Executive Summary

There are a lot of good signs in Philadelphia today—population is increasing, the economy is strong, and our sports teams are winning. But we all know that over the long-term, Philadelphia’s future relies on our success in developing young people into healthy, successful adults.

And on that front, we face some challenges.

Philadelphia is the poorest of the nation’s largest cities.\(^1\) Today, 37 percent of Philadelphia’s children live under the Federal Poverty level. Nearly 30 percent of youth from low-income households do not participate in sports and physical activity nationwide, a rate 2.5 times greater than the level of youth physical inactivity in the wealthiest households.

Only 1 in 5 of Philadelphia’s young people gets the recommended 60 minutes a day of physical activity, and 1 in 5 gets no physical activity at all. That can lead to health problems for those children today, and is even more troubling for their lifelong health outcomes.

We also know that the occurrence of truancy climbs significantly between the ages of 10 and 14, and that youth who participate in sports and other school-sponsored programs tend to have better attendance rates.

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But despite all the evidence of the benefits, we’re not seeing enough kids engaged in high quality sports-based youth development (SBYD) programs, where sports training is combined with positive youth development programs (academic support, healthy lifestyles, team building and leadership) to address the needs of the whole child. Too few kids have access to quality sports opportunities, because traditional sports programs are often too expensive for many Philadelphia families; program providers have limited access to the fields, gyms and facilities located at city recreation centers, schools or private facilities throughout the city; not enough families are aware of sports-based youth development opportunities; and programs don’t have the resources to grow to scale.

Every Child Has an Opportunity for Sports-Based Youth Development

So how do we overcome these challenges and provide SBYD opportunities to every young person in Philadelphia?

After 9 months of work and engagement, The Philadelphia Task Force on Sports-Based Youth Development believes that a focus on sports-based youth development, as an integral part of the city’s emerging Out-of-School Time initiatives, can make a profound difference in the lives of our young people, and can also serve as the centerpiece of a citywide “System” of sports-based youth development, defined below. To be successful, we need to build and support a system that provides access to affordable, high-quality sports-based youth development opportunities in every neighborhood: equal opportunities for every child in the city.

Big goals like these require a new approach, and a change in thinking. We will need to overcome barriers and improve performance in three key areas of the SBYD system: we need to increase access, affordability and availability for the Places where SBYD programs operate; we need to increase the reach, scale and quality of SBYD Programs across all neighborhoods of the city; and we need to increase the capacity and training of the People—professionals and volunteers—who operate and deliver SBYD programming to children.

While we understand this is a big challenge, we are committed to meeting it. We have tangible strategies that demonstrate the commitment of city government, the School District of Philadelphia and private and non-profit organizations to increase opportunities for young people across the entire city.

There already are promising initiatives underway to address the beginning and conclusion of the public education process (Universal Pre-K, Read by 4th for younger children and various workforce programs for secondary school students.) However, there is an opportunity to make a difference in the middle school years of 4th to 8th grade—in those formative pre- and early-teen years where there is a need to capture the passion and energy of children and help them develop the habits and skills that will change their health outlook, improve their educational outcomes, and infuse them with lifelong leadership skills.

The Task Force concluded that we must seize this moment and build a world-class system of sports-based youth development. With that system, we can reach for the ultimate goal—that every child in the city has access to a high-quality SBYD experience.
**GOAL**  Every child in Philadelphia has access to a high-quality sports-based youth development program, with an initial focus on fourth through eighth grade.

**TEAM**  We will build and support a system that brings together providers, city government, the School District, and others in a collective impact effort, guided by the Philadelphia Youth Sports Collaborative, functioning in a “backbone” role.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**  We will work as a system to:

- Leverage city and School District partnerships to create pilot programs in schools and at recreation centers
- Maximize usage and availability of public and private facilities for SBYD programming
- Develop intentional, comprehensive training programs for all youth-facing members of the SBYD community, both employees and volunteers
- Measure and report the impact of SBYD programs and interventions
- Conduct cutting edge research to prove the system’s effectiveness
- Engage the community to raise awareness of the benefits of SBYD
- Develop and invest in grassroots efforts to engage, support, and recognize a trained coaching corps
- Identify sustainable support for collaboration and growth to scale

**KEEPING SCORE**  By 2023:

- Every school housing 4th to 8th grades has at least one SBYD Out-of-School Time program or in-school sports program on site or at a nearby location with coaches trained in positive youth development;
- Philadelphia Parks and Recreation and School District of Philadelphia, along with private and non-profit program host facilities, has developed a coordinated access approach to their facilities to ensure that every neighborhood has adequate spaces available for use in a manner that is not cost-prohibitive;
- All SBYD OST programs are using a set of common measurement tools and reporting them through the Out-of-School Time Initiative’s citywide data management system (or a comparable system that feeds information into the citywide system);
- Partnerships have been established with key community influencers to support promotion of SBYD to make sure that we are reaching everyone who wants to participate;
- Sufficient funding has been identified and secured to support program expansion without impact on other city or School District of Philadelphia priorities, and supports the work of current SBYD providers.
We are launching Game On Philly! as a 5-year campaign to reach our goal of providing every child in Philadelphia with an opportunity to participate in a sports-based youth development program.

We believe that Philadelphia can be the nation’s leader in using sports to fuel youth development. As a Task Force, we will stay engaged in this campaign—advising PYSC and the Game On Philly! team on adjustments to the strategy, participating in working groups and pilot projects, and providing leadership on key initiatives.

What are we asking you to do? Get in the game. Connect with the Game On Philly! campaign and find out how you can help. Here are some opportunities:

- **Do you have a passion for sports and/or youth development?** We can connect you with an SBYD provider in your community. Be a volunteer. Serve on a board. Help us recruit kids for these programs.

- **Do you have a social media presence?** Let us leverage your platforms. We will be launching major communications and fundraising campaigns in the coming months, and we would love to connect with your platform and use it to promote this effort.

- **Like politics?** Be an advocate. We will connect you to opportunities to testify, write an op-ed, or just meet with an elected or appointed official and let them know how important SBYD is to you and your organization.

- **Can you make a financial contribution?** Ideas that have a big impact need financial support. If you can help, consider getting in the game now. We hope to raise $1 million over the next five years for this campaign—to support pilot programs, comprehensive training, and research. In the coming months we will be announcing great collaborative funding opportunities that will make a huge difference in building out this system.

It’s time to get off the sidelines.