



The Mayor's Youth Sports Initiative 2024

The State of Boston Youth Sports

Throughout 2023, the mayor's office and the human services cabinet engaged with internal and external partners to assess the Boston youth sports ecosystem and develop goals. The insights below come from myriad meetings with [neighborhood and non-profit providers](#), [Parks](#), [BCYF](#), [E&I](#), & [BPS Athletics](#) leaders, and dedicated soccer and basketball provider focus groups.

Nationally, we know that youth in the lowest income bracket participate in sports at a much lower rate (45%) than youth in the highest income bracket (76%). While MA is a leading state for youth sports participation, Boston's high school student involvement (34%) lags significantly behind the state average for youth aged 6-17 (63%). BPS athletics participation dropped 10% during the pandemic (from 44% in 2019), and girls participation (30%) is even lower than boys' (39%). While 53% of white students play sports, Asian (25%), Black (41%), and Latino (27%) participation is much lower.

Mirroring national trends, middle school is the time when youth in Boston are most likely to stop sports participation. Boston has a rich ecosystem of volunteer-run neighborhood, philanthropically-funded non-profit, and government-provided youth sports programs, but improved coordination and support are essential to address existing disparities.

The Vision

Mayor Wu's administration is committed to nurturing a robust and resilient youth sports ecosystem that **develops youth** and **creates community**. We envision a future where Boston youth have access to and participate in youth sports at the same rate as their suburban peers, irrespective of race/ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status. We envision a Boston where neighborhood, BCYF centers, and school-based sports programming instill community pride and facilitate healthy cross-city connections.

In 2024 the administration's main focus is on:

- Supporting the entrepreneurialism of non-profit and neighborhood providers
- Exploring new strategic roles for the city:
 - Vision setter and convener to facilitate effective cross-sector partnerships
 - Researcher and experimenter to deliver new experiences & identify best practices
- Working with our departments to evolve and expand offerings

Below is a sample of strategic projects within these three areas led by the Mayor's Office, Human Services Cabinet, BCYF, Parks, and BPS athletics. To build capacity for this work, the FY24 budget added a **Youth Sports Initiative Manager** on the Human Services team, a new **Recreation Program Manager** on the Parks team, and **three regional athletic coordinators** for BPS Athletics.

Projects

Supporting neighborhood and non-profit providers

- **Collaborative relationship development**
 - Objectives: 1) Understand, acknowledge, and respond to providers' priorities and needs 2) Collaboratively address challenges and align around shared goals 3) Connect providers to other City opportunities
- **Sports recreation facilities mapping and strategy**
 - Objectives: 1) Enhance providers' and residents' awareness of recreation spaces across the city; 2) Identify facility gaps in facilities across the city, highlighting areas with high demand and limited supply 3) Coordinate across city planning departments to develop a strategy for facility development and access
- **Sustainability and expanded support for neighborhood sports programming**
 - Objectives: 1) Identify and spread best practices for financially sustaining neighborhood sports programming 2) Evaluate the city's optimal role by piloting grants
- **Coach training and recruiting initiatives**
 - Objective: Respond to expressed provider needs for volunteer coaches and training

Exploring new roles for the City

- **Community pride and recognition initiatives**
 - Objective: Build community and excitement around youth sports by celebrating team and individual athlete accomplishments
- **[Youth sports hub](#) website**
 - Objectives: 1) Centralize resources and information for families to decrease barriers in finding and registering for programs; 2) Centralize City resources for providers
- **BCYF+Parks girls sports initiative and Mayor's Cup sports festivals**
 - Objectives: 1) Engage girls who are not currently participating in sports; 2) Test the efficacy of citywide events at increasing youth sport participation
- **2026 World Cup working groups**
 - Objective: Convene soccer organizations citywide leading up to the 2026 World Cup and White Stadium renovation to grow soccer awareness and ensure the Cup leaves a unified and meaningful legacy

Strengthening cross-departmental coordination

- **BPS Athletics strategic planning**
 - Objectives: 1) Develop and implement a strategic plan to guide the future of middle and high school athletics 2) Address BPS Athletics' operational needs
- **BCYF centers strategy**
 - Objective: Improve program standardization and quality for youth 8-14 across all BCYF centers and re-introduce a variety of intra-city youth sports activities and leagues

Appendix A: Internal Provider Offerings (2023)

BPS Athletics

High School

Fall

- Boys Soccer - 13 Programs - 403 Participants
- Girls Soccer - 11 Programs - 231 Participants
- Girls Volleyball - 14 Programs - 238 Participants
- Football - 7 Programs - 224 Participants
- FCross Country - 1 Programs - 26 Participants

Winter

- Boys Basketball - 15 Programs - 285 Participants
- Girls Basketball - 15 Programs - 210 Participants
- Indoor Track - 10 Programs - 192 Participants
- Swimming - 3 Programs - 104 Participants
- Wrestling - 2 Programs - 71 Participants
- Boys Hockey - 2 Programs - 63 Participants
- Girls Hockey - 1 Program - 10 Participants

Spring

- Baseball - 12 Programs - 276 Participants
- Softball - 12 Programs - 217 Participants
- Outdoor Track - 10 Programs - 187 Participants
- Girls Lacrosse - 1 Program - 21 Participants
- Boys Tennis - 1 Program - 24 Participants
- Girls Tennis - 1 Program - 18 Participants
- Boys Volleyball - 3 Programs - 63 Participants

Middle School

Fall

- Co-ed Baseball - 4 Programs

Winter

- Girls Basketball - 29 Programs
- Boys Basketball - 29 programs

Spring

- Co-ed Track and Field - 15 Programs
- Girls Volleyball - 17 Programs

Year-round

- Boston Scores Soccer - 9 Programs

Upper Elementary School

Year-round

- Boston Scores Soccer - 12 Programs

BCYF Centers

- 27 BCYF Community centers and 18 pools with 350 staff
- 2023 programs: 281 recreational sports offerings, 170 sports leagues, 146 skill building classes, and 162 aquatics courses.
- Girls Sports April Break Festival and Summit in collaboration with Parks Recreation
- Primary sports offerings: basketball, futsal, flag football, volleyball, baseball/softball, floor hockey, and aquatics
- At least one center offers: kickball, dodgeball, lacrosse, running, tennis, boxing, stickball, pickleball, wiffle ball, martial arts, fitness, ping-pong, roller skating, walking clinic, zumba, bowling, boxing, double dutch, ultimate frisbee, golf, and badminton

Parks Recreation Team

Summer Programs

- Parks Summer Fitness Series (Citywide) - 603 hours of programming
- Five Sports Centers (East Boston, Garvey, Almont, Ronan, White Stadium) - 16,373 participants
- Summer Baseball League (Moakley Park) - 3 teams, 12 games
- Boston Neighborhood Basketball League (Citywide) - 86 teams, 500 games
- Junior Golf Lessons (Franklin Park, George Wright) - 110 youth employees, 400 participants
- Flag Football League (Carter Bubble) - 31 teams, 58 games, 402 participants
- Willie O'Ree Street Hockey Clinics (Dorchester, Roxbury, JP, East Boston, Mattapan, South Boston) - 2,903 participants

School Year Programs

- April Vacation Girls Sports and Wellness Festival - 414 participants
- April Vacation Baseball Clinic (South End) - 103 participants
- Softball Clinics (Dorchester, South End) - 225 participants
- Archery Classes (Dorchester, Roxbury, Jamaica Plain, Mattapan, North End, South Boston, East Boston, and Allston/Brighton) - 2,823 participants
- Winter 7x7 Soccer Classic (December) - 15 teams, 29 games, ## participants

Mayor's Cups

- Tennis (April) - 30 participants
- Street Hockey (April) - 17 teams, 30 games

- Baseball (July) - 28 teams, 54 games
- Softball (July) - 11 teams, 17 games
- Tennis (August) - 105 participants
- Cross Country (October) - 500 participants
- Soccer (October) - 26 teams, 42 games
- Football (November) - 4 teams, 2 games
- Ice Hockey (December) - 81 teams, 136 games

Appendix B: Neighborhood Youth Soccer and Basketball Listening Session Summary

What's working?

- *Free programming*
- *Dedicated staff*
- *Flexibility: allow athletes to try other sports with practice schedule, accepting youth from other neighborhoods, multiple teams practicing on same field*
- *Creating appropriate schedules by age group*
- *Engaging families creatively while on the field/court*
- *Providing enrichment opportunities/setting developmental goals*
- *Higher resourced orgs supporting grassroots efforts*
- *Collaboration with local universities*
- *Using limited space creatively*
- *Word of mouth outreach to families*
- *Large community events/tournaments*

What're the challenges?

- *Field/court space - competition for permits, maintenance issues*
- *Volunteer recruitment*
- *Capacity for special programming: summer training, end of season banquets, tournaments, pre-season, community building events*
- *Waitlist of participants*
- *Low girls participation*
- *Transportation to games*
- *Support with large tournaments & events*
- *Athletes leaving for more competitive leagues*
- *Consistency in funding sources*
- *Lack of partnerships and city connections to build capacity and problem solve collaboratively*
- *Lack of coordination*