

# YOUTH FITNESS, SPORTS & OPPORTUNITY TASK FORCE

## PURPOSE:

- *Develop a community response and strategic plan regarding the findings of this study and recommendations listed below;*
- *Obtain feedback from a broader representation of stakeholders, including students and families experiencing barriers to participation;*
- *Identify “best practices” for youth sports delivery and participation in Lincoln;*
- *Further assess the socio-economic barriers of youth sports participation; and*
- *Evaluate the impact of youth sports on the local economy.*

## COMPOSITION:

- *Schools/education*
- *Business*
- *Public health and health care*
- *Coaches and educators (Title 1 and non-Title 1 schools)*
- *Parents and students (Title 1 and non-Title 1 schools)*
- *Government and elected officials*
- *Youth & Club sports*
- *Community agencies*
- *Philanthropy*
- *Others*

## TASK FORCE DISCUSSION POINTS BY TOPIC AREA:

### Schools and Education:

- Explore the development of more robust middle-school sports programming as an added opportunity for student mentoring, physical and aerobic fitness, and high school preparation. Consider alternative sports offerings that meet cultural interests after consultation with local cultural organizations.
- Clarify and publicize gate fee policies (<https://home.lps.org/athletics/prices/>) that would positively impact low-income parents and families. Examples could include transferable athletic passes and/or gate fee sponsorships.
- Clarify and publicize a reduced fee schedule for LPS sports facilities rental/usage by non-profit youth teams (<https://home.lps.org/operations/archibus/>). Research fee schedule policies at Omaha Public Schools, other area public schools, and comparable Midwest communities.
- Provide materials and targeted mental health training/education to assure that at least 90% of school coaches/staff are comfortable with supporting and referring student-athletes.
- Create an athlete transportation plan that considers transportation barriers to athletic events and/or practices. Consider ride-sharing options.
- Actively encourage student athletes who discontinue a sport to transition to another sport in the same season. Encourage student participation in multiple sports.
- Annually administer the survey that is the basis for these recommendations to assess/update the status of youth sports on a continuous basis.
- Continue a primary focus on education-based athletics and activities with a goal of a 100% graduation rate among student participants.

### Public Health & Health Care

- “Prescribe” physical fitness and youth sports to parents/youth as preventive measures for childhood obesity, early-onset diabetes, anxiety/depression, electronic device addiction, and other public health concerns.
- Provide education regarding local youth sports opportunities and support the connection of young patients and their families to local sports options.
- Include the availability of youth sports and youth sports facilities as a priority in Community Health Needs Assessments required of hospitals under the Affordable Care Act.

## Parents & Families

- Engage in activities that support each child's interests to avoid burnout, stress, and over-commitment. Don't make a "college offer" the end goal.
- Avoid high doses of a single sport that require substantial levels of deliberate/focused practice, putting children/youth at risk of injury and stress. Learn your child's interests through sports sampling clinics or recreational leagues which are shown to improve longevity in sports participation and build social/emotional skills.
- Encourage high school athletes to become youth sports coaches/mentors and to "give back" their knowledge and talents to children/youth.
- Cheer on children other than your own.
- Model respect to coaches, referees, and school athletic officials.

## Policymakers & Civic Leaders

- Consider the use of social impact bonds to support the development of youth sports programming and facilities with a priority to provide added opportunities to low-income youth and families.
- Create a Sports Equipment Bank to lend sports equipment to low-income athletes/families for a season. Utilize high school and/or university students to build an on-line "matching" database.
- Evaluate the Level of Service expectation\* for city facilities to meet the needs of a growing population. (*\*Level of Service expectations are approved by City Council and drive capital improvement investments in city facilities.*)
- Evaluate reciprocal use agreements between Lincoln Public Schools and the City of Lincoln to ensure that there is equitable access to facilities across the city.

## Youth Sports & Community Organizations

- Create and widely disseminate the eligibility criteria for scholarship/fee reduction programs available at local club sports programs (nonprofit and private).
- Commit to working for the best interest of the mental/physical wellbeing of athletes, including complying to health/safety guidelines of national organizations.
- Develop new opportunities to better utilize existing sports facilities (gyms, fields, pools, tracks, etc.) that have limited use by churches, community organizations, colleges/universities, and others. Widely disseminate a database of existing sports facilities (include contact information, reservation schedules, eligibility, and fees). Utilize high school and/or university students to build an online inventory/scheduling platform.
- Provide free, online resources for inexperienced or novice coaches to assure an increased number of volunteer youth sports coaches in the community. Promote the coaching resources that existing platforms offer (e.g. YMCA's 360).

## The Lincoln Community

- Create and support an endowed scholarship program (at least \$2 million) for youth sports participation fees, equipment, transportation, and/or family spectator expenses. Funds (individuals, businesses, foundations, etc) would be pooled, perhaps with the assistance of the Lincoln Community Foundation. Private club sport programs could support the effort by providing discounted rates to youth supported by the scholarship program.
- Support the LPS "Get Involved" initiative (Fall 2023 launch) to encourage all students to get involved in an academic or extracurricular activity, including athletics, with a goal to increase physical activities and fitness.
- Be an advocate for reducing barriers to youth sports opportunities.
- Model an active lifestyle so Lincoln's children/youth will follow your lead.