

2024  
CALIFORNIA  
**Play**   
**Equity**  
**Report**



Commissioned By



# Letter from Renata Simril

September 27, 2024

We are excited to share the groundbreaking *2024 California Play Equity Report*, commissioned by the LA84 Foundation. This study is the first of its kind that examines the landscape of youth sports participation and physical activity across the state, with a specific focus on underserved communities and the barriers they face.

The findings are both eye-opening and inspiring, revealing both the promise of youth participation in physical activity, as well as the pressing challenges that prevent many children from fully benefiting from play, sports and movement.

The study highlights a critical truth: while many young people in California are active, the majority are not meeting the CDC's recommended guidelines for physical activity. Access, affordability, transportation, and safe spaces to play continue to hinder the ability of youth – particularly those from underserved parts of our state – to engage in the type of physical activity that foster lifelong well-being. Furthermore, the study uncovers a troubling lack of access to quality Physical Education (PE) and school-based sports, especially in communities that need them most.

The study lifts up the voices of young people themselves, and provides stories of hope, resilience, and a shared desire to experience the transformative power of sports and play. However, it also makes clear that advancing play equity is not just about providing opportunities. It confronts the systemic barriers that perpetuate inequities. It is why our message is so vital: *play equity is a social justice issue.*

It is why we work to ensure all children, regardless of background, can access the benefits of sports, play and movement. It is not just a matter of health, it's a matter of fairness and justice. Now more than ever, we must act. We must work together to remove the obstacles of cost, access, and safety so every child in California can experience the physical, emotional, and social benefits of play. This study calls on all of us – educators, policymakers, community leaders, parents, youth and advocates – to invest in solutions that bridge the play equity gap and give every young person the opportunity to thrive through sports and movement.

I invite you to read the study, reflect on its findings, and join us in this important call to action. Together, we can create a future where play equity is a reality for all children – no matter their zip code or family income, sexuality or ability. A future where all kids have the opportunity to benefit from the joy, health and confidence that comes from play.

Thank you for your commitment to this critical issue. Let's make play equity a priority in California and ensure that no child is left on the sidelines.

Let's get started together. Let's get started today.

**Renata Simril**  
President & CEO  
LA84 Foundation

---

## Executive Summary

The **2024 California Play Equity Report**, commissioned by the LA84 Foundation, details findings from a **distinctive, first-of-its-kind study of play equity** statewide, along with levels of youth sports participation and physical activity. Since 2016, the LA84 Foundation has assessed youth activity levels and sports participation rates in Los Angeles County through its Los Angeles County Youth Sports Participation Survey.

Building upon this robust body of research, **the 2024 study establishes a new baseline as the first statewide study of youth sports participation, play, and movement, and importantly, play equity** – defined as the concept of ensuring that all children, regardless of their race, gender, sexual orientation, zip code, or socioeconomic status – have access to the opportunity to play and engage in physical activity. It recognizes that play is essential for a child’s physical, emotional, social and academic development and that disparities in access to play can perpetuate and exacerbate already existing inequalities.

The study includes a detailed exploration of gaps in play equity, the barriers to youth sports and play, and the challenges youth face remaining engaged in sports and regular physical activity. The research is innovative in that it includes qualitative focus group data *as well as* quantitative survey data with a robust statewide sample. Moreover, questions around the value and support for public investment in sport, play, and physical activity make the 2024 California Play Equity Report an effective tool for policy makers to evaluate public perceptions in these areas.

The 2024 California Play Equity Report is distinctive across four key areas:

- First, this research uplifts the voices, attitudes, experiences, and hopes of both parents and school-aged children (defined as children ages 6-17) located throughout California — gleaned through both quantitative and qualitative research.
- Next, the 2024 study expressly illuminates and amplifies the voices and experiences of understudied residents who have not been included as focal subjects in prior research— including oversampling of youth in the more sparsely-populated rural northern parts of the state, youth from the Central Valley, and youth from Spanish-speaking households. The survey also includes a robust number of responses among youth with disabilities and youth from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, allowing for reporting and analysis of activity levels and experiences of youth across a range of dimensions not possible in prior studies.
- This study also shines a light on apparent gaps in *play equity*, delivering detailed explorations of barriers to youth sports and play, as well as the challenges youth face to remain engaged in sports and regular physical activity.

- Finally, the study represents the first body of research conducted during the post-COVID-19 pandemic period, and illuminates how youth are engaging in movement, play, and sports in this current moment when social distancing has relaxed, and people are now regularly gathering.

**The research approach includes:**

- The quantitative research conducted as a part of the 2024 California Play Equity Report included a representative survey of 1,636 California households with school-aged children (defined as children ages 6-17), conducted from May 1-14, 2024, representing over 2,686 children. The survey sample was drawn using address-based-sampling.

The survey, offered in English and Spanish, was completed online by parents and included questions designed to assess:

- Levels of physical activity among youth (and parents);
  - Physical education (P.E.) enrollment rates;
  - Participation in specific types of sports and physical activities; and
  - Issues related to *play equity*.
- The qualitative phase conducted as a part of the 2024 California Play Equity Report included four statewide focus groups, including three groups among middle-school and high-school-aged youth, segmented by age, accompanied by a group among parents with school-aged children ranging from elementary to high school.

The focus groups enhance the research by providing insight into how youth and parents reason together and think individually about sports, play, and movement, including:

- Pathways to involvement;
- The value of physical activity;
- Motivations for remaining involved in sports and play;
- Reasons youth discontinue playing sports or stop engaging in physical activity; and
- Issues related to *play equity*.

The focus group research assisted in informing questions included in the quantitative phase of the research.



## Key Findings

The 2024 California Play Equity Report shines a light on important gains that have been made to expand youth exposure to a variety of sports, play, and movement activities. **Yet, it also clearly illuminates that – not all play is created equal.**

**California’s youth are not moving enough** – with reported rates of weekly engagement in physical activity falling below the Centers for Disease Control (CDC)’s recommended guideline that youth engage in *at least* 60 minutes of physical activity *each day*.<sup>1</sup> The study also illuminates important **gaps in play equity** – by gender, race and ethnicity, disability status, and income level.

Key findings include:

1. **California’s youth are not moving enough.** The CDC and the Department of Health and Human Services recommend that youth ages 6-to-17 engage in **at least 60 minutes of physical activity each day**, however; **more than 2-in-3 California youth (66%) are engaged in sports or physical activity** – defined as any form of indoor or outdoor play, movement or physical activity – **less than 5 times per week.**

More specifically, a **majority of California youth are less active than they should be**, including nearly 10% of youth statewide who are “never” active. The low rates of engagement in regular physical activity may be connected to the fact that slightly **less than 2-in-5 youth (39%) have P.E. every day at school.**

2. **Important gaps in play equity exist – by gender, race and ethnicity, ability status, and income level. Rates of physical activity are lowest for:**
  - Latinas and Black/African American females;
  - Latino youth in general;
  - Youth with disabilities;
  - Youth in households with annual incomes of \$50,000 or lower; and
  - Youth in the Inland Empire (Riverside and San Bernardino Counties collectively).

Across each of the above categories, only 1-in-4 youth (22%-28%) are physically active five times a week or more. Notably, **the only demographic subgroup in which a majority report activity rates that meet CDC recommended guidelines is youth in households with annual incomes of at least \$100,000** – 50% of youth in households with \$100,000 in annual income or higher report engaging in physical activity five days a week or more. The only other subgroup where at least half (50%) report being physically active five days a week or more is White male-identifying youth.

---

<sup>1</sup>U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, 2nd edition. Physical Activity Guidelines 2nd edition.pdf (health.gov)*. Accessed: September 12, 2024.

**3. Youth exposure to a variety of different sports and play activities is relatively high—but nearly one-third (30%) of youth have stopped playing a sport or participating in a sport in the last two years.**

The survey results indicate that nearly 9-in-10 California youth (88%) have participated in at least one sport or form of physical activity at some point over the course of the 2023-2024 school year. **However, this high level of exposure to sports, play, and movement is not necessarily translating into regular physical activity consistent with recommended guidelines.** The survey results also reveal that a notable percentage of youth, nearly 1-in-3 (30%), have stopped playing or participating in sports over the course of the last two years.

**Cost, loss of interest, and the time commitment** emerge as top reasons why youth stop playing – with 53% or more citing these factors as having some level of impact on decision-making around their lack of continuous involvement in sports and physical activity. **A decline in the fun** associated with playing also emerged as a reason youth stopped playing.

For example, during focus group discussions, youth demonstrated a keen awareness of not only equipment costs and participation fees, but also how issues such as transportation and a lack of safe, local spaces for sports and play make it difficult for them and or their friends to remain active. In addition, youth shared that when their friends stopped playing – particularly due to mounting costs and transportation challenges – playing became less fun.

**4. Organized sports and structured play have the potential to amplify levels of regular physical activity.<sup>2</sup>** Youth who have P.E. every day, and those who are active in at least one organized sport or structured play activity are more likely to be engaged in regular physical activity (five times a week or more) when compared to those who engage in sports, play, and movement casually (40% versus 28%).

Likewise, when parents are active, their children are also likely to be more active. Among youth with parents who report exercising regularly (at least once a week), 44% engage in physical activity five times a week or more. By comparison, only 17% of youth with parents who report that they “never” engage in physical activity are active five times a week or more.

**5. Parents identify cost as a key barrier to keeping their children engaged in youth sports.** Nearly two-thirds (63%) of parents report struggling to afford the costs associated with their children’s sports participation, including nearly a quarter (24%) who say they have “struggled a lot.” More than 3-in-5 parents (62%) say that cost played a role in why one or more of their children have stopped playing sports,

---

<sup>2</sup> Structured play is defined as activity that is organized by adults with intention to use physical activity and play to stimulate physical, mental, and social growth and overall well-being. Similarly, structured sport is organized by adults and involves defined sport training, coaching, and competition.

including more than one-third (35%) who say cost has a **major impact** on that decision.

- 6. Youth and parents express a strong value for play equity** – study participants express a high degree of support and enthusiasm for the State of California and elected leaders to make greater investments in ensuring that all youth have the opportunity to engage in sports, play, and movement, including physical education.

Near universal agreement exists among parents that the State of California should provide full funding for youth sports, physical education, and structured play activities (95%).

In addition, an overwhelming majority of parents (86%) support more funding at the state and local level for *play equity* initiatives that expand opportunities for all young people to participate in structured play and physical activity.

That noted, **nearly 3-in-5 parents (58%) do *not* know that P.E. is *not* fully funded.**

Taken in concert, the Key Findings highlight that: ***play equity*** – as a concept and a cause – represents an opportunity to **coalesce a robust degree of support and enthusiasm** among a **potentially deeply committed base of racially, ethnically, and geographically diverse parents, youth, and stakeholders.**

## Chapter 1

### Introduction – It’s Time to Take Action For Play Equity: California Youth Sink Below CDC Guidelines for Activity as Barriers Persist

Disparities in opportunities for physical activity and Physical Education (P.E.) enrollment prevent all children from reaping the benefits of active play, movement, or physical activity. While California youth are generally active—meaning they participated in at least one sport during the past year – they do not meet the Center for Disease Control’s (CDC) recommended levels of daily physical activity<sup>3</sup>.

Significant inequities in physical activity levels exist across gender and racial/ethnic groups, particularly among females, Latino youth, high school students, rural residents, and those from lower-income families. In addition, while most parents report having their children enrolled in P.E. class, disparities exist across gender, region, and income levels.

**Youth widely recognize the mental health benefits of physical activity.** In youth focus group discussion, **youth ranked mental health as the most important benefit of sports and physical activity.** While both youth and parents recognize the physical, mental, and social benefits of engaging in these activities, the fact that youth from certain subgroups are more likely to be inactive limits their access to these benefits. To address these disparities, it is essential to implement changes that **ensure equitable and fair access to active play, movement, and physical activity for all children, regardless of gender, race/ethnicity, age, region, ability level, sexual orientation, or family background.**

### Key Findings

#### Key Finding 1: Activity Levels Among California Youth

1. **California youth are falling short** in the frequency of their physical activity. Despite exposure to various types of play, sports, and movement, most children’s physical activity participation does not come close to meeting the CDC’s recommendation of 60 minutes of daily moderate-to-vigorous intensity physical activity.
  - Only one-third (34%) of children engage in active play, movement, or physical activity five or more times per week. Thus, **the majority of California youth – nearly two-thirds (66%) – are failing to meet the CDC’s recommendation of 60 minutes of daily moderate-to-vigorous physical activity.**

#### Physical Activity by Race/Ethnicity and Gender

- **Equity gaps exist across different groups** defined by race/ethnicity and gender, **with females and Latino youth being the least active.** In California, **females are less frequently engaged in active play, movement, or physical activities** compared to males. 2-in-5 females (41%) play less than 3 times per week, as compared to less than 1-in-3 males (29%).

<sup>3</sup>Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). “Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans.” <https://www.cdc.gov/physical-activity-basics/guidelines/index.html>



Just under 1-in-3 females (30%) participate in physical activities more than four times per week, whereas less than 2-in-5 males (38%) do. Additionally, less than a quarter (24%) of Latino children engage in physical activities more than four times per week, in contrast to nearly half of White children (48%).

**Figure 1 – Frequency of Play by Gender (Ranked by Play More Than 4 Times Per Week)**

	Play More Than 4 Times Per Week	Play 3-4 Times Per Week	Play Fewer Than 3 Times Per Week	Don't Know
<b>Males</b>	<b>38%</b>	32%	<b>29%</b>	1%
<b>Females</b>	<b>30%</b>	27%	<b>41%</b>	2%

**Figure 2 – Frequency of Play by Race (Ranked by Play More Than 4 Times Per Week)**

	Play More Than 4 Times Per Week	Play 3-4 Times Per Week	Play Fewer Than 3 Times Per Week	Don't Know
<b>White</b>	<b>48%</b>	25%	<b>26%</b>	<b>1%</b>
<b>Asian American / Pacific Islander (AAPI)</b>	40%	26%	35%	<b>&lt;1%</b>
<b>Black / African American</b>	29%	33%	38%	<b>&lt;1%</b>
<b>Latino</b>	<b>24%</b>	33%	<b>40%</b>	<b>2%</b>

- The equity gaps become even more pronounced when considering the intersection of race and gender, with **significant disparities observed between White males and Black / African American females or Latinas**. More than half (55%) of White males engage in physical activities more than four times per week, whereas just over 1-in-5 Black / African American females and Latinas (22%) participate at the same level.

**Figure 3 – Frequency of Play by Race & Gender (Ranked by Play More Than 4 Times Per Week)**

	Play More Than 4 Times Per Week	Play 3-4 Times Per Week	Play Fewer Than 3 Times Per Week	Don't Know
<b>White</b>				
<b>Males</b>	<b>55%</b>	23%	<b>22%</b>	0%
<b>Females</b>	40%	29%	30%	1%
<b>AAPI</b>				
<b>Males</b>	44%	28%	28%	0%
<b>Females</b>	35%	23%	42%	0%
<b>Black / African American</b>				
<b>Males</b>	36%	36%	28%	0%
<b>Females</b>	<b>22%</b>	30%	<b>47%</b>	1%
<b>Latino</b>				
<b>Males</b>	26%	39%	34%	1%
<b>Females</b>	<b>22%</b>	28%	<b>47%</b>	3%

**Activity by Area Type and Region**

- In addition, equity gaps in the levels of youth physical activity persist across area types and regions. California **youth living in rural areas (29%) and in the Inland Empire (28%) report the lowest frequencies of play more than 4 times per week.** In contrast, more than 2-in-5 suburban youth (41%) and approaching half (46%) of youth living in the Rural North report playing at least 4 times per week.

**Figure 4 – Frequency of Play by Area Type (Ranked by Play More Than 4 Times Per Week)**

	<b>Play More Than 4 Times Per Week</b>	<b>Play 3-4 Times Per Week</b>	<b>Play Fewer Than 3 Times Per Week</b>	<b>Don't Know</b>
<b>Suburb</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>1%</b>
<b>Urban Area</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>2%</b>
<b>Small Town</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>2%</b>
<b>Rural Area</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>2%</b>

**Figure 5 – Frequency of Play by Region (Ranked by Play More Than 4 Times Per Week)**

	<b>Play More Than 4 Times Per Week</b>	<b>Play 3-4 Times Per Week</b>	<b>Play Fewer Than 3 Times Per Week</b>	<b>Don't Know</b>
<b>Rural North</b>	<b>46%</b>	24%	<b>29%</b>	1%
<b>Central Valley</b>	<b>37%</b>	27%	35%	2%
<b>Central Coast</b>	35%	28%	36%	-
<b>Los Angeles</b>	<b>35%</b>	28%	35%	1%
<b>San Francisco / Bay Area</b>	<b>34%</b>	31%	<b>33%</b>	2%
<b>Greater Sacramento Region</b>	<b>33%</b>	29%	35%	<b>4%</b>
<b>Lower Southern California</b>	<b>33%</b>	33%	<b>32%</b>	2%
<b>Inland Empire</b>	<b>28%</b>	30%	<b>41%</b>	<b>1%</b>

### Activity by Age

- **Likewise, equity gaps across age groups exist, particularly for those engaging in physical activities or sports at moderate frequencies (i.e., 3-to-4 times per week). Among all age groups, less than a quarter (24%) of youth aged 16 or older engage in sports or physical activity 3-to-4 times per week, whereas children aged 8-to-9 have the highest percentage of engaging in sports or physical activities at the same daily rate (35%). Nonetheless, the percentages of frequent participation (more than 4 times per week) in physical activities remain consistent across all age groups (34%).**

### Key Finding 2: Inequities In Daily Physical Education (P.E.) Enrollment

2. **Despite more than 3-in-4 parents (76%) reporting enrollment of their child in a P.E. class, less than 2-in-5 (39%) report their child having that P.E. class every day.** Females, children from rural areas, and lower-income households are less active despite their enrollment in P.E. classes.

### Daily P.E. Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity

- **Both Latinas and Black / African American females tend to have lower enrollment rates in P.E. classes than their male classmates of the same race.** Despite overall enrollment rates for Latino youth in P.E. class (77% for Latinas compared to 79% for Latinos), there is a disconnect between this enrollment and the frequency of these P.E. classes. For example, of the Latinas are enrolled in P.E., nearly two-thirds (64%) do not have daily classes. Similarly, for Black / African American students, a lower percentage of female students (75%) are enrolled in these classes compared to male students (81%). Nonetheless, the frequency of P.E. classes is similar across genders; more than half of Black / African American students do not have daily P.E. classes (53% for females, 52% for males). Additionally, **AAPI youth have the lowest enrollment rate and the highest frequency of not having daily P.E.** AAPI females who are enrolled have the highest percentage of *not* having daily P.E. classes (70%) and nearly half (48%) of AAPI females have P.E. classes only *once or twice* a week.

### Daily P.E. Enrollment by Age

- **Older high school students (age 16 and older) and homeschooled students report the lowest P.E. class enrollment rates.** More than half (56%) of children aged 16 or older report enrollment in a P.E. class. Less than a third (31%) of homeschool students are enrolled in a P.E. class, and of those enrolled, less than



2-in-7 (27%) have the class every day. In contrast, nearly 4-in-5 public school students (79%) are enrolled in a P.E. class.

### Key Finding 3: Benefits of Active Play

3. Disparities in opportunities for physical activity and P.E. enrollment prevent all children from accessing the benefits of active play, movement, or physical activity. According to parents, **the top three perceived benefits of active play include physical health (92%), confidence-building / self-esteem (89%), and social / relationship-building (88%).**

- **Youth widely recognize the benefits of physical activity for their mental health.** In youth focus group discussions, **participants ranked mental health as the most important benefit of sports and physical activity.** During the 16-to-18-year-old focus group, an AAPI participant shared, *“I really like the physical health aspect, but also **mental health is a huge part.** ... Sometimes if you need to vent, it’s a good way to get out your excess energy or even take your mind off things. I personally really think that it helps with character, too, in terms of sportsmanship, but also being responsible. ... Balancing sports and academics can make you more organized and have time management. Being motivated and working hard. I feel like a lot of values in sports you can really apply to be successful and things outside.”*

#### Benefits of Active Play: Mental Health

- Over 9-in-10 parents (91%) living in lower Southern California<sup>4</sup> recognize the mental health benefits of playing sports and physical activities. A similar percentage (90%) of parents who earn more than \$50K annually make that same connection between mental health and physical activity.

#### Benefits of Active Play: Physical Health

- Nearly all White parents (96%), parents living in the Central Valley (96%), or parents earning more than \$100K annually (96%) understand the benefits of playing sports and physical activities to the physical health of their children.

#### Benefits of Active Play: Confidence Building / Self-Esteem

- More than 9-in-10 parents living in lower Southern California (93%), in urban areas (93%), or earning between \$50K and \$100K annually (93%) recognize the benefits of sports and physical activity on confidence-building and self-esteem.

<sup>4</sup>Lower Southern California includes Orange County, San Diego County, and Imperial County.

### Benefits of Active Play: Social / Relationship Building

- Over 9-in-10 parents living in the Central Coast (91%), lower Southern California (91%), or living in a small town (91%) understand the benefits of playing sports and physical activities on social/relationship building.

**Figure 6 – Parents’ Perceived Benefits of Active Play (Ranked by Agreed Benefit)**

<b>Benefit of Sports</b>	<b>Percentages of Agreement</b>
<b>Physical Health</b>	<b>92%</b>
<b>Confidence-building/Self-esteem</b>	<b>89%</b>
<b>Social/Relationship Building</b>	<b>88%</b>
<b>Mental Health</b>	<b>87%</b>
<b>Character/Values</b>	<b>85%</b>
<b>Life Skills</b>	83%
<b>Leadership</b>	81%
<b>Academic Success</b>	66%
<b>Other</b>	24%

## Chapter 2

### Introduction – Structured Sport And Play: The Catalyst For Quality Play

Structured sports or play is a strong indicator of more frequent play and greater sports sampling. In this sense, structured play is a crucial ingredient for youth to achieve a high quality of play in accordance with the CDC’s recommended activity levels<sup>5</sup>.

While over 4-in-5 youth (83%) report engaging in at least one structured sport<sup>6</sup> or instance of structured play<sup>7</sup> in the past year, **glaring disparities are apparent, especially when comparing participation in structured sport within school versus outside of school.** More than half of youth from households earning less than \$50K annually, the Inland Empire and Lower Southern California, Latino and Black / African American youth, and particularly Latinas, face substantial inequities to access to structured play.

**These gaps are further compounded when viewed through an intersectional lens,** meaning that certain subgroups, such as Latinas in the Inland Empire, or elementary school youth in Greater Sacramento, have little opportunity to enhance their physical activity through structured play.

### Key Findings

#### Key Finding 1: The Benefit of Structured Play on Physical Activity

1. **Participation in structured sports or play is an indicator for the frequency of play each week and the likelihood of sports sampling.** Over 4-in-5 youth (83%) participated in at least one organized and structured sport in the past year, and this involvement enhances the frequency of sport and play, as well as the number of sports played. However, it is important to distinguish between this finding and the CDC’s recommendations about daily physical activity for youth. This finding refers to the percentage of youth who participated in at least one structured sport or physical activity *at any point* in the past year rather than their daily activity levels.
  - **Youth who participate in structured play tend to play more frequently.** Among youth who have participated in at least one structured sport or physical activity in the past year, 2-in-5 (40%) report playing five times or more per week, while just under 2-in-7 (27%) play fewer than three times per week. In contrast, youth who have not participated in structured sports engage in less frequent physical activity. Among this group, about 2-in-7 (28%) play five times or more per week, while more than 2-in-5 (43%) play fewer than three times per week.

<sup>5</sup> Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). “Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans.” <https://www.cdc.gov/physical-activity-basics/guidelines/index.html>

<sup>6</sup> Structured sport is training, coaching, and competition are used to provide positive growth and well-being for youth. Structured sport provides youth with positive affiliations, adult advocates (coach or instructors), and a sense of agency and resilience.

<sup>7</sup> Structured play is play that is organized by adults with intention to use physical activity and play to stimulate physical, mental, and social growth and overall well-being. Structured play provides youth with positive affiliations, adult advocates (coach or instructors), and a sense of agency and resilience.

- **Structured play increases the likelihood of sports sampling.** Nearly 3-in-5 youth (58%) who have participated in structured play have *also* played at least three sports or different physical activities in the past year. In comparison, only about 2-in-5 youth (45%) who have *not* engaged in structured sport or play have the same variety of participation in 3 or more sports or physical activities. Thus, participation in structured sports or play represents a key driver for activity frequency, as well as the number of sports played. Ultimately, this increase in the frequency of participation and sports sampling among youth improves the overall quality of their physical activity.

## Key Finding 2: Equity Gaps in Access to Structured Sports or Play Within School

2. While 3-in-4 youth (76%) are enrolled in a P.E. class, only half (48%) of parents consider their child’s in-school physical activity to be “structured” or “organized.” As such, this discrepancy suggests that **parents do not equate P.E. with structured sport or play. Regardless, youth have disparate participation rates in organized sports within school, with equity gaps existing based on school type, race, gender, age, and region.**

### Structured Sports or Play Within School by School Type

- There are no discrepancies in access to structured play in school based on income; however, **access to structured sports or play in school is greater among youth attending private schools.** A narrow majority (51%) of public-school students *do not* participate in structured play at school, whereas the opposite is true for private school students. Nearly 3-in-5 (57%) of those students participate in structured play in school.

### Structured Sports or Play Within School by Race/Ethnicity and Gender

- **Overall participation levels in structured play within school are low. Furthermore, inequitable access to structured play in these spaces persists across race/ethnicity and gender lines.** More than 2-in-5 Black / African American youth (44%) and nearly half (47%) of AAPI youth *do not* participate in structured play in school. Despite these two groups having low participation rates, they have the highest levels of participation when compared to Latino and White youth (both 53%). When examining the intersection of these demographics with gender these equity gaps become more pronounced. For example, more Black / African American females (46%) *do not* participate in structured play in school when compared to their male classmates (43%) of the same race. In contrast, a higher percentage of AAPI males (50%) *do not* participate in structured play in school compared to AAPI females (44%). There are also comparable percentages for White students who *do not* engage in structured play within school across genders (54% for White males compared to



52% for White females). There are no differences among Latinos by gender (both males and females do not participate at the same rate – 53%).

**Figure 1 – Participation in Structured Sports / Play in School by Race and Gender (Ranked by Total Youth Participation)**

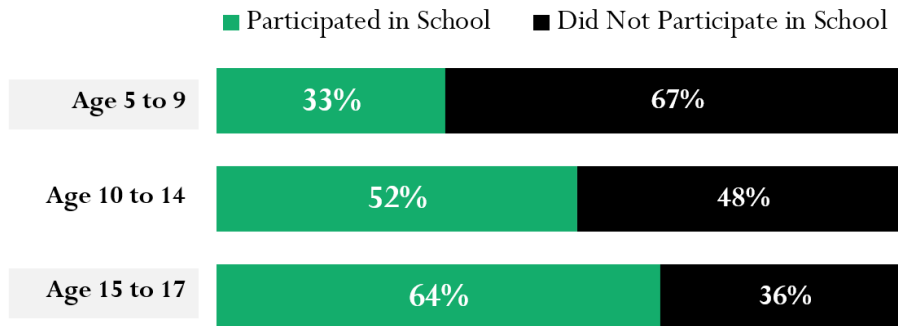
	<b>Youth Who Participate in Structured Sports or Play Within School</b>	<b>Youth Who DO NOT Participate in Structured Sports or Play Within School</b>
<b>Black / African American</b>	56%	44%
<b>AAPI</b>	53%	47%
<b>White</b>	47%	53%
<b>Latino</b>	47%	53%
<b>Youth Who Participate in Structured Sports or Play Within School</b>		
<b>Youth Who DO NOT Participate in Structured Sports or Play Within School</b>		
<b>Black / African American</b>		
<b>Males</b>	57%	43%
<b>Females</b>	54%	<b>46%</b>
<b>AAPI</b>		
<b>Males</b>	50%	<b>50%</b>
<b>Females</b>	56%	44%
<b>White</b>		
<b>Males</b>	46%	<b>54%</b>
<b>Females</b>	48%	52%
<b>Latino</b>		
<b>Males</b>	47%	53%

<b>Females</b>	47%	53%
----------------	-----	-----

### Structured Sports or Play Within School by Age

- **There are significant inequities for children attending Elementary and Middle School; however, participation in structured sports or play within school does increase with age. Two-thirds (67%) of children ages 5-to-9 do not participate in structured sports or play at school, and nearly half (48%) of youth ages 10-to-14 do not participate.** However, participation in structured sports or play within school increases as school-based sports programs become more prevalent. By high school, more than a third (36%) of students do not participate in any structured school-based sport or play. Despite strong participation rates in high school, these glaring disparities based on age accentuate the need to expand opportunities for elementary and middle school students to engage with structured play within their school.

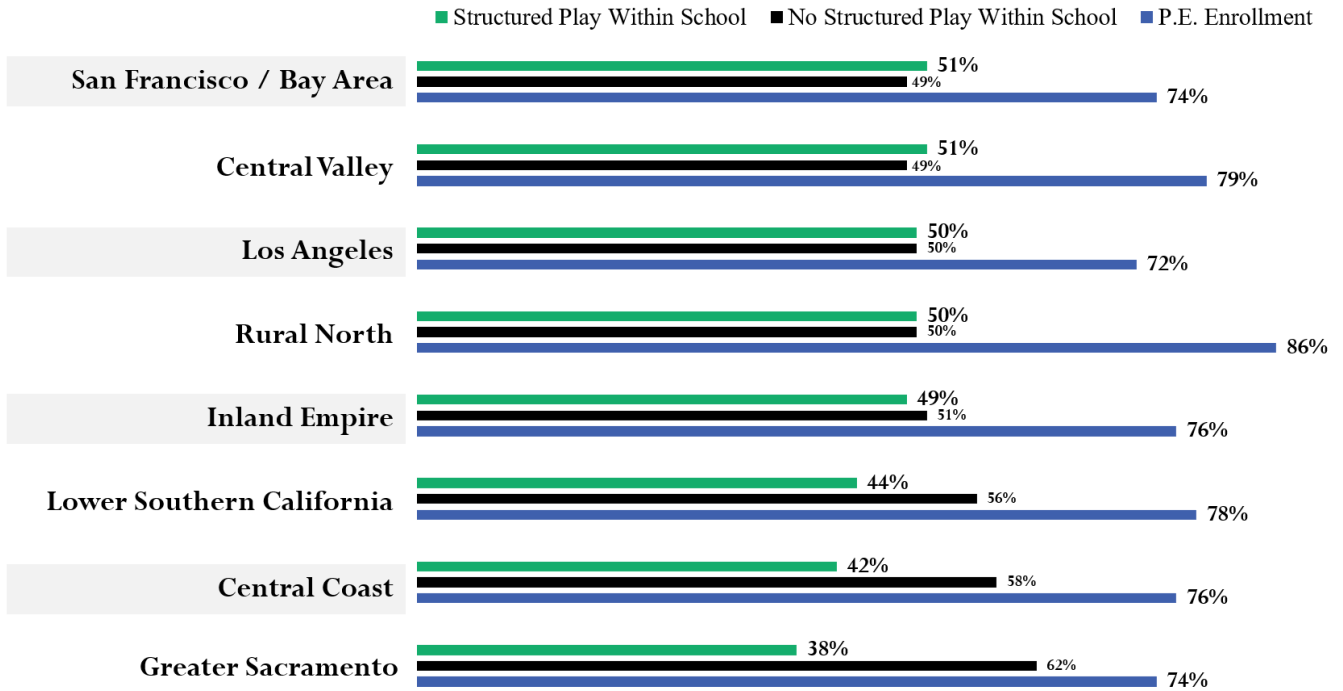
**Figure 2 – Participation in Structured Sport / Play in School by Age**



### Structured Play Within School by Region

- **Statewide, over half (52%) of all youth do not participate in structured sports or play at school, with the greatest gaps in Greater Sacramento and the Central Coast, where nearly 3-in-5 youth from those areas (62% and 58%, respectively) experience this inequity.** In this sense, there are not only regional equity gaps in terms of structured sports or play within school, but also a broader disconnect between P.E. activities and the level of participation parents associate with “structured” sports or play.

**Figure 3 – Participation in Structured Sport / Play in School Against P.E. Enrollment by Region (Ranked by Structured Play Within School)**



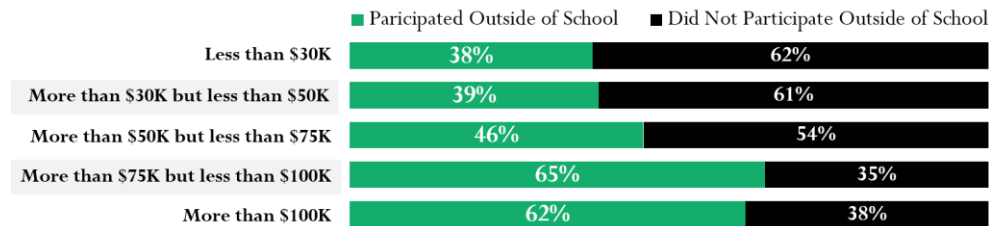
### Key Finding 3: Equity Gaps in Access to Structured Sports or Play Outside of School

- Slightly more youth participate in structured sports or play outside of school (51%) than within school (48%). Despite these higher participation rates outside of school, **significant equity gaps exist based on income, region, race, and gender that may serve as barriers to participating in organized sports or play outside of school.**

#### Structured Sports or Play Outside of School by Income

- Household income is a strong barrier for accessing structured sports or play outside of school.** While more than 3-in-5 youth whose parents' household income is between \$75K and \$100K (65%) have participated in organized sports or play outside of school, the opposite is true for lower-income households. There, less than 2-in-5 youth from households earning **less than \$30K** (38%) engage in structured sports or play outside of school. More broadly, the clear demarcation between those households earning less than \$75K and those earning more than that amount (see Figure 4) serves to underscore the ways **cost and household income serve as barriers in accessing sports or play outside of school, thereby illustrating significant equity gaps.**

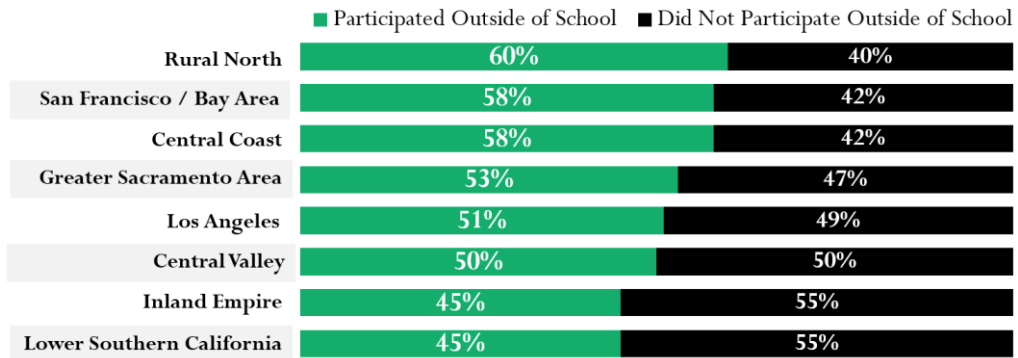
**Figure 4 – Participation in Structured Play / Sport Outside of School by Income**



#### Structured Sports or Play Outside of School by Region

- In addition, there are regional equity gaps in accessing structured play outside of school, with disparities most prevalent in Southern California.** More than half (55%) of youth in the Inland Empire and Lower Southern California (also 55%) *do not* participate in sports or play organized outside of school. In contrast, only about 2-in-5 youth in the Rural North (40%), the Central Coast (42%), or the San Francisco Bay Area (42%) *do not* participate in structured physical activity outside of school. In this sense, youth in Northern California have greater access to structured sports or play outside of school than those in Southern California (see Figure 5).

**Figure 5 – Participation in Structured Play / Sport Outside of School by Region (Ranked by Participation Outside of School)**



**Structured Play Outside of School by Race/Ethnicity and Gender**

- **There are substantial gaps to accessing structured play outside of school at the intersection of race and gender.** The largest race-based inequities are apparent among females. Almost 3-in-5 Latinas (58%) and more than half (55%) of Black / African American females, *have not* engaged in organized sports or physical activity outside of school. In contrast, just over 2-in-5 White females (41%) *have not* participated in organized sports or play outside of school, making them the group with highest participation rate outside of school among race and gender subgroups. This gap is less pronounced, but still large, among males – more than half (52%) of Latino and Black / African American males (51%) *do not* engage in structured sports or play outside of school – whereas only 2-in-5 White males (42%) experience the same issue. More broadly, a majority of Black / African American youth (53%) and Latino youth (55%) *do not* engage in structured sports or play outside of school, compared to just over 2-in-5 White youth (41%) and AAPI youth (46%). Thus, inequitable participation in structured sports or play outside of school exists across ethno-racial groups more broadly, and these gaps are further exacerbated among females.

**Figure 6 – Participation in Structured Play / Sport Outside of School by Race & Gender  
(Ranked by Total Youth Participation)**

	<b>Youth Who Participate in Structured Sports or Play Outside of School</b>	<b>Youth Who DO NOT Participate in Structured Sports or Play Outside of School</b>
<b>White</b>	59%	41%
<b>AAPI</b>	54%	46%
<b>Black / African American</b>	47%	53%
<b>Latino</b>	45%	55%
	<b>Youth Who Participate in Structured Sports or Play Outside of School</b>	<b>Youth Who DO NOT Participate in Structured Sports or Play Outside of School</b>
<b>White</b>		
<b>Males</b>	58%	42%
<b>Females</b>	59%	41%
<b>AAPI</b>		
<b>Males</b>	54%	46%
<b>Females</b>	53%	47%
<b>Black / African American</b>		
<b>Males</b>	49%	51%
<b>Females</b>	45%	55%
<b>Latino</b>		
<b>Males</b>	48%	52%
<b>Females</b>	42%	58%



### Structured Sports or Play Outside of School and Inadequate P.E. Activity

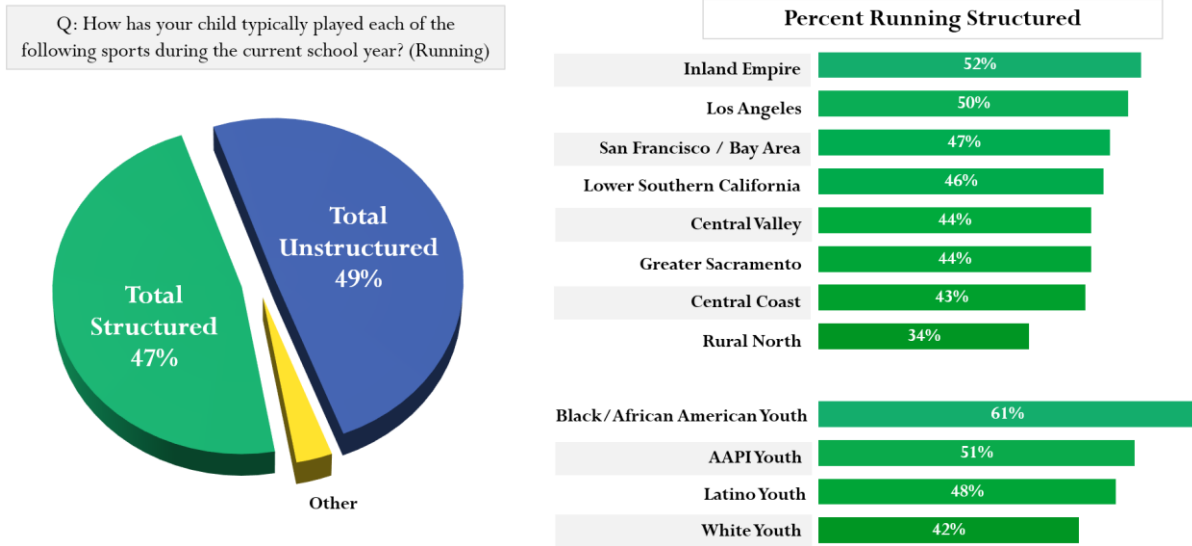
- **Finally, youth may participate in structured sports or play outside of school to supplement inadequate levels of P.E. activity.** Among youth who take P.E. classes every day, less than half (49%) *also* report participating in structured sport or play outside of school. In contrast, nearly 3-in-5 youth who *do not* take P.E. classes every day (56%) *do* report participating in structured sport or play outside of school. In other words, **the frequency at which youth participate in P.E. classes may influence whether they also participate in an organized sport or play outside of school.**

Nonetheless, this finding does not indicate that *all* youth are finding alternative routes to physical activity. Indeed, when compounded with infrequent P.E. activity, **youth who experience the greatest barriers to accessing structured sport or play outside of school are even less likely to achieve the CDC’s recommended daily activity levels.** Thus, structured physical activity outside of school should not be used to make up for inadequate P.E. access, since **these play equity gaps would only be exacerbated among those who cannot access organized physical activity outside of school.**

### Key Finding 4: Top 3 Sport-By-Sport Findings for Structured Play

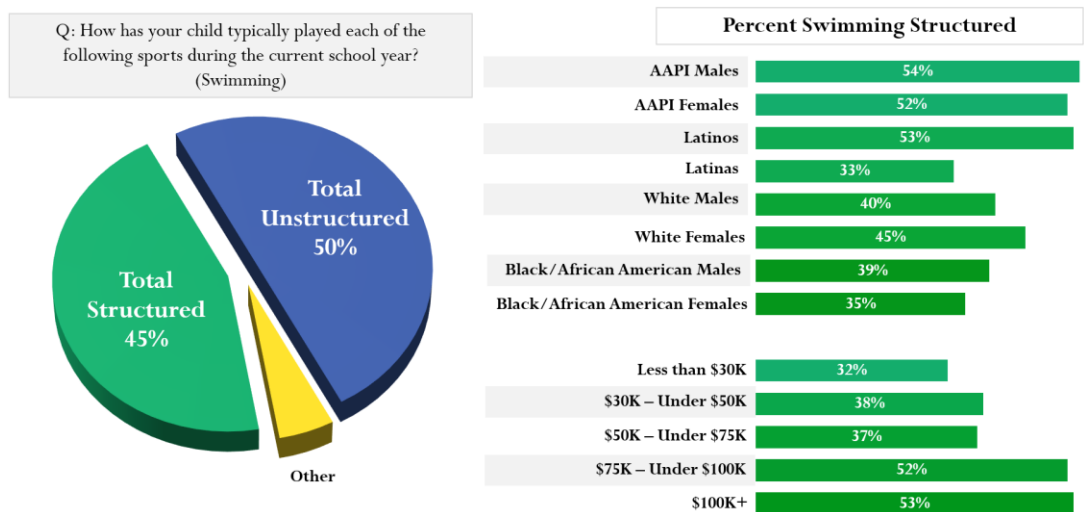
4. **Sport-by-sport findings for structured play.** This report will highlight the structured play findings of the top 3 sports respondents reported playing: Running/Jogging (46%), Soccer/Futsal (36%), and Swimming (33%).
  - **Running/Jogging** has an even distribution of those who engaged in structured and unstructured play (47% and 49%, respectively). However, discrepancies exist across race. Black / African American youth reported the highest participation in structured running. 3-in-5 Black / African American youth (61%) reported doing so, compared to 2-in-5 White youth (42%), who report the lowest participation.

**Figure 7 – Structured Running by Region and by Race (Ranked by Structured)**



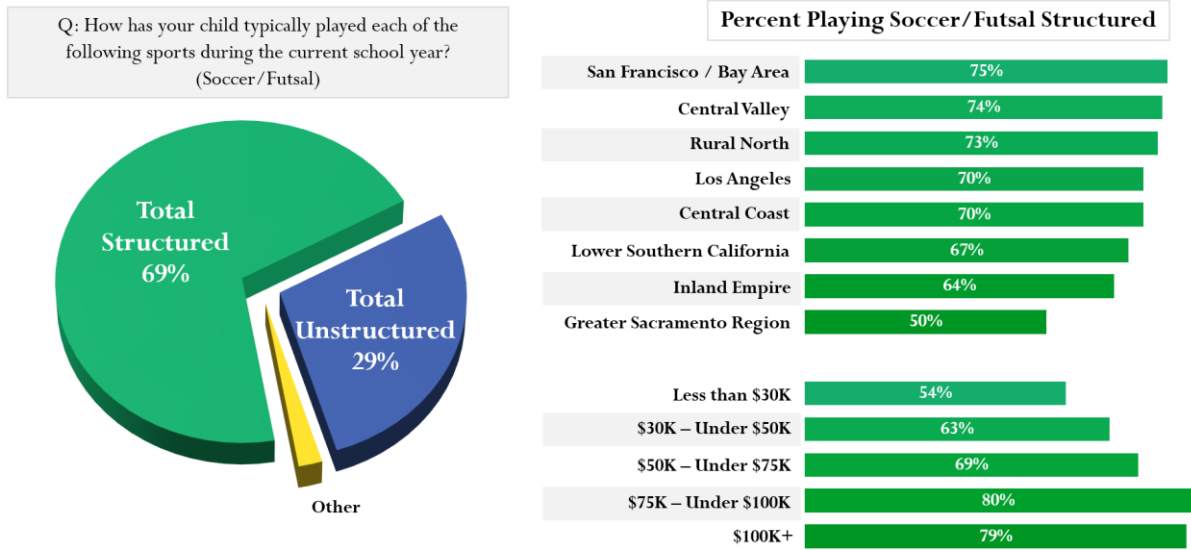
- Among youth who play **soccer/futsal**, nearly 7-in-10 (69%) play in structured settings compared to 2-in-7 (29%) who play in an unstructured setting. However, youth from lower income households have less access to organized soccer. Of youth who play soccer, nearly 4-in-5 from households over \$100K (79%) play in an organized environment, while only half (54%) of youth from households under \$30K do the same.

**Figure 8 – Structured Soccer/Futsal by Region and by Income (Ranked by Structured)**



- Likewise, **swimming** also has similar levels of unstructured and structured play (50% and 45%, respectively). Like soccer, gaps exist at the intersection of household income and structured activity. More than half (53%) of youth from households earning more than \$100K reported engaging in organized swimming. In contrast, less than 2-in-5 youth from households earning between \$30K and \$50K (38%) reported the same. Although nearly a quarter (24%) of youth from lower income households (less than \$30K) engage in swimming, a majority (54%) do not do so in a structured environment.

**Figure 9— Structured Swimming by Region and by Income (Region Ranked by Structured)**



## Chapter 3

### Why Youth Stop Playing

Dropout rates in youth sports are a national concern.<sup>8</sup> Consistent with national annual estimates, **nearly 1-in-3 California youth (30%) have stopped playing sports in the last two years.** Middle-school youth ages 12-to-14 (32%), Black / African American youth (38%), youth in the Greater Sacramento region (38%), youth with disabilities (38%), and those from families with incomes between \$30K and \$50K (36%) have the highest rates of stopping play.

In focus groups, youth shared accounts of sports and physical activities no longer being fun, challenges balancing school, work, and other responsibilities, perceptions that they were not “good enough” to continue playing, and concerns related to a lack of safe spaces in which to play and risk of injury. In the survey, the time commitment required to continue playing, loss of interest, friends quitting, and competitiveness emerged as top reasons that had a significant impact on youth leaving a sport.

### Key Findings

#### Key Finding 1: Equity Gaps Related to Youth Dropout Rates

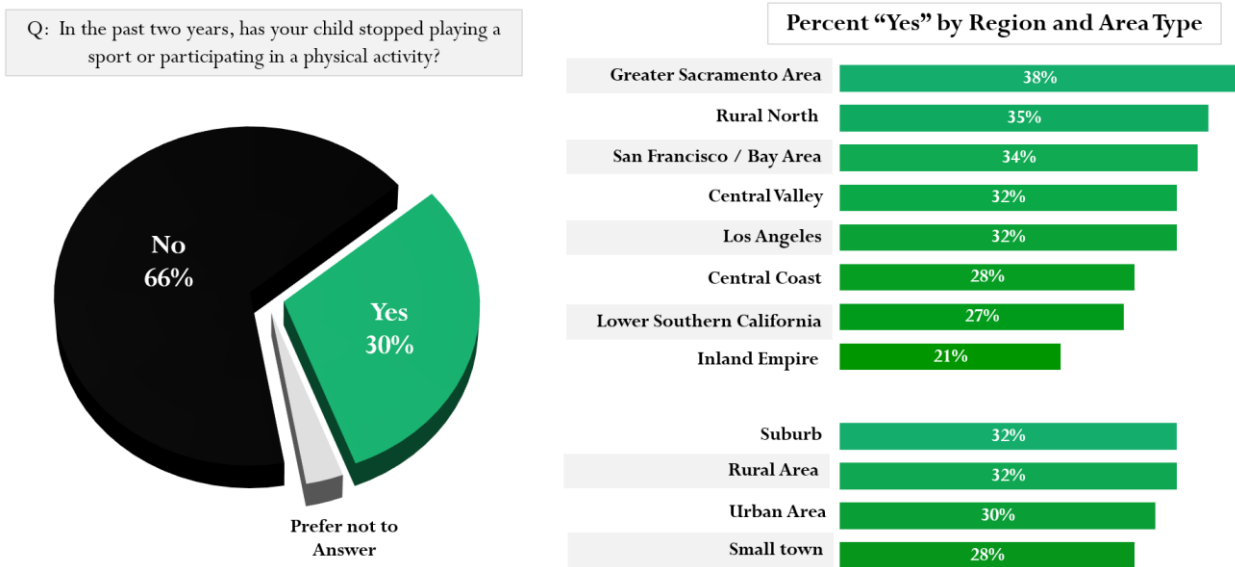
1. **Nearly one-third (30%) of youth have stopped playing a sport in the past two years – Rates are highest for middle schoolers (32%), Black / African American youth (38%), and those from families with annual household incomes between \$30K and \$50K (36%).**
  - Nearly 1-in-3 parents of middle school-aged youth (ages 12-to-14) (32%) report their children stopped playing a sport in the past two years. A Black / African American male high schooler in the 16-to-18-year-old focus group shared how his experience in middle school led him to take a break from sports: *“I don’t know if anyone here can relate, but **in middle school I stopped playing because I was way too short. Everyone was taller than me by like a foot, and I was getting tired of just being the smallest dude on the court and not being able to do anything.**”* His description of this experience may shed some light on potential reasons middle schoolers tend to drop out of sport participation at higher rates than children of other ages. In contrast, only about 2-in-7 children ages 5-to-8 (28%) stopped playing a sport during that same period. Here, different participation rates in youth sports across age groups may help explain these differences in dropout rates. Since younger children participate at lower rates, it makes sense that their dropout rates would be similarly low.

<sup>8</sup> Fraser-Thomas, J., Falcão, W., & Wolman, L. (2016). Understanding take-up, drop-out and drop-off in youth sport. In Routledge handbook of youth sport (pp. 227-242). Routledge.

### Dropout Rates by Region and Area Type

- **These dropout rates are highest for children in the Greater Sacramento region (38%) and lowest for children in Inland Empire (21%).** In addition, there are significant differences across area types. Parents who live in the suburbs report higher dropout rates for their children (32%), but parents who live in small towns report lower dropout rates for their children (28%). This difference in dropout rates across area type is likely related to concerns about transportation (discussed at length in Chapter 4). Figure 1 helps to illuminate these dropout rates across regions and area types.

**Figure 1 – Youth Dropout Rates by Region and Area Type (Ranked by Dropout Rate)**



### Dropout Rates by Race/Ethnicity

- There are also significant differences in dropout rates reported across race and ethnicity. **Nearly 2-in-5 Black / African American parents (38%) report their child dropped out of a sport. Just under a third (32%) of White parents and a similar percentage (31%) of AAPI parents, report the same about their child.** In contrast, only 2-in-7 Latino parents (28%) reported their child dropped out of a sport. Parents of a child with a disability also report higher dropout rates; the rate is about 2-in-5 for those with a disability (38%) compared to just under 1-in-3 of those youth without one (29%). Finally, there are also significant differences across parent income levels. These dropout rates in sport participation are highest for parents whose income is between \$30K and \$50K (36%) and lowest for parents whose income is between \$75K and \$100K (26%). There are not statistically significant differences in the dropout rates across genders.

## **Key Finding 2: Parents Cite Multiple Social Reasons Their Children Drop Out of Participating in Sports, Including the Time Commitment, a Loss of Interest, and the Importance of Fun.**

### **Factor for Dropouts: Time Commitment**

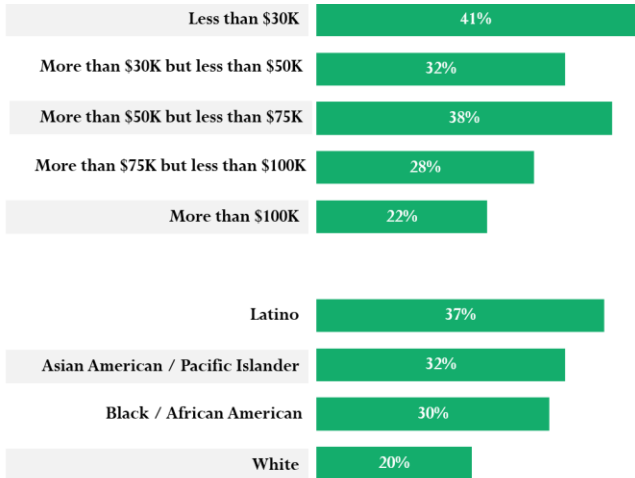
- More than half (54%) of parents say the **time commitment** is a reason their child stopped playing sports. If youth are too busy with schoolwork and other extracurricular activities, it makes sense that they have less time for sports. The percentage who stopped playing due to this reason is also highest in urban areas (60%) as well as for youth with AAPI parents (67%). Similarly, nearly 3-in-5 Black / African American parents (58%) cite the time commitment as a reason their child stopped playing a sport. In addition, 1-in-5 parents (20%) report their child playing at least 5 or more sports and of those parents, 3-in-5 (61%) cite the time commitment as a reason their child stopped playing. In this sense, playing 5 or more sports in one year may become too much of a time commitment, and thus a predictor for dropping out.
- Indeed, parents cite other reasons related to their child's time commitment issues, including needing to spend more time on schoolwork (36%), needing to work (29%), or needing to address other household responsibilities (24%). There is considerable overlap between those who cite needing to focus more on schoolwork and those who cite time commitments as a reason their child stopped playing. For this group who cite both reasons, nearly half (48%) say their child dropped out of sports to spend more time on schoolwork. In contrast, there is less overlap between those who cite their child's work commitments and those who cite their child's household responsibilities as the reason for dropping out of sports. Less than 2-in-5 parents who say time commitment is a reason their child dropped out (39%) also cite their child's work commitments as an additional reason. Likewise, less than 1-in-3 parents who list time commitments as an issue (30%) also indicate that their child's household responsibilities are a reason their child stopped playing a sport.
- There are notable differences among race and age groups for those needing to spend more time on schoolwork. **Only about 2-in-7 White parents (28%) cite that as reason their child stopped playing a sport. In contrast, more than 2-in-5 Black / African American parents (43%), AAPI parents (42%), and Latino parents (41%) indicate a shift in focus on schoolwork was a reason for dropping sports.** Moreover, for parents with children ages 9 and older, this reason is more salient (43%). This finding makes practical sense, since typically older youth tend to have more homework.



**Factor for Dropouts: Parent Work Responsibilities**

- For those parents who cite their child’s work responsibilities as the reason they stopped playing sports, the percentage of White parents is lowest for that item (only 1-in-5 or 20%), compared to 37% of Latino parents. There are not statistically significant differences in the percentages for Black / African American and AAPI parents compared to parents of other ethnicities. In addition, more than 2-in-5 parents whose income is \$30K or less (41%) cite needing to work as a reason their child dropped a sport. In contrast, only 22% of parents whose income is over \$100K cite that as a reason. Here too, this finding makes some conceptual sense as youth from households with higher incomes likely do not have to supplement their parents’ income.

**Figure 1 -- Child Work Responsibilities as a Reason for Dropping Out of Sports by Household Income and Race/Ethnicity**



- Finally, there are geographic differences in the percentages of parents who cite their child’s household responsibilities and chores as a reason for quitting a sport. More than a third (36%) of parents who live in urban areas cite it as a reason, compared to only 1-in-6 parents who live in the suburbs (16%). In addition, there are also differences across ethnicities. **A third (32%) of Latino parents indicate that these household responsibilities were a reason their child quit sports. A similar proportion of AAPI parents (31%) and Black / African American parents (29%) indicate the same. For White parents, this percentage is much lower; only about 1-in-9 White parents (11%) cite needing to spend more time on household chores as a reason their child quit a sport.**

**Factor for Dropouts: Loss of Interest**

- More than half (53%) of parents say **loss of interest** is a reason their child stopped playing sports. This rate is highest among youth in the San Francisco / Bay Area (59%), those with White parents (66%), and those with parents with incomes of \$100K or more (also 66%). Indeed, a White female from the 12-to-13-year-old focus group had the following to say about her shifting levels of interest in organized sports: *“I loved doing sports. I loved having games, I loved going to them, I loved going to practices. It was very fun for me. But I think as I got older, I kind of just lost interest in that, and I am regaining that interest in it. ... I like to do those things, but it was hard for me. I still love to do them, it’s just harder to find somewhere where it actually does it.”* Furthermore, a Black / African American

male youth from the same focus group also commented on the importance of interest as a necessary prerequisite for participation: *“No matter what age or height or no matter what your child is, they should be allowed to play in the sport that they want to play, and **they cannot be forced to play a sport that they have no interest in at all.**”* His sentiment not only emphasizes interest as a key component of structured play, but also makes broader connections to the importance of accessibility in play. The importance of play equity is discussed further in depth in Chapter 5 of this report.

### Factor for Dropouts: No Longer Fun

- 2-in-5 parents (43%) say the sport was **no longer fun** for their children. Over half (53%) of parents from the Los Angeles area cite this as a reason their child stopped playing and a similar percentage (51%) of parents who live in the suburbs report the same. 3-in-5 White parents (58%) indicate that their child stopped playing because it was no longer fun and more than half (55%) of AAPI parents indicated the same. These rates are lower for Black / African American parents (41%) and Latino parents (30%). In addition, there are differences based on parent income, with more than half those earning \$100K or above (56%) indicating lack of fun was a reason their child stopped playing. In contrast, only about a quarter (27%) of those parents whose income is between \$30K and \$50K indicate that as a reason.

## Key Finding 3: Secondary Reasons Parents Cite for their Child Dropping Out of Participating in Sports Include Concerns About Friends Quitting, and the Overall Competitiveness of the Sports

### Factor for Dropouts: Friends Quitting and Competitiveness

- Nearly a third of parents cite **friends quitting** (32%) or **excessive competitiveness** (31%) as a reason their child stopped playing a sport. Friends quitting as a reason for dropping is highest in the Greater Sacramento Region (47%) and among AAPI parents (51%). There are no differences in the impact of perceived competitiveness across regions or ethnicities; however, parents earning less than \$30K (37%) are more likely to cite this as a reason for their child dropping out of a sport. Indeed, a White participant from the 12-to-13-year-old focus group expressed a similar sentiment: *“**I would do more physical activity if it wasn’t as competitive as it is. Everyone yelling all the time and getting super mad if you accidentally do something wrong.**”*

These two reasons highlight some of the social aspects present in sports – if the goal is to have fun, then having friends drop out or overly competitive atmospheres can be detrimental to that goal. It is also critical to understand how these social dynamics may change as more friends drop out. By addressing these two contributing factors to

dropouts, we can create sport and play environments that encourage youth to stay active, especially those experiencing the most barriers to play like Black and brown youth and those from lower income households.

**Key Finding 4: Youth focus groups illuminated other factors influencing dropout rates including the importance of mental health, and relationships with coaches.**

**Factor for Dropouts: Mental Health and Coaching**

- Participants in each youth focus group were able to connect mental health with sports participation and understood the positive impact therein. One biracial youth from the 16-to-18-year-old focus group highlighted this importance when she said: *“Being active is beneficial for your mental health because **it can boost your confidence in yourself in order for you to accomplish other things.**”*
- One social element that was salient in the focus groups, but not highlighted in the results of the survey research, was the importance of the relationship between coaches and their students. A Black / African American male youth from the 16-to-18-year-old focus group said: *“When I played football, I **was really there for the coaches. They put a lot of faith in me; always trained me one-on-one.** And then the rest of the team, they didn’t really care. So, then the coaches started quitting, and then everything was falling apart. **And then the head coach quit, so I was like, “Yeah, I’m done, too.”**”*
- Indeed, many of the reasons for dropping out of sports are compound. An AAPI female from the 14-to-15-year-old focus group highlighted how the time commitment led her to quit: *“I used to play a lot of sports. I did it all with my friends, and the more that they got uninterested in it because they found a different thing, that they like a different sport that they’re excited about, I was mostly in it to be with friends as well as to play. Then when I found a sport that I was really interested in, like in swimming, I stayed in that while some of my friends left. **Then after a while, all the work caught up to me of like going to swim meets, that I left it.**”* Her perspective also helps to illustrate how many of the reasons youth drop off from sports participation can be mutually reinforcing. Some friends quit playing due to a loss of interest, others drop out due to the time commitment. In any case, the result is the same: fewer friends participating in sports. Thus, even when there is strong interest in playing a sport, there can be a litany of other reasons compelling youth to drop off.

## Chapter 4

### The Price of Play: Parents Struggle with High Costs of Youth Sports

**Parents struggle to support their children’s participation in sports due to the compounding effects of the high cost of organized sports, the time commitment, and the costs and challenges related to transportation.** More than 5-in-8 parents (62%) identify cost as an obstacle with disparities across race/ethnicity, region, and household income – Black / African American (67%) and Latino parents (69%), those residing in the Inland Empire (72%), and families with incomes between \$30K and \$50K (74%) – struggle most with the high cost of play.

Furthermore, over half (54%) of parents cite the amount of time required, and over 1-in-3 (36%) identify transportation issues as significant challenges. Parental concerns also center upon safety at playgrounds and on public transportation, which both hinder youth participation in physical activities.

### Key Findings

#### Key Finding 1: Cost of Sports as a Barrier to Participation

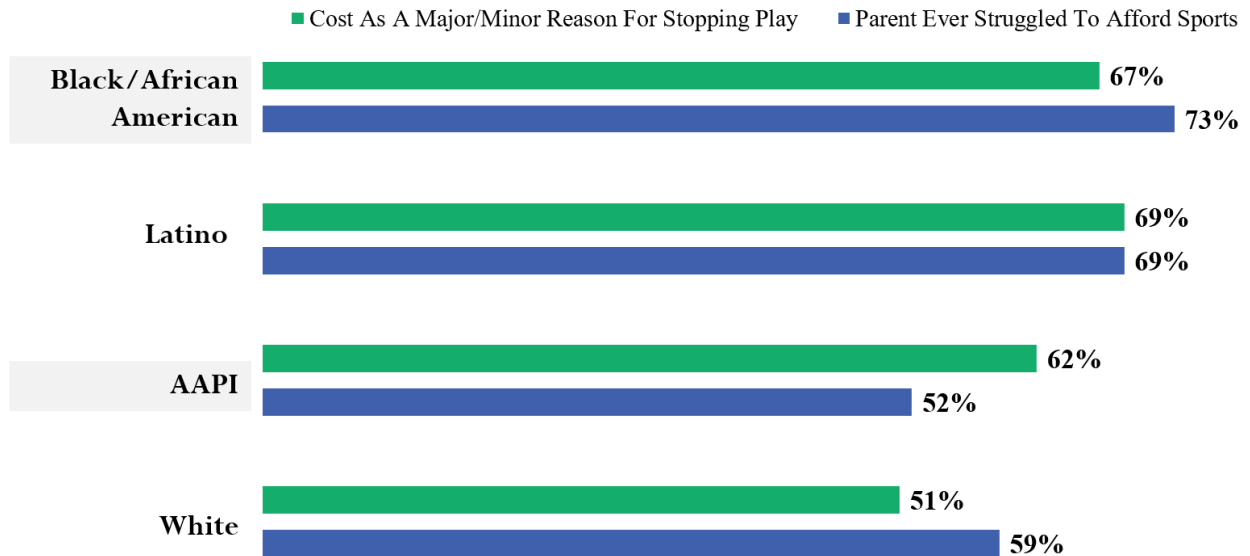
1. **Parents largely identify high cost as a major barrier** to support their children in engaging in physical activities. Disparities exist among groups of different races/ethnicities, regions, and household incomes.
  - **More than 5-in-8 parents (63%) have struggled to afford sports, and the proportion increases to almost 3-in-4 (74%) for those whose children stopped playing in the past year.** These gaps are more apparent when comparing struggles with cost across race or ethnicity, regions, types of areas, and family income. Nearly 3-in-4 Black / African American parents (73%), more than two-thirds (69%) of Latino parents, almost 3-in-4 parents living in the Inland Empire (73%), and 4-in-5 parents with incomes between \$30K and \$50K (80%) report having struggled with the cost of their child’s sports and physical activity.

#### Cost Barriers by Race/Ethnicity

- **Significant equity gaps exist among parents of different racial and ethnic backgrounds in affording sports for their children.** Black / African American parents (73%) have the highest proportion of having ever struggled with cost, followed by Latino parents (69%). In contrast, less than 3-in-5 White parents (59%) and just over half (52%) of AAPI parents report facing challenges with the cost of sports. Moreover, over 4-in-5 parents (83%) agree that household income is a barrier to accessing sports and play. More than 9-in-10 Black / African American parents (91%) agree that income is a barrier, making them the group with the highest rate of agreement. They are followed by AAPI parents, more than 4-in-5 (84%) of whom agree income is a barrier. In addition, similar proportions of White parents (83%), and Latino parents (81%) also agree with

that sentiment. Figure 1 compares the financial challenges of youth sports and play faced by parents of different racial and ethnic backgrounds.

**Figure 1 – Cost as a Reason for Stopping Play Compared to Parents Ever Struggling to Afford Sports by Race/Ethnicity**



### Cost Barriers by Region

- **Regional equity gaps highlight financial barriers faced by parents in different areas.** More than 7-in-10 Inland Empire parents (73%) report having ever struggled with the cost of their child’s sports. This finding makes sense given a similar proportion of parents from the Inland Empire (72%) cite cost as a reason their children stopped playing a sport. By comparison, the parents with the lowest propensity of ever having struggled with cost live in the Central Coast region. Just over half (54%) of those parents report struggling with the cost of their child’s sports, and only half (50%) of parents from that region cite cost as a reason their child stopped playing.

These findings are consistent with the results described in Chapter 1—youth from the Inland Empire have the lowest sports engagement level (28%). This finding suggests that parent struggles with cost may contribute to lower rates of physical activity among their children.

## Cost Barriers by Income

- Equity gaps are evident when comparing financial struggles across different income levels. **Parents with incomes between \$30K and \$50K are nearly twice as likely to struggle with the cost of sports compared to those with incomes over \$100K.** 4-in-5 parents whose income is between \$30K and \$50K (80%) have faced financial challenges, while less than half (46%) of parents with incomes of more than \$100K have experienced the same issue.
- **Although not highlighted by the survey results, focus group parents expressed that gatekeeping in certain sports represents a barrier for youth participation.** A parent from San Francisco / Bay Area said it is not just about the lack of available opportunities in local areas, but also about the lack of “readiness” for their children to engage in certain types of sports. *“... it was more readily available. I grew up playing golf. By no means was I rich but I grew up in an area where there were plenty of golf courses. If someone wanted to be the next Tiger Woods and you are in the inner city, we can even look at L.A. where L.A. Country Club is so expensive and it is a public course but it is super expensive. Nobody can get here if you are not in the right demographics. Let’s go with that. There is too much gatekeeping going on within certain sports that not everybody has access to. If we are going to talk about equity then there are certain things that need to be done to make it equitable for everyone and not just equal.”*

## Key Finding 2: Time Commitment of Sports as a Barrier to Participation

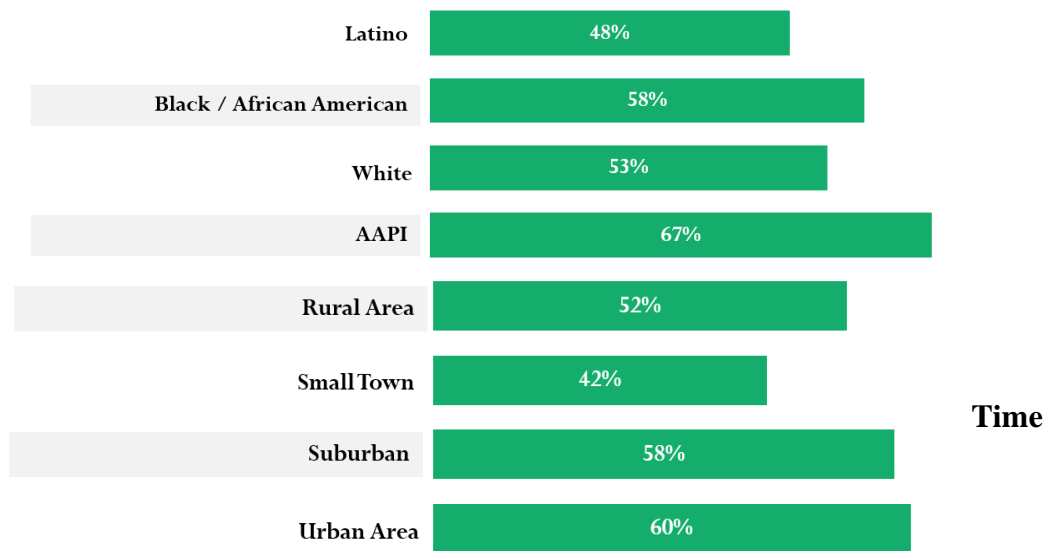
2. **Parents also cite time commitment as a second common barrier to play.** Over half (54%) of parents identify lack of time as a reason their child stopped playing a sport. Many parents report struggling to balance work responsibilities with time spent on their child’s sports, which often leads to a decrease in these play opportunities. This challenge was echoed by youth who participated in focus groups, who noted that their parents’ busy work schedules frequently prevented them from being taken to places where they could play, as one youth from the 12-to-13-year-old focus group shared, *“I live in [Inland Empire]. There are parks around here, but it’s hard for me to go to those places because my parents work, and on the weekends, they just want to relax. I sometimes have my friends over, but it’s still hard to go to those places.”*
  - **Parents struggling with time commitments find it hard to balance the time spent on work with the time spent supporting their child’s regular play.** Of those parents, nearly 2-in-5 (39%) also cited needing to work as a reason their children stopped playing. In addition, just under a third (30%) of those parents who indicated struggling with the time commitment *also* cited focusing on chores and other household responsibilities as a reason their child stopped playing.



### Time Commitment by Race/Ethnicity and Area Type

- **The challenges presented by the time commitment required are especially pronounced for AAPI parents (67%), those living in lower Southern California (63%), and those living in urban areas (60%), leading to exhaustion and reduced engagement in physical activities. Figure 2 compares the negative impact of time commitment on sports and play by race/ethnicity and area type demographic subgroups.**

**Figure 2 – Time Commitment as a Reason Youth Stop Playing by Race/Ethnicity and Area Type**



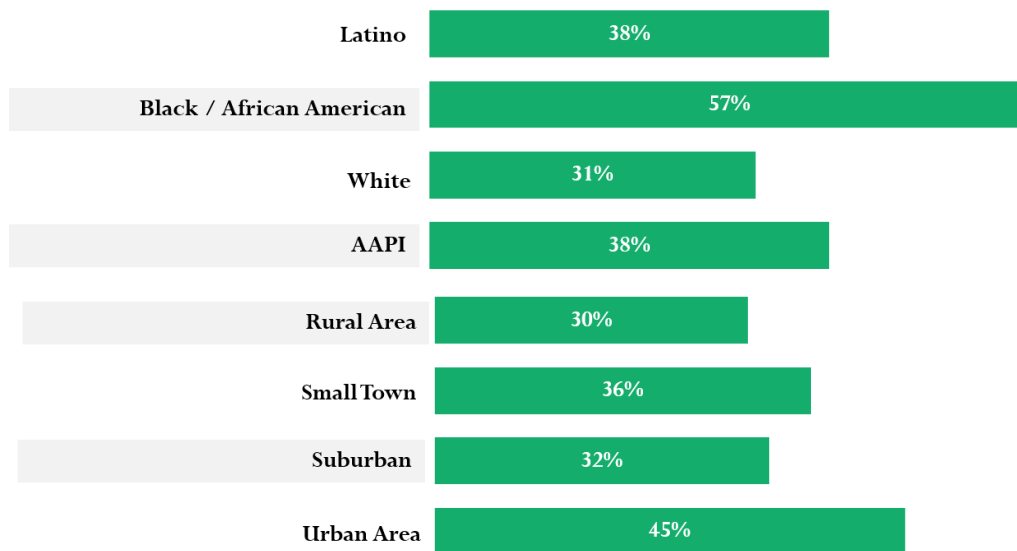
### Commitment by the Number of Children

- **Parents with multiple children face even greater challenges in managing time for their children's physical activities.** Nearly all parents (94%) agree that there is not enough time for their children to engage in physical activities. This sentiment is nearly unanimous among parents with three or more children (99%) compared to about 9-in-10 parents with only one child (91%). In focus groups, these parents frequently expressed exhaustion from trying to divide their time to meet the demands of each child's physical activity needs, as a Black / African American parent from the Central Valley shared, *“For me, working overnights is a problem. Me running my own business is another problem and then having four kids, that is not really a problem but another problem because having to split up my time the best that I can. I really don't have much of it.”*

### Key Finding 3: Transportation as a Barrier to Participation

3. **Parents cite transportation issues as common barriers that significantly hinder their child’s participation in sports, with notable equity gaps based on area type, region, and income.** More than 1-in-3 parents (36%) identify challenges with transportation as a significant factor for their children stopping playing a sport.
  - **Nearly 3-in-5 Black / African American parents (57%) and parents with three or more children (also 57%)** report issues with transportation as a barrier to their child’s participation in sports or play. In addition, **more than 2-in-5 parents earning less than \$30K (43%), as well as parents living in urban areas (45%)** report the same, making parents of these demographics among the most likely to report transportation as a reason their child stopped playing a sport. Figure 3 shows equity gaps based on transportation for race/ethnicity and area type.

**Figure 3 – Challenges with Transportation as a Reason for Stopping Play by Race/Ethnicity and Area Type**



#### Transportation Barriers by Area Type

- **Although few parents living in rural areas identify transportation as a problem, youth from those areas must travel longer distances to the places they play.** Over 1-in-3 parents living in rural areas (34%) say that they need a moderate or long drive to take their child to places to play, while only a quarter (25%) of parents in suburban areas report the same. In youth focus groups, the lack of transportation is frequently cited as a barrier to play, particularly among younger children. As one youth from the Rural North expressed, *“When I was 10, I did a bit of dancing. But what turned me away from it was more my parents losing motivation to take me, so I stopped doing it.”*

## Transportation Barriers by Distance

- Broadly, as distance increases, more youth drop out of sports or physical activities. However, **driving even a short distance can be a significant deterrent to parents continuing to support their child's physical activities.** Just over 1-in-6 youth who stopped playing a sport live within walking distance of the location they go to play (17%), compared to just under 1-in-4 (24%) who continued. However, when the distance requires a short drive, just over half (53%) of the youth stopped participating and 47% continued.

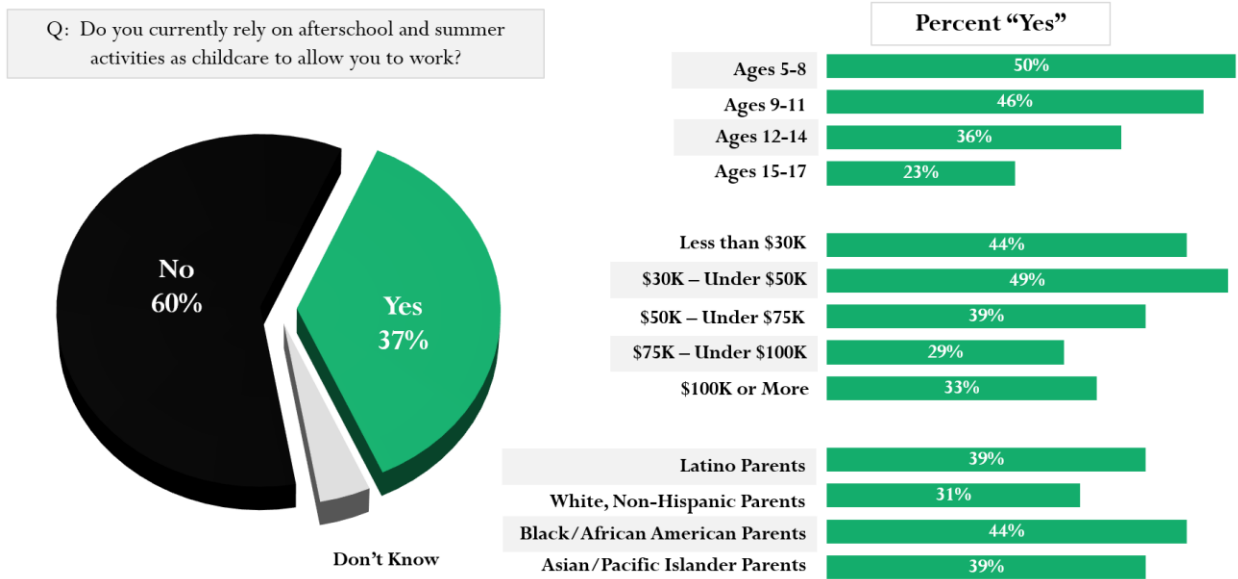
### Key Finding 4: After-School Child Care as a Barrier to Access

4. Many school-based or community-based youth sports programs occur after-school or during the summer, but some youth are unable access these opportunities due to challenges their parents face with childcare. **Nearly 3-in-5 parents (37%) rely on after-school or summer programs as a form of childcare to manage the challenges of balancing time, cost, and transportation.**

These programs are crucial in helping parents alleviate the exhaustion of continually taking their children to participate in sports.

- Black / African American parents (44%), parents of children aged 5-to-8 (50%), parents living in lower Southern California (43%), or in rural areas (45%), and nearly half (49%) of households earning \$30K to \$50K per year, rely more on after-school physical activities or summer programs as childcare.
- However, the reliance on these programs underscores the need for more accessible and sustained opportunities. **Without these programs, youth are more likely to stop playing sports** – more than 1-in-3 parents who depend on after-school programs (36%) had children stop participating in sports in the past year, compared to just under 2-in-7 (27%) who did not. The primary barrier is the lack of accessible opportunities in the local area. When these programs end, youth struggle to engage in other available activities, as noted by an AAPI child in the youth focus group, *“I used to play flag football for an afterschool program, but I just kind of started ... the program just stopped, and I didn't really see any more opportunities for me to join another team. So, I just focused on other things.”*

**Figure 4 – Reliance on After-School and Summer Programs for Childcare by Children Age, Household Income, and Parent Race/Ethnicity**



**Key Finding 5: Lack of Local Opportunities as a Barrier to Participation**

- Lack of opportunities to play in the local area is another significant indicator of youth who drop out of sports** – less than 2-in-5 youth who dropped out of playing (38%) did not find opportunities for play in local areas. **Disparities in opportunities to play exist across race and ethnicity, regions, and area types**, with Latino parents (34%), Black / African American parents (33%), parents from rural areas (43%) and the Inland Empire (37%) reporting being unable to find enough opportunities for their children to play in local areas.

  - While parents living in rural areas did not report the lowest percentages of finding enough opportunities in local areas, they express the strongest wishes for more available opportunities and a wider range of activities in their local areas.** More than 9-in-10 parents from rural areas (93%) wish for more opportunities and a wider range of activities, while over 4-in-5 parents from small towns (86%) and suburban areas (81%) express these same wishes.
  - Both parents and youth in the focus groups mentioned that youth only have access to a limited range of traditional physical activities and sports in their communities.** This limitation prevents youth from engaging in the sports they truly enjoy and find "fun," which aligns with one of the major reasons for dropping out of play – "No Longer Fun," as discussed in Chapter 3.

A Latina mother from the Central Valley shared her daughter’s struggle to find sports she enjoyed in after-school programs—***“In the poor neighborhoods where I am, there aren’t enough sports. They want all the kids to be football players. Maybe not all kids want to be football players. My daughter wants to play volleyball. She only gets to play in certain after-school programs, and they don’t really teach it well there. There are so many other options – maybe take the kids golfing or just something different, not just the usual basketball and football.”***

### **Key Finding 6: Safety as a Barrier to Participation**

6. While safety was not a top barrier highlighted by parents in the survey, **many parents in the focus groups expressed that safety was among their major concerns.** Here, parents expressed concerns **not just about the safety of the sport, but more importantly, the safety of their children on the playground and on public transportation their children might take to the places where they play.**

Due to these safety concerns, youth cannot participate in physical activities far from their homes if their parents are unable to take them there, as expressed both by youth and their parents. A Latina parent from Central Valley expressed her concerns on safety issues: ***“If I am not able to take her, how is she supposed to get there? If I wouldn’t personally take her, she wouldn’t go. Just riding the bus, being in the neighborhood, I had to file a police report because a man was following her after school. Safety more than anything. What else? What else can we do? Just try to do our best. Safety more than anything.... We are able to continue that but if I am not able to take her, she was like, if you can’t take me every day then I don’t want to go.”***

## Chapter 5

### Invest in Play: Parents Support more State and Local Investment for Play Equity

Parents recognize the play equity gaps elevated in this report, place high value on the development benefits of sports and structured play and identify the need to improve access to sports for all youth. In addition, **parents near-unanimously (95%) believe it is important for the State of California to provide full funding for youth sports, P.E., and structured play, and an overwhelming majority of parents (86%) support more funding at the state and local level for play equity.**

Moreover, many parents rely on after-school and summer activities for childcare, and this group is more likely to recognize gaps in play equity and much more *strongly* support greater investment for in-school and after-school sports and structured play. Thus, play equity funding will not only improve access to sports and structured play, but also address a broader socioeconomic issue and positively benefit families who struggle with childcare.

### Key Findings

#### Key Finding 1: Parental Understanding of Play Equity Issues

1. **Parents overwhelmingly recognize *play inequities*** – when their children either do not have access or encounter barriers to participating in sports and play. With this in mind, **parents clearly identify youth access to expanded sports opportunities – and more time to engage in movement and physical activity – as critical areas for improvement.**
  - **Nearly all parents agree that opportunities for sports and physical activity should be available to all youth (96%)** regardless of ability level (94%) or disability status (87%). They also perceive equity issues in school-based sports and play, as 6-in-7 (86%) wish there were more sports offered at their child’s school, amid near unanimous agreement that there is not enough time spent engaging in physical activity (94%).
  - Likewise, **nearly all parents agree that opportunities for play and physical activity should be available through school recess – 97%** believe it is important for schools to provide at least 30 minutes during the day for play, movement, and physical activity. While 6-in-7 parents (86%) are highly enthusiastic, believing the issue is *very important*, those from lower Southern California (90%), the Central Coast (90%), and Spanish-speaking parents (91%) express the greatest enthusiasm.
  - **Parents also understand there are socioeconomic barriers that prevent youth from accessing sports and physical activities.** In support of the findings from Chapter 4, challenges associated with cost and income are the most resonant to parents, as 6-in-7 (86%) agree that youth sports cost too much money and that household income is a barrier to participation (83%). In addition, at least half of parents also identify gender (57%) and race / ethnicity (50%) as barriers, further confirming the equity gaps in access to structured play outlined in Chapter 2.

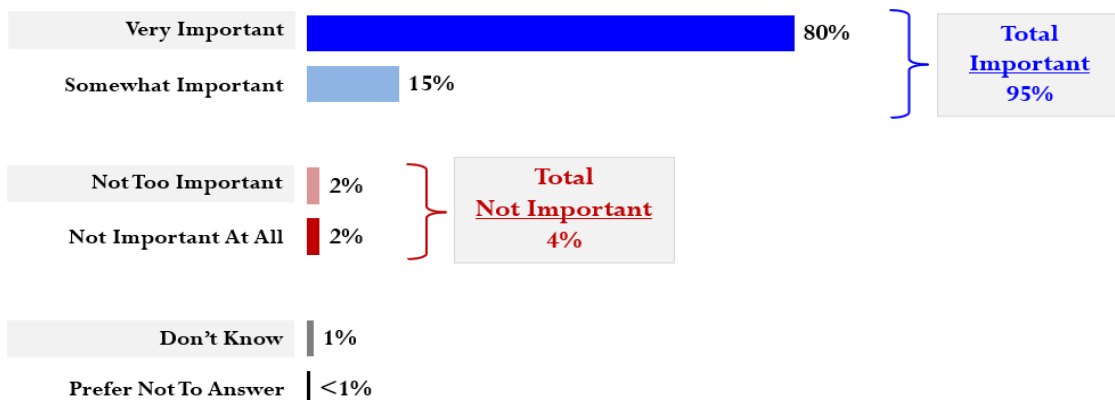


- **Parents recognize the equity issues discussed in Chapter 3 that influence why youth stop playing sports.** A significant majority (72%) of parents believe that youth do not have enough time for fun. They also identify competitiveness and skill as an equity issue, as more than two-thirds (68%) believed that youth sports are becoming too specialized.
- While a broad majority of parents perceive the play inequities elevated in this report, **certain demographic subgroups have stronger recognition than others.** In conjunction with the report’s findings, parents with the most passionate enthusiasm towards play equity issues are those who identified with demographic subgroups experiencing the greatest inequities in accessing sports and play for their children. As such, the strongest degree of enthusiasm for play equity exists among parents from the Inland Empire (87%), Latino and Black / African American parents (both 87%), and parents with incomes between \$50K and \$75K (88%), with nearly all *strongly* agreeing that sports and physical activity should be available to all.

**Key Finding 2: Parent Support for Play Equity Initiatives**

2. Funding initiatives to help close equity gaps in access to youth sports hold the potential to garner high levels of support among parents. **Parents overwhelmingly support action by the State of California to provide full funding to support structured play and physical activity.**
  - **Nearly all parents (95%) believe it is important for the State of California to provide full funding** for youth sports, P.E., and structured play. Figure 1 illustrates this overwhelming support, including 4-in-5 parents (80%) who believe funding is *very important*.

**Figure 2: Importance of Full State Funding for Youth Sports, P.E., and Structured Play**

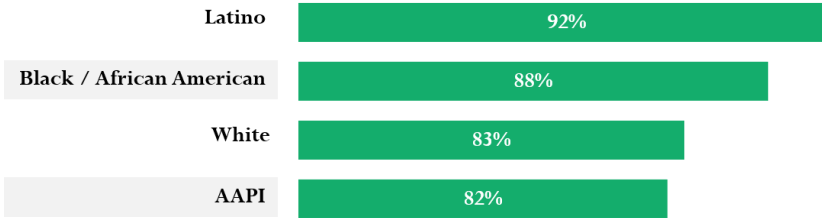


- Likewise, an overwhelming majority of parents (86%) support more funding at the state and local level for play equity initiatives that expand opportunities for all young people to participate in structured play and physical activity. Latino parents (92%) and parents from the Inland Empire (96%) are the most likely to support these initiatives.

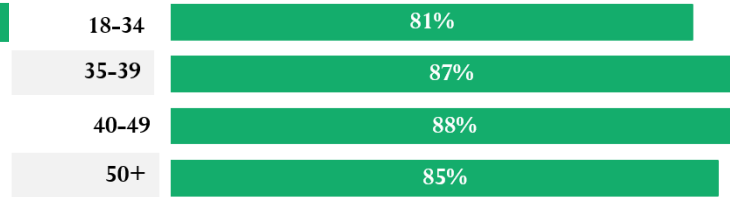
This support corresponds with the report's findings, as these groups experienced the greatest equity gaps in accessing physical activities. While overall support is still robust, parents from the Rural North (78%), Bay Area (79%), AAPI parents (82%), and parents earning over \$100K (82%) show slightly less support for increased funding. In this sense, there is broad consensus across the state of California to expand state and local funding to expand equitable access to youth sports and play. Figure 2 details the robust support for funding play equity across demographic subgroups.

**Figure 2 – Support for Play Equity Funding Initiatives (Total Support) by Demographic Subgroup**

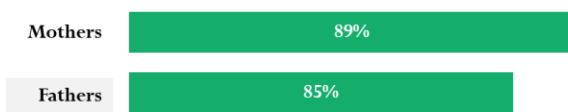
**Race / Ethnicity (Ranked by Total Support):**



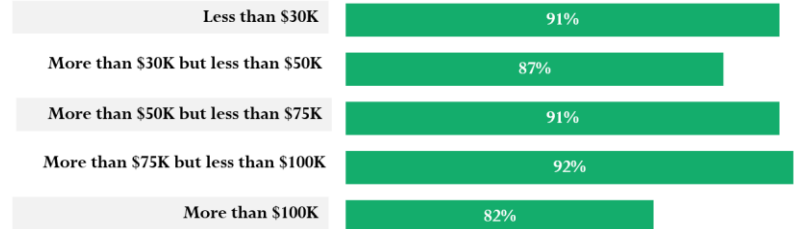
**Age:**



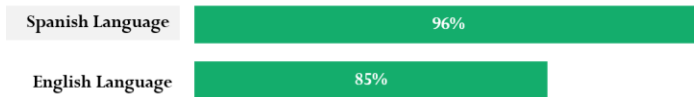
**Gender (Ranked by Total Support):**



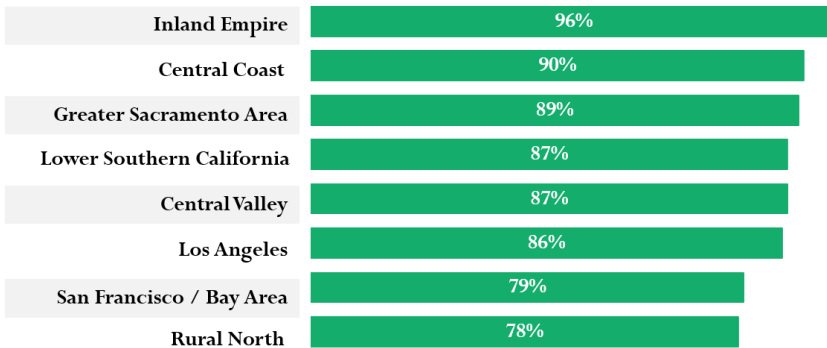
**Income:**



**Language (Ranked by Total Support):**



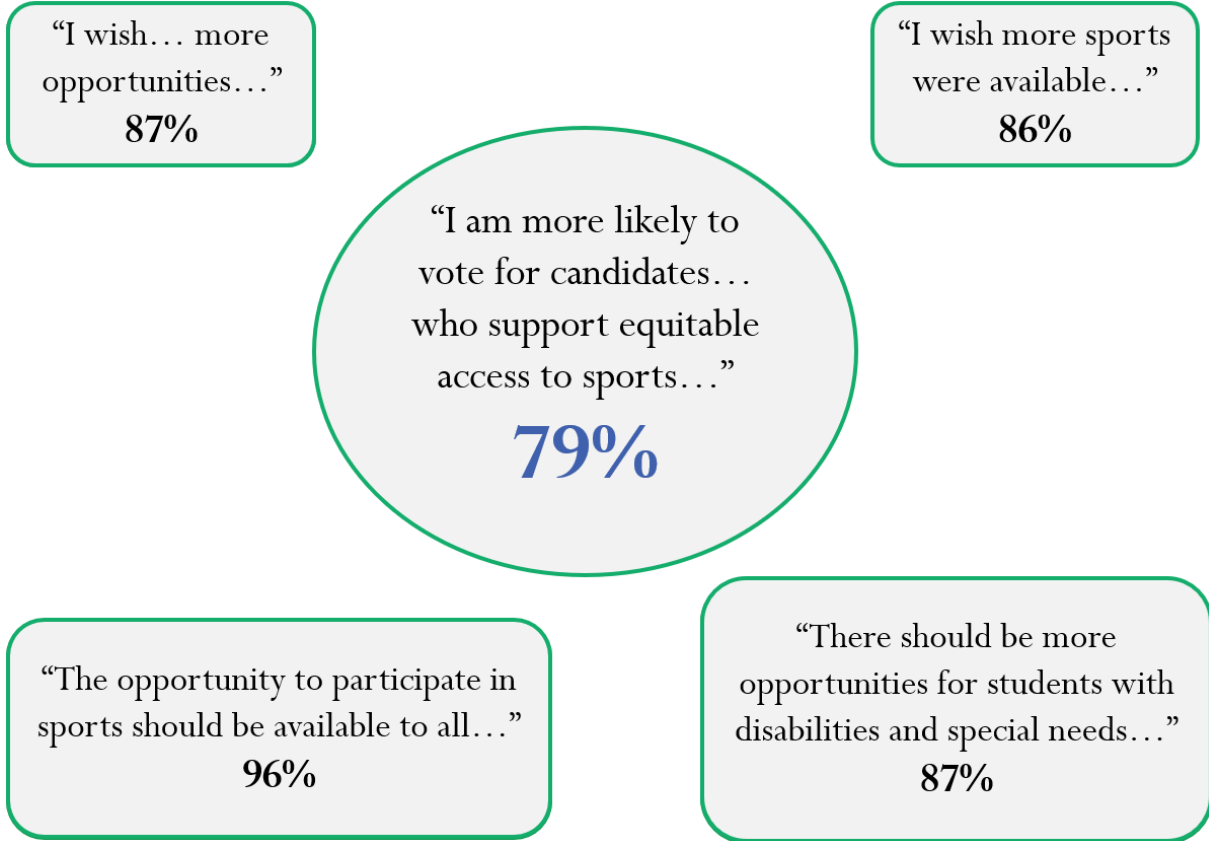
**Region (Ranked by Total Support):**



**Education:**



- Additionally, **nearly 3-in-5 parents (58%) do not know that P.E. is not fully funded.** Parents near-unanimously support increased funding for play equity (86%), despite a majority falsely believing that their child's P.E. is already fully funded (58%).



- Since there is broad parental consensus around funding play equity initiatives, it makes sense that they would also be keen to support political candidates who favor these initiatives. Indeed, nearly 4-in-5 parents (79%) say they are more likely to vote for a candidate who supports equitable access to sports. Candidate enthusiasm is particularly high among parents from the Central Coast (91%), Los Angeles (83%), and the Central Valley (81%), as well as Latino parents (83%) and AAPI parents (82%). Statements from the focus group research also echoed these survey findings. There, an AAPI mother participant in the parents focus group expressed the need for elected officials to focus on issues of *play equity*:

Female: *"I don't think they are focused. I think I see their intentions, and I think they are trying. I think they are more focused on issues for certain people who are old enough to vote. They are more focused on those issues and making sure those people are happy and because of that I think they are forgetting a little bit about the children. I do see from those other issues that they are focusing on equity, but it hasn't come to the children yet."*

Moderator: *"Do you think play equity should be a higher priority?"*

Female: *"I think so. **I feel like our future is in these kids.** All of us, we are old. We are going to end soon but these kids, they are our investment to our future and how our country is going to be. I think a lot of times people don't think about that when they make decisions. That is really going to be how the*

---

*world is going to be and how these kids are going to be. **They really deserve the best.***"

- Since most policymakers are not oriented around equity issues related to youth, most parents are eager to back a political candidate who uses an equity lens to address issues affecting youth.

### **Key Finding 3: The Socioeconomic Benefits of Play Equity**

3. Beyond its immediate impact on youth sports engagement, **play equity is also interconnected with the broader socioeconomic issue of childcare.**
  - To be able to work, more than one-third (37%) of parents report relying on after-school and summer activities for their child. **These parents are even more likely to identify equity gaps within youth sports and support funding initiatives with greater enthusiasm.** Nearly 2-in-3 parents who rely on extracurriculars for childcare (64%) agree *strongly* that they wish there were more sports available at their child's school, compared to a narrow minority of all other parents (49%). Likewise, more of these parents enthusiastically believe there are barriers to participation based on race (25%) and income (57%) compared to those who do not rely on after-school and summer activities for childcare (20% and 50%, respectively). Finally, nearly two-thirds (65%) of parents who rely on after-school or summer childcare *strongly* support expanding funding for play equity, compared to a slight majority (54%) of all other parents who feel the same.

**Figure 3 – Barriers to Access Sport and Play for Parents Who Rely on After-School and Summer Activities for Childcare (Ranked by Strongly Agree, Parents Who Rely on After-School and Summer Activities for Childcare)**

<b>Barrier to Sport and Play (Agreement Statements)</b>	<b>Parents Who Rely on After-School and Summer Activities for Childcare (Strongly Agree)</b>	<b>Parents Who DO NOT Rely on After-School and Summer Activities for Childcare (Strongly Agree)</b>
More opportunities for students with disabilities and special needs	69%	59%
More opportunities for a wider range of sports and physical activities	67%	48%
I wish more sports were available at my child’s school	64%	49%
Costs too much money to participate in youth sports	58%	47%
Barriers to participation based on income	57%	50%
Barriers to participation based on race/ethnicity	25%	20%

- Moreover, many of these parents must choose between work and supporting their child’s extracurricular physical activities. **Greater funding for sport and play initiatives that focus on equity will not only improve access to sports and physical activities for youth experiencing inequitable access, but it will further ease the economic burden of parents by providing more recourses for childcare.** In the focus groups, a Latina parent from the Inland Empire articulated the dilemma parents face as they juggle the costs of living, work commitments and childcare associated with physical activities. *“My youngest son, he is hyperactive. For that reason, we started him so young with sports. ... The only thing like I said at the beginning is it is hard to keep up with everything because nowadays, even the programs through the school, we have to pay a lot of money and sometimes it is hard. I have to be taking him places or I stopped working a regular job in order to be able to keep up with my son to take him from here to there.”* To best support their child’s extracurricular activities and physical wellness, parents often must decrease their work hours or even quit their job.
- **Without any state-funded after-school physical activities or extracurriculars as support, many working parents confront a no-win situation in which they must choose between after-school childcare and working to ameliorate any financial stress.** In this sense, play equity is not only meant to increase youth’s physical activity to the CDC’s recommendations, but it is a broader initiative to support working families who struggle to maintain their socio-economic status amidst rising inflation and cost of living.



## **About The LA84 Foundation**

The LA84 Foundation is a national leader in support of youth sport and public education about the role of sports in positive youth development. For four decades, the LA84 Foundation has supported thousands of youth-serving organizations in Southern California through grants, funding facilities and fields of play, training coaches and commissioning research. The LA84 Foundation takes on critical issues as a national thought leader by elevating youth sports and play as a pathway to lifelong well-being.

Visit [la84.org](https://la84.org) and follow @LA84Foundation on X and Instagram.

## **About EVITARUS**

EVITARUS is a public opinion research firm that delivers actionable data and strategic insights to public policy, political, and corporate decision makers. EVITARUS generates data to illuminate, elevate, and amplify the voices of everyday people.

To learn more, visit [www.evitarus.com](https://www.evitarus.com).