games by observers, and gunfire at one game. More city and county officials could and should follow suit by creating and enforcing permit standards throughout youth sports.

“I always tell groups who use our park we don’t have control of the group, but what we do have control over is how people act in those spaces,” said Sherri Mims, who oversees parks and recreation and left open the possibility of inviting the league back in the future if improvements are made. “Apparently, I’m the first one to put their foot down and say enough is enough.”

Mobile County’s stand against MYFC offers a greater opportunity for the community to clearly address its values. The challenges for Mobile County don’t start and end with football. Across the county, in rural, urban and suburban areas, examples pop up of poor behavior in different sports. City and county leaders could use access to public facilities as a carrot and stick to set appropriate standards based on Mobile County’s values.

What does Mobile County want from youth sports? Is it more about winning games, or shared values to teach life lessons and get as many kids as possible into a safe and quality environment to become athletes for life? Solutions start with shared values that can be applied through the power of the permit, an effective strategy increasingly being used by municipalities across the country. Examples include:

- If independent leagues in all sports want to use public fields, require explicit shared-use agreements so leagues build relationships steeped in policies that help kids, not handshake agreements that can hurt them. For example, Mims said some park leaders are loyal toward adults whose behavior doesn’t serve the best interest of children.
- If stakeholders determine they want children to learn character through sports, insist on coach training for programs in developing as much.
- If the Mobile community wants to prioritize safety and minimize head injuries so youth can play in high school, set a minimum age for tackling in football, heading in soccer and checking in lacrosse. Require leagues using public facilities to have coaches who are trained in CPR, basic first aid, and concussion prevention and management.
- If leagues want to know whether they are truly serving youth, ask them. Ensure that every sports organization using public facilities surveys kids about their experiences, giving them a voice so programs are designed to serve them. The survey results could be reviewed annually by city and county recreation departments in conjunction with issuing permits.
- If problematic behavior — alcohol, drugs, gambling, damage to fields and facilities — follows certain leagues or teams, restrict their use of public venues.

Right now, there is an open secret of poor behavior, drug use and gambling at some Mobile

youth sporting events, often to the detriment of kids. It's certainly not everywhere in the county or every sports provider. But it happens enough in several prominent sports that stakeholders should recognize and treat the symptoms now. Set a new standard before similar challenges may one day trickle down to emerging sports such as soccer and lacrosse.

According to a survey by the Aspen Institute, 26 percent of Mobile County youth said they have played in a game where adults bet money on who would win or on the final score. African-American children (35 percent) are more likely to experience this behavior by adults, but white youth also reported gambling at an alarming rate (15 percent). Adult gambling on games has been witnessed by both boys (33 percent) and girls (19 percent). At one prominent private school in the county, 11 percent of surveyed youth reported playing in a game that adults gambled on, though not necessarily at their high school.

Gambling on youth sports can create immense pressure on children to perform and win at all costs — the exact opposite of what kids' games should be about. “The kids see it,” said Andrew Thomas, a community activist and football coach. “They’ve been promised money if the game goes a certain way. I’ve seen the money exchanged after games. These kids come off the field and get this money, and it destroys them.” Even if adults are simply making friendly bets without paying a child, the psychological impact on kids can be harmful.

Fifty-three percent of all youth who have played organized football said adults have bet on their games, with younger kids reporting the most activity. And it's not just football. Forty-one percent of county youth who said they have recently played baseball (either organized or with friends) have experienced adults gambling on youth sports games; it's 38 percent for youth who recently played basketball.

Thirty-nine percent of adult stakeholders said they are aware of youth sports gambling in the county. “We do know there is gambling going on in youth sports,” said Matthew Capps, who left in April 2018 as the city's senior director of parks and recreation. “I'm sure it happens in many sports at different levels.”

City and county leaders could make greater efforts to crack down on youth sports gambling and unsavory spectator behavior, and in the process, use the power of the permit as an incentive. For sports providers that are making great efforts to create a positive playing environment, reward them with greater use of public fields.

The power of the permit opens an opportunity for dialogue. One dilemma facing the city is how to balance field use at parks between different sports in different seasons. At some parks, travel baseball parents say they spend money maintaining fields only to see football teams damage the grass by practicing on the outfield. While not ideal





for the grass, the football players need a place to play given limited options. Very intentional dialogue between all parties should lead to written agreements that recognize the needs of all children, not just those teams putting money into the park.

Positive playing experiences also mean feeling safe. Injuries were one of the most common reasons Mobile County youth said they don't play sports. Girls were more likely to be concerned than boys about injuries. Investing in youth participation means investing in children's physical and emotional safety. Municipalities could require that to use public facilities, an athletic trainer — or someone with medical training — attend all youth sports practices and games. This would be especially valuable in contact sports (football, soccer, lacrosse, wrestling).

Initially, this might be a difficult challenge for some sports providers. Athletic trainers can be in short supply and cost money. But setting the standard could rally the community to think outside the box. Shared partnerships could be created with local hospitals and universities to use professionals and students trained in that expertise. Sports leagues could make concerted efforts to identify parents and local community members with medical training who could volunteer to attend practices or games, or better yet, coach the team.

On the field, Mobile should demand proper behavior from players and coaches. While just one example, the MYFC situation is a cautionary story of what happens when a league goes astray. According to MYFC, 19 players, coaches and administrators were suspended in the 2017 football season for actions that included fighting on the field, profanity, arguing with officials, and impermissible practice and recruiting.⁵³ Eight of the suspensions were handed down against players, including kids as young as 5 years old. "We are trying to get coaches to understand that the attitudes and actions of our youth are the direct reflection of the coaches," said MYFC Athletic Director Jerry Ford.

The problems for MYFC, which is Mobile's largest and longest-running football league dating to 1971, didn't happen overnight. Ford acknowledged that his league's games sometimes involve alcohol in the stands and that he has heard rumors of gambling. Ford said the league's reputation was tarnished by the past board of directors, who were voted out after the 2017 season. He called for the city and county to provide volunteer police to help cut down on drugs and alcohol at parks.

For municipalities, the ultimate power of the permit is that it can create much-needed dialogue and policies. The values of a community are displayed when sports providers sit down with municipalities and craft memorandums of understanding and shared-use agreements — and then follow through on those terms.

Stricter enforcement by public officials will upset some people. Mims said she received complaints after banning MYFC. But she heard from many more happy parents who want a safe, positive experience for their kids when they play sports.

And ultimately, keeping kids healthy and happy should be the focus for youth sports to create more athletes for life.





IDEAS

The ideas below can help reimagine youth sports through the core values of community collaboration, health and inclusion. They were developed through interviews by the Aspen Institute with community leaders and from our survey, in which Mobile County stakeholders offered feedback on how well they are providing access to quality youth sport.

Community Recreation Groups

Recruit college athletes as youth coaches and programmers: More than 700 athletes at University of South Alabama, University of Mobile, Spring Hill College and Bishop State Community College are largely an untapped resource. They're young enough to relate to youth and experienced enough from competing in college to teach and inspire kids.

Share ideas among sports: Have a quarterly, county-wide workshop for coaches and program administrators to discuss best practices and arising challenges. Make sure the workshop is open to all sports; good ideas from one sport should flow to another.

Engage parents/guardians: Connect parents with other parents on the team for car-pool transportation. Organize a fitness session for parents while their child is at practice because youth model their parents' behavior. Distribute the Project Play Parent Checklists ([as.pn/checklists](#)) that provide 10 questions parents can ask themselves, their child and local sport providers.

National Sport Organizations

Create a youth sports festival: Make it the annual Mardi Gras of youth sports. Invite national governing bodies and other sports organizations to demonstrate their sport. Highlight unique sports that every two years make a buzz at the Olympics.

Teach golf to minority youth: Restart a relationship with The First Tee, which previously offered programs in the Mobile County Public School System but didn't reach every school. The First Tee introduces kids to golf at free or reduced costs for those with financial need. P.E. teachers who get trained receive free equipment.

Connect with a learn-to-swim program: The USA Swimming Foundation annually visits cities with the Make a Splash Tour. It aligns partners and raises awareness on water safety with a goal of increasing swimming participation, especially among minority kids. Mobile County is a perfect location given its proximity to water.

Education

Prioritize girls sports: Make sure Title IX obligations are being met in schools to develop opportunities for girls. Regularly complete Title IX surveys and use the data to make future decisions.

Partner public schools with parks and recreation departments: Offer quality after-school instruction for any child, without families having to pay high costs. Think outside the box to expand sport options. For example, Mobile County is right on the water and could embrace kayaking and crew.

Teach physical literacy: At recess, help students organize themselves into free play or more traditional games that get them moving. In P.E., where Mobile County youth said they receive their most exposure to sports, focus on teaching fundamental movement skills that are transferable across sports.

Civic Leaders and Policymakers

Listen to kids and learn from them: Create a youth sports commission to hear directly from kids of all ages and backgrounds to understand their needs and barriers for quality access to sports and physical activity. Use listening sessions, surveys, and civic engagement projects to collectively launch new recreation and sport activities.

Align priorities: Create partnerships among city agencies, direct-service youth providers, and foundations or other funders. Work together as community leaders for intentional and meaningful commitments to action that improve facilities and programming for youth.

Reinvent the Fun Mobile: With very little publicity, the city has a truck drive to neighborhoods in the summer and create games for kids. It hasn't gone as well as the city hoped. Better marketing and switching to evening hours could help, since few kids play outside in the daytime summer heat.

Apply for free, donated equipment
through Good Sports:
www.goodsports.org/apply

Tech & Media

Market youth sports: Seven percent of county youth said they don't play sports often because it's difficult to know what programming is available. Create a digital presence through a website, app, and social media that's a central portal for distributing important information (such as registration dates, costs, points of contact, game/practice locations, etc.).

Embrace video game culture: Go to where kids are — video games and cell phones. Create sports video-game competitions and use virtual reality software to introduce youth to sports they have never played.

Tell different kinds of stories: For example, report on the challenges for youth with special needs in sports, the behavior of parents at games, and where the money goes for travel teams. Hold Mobile County sports providers accountable, and celebrate the best actors in this space.

Business and Industry

Corporate responsibility: Develop a rewards system for employees who become certified trained coaches. A flex-hours policy could allow employees to volunteer to coach.

Raise money through a corporate challenge: Create a competition where businesses compete against each other — with their employees' kids — in multiple sporting events. The money raised could fund youth sports, while employees model proper behavior in sports by enjoying the spirit of friendly competition.

Support transportation needs: Help find transportation — buses, vans, volunteer drivers — to take youth to and from practices, games, rec centers, and parks. Sponsor a project that attacks transportation barriers.

Public Health

Partner on athletic trainers: Hospitals and local universities can partner to provide athletic trainers and physicians in residence for high schools. Potential partners include the University of South Alabama, University of Mobile and Providence Hospital.

Integrate policy: Provide research support to policy leaders and encourage evidence-based action on policy decisions related to youth sports and physical activity.

Commit to action: Fund initiatives that promote quality sport participation and physical activity. Communicate that the lack of physical activity by too many youth is a public health concern.

Parents/Guardians

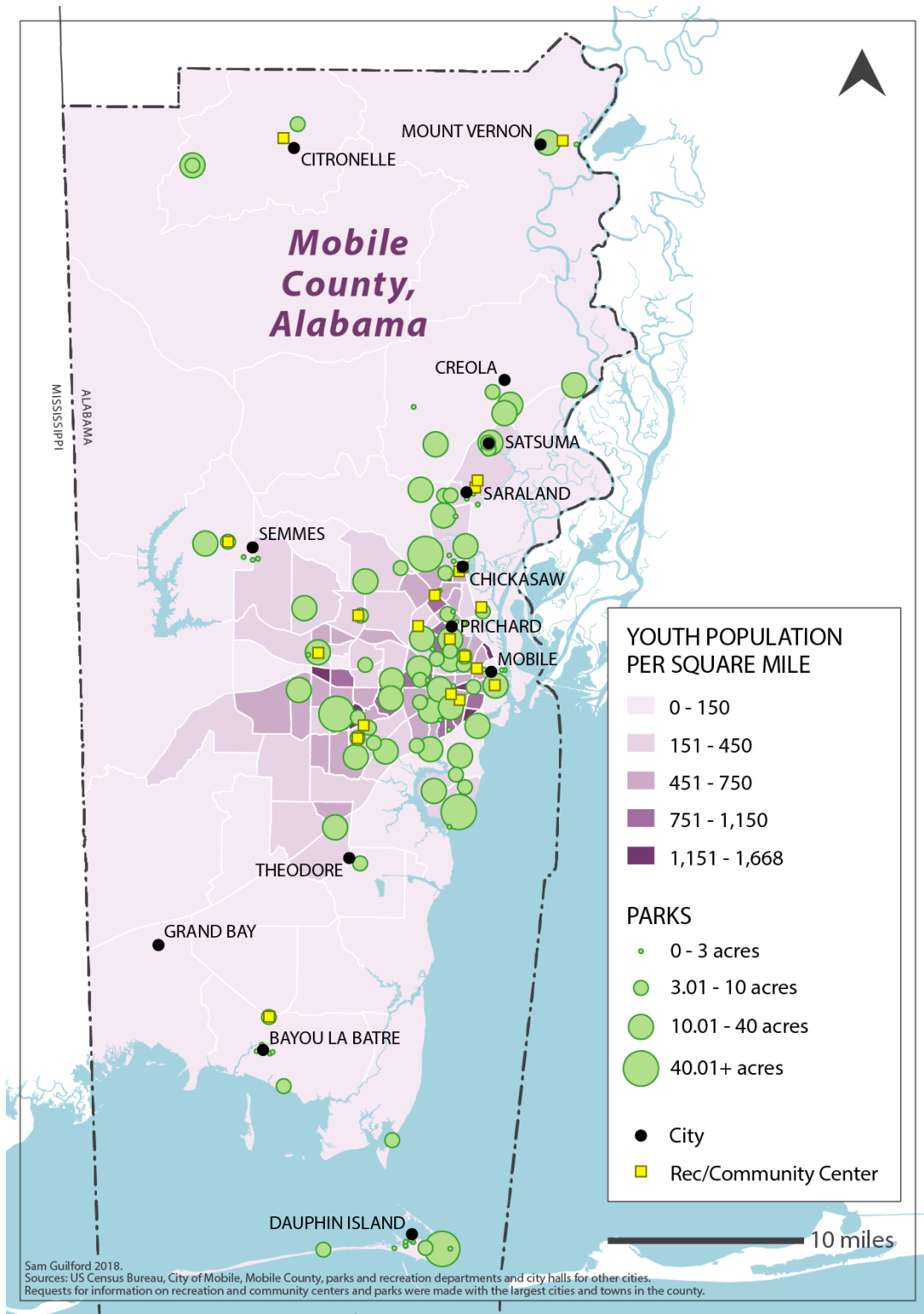
Get involved: Volunteer your time to coach, serve on the board of a sports provider, or help run a park. Get trained so you can serve youth, or find someone who can help in an area where you may be weak.

Adopt “Sandlot Day”: Schedule a day each season when the adults step aside and the players get to run the show — lineups, substitutions, strategic decisions — like the days of sandlot sports. Youth get to learn problem-solving; adults see what youth want from a sport.

Choose leagues that play by safer rules: USA Football now promotes modified games: no more kickoffs, fewer players on a team, and a smaller field. Also, flag football should be a viable option for families that don't want to play tackle (for boys and girls). In baseball, choose leagues that enforce pitch counts for pitchers. In soccer, play in leagues that don't allow heading in practices or games under the age of 11 and only in practices for ages 11 to 13.

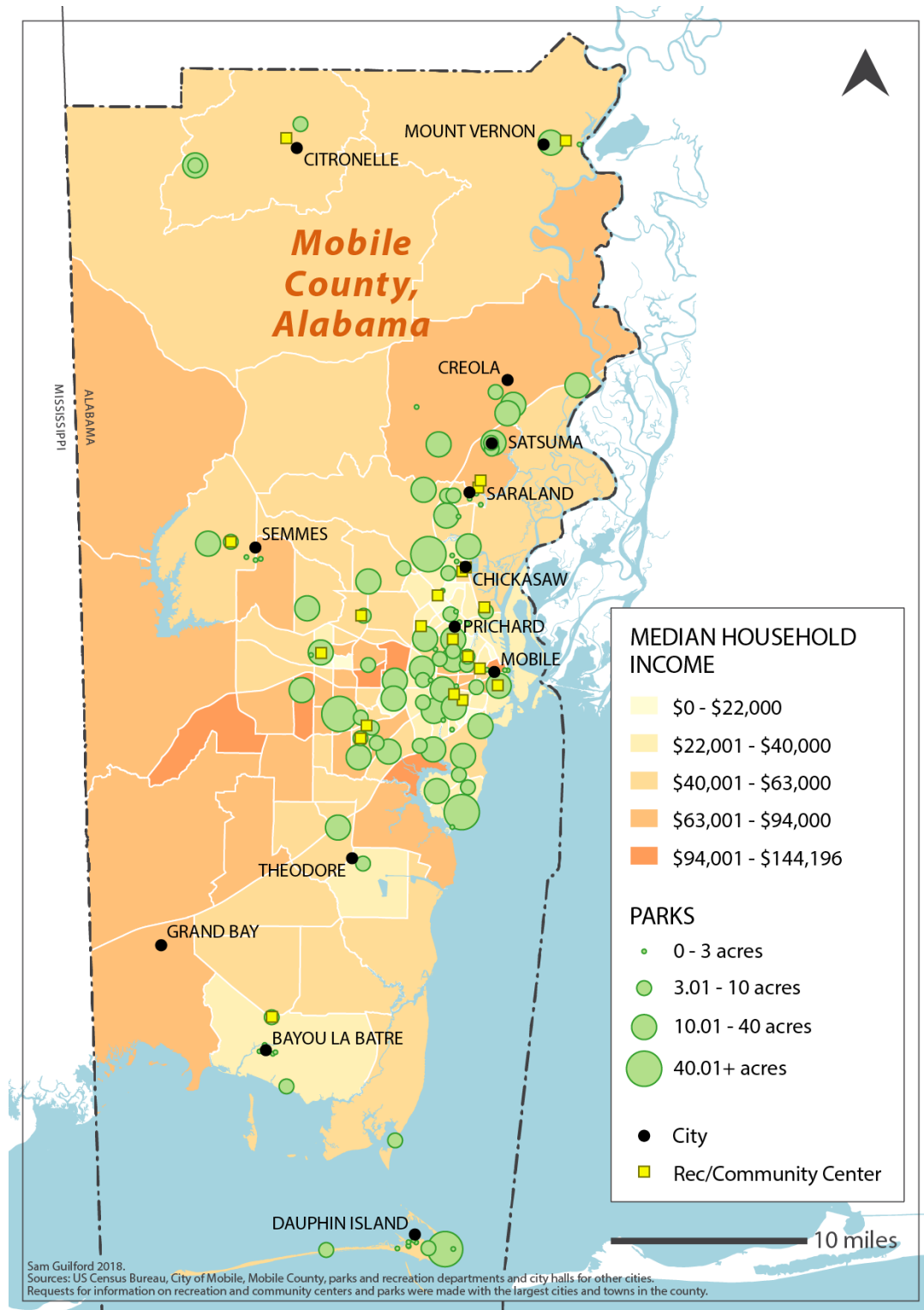
APPENDIX A

MOBILE COUNTY PARKS, RECREATION AND COMMUNITY CENTERS BY YOUTH POPULATION



APPENDIX B

MOBILE COUNTY PARKS, RECREATION AND COMMUNITY CENTERS BY HOUSEHOLD INCOME

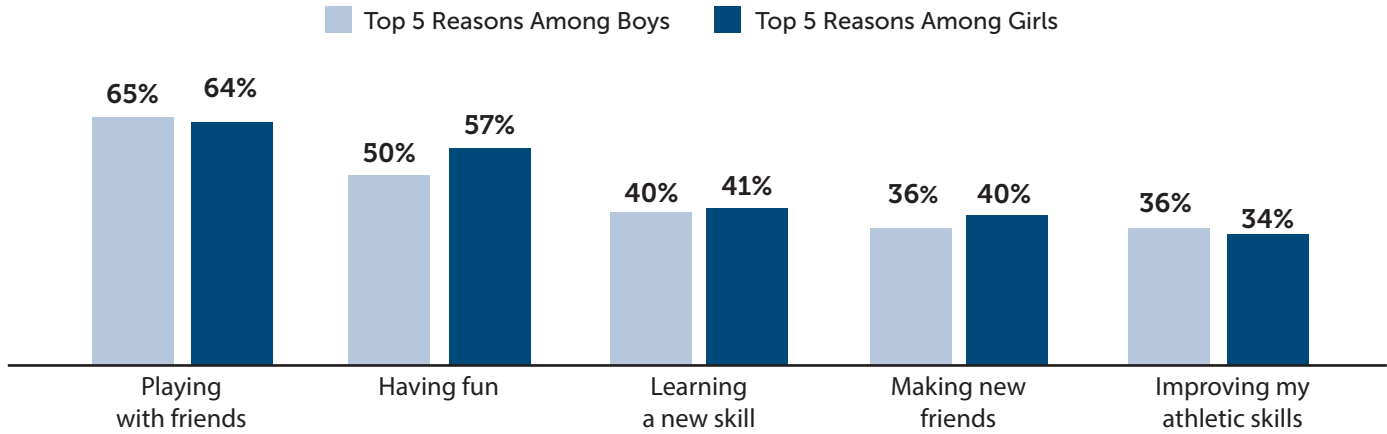


APPENDIX C

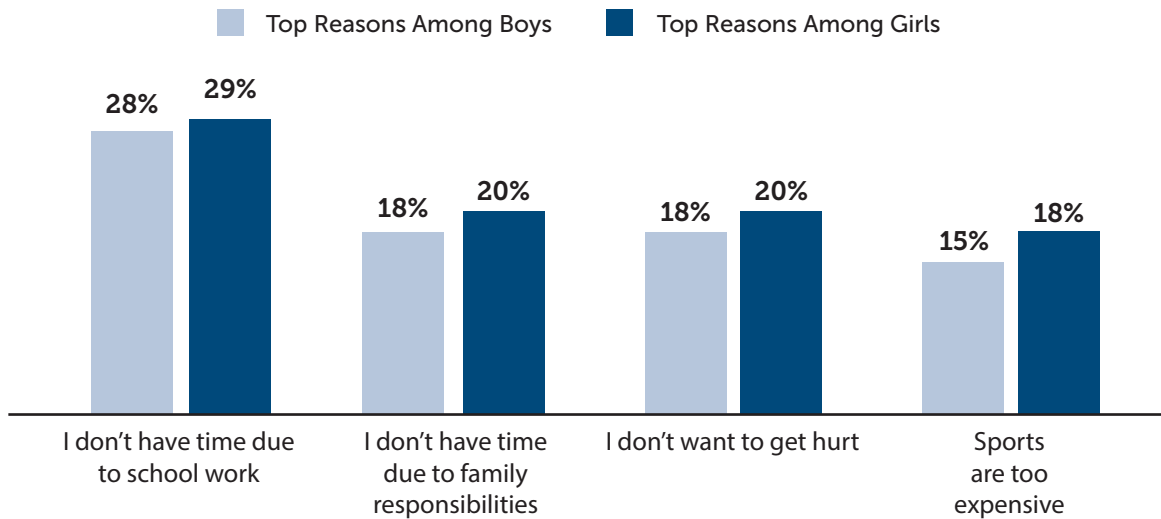
ASPEN INSTITUTE YOUTH SURVEY DATA

1,721 Mobile County youth (K-12) were surveyed across 17 schools

What Mobile County Kids Like Most About Sports



Why Mobile County Kids Say They Don't Play



How Youth Get to Practices, Games and Play Spaces

DRIVEN BY PARENT/GUARDIAN



BOYS
77%

GIRLS
82%

DRIVEN BY SOMEONE ELSE



BOYS
22%

GIRLS
32%

WALK



BOYS
10%

GIRLS
7%

PUBLIC BUS



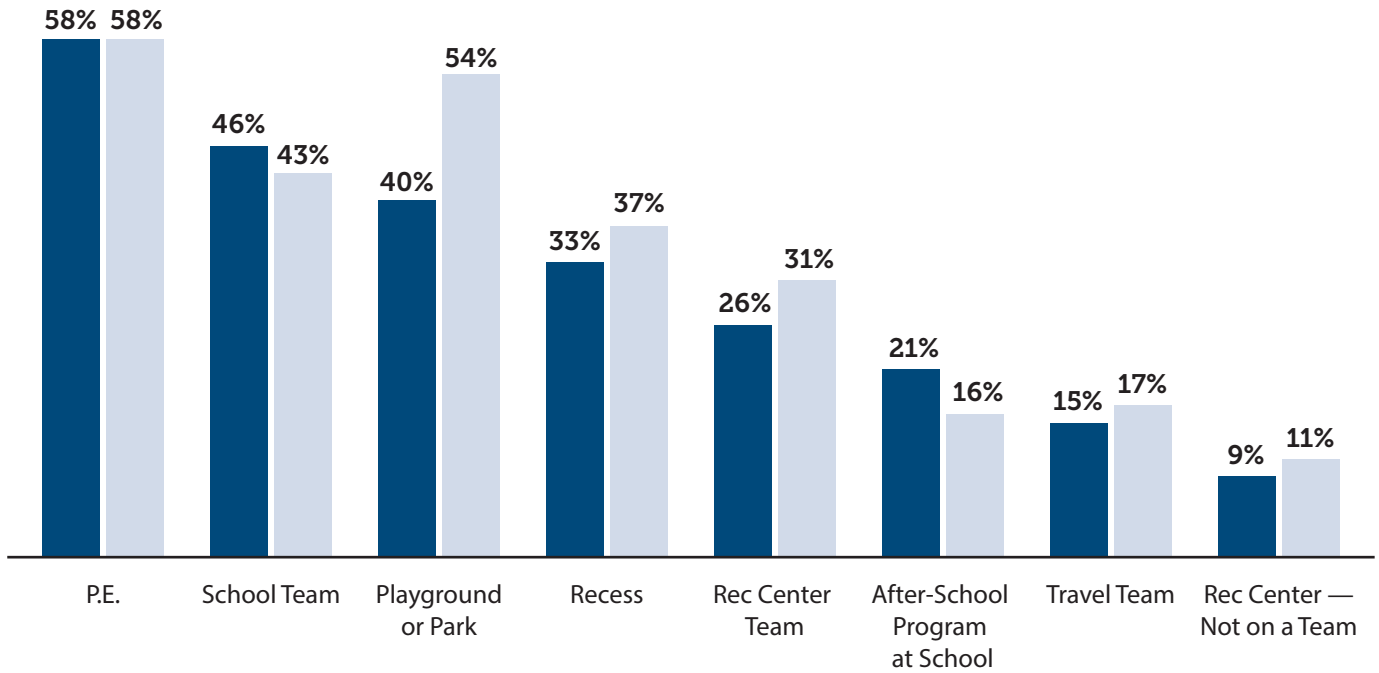
BOYS
22%

GIRLS
22%

APPENDIX C (CONTINUED)

Where Mobile County Kids Play Sports

■ Girls ■ Boys



APPENDIX D

FITNESS LEVELS OF MOBILE COUNTY SOLDIERS

SOLDIER CHARACTERISTICS	MOBILE COUNTY	ALABAMA	WASHINGTON STATE	NATIONAL
Males in Study	276	3,353	2,845	134,921
Avg. 2-Mile Run Time	16:24	16:18	15:42	15:58
Training-Related Injury Rate	21.2%	17%	13.8%	15.8%
Total Injury Rate	36.1%	34.5%	29.1%	32.5%
Females in Study	61	956	620	34,972
Avg. 2-Mile Run Time	19:12	20:12	18:48	19:18
Training-Related Injury Rate	39.3%	44.4%	36.7%	39.5%
Total Injury Rate	49.2%	58.8%	57.6%	57.8%

Source: Data provided by Daniel Bornstein, Citadel Health, Exercise, and Sport Science professor.

APPENDIX E

CITY OF MOBILE MAINTENANCE COSTS FOR RECREATIONAL BUILDINGS

BUILDING	SHORT-TERM COSTS	MODIFICATIONS FOR ADA*
Copeland-Cox Tennis Center	\$486,601	\$88,500
Springhill Recreation Center	\$395,825	\$8,150
Seals Community Center	\$357,500	\$17,300
Kidd Park Recreation Center	\$297,000	\$16,000
Miller Park	\$233,865	\$13,200
Dog River Park	\$217,750	\$64,360
Azalea City Golf Course	\$158,290	\$250
J.R. Thomas Wellness, Fitness and Rehab Center	\$156,875	\$24,270
Taylor Park Bath House	\$151,334	\$15,350
Hillsdale Community Center	\$149,100	\$46,900
Langan Park	\$124,250	\$12,600
Thomas Sullivan Community Center	\$124,118	\$1,650
Lyons Park Tennis Center	\$101,000	\$52,300
Dearborn YMCA	\$99,852	\$20,600
Trimier Park	\$87,000	\$9,400
Hope Community Center	\$86,305	\$1,210
Newhouse Recreation Center and Pavilion	\$78,400	\$18,200
Mims Park Concession and Restroom	\$76,840	\$16,410
Figures Community Center	\$67,350	\$17,650
Laun Park Recreation Center	\$58,550	\$400
Harmon Recreation Center	\$58,100	\$150
Dotch Community Center	\$44,128	\$0
Medal of Honor Park Gymnastics Center	\$41,100	\$0
Taylor Park Community Center Pavilions	\$32,284	\$12,140
Aaron Park Concession and Restroom	\$27,775	\$16,900
Herndon Park Concession and Restroom	\$26,000	\$0
Bush Park Boys Club	\$25,000	\$250
Rickarby Park Recreation Center	\$20,950	\$0
Medal of Honor Park Restroom	\$19,500	\$0
Tricentennial Park Pavilions and Restroom	\$17,240	\$0
Midnight Park Recreation Center	\$16,515	\$6,300
Baumhauer-Randle Park	\$12,650	\$9,900
Sam Stotts Park Restroom	\$10,400	\$28,700
Maitre Park Concession and Restroom	\$9,713	\$11,500
McNally Park Open Pavillion	\$4,250	\$0
Cooper Riverside Park Restrooms	\$4,250	\$1,600
McCants-Chavers Park Restroom	\$2,650	\$600
Doyle Park Restroom	\$2,400	\$9,000
Theodore Park Concession and Restroom	\$1,050	\$250
Skyland Park Pavilion	\$700	\$0

Source: CBRE Facility Condition Assessment in 2017 for City of Mobile. Note: Assessments were opinions made by a city consultant and only for buildings, not fields and parks.

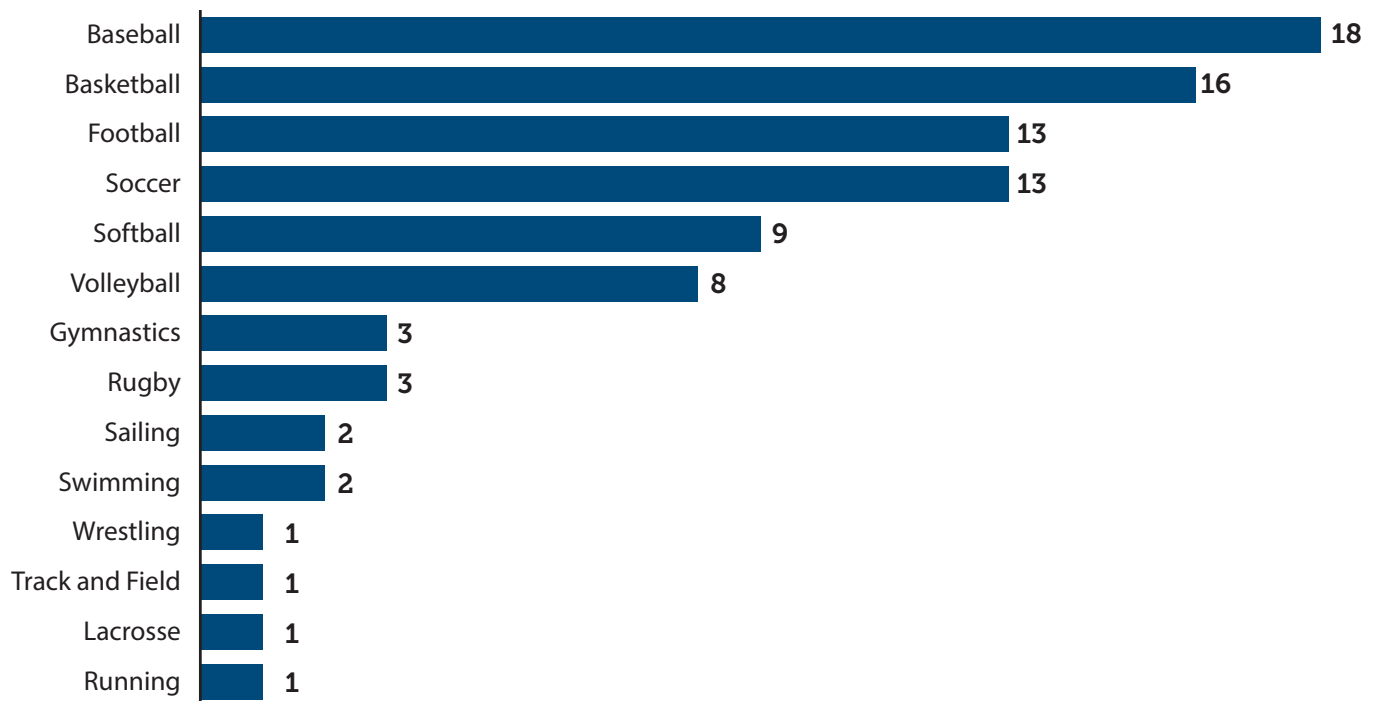
*Americans with Disabilities Act

APPENDIX F

MOBILE COUNTY YOUTH SPORTS PROGRAMS

The list of sports programs was created through a search by SportsEngine, a national online platform that identifies sport providers. The list does not represent the full universe of programs offered across the region, due in part to the fact that some grassroots programs lack an online presence or are not registered with umbrella organizations. This list should be viewed as representing the minimum number of available offerings and as an example of which sports are being marketed on a major online portal. Seven percent of Mobile County youth told the Aspen Institute they don't play sports very often because there's not enough information available about sports programs.

Programs Offered by Sport



APPENDIX G

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 lifetime benefits to Mobile County if stakeholders can get more youth active at least 60 minutes a day, as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. GOPC projections:

25.1% OF MOBILE COUNTY 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 UNTIL THEY ARE 18 YEARS OF AGE	1,128	\$18 Million	\$19.4 Million	1,368
50% of Youth GET AND STAY ACTIVE UNTIL THEY ARE 18 YEARS OF AGE	6,257	\$101.2 Million	\$108.7 Million	7,726
75% of Youth GET AND STAY ACTIVE UNTIL THEY ARE 18 YEARS OF AGE	13,019	\$211.2 Million	\$226.6 Million	16,161
100% of Youth GET AND STAY ACTIVE UNTIL THEY ARE 18 YEARS OF AGE	19,796	\$321.4 Million	\$344.7 Million	24,608

**According to the CDC, 15.2% of Mobile County females ages 14 to 18 meet the recommended 60 minutes of physical activity per day, compared to 35.5% of males 14 to 18. For the purposes of this 25% projection, Johns Hopkins did not increase physical activity levels for males because they already exceeded 25%. The physical activity levels for females were increased as part of this model.*

Fewer Overweight and Obese Youths:

Number of additional youth dropping below the 85th BMI (Body Mass Index) percentile, which is the CDC’s definition of overweight. Currently, 17 percent of Mobile County females and 18 percent of males are overweight; another 13.5 percent of females and 18.6 percent of males are obese (at or above the 95th BMI percentile).

Direct Medical Costs Averted:

By reducing youth’s 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

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CREDITS

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The Caring Foundation (TCF) was established in 1990 by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama to serve as a corporate charitable foundation for philanthropic needs within the state. TCF is focused on improving the health and well-being of Alabamians by investing in charitable organizations across the state.

www.BCBSAL.org/web/The-Caring-Foundation.html

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