Fields of Dreams: Innovate and They Will Come?

September 24, 2014  |  Chicago, IL

@AspenInstSports #ProjectPlay
Support for this conversation is provided by Nike through Designed to Move, a framework co-authored with the American College of Sports Medicine to address the global epidemic of physical inactivity. The University of Florida’s Sport Policy & Research Collaborative provided research support, and the Illinois Youth Sport Summit supplied meeting space.

The Aspen Institute Sports & Society Program thanks each of these event partners.
Welcome to Chicago, one of America’s great cities. Just fly over the top and you can see why. More than 580 parks, green patches amid the urban density, the legacy of the Playground Movement from a century ago, sustained through a dedicated share of property taxes. Communities come together at parks, to recreate, celebrate (Go Cubs!) and find themselves. They’re essential for kids, who need spaces to play sports and stay active.

In Cook County, 98 percent of residents live “reasonably close” to a location for physical activity, according to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (see page 2). Still, barriers to use remain. On Chicago playgrounds, black-and-yellow signs state, “WARNING: You Have Entered a SAFE PARK ZONE: Criminal Penalties Are Severely Increased for Gang Recruitment Activities and Possession, Use or Sale of Drugs and Weapons.” The sign didn’t stop a gunman last year from opening fire on a basketball court, shooting 13 people, including a 3-year-old boy.

Safety is a concern in some neighborhoods. Elsewhere in Illinois and around the U.S., the main obstacle in providing children with access to play spaces might be a lack of joint-use agreements with schools to leverage existing facilities, or the cost of maintaining gyms and fields amid budget cuts, or just transportation – getting kids there. But all communities share a need to innovate and collaborate across sectors.

We have organized this Project Play event to pump a few big ideas into the bloodstream. We recognize that improving the built environment is a complex problem, as is connecting kids to the great outdoors, and only so much can get done in one afternoon of dialogue. But it’s an essential conversation as Project Play reimagines youth sports in America to serve all children in all communities.

So, thank you for engaging. The strategies that surface today will help inform the Aspen Institute’s Project Play report, a playbook that stakeholders – from parents to policymakers, sport leaders to mayors – can use to create universal access to an early positive sports experience. The report, more than a year in the making, will identify eight key strategies and be released in advance of the Project Play Summit, Feb. 25 at the Newseum in Washington, D.C.

We hope that you can join us again then, as meaningful talk turns into powerful action.

Sincerely,

Tom Farrey
Executive Director
Aspen Institute Sports & Society Program
@tomfarrey
In 2014, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s County Health Rankings created the first national measure of the many places where individuals have the opportunity to participate in sport and physical activity outside their home. Locations are defined as parks (local, state, national) and recreational facilities (gyms, community centers, YMCAs, dance studios, pools, certain businesses). People living within a half mile of a park are considered to have adequate access to opportunities for physical activity, as are those within either one mile (urban area) or three miles (rural area) of a recreational facility.

The chart on this page reflects the wide disparity in Illinois, ranging from counties where one percent of the population has adequate access to sports and exercise opportunities (Cumberland County, in the rural, south central part of the state) to counties where 99 percent do (DuPage County, just outside Chicago).
Agenda

September 25, Navy Pier, Chicago, IL

Noon  Lunch + networking

1:30 pm  Welcome and introduction to the topics
        
        Tom Farrey  
        Executive Director, Aspen Institute Sports & Society Program

1:45 pm  4 trends in play spaces
        
        JO Spengler  
        Sports Policy and Research Collaborative, University of Florida

2:00-4:00 pm  Working groups
        
        Goal: Identify the 5 most promising strategies or ideas that will grow access to quality play spaces for children in each of 4 areas
            • Urban
            • Suburban
            • Rural
            • Special opportunity: Olympics
                How can the hosting of an Olympic Games best leave a legacy of community facilities? What are the lessons of London, Salt Lake City, Los Angeles, other cities?

4:00 pm  Report backs

4:45 pm  Next steps with Project Play
        
        Tom Farrey  
        Alexander Chan  
        Clinton Health Matters Initiative

5:00 pm  Meeting concludes
Please share your thoughts and perspectives on the topic through the following means:

**Social Media**

#ProjectPlay  
@AspenInstSports

**Websites**

Aspen Institute Project Play microsite: www.AspenProjectPlay.org  
Designed to Move: www.DesignedtoMove.org

**Email**

sportsandsociety@aspeninst.org

**Survey**

Post-event, we will send a brief survey to capture your feedback and additional ideas.

*The Sports & Society Program will later publish a report, featuring a summary of the day, highlights from the roundtable, and supporting materials. The report will be available on the Project Play microsite. To receive a copy, please sign up for our distribution list at www.AspenProjectPlay.org.*
Four Built Environment Settings

Insights and opportunities for leaders to consider in growing access to youth sport, physical activity

1. Parks and Open Spaces

Building new parks, renovating old ones, and improving all parks with features that promote sport and exercise are proven strategies for improving health and reducing the costs associated with physical inactivity.

Observations of children in the 2nd through 8th grades over two years in an inner-city New Orleans schoolyard* show that children are more likely to be very active in play areas with installed play structures than those with an open field.

*Mean of children present on any given observation: 39.6

**Equipped concrete refers to a concrete surface with basketball hoops, hopscotch, and other play features

A 2011 study conducted at a Florida elementary school found that the school’s first-graders were far more active during recess after a project that painted stenciled shapes, grids, and games onto the ground. Prior to the improvements, barely half of first-graders were active during recess.


1 Special thanks to Prof. J.O. Spengler, chair of the Sport Policy and Research Collaborative at the University of Florida, for his contributions to this section. All charts based on materials by ActiveLivingResearch.org.
2. Urban Design and Land Use

City planners should pay special attention to the sport and recreational needs of low-income areas and communities of color, given the limited access to safe, well-maintained play spaces.

A 2007 study of Maryland, New York, and North Carolina found that most neighborhoods identified as predominantly African-American or Hispanic did not have any recreational facilities. The opposite is the case in most predominantly white areas.


People living within one mile of a park are four times as likely to visit the park once/week or more as compared to those living farther away. Additionally, those living within one mile had an average of 38 percent more exercise sessions.

3. Transportation

Enhancements to transportation infrastructure such as sidewalks and bicycle lanes, multi-use trails, and traffic calming measures, can result in increased sport and recreational opportunities, and improvements in children’s health.

Parents reported children walked or biked to school more after a Safe Routes to Schools project was completed.

A national study of nearly 3,000 women found that American-Indian and African-American women are more likely to report not having neighborhood sidewalks compared with white women. As the primary caretakers of children, we can assume that this lack of infrastructure also disproportionally affects American-Indian and African-American children.


4. Schools

Sharing school and community play spaces through legal contracts (shared-use agreements), or simply opening school facilities to the public, can increase opportunities for sport and recreation, as well as increase the number of children who are active.

“…when a previously locked schoolyard was opened and supervised, the number of children who were physically active outdoors was 84% higher than in a [comparable] community that had closed schoolyards.”

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Participants

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About the Aspen Institute

The Aspen Institute is an educational and policy studies organization based in Washington, DC. Its mission is to foster leadership based on enduring values and to provide a nonpartisan venue for dealing with critical issues. The Institute has campuses in Aspen, Colorado, and on the Wye River on Maryland’s Eastern Shore. It also maintains offices in New York City and has an international network of partners.
www.aspeninstitute.org

About Sports & Society

The mission of the Sports & Society Program is to convene leaders, facilitate dialogue and inspire solutions that help sports serve the public interest, with a focus on the development of healthy children and communities. The program provides a venue for thought leadership where knowledge can be deepened and breakthrough strategies explored on a range of issues.
www.SportsandSociety.org

About Project Play

The Aspen Institute’s Project Play is a thought leadership exercise that will lay the foundation for the nation to get and keep more children involved in sports, with a focus on addressing the epidemic of physical inactivity. The initiative convenes sport, policy and other leaders in a series of roundtable and other events, and in January 2015 will publish a framework for action that can help stakeholders create “Sport for All, Play for Life” communities.
www.AspenProjectPlay.org

About Designed to Move

Designed to Move is a global call-to-action supported by a growing community of public, private and civil sector organizations dedicated to ending the epidemic of physical inactivity. More than 75 sport and academic organizations have endorsed the plan, co-authored by Nike, the American College of Sports Medicine and the International Council of Sport Science and Physical Education. The collective vision is of future generations running, jumping and kicking to reach their greatest potential.
www.designedtomove.org

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