

Every Neighborhood Must Have Great Rec Centers, Parks, Libraries, Safe Places, Afterschool and Summer Programs

What Kids Need

Kids in Philadelphia deserve and need more recreational, sports and enrichment options after school and during the summer so they can grow up to be healthy adults.

The dearth of safe community open and recreational spaces and enriching extracurricular activities in nearly every neighborhood across Philadelphia is directly a result of a lack of funding and coordination.

To ensure that every neighborhood has great rec centers, libraries, and afterschool and summer programming, the Mayor must:

- Designate a high level Out of School Time System Team with a talented leader who reports to the Mayor. The team must be tasked with aligning and planning for new resources to ensure that after school activities are available for every child that needs them. This team must include the leadership of the Free Library, Parks and Recreation and leaders of youth serving organizations who are tasked by the Mayor to make sure enriching opportunities are available from morning to night and create a five year plan to increase program partnerships, and access to other government services for the entire family and increasing mental health and well being.
- Continue and expand the Rebuild program so that all of the city's recreation centers and libraries are modernized.
- Increase the number of recreation center staff so centers and playgrounds are open seven days a week and gyms are open 12 hours a day with enough staff to support robust programming for children.
- Fund libraries sufficiently so that branches can offer after school programming and are open seven days a week.
- Directly fund out-of-school time providers through the city budget instead of state allocated prevention funding allowing more flexibility to ensure available programming meets the needs of youth.
- Make it safe for children to play outside and improve air quality by tending to and investing in the city's tree cover.
- Expand drop in programs for teenagers and young adults and use evidence-based practices to measure the quality and impact of the drop in programs.

Why This Matters To Kids, Parents and, The City

Ample research shows that kids involved in afterschool activities have improved school attendance, better grades, and show more engagement in their learning. In fact, students at greatest risk also exhibit the greatest gains when they are involved in extracurricular activities.

The benefits of funding, coordinating, and delivering high quality programs in our public spaces begins with our kids and billows out to improve all of our city. Indeed, a 2015 study from the Teachers College at Columbia University found that every \$1 invested in Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) interventions, like after school programming, provided an economic return of \$11.

Finally, if the next Mayor intends to fight gun violence and increase the safety in the city, he or she must invest in youth so that they have a stake in helping him/her achieve those critical safety goals. When youth believe they have a future, they fight to protect it. Youth programming builds that belief.

The Details

Philadelphia invests only \$50 per person in parks and recreation operations, significantly less than other comparable cities (Chicago: \$177, Atlanta: \$136, Baltimore \$125, Pittsburgh: \$89, Phoenix: \$86). It also only uses state dollars to fund out-of-school time (OST) activities (i.e., after school and summer programs). Meanwhile the city departments running recreation centers, libraries, and the out of school time system rarely coordinate among themselves much less with partners. As a result, access to quality recreational or enriching after school or summer program options for children is uneven, or non-existent in some neighborhoods with quality varying as widely as access.

The first step for the new administration is a more significant investment in the quality of our recreational spaces. The Rebuild program, funded by the city's sweetened beverage tax, made good strides in rehabilitating rec centers and libraries with the most need for attention. However, many more public buildings that serve children need updates. Recreation centers and libraries also need more staff who can run programs for children. Communities are eager for new programs, but without the staff capacity to lead programs or care for the hundreds of parks, fields, and centers across our city, Philly kids will still not have access to the enriching activities they deserve.

Beyond an investment in publicly run youth programs, the next administration must coordinate and invest heavily in the voluntary and private run out of school time ecosystem. OST programs don't just help students, they help families. When parents and caregivers can trust that their child is safe and well cared for in the local community spaces it provides freedom to work, to relax, or to pursue other interests knowing that childcare is not solely their burden. This has physical, psychological, economic, and sociological benefits for the parent that then impacts the child.

The Mayor must direct his appointees to proactively tap the commitment and enthusiasm from the thousands of youth-serving providers operating in schools and recreation centers across the city. Many already partner with libraries, recreation centers, parks, and schools to provide programs to thousands of Philadelphia's kids. They must be seen as an essential extension of the system.

While Philadelphia has many challenges, it also has a wealth of assets that simply need better support and organization so that the city and these partners can maximize their impact on children. The City's Office of Children and Families spends approximately \$26 million to permit slightly more than 6,000 out of school slots for children who participate in programs run by non-profit and voluntary agencies. Over 80% of these funds come from state prevention funding which dictates who can be served and what those services can be. Often these dictates mean that far too many children cannot be served. Direct investment from the city is needed so more kids can participate in after school and summer programs offering an array of activities.

Finally, increasingly children are living and playing outside in extreme heat. Communities without trees and greenspaces become heat islands, where temperatures can rise over 20° past that of greener neighborhoods in the city. 80° in Chestnut Hill can be over 100° just a few minutes away in Hunting Park. The youth of this city require that the Mayor accelerate the tending to and expanding the city's tree cover in order to protect children from extreme heat and clean the air they breathe. The city is facing a backlog in tree maintenance and tree planting, a matter that must be addressed to improve the communities where children live and ensure that the next generation of Philadelphians inherit a more environmentally resilient city.

About The Kids Campaign

The Kids Campaign is a coalition of 60 plus child-serving groups in Philadelphia. Our coalition formed to make sure that the next mayor of Philadelphia is ready to do whatever it takes to ensure a **S.E.C.U.R.E.** future for every kid – a future with Safety, an Education, Careers, Uplift, Recreation, and a healthy Environment. A non-partisan effort, the Kids Campaign will share information parents and voters need to determine which candidate will make every day safer than the one before for children and youth. Organizations and individuals can learn more and join the Kids Campaign at www.thekidscampaign.org.