



Committee: Directly to Council
Committee Review: N/A
Staff: Natalia Carrizosa, Legislative Analyst
Purpose: Receive briefing and have discussion – no vote expected
Keywords: Children, Youth, Sports

AGENDA ITEM 14
July 21, 2020
Discussion

SUBJECT

Office of Legislative Oversight Report 2020-4: *Youth Sports in Montgomery County*

EXPECTED ATTENDEES

- Robin Riley, Director, Recreation Department
- Ramona Bell-Pearson, Director, Community Use of Public Facilities
- Dr. Jeffrey Sullivan, Athletics Director, MCPS
- Mike Riley, Director, Parks Department
- Cliff Driver, Athletic Field Program Manager, Parks Department
- Joseph Hooks, 480 Club
- Diego Uriburu, Identity Inc.
- Nora Morales, Identity Inc.
- Michael Rubin, Impact Silver Spring

COUNCIL DECISION POINTS & COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION

- Not applicable

DESCRIPTION/ISSUE

This Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) report reviews national research on youth sports and examines the youth sports landscape in Montgomery County.

SUMMARY OF KEY DISCUSSION POINTS

OLO Report 2020-4 is available online at <http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OLO/Reports/CurrentOLOReports.html>. The report offers three recommended discussion issues for the Council to raise with agency representatives:

1. Access to public athletic facilities.
2. Addressing silos in youth sports provision
3. Promoting and expanding affordable and recreational youth sports programs

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MEMORANDUM

July 16, 2020

TO: Montgomery County Council

FROM: Natalia Carrizosa, Legislative Analyst
Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO)

SUBJECT: **OLO Report 2020-4, *Youth Sports in Montgomery County***

On July 21, the Council will discuss the findings of OLO Report 2020-4, which the Council received and released on March 10, 2020. This Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) report reviews national research on youth sports and examines the youth sports landscape in Montgomery County. In particular, this report:

- Summarizes national research on trends in youth sports participation;
- Describes public and private youth sports provision in Montgomery County; and
- Presents stakeholder observations on youth sports in Montgomery County.

This memorandum summarizes the findings and recommended discussion issues in OLO Report 2020-4 and provides an overview of recent research from the Aspen Institute on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on youth sports.

SUMMARY FINDINGS

Overall, OLO Report 2020-4 found that while some affordable and recreational youth sports programs exist, youth sports provision in Montgomery County is not well-aligned with the needs of many families. OLO's findings are summarized below.

- National data shows that children do not do enough physical activity. Youth sports participation has declined in recent years, and wide disparities in participation exist.
- The Aspen Institute's Project Play offers a framework for increasing youth sports participation that focuses on children under age 12.
- The provision of youth sports in Montgomery County is decentralized.
- The Recreation Department's youth basketball league represents the County Government's largest youth sports offering. League participants are concentrated in the southwestern and western portions of the County.

- Private and nonprofit sports leagues and clubs play a major role in youth sports provision in Montgomery County.
- Access to athletic facilities is a central concern among government and community stakeholders seeking to increase youth sports participation among underrepresented populations.
- Youth sports providers in Montgomery County rely heavily on volunteers. However, recruiting and training volunteer coaches is a growing challenge.
- The timing, location, cost and competitiveness of youth sports offerings in Montgomery County are not aligned with the needs of many families.

RECOMMENDED DISCUSSION ISSUES

OLO Report 2020-4 offered three recommended discussion issues for the Council to raise with agency representatives.

1. **Access to public athletic facilities:** The Council may wish to discuss policies and processes around community use of public athletic facilities to identify ways to support affordable sports programs and encourage free play. Note: OLO's FY20 work program included two projects related to community use of public facilities. These upcoming reports may inform this discussion.
2. **Addressing silos in youth sports provision:** The Council may wish to discuss options to promote collaboration and address silos in youth sports provision, such as convening government stakeholders and youth sports providers to encourage partnerships, or organizing a sports fair to help parents learn about sports programs in their communities that are appropriate for their child.
3. **Promoting and expanding affordable and recreational youth sports programs:** The Council may wish to discuss options for promoting and expanding affordable and recreational youth sports programs in the County, such as offering training for volunteer coaches, developing new partnerships, or expanding the public provision of youth sports.

ASPEN INSTITUTE FINDINGS ON THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON YOUTH SPORTS

In recent months, the Aspen Institute's Project Play has produced a variety of resources on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on youth sports and how to respond. Similar to other sectors, the impact on youth sports is profound. Furthermore, concerns exist about the future of the sector, particularly with respect to access for children from low-income families. However, Aspen Institute experts also note that the pandemic offers opportunities to develop more accessible and healthier models for youth sports for the future.

Youth sports organizations are experiencing severe revenue losses due to the pandemic. In the initial weeks of the pandemic, an informal poll of over 1,000 Project Play webinar participants from youth sports organizations showed that over half of respondents anticipated at least a 50% drop in

revenue in the next year.¹ A June survey of parks and recreation departments across the country showed that two thirds of respondents are reducing spending on operations. Respondents reported median reductions of between 10% and 19%, with even more dramatic reductions in capital budgets.²

Parents are increasingly concerned about sending their children back to sports. A June survey by the Aspen Institute and Utah State University found that only 53% of parents anticipate that, when current restrictions are lifted, their child will return to play sports at the same or higher amount as before. Respondents indicated they felt most comfortable with their children engaging in individual and neighborhood pickup sports, and the least comfortable with travel, elite or club league sports. Fears of illness among children and/or adults were the most commonly cited barriers for returning to youth sports. Black and Asian parents were the least likely to expect their children to return to sports (42% and 40% respectively) and the most likely to cite fears of illness as the reason.³

Youth from low-income families face significant challenges. Jon Solomon of the Aspen Institute notes that cancelations of sports programs, which provide a support system for many youth, are hitting youth in low-income families the hardest. These youth face numerous challenges including food and housing insecurity, as well as barriers in remaining physically active during the pandemic such as lack of space for social distancing in their communities.⁴ The Aspen Institute's June survey of parents shows that while youth overall are engaging in virtual training at higher rates during the pandemic, participation in virtual training among youth from low-income families has not increased as significantly.⁵

As sports programs resume operations, families impacted by job losses will be less able to afford program fees. Organizations that serve low-income youth expect that they will need to provide free programming in order for youth to participate, but doing so will be particularly challenging given their budget constraints.⁶

Experts see opportunities to strengthen local and affordable sports. Experts note that youth sports participation dropped significantly during the Great Recession and may see similar impacts as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. However, Tom Farrey of the Aspen Institute argues that communities may also see opportunities to expand local, affordable and accessible youth sports.⁷

¹ Solomon, J., "Leaders say transparency is vital for youth sports refunds," Aspen Institute Sports & Society Program, April 16, 2020, <https://www.aspenprojectplay.org/coronavirus-and-youth-sports/reports/2020/4/16/leaders-say-transparency-is-vital-for-youth-sports-refunds>, accessed 7/15/2020.

² Roth, K., "NRPA Parks Snapshot: June 24-26 Survey Results," National Recreation and Park Association, June 26, 2020, <https://www.nrpa.org/blog/nrpa-parks-snapshot-june-24-26-survey-results/>, accessed 7/15/2020.

³ Solomon, J., "Survey: Parents grow more worried about their child returning to sports," Aspen Institute Sports & Society Program, July 14, 2020, <https://www.aspenprojectplay.org/coronavirus-and-youth-sports/reports/2020/7/14/survey-parents-grow-more-worried-about-their-child-returning-to-sports>, accessed 7/15/2020.

⁴ Solomon, J., "'Invisible voice': What happens to low-income youth without sports?," Aspen Institute Sports & Society Program, March 30, 2020, <https://www.aspenprojectplay.org/coronavirus-and-youth-sports/reports/2020/3/30/invisible-voice-what-happens-to-low-income-youth-without-sports>, accessed 7/15/2020.

⁵ Solomon, "Survey: Parents grow more worried."

⁶ Solomon, "Invisible Voice".

⁷ Farrey, T., "How Sports Can Help Rebuild America," The Aspen Institute, June 1, 2020, <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/blog-posts/how-sports-can-help-rebuild-america/>, accessed 7/15/2020.

For example, the pandemic has placed a new burden on parks and recreation departments organizations to ensure children's safety from COVID-19 as they return to play. However, Farrey notes that this also presents an opportunity for agencies to set new standards for youth sports. Agencies could not only require that organizations that use their facilities meet COVID-19 training and sanitation standards, but also prioritize programs that meet other criteria, such as inclusiveness or alignment with best practices in athletic and child development.

Additionally, with structured sports programs shut down, many youth are engaging in free play and family-based play, which had been declining for decades. Charitable organizations are supporting this trend by delivering sports equipment directly to low-income families. Farrey suggests that communities could build on this trend to promote neighborhood-level sports and free play as children return to sports.

Youth Sports in Montgomery County

OLO Report 2020-4

March 10, 2020

Summary

Physical activity generally and sports specifically have numerous benefits for children and youth. However, national data show that participation in sports is declining among children and youth. Additionally, disparities in participation exist by race and ethnicity, gender, and family income. This Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) report reviews national research on youth sports and examines the youth sports landscape in Montgomery County. OLO found that while some affordable and recreational youth sports programs exist, youth sports provision overall in Montgomery County is not well-aligned with the needs of many families.

Youth Sports in the United States

An extensive body of research shows that physical activity has numerous and significant health, cognitive and academic benefits for children and adolescents. Yet, only about a quarter of children in the United States did the recommended daily 60 minutes physical activity in 2016. Children who play sports are more likely to meet physical activity guidelines compared with their peers. However, survey data show that the percentage of children under age 12 who played team sports “regularly” has declined in recent years, from 42% in 2011 to 38% in 2018. Data also show wide disparities in youth sports participation by family income, gender, and race and ethnicity.

The structure of youth sports has transitioned over time from recreational leagues that rely on parent volunteers to one based more heavily on private leagues and professional training. Families reported paying an average of \$693 annually for a child to participate in a sport in a 2019 survey. Youth sports are inaccessible for many children, and children that do play sports regularly are now playing in competitive travel teams starting as early as age 6. Children are at risk for injuries and burnout, and on average, children quit a sport at age 11.

The Aspen Institute’s 8 Plays To Increase Participation

1. Ask children what they want and offer it
2. Promote free play
3. Allow children to sample different sports
4. Revitalize local recreational leagues
5. Add sports facilities in small spaces
5. Design age-appropriate sports programming
6. Offer training for coaches
7. Create policies and alternatives to reduce injuries

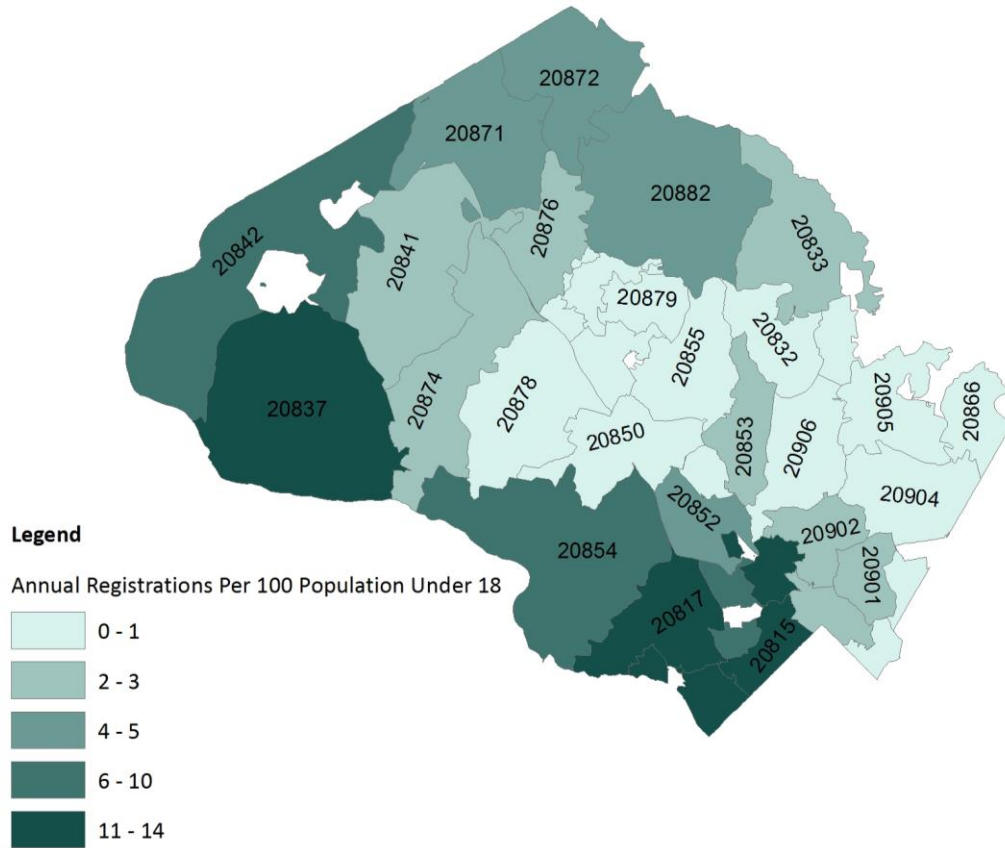
The Youth Sports Landscape in Montgomery County

Several government entities provide youth sports programming and manage sports facilities in the County, summarized below. Additionally, private and nonprofit organizations play a major role in youth sports provision.

Montgomery County Government	The Recreation Department provides recreational programs, services and facilities in the County, including youth basketball leagues. The Office of Community Use of Public Facilities issues permits for sports leagues and clubs to use public athletic facilities.
Montgomery Parks (Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission)	Montgomery Parks manages and maintains athletic facilities in its system of 422 parks and offers instructional sports programs.
Montgomery County Public Schools	MCPS operates the interscholastic athletics program at its 40 middle schools and 25 high schools.
Montgomery County Revenue Authority	The Revenue Authority provides instructional golf programs for youth and operates the MCG Juniors Golf League at its golf courses.

Recreation Department Youth Basketball. Youth basketball leagues represent the Recreation Department’s largest youth sports offering. OLO found that participation in the leagues increased from 7,500 registrations in FY17 to 8,300 in FY19. Male participants accounted for two-thirds of registrations in FY19, and participants were concentrated in the southwestern and western sections of the County.

FY17-FY19 MCRD Youth Basketball League Registrations by Participant ZIP Code Per 100 Child Population



Montgomery County Public Schools. Data on the MCPS High School Interscholastic Athletics Program show that in FY19, 20,147 rostered student-athletes participated across all high school sports, except for cheerleading and pompons, of which 11,239 (56%) were boys and 8,908 (44%) were girls. Students that had Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) or 504 plans accounted for 2,437 (12%) rostered student-athletes in FY19. Overall participation in these sports declined slightly since FY15, when 20,483 rostered student-athletes participated.

The Office of Community Use of Public Facilities (CUPF). CUPF issues permits to use publicly-owned facilities in Montgomery County, including permits for sports leagues and clubs to use athletic facilities. Athletic facilities available for booking from CUPF (MCPS, County Government and M-NCPPC-owned athletic facilities) are subject to historical use policies. Under these policies, sports leagues and sports clubs that have booked an athletic facility in the past have priority for booking the same facility during the same time period in the future.

Private and Nonprofit Sports Leagues and Clubs. Privately-operated youth sports leagues and clubs in Montgomery County play a major role in the provision of youth sports. OLO found that among those that book public athletic facilities through the Office of Community Use of Public Facilities:

- Soccer was the most common sport offered, followed closely by baseball;
- More leagues and clubs served elementary and middle school-aged children than high school youth; and
- 12 out of 89 (13%) leagues and clubs each made more than 1,000 bookings in FY19, accounting for 28,558 out of 44,873 bookings (64%) of bookings by sports leagues and clubs with historical use priority.

Stakeholders report many children in Montgomery County are playing with competitive, tryout-based leagues and clubs that employ paid coaches, charge high participant fees, and demand significant amounts of time and travel from players and their families. Recreational leagues and clubs that charge relatively low fees and do not require tryouts are thriving in some parts of the County. However, many areas lack access to affordable youth sports. For providers of youth sports providers, recruiting volunteer coaches and securing athletic facilities for their activities are two key challenges.

Families’ Experiences With Youth Sports in Montgomery County. OLO conducted an anonymous online survey of parent-teacher association (PTA) members to learn about their experiences with youth sports. Overall, respondents expressed a desire for more recreational sports that are not tryout-based, are available to children who have not played the sport before, and take place at their children’s schools. Respondents identified a variety of challenges they face in finding and participating in youth sports for their families, including:

- The time gap between the end of the school day and the start of youth sports activities presents a logistical challenge for many parents.
- Sports activities do not take place near respondents’ families’ schools or homes.
- Available sports activities are too competitive, even at very young ages.
- Cost is a significant barrier: over a third of respondents reported paying over \$2,000 annually for one child to play sports.
- Programs do not serve children with disabilities.

Recommended Discussion Issues

OLO offers three recommended discussion issues for the Council to raise with agency representatives.

- 1. Access to public athletic facilities:** The Council may wish to discuss policies and processes around community use of public athletic facilities to identify ways to support affordable sports programs and encourage free play. Note: OLO’s FY20 work program includes two projects related to community use of public facilities. These upcoming reports may inform this discussion.
- 2. Addressing silos in youth sports provision:** The Council may wish to discuss options to promote collaboration and address silos in youth sports provision, such as convening government stakeholders and youth sports providers to encourage partnerships, or organizing a sports fair to help parents learn about sports programs in their communities that are appropriate for their child.
- 3. Promoting and expanding affordable and recreational youth sports programs:** The Council may wish to discuss options for promoting and expanding affordable and recreational youth sports programs in the County, such as offering training for volunteer coaches, developing new partnerships, or expanding the public provision of youth sports.



OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Marc Elrich
County Executive

Andrew W. Kleine
Chief Administrative Officer

MEMORANDUM

March 2, 2020

TO: Chris Cihlar, Director
Office of Legislative Oversight

FROM: Andrew Kleine, Chief Administrative Officer *AWK*

SUBJECT: Draft OLO Report 2020-4: Youth Sports in Montgomery County

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Office of Legislative Oversight's (OLO) Draft Report 2020-4: Youth Sports in Montgomery County. As indicated in the research, children's experiences in youth sports can have important long-term consequences for their health and well-being. This report provides a useful overview of the landscape of youth sports in Montgomery County and reviews evidence on access to youth sports, noting wide disparities exist.

Recommendations:

The report's three (3) recommended discussion issues provides us with an opportunity to examine our current level of service and identify strategies for ensuring an appropriate and equitable balance of programs and facilities, and to examine the County's relationship with other youth sport service providers.

CAO Response:

We recognize that youth sports have the potential to improve outcomes and yield high social returns and impact health and wellness. We acknowledge the significance of the discussion issues presented in this report and we stand ready to work with the Council. We are committed to begin meaningful conversations with the Council and community stakeholders. Having these conversations will help us to enhance programs and to establish policies and initiatives that are embedded with equity outcomes; and to better understand the important role of public recreation services, facilities and programs for effectuating equity in youth sports.

Thank you for the opportunity to review the draft report and present our comments. We look forward to providing more detailed information and analysis as needed.

cc: Fariba Kassiri, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer
Robin Riley, Director, Department of Recreation
Ramona Bell-Pearson, Director, Community Use of Public Facilities
Dale Tibbitts, Special Assistant to the County Executive