

THE 32

*A Community Sports Center for Youth Development,
Healthy Families and an Active Community*

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PROJECT ABSTRACT

The 32 would be a community-based, inclusive sports center. It would be designed to support positive youth development by providing cutting edge programming for youth athletes of ability levels. It would also provide education for the variety of individuals who develop, train, engage and support them. The project's success would be based upon providing diverse sports, classes and events for the entire community that are relevant to and informed by their youth participants. The programming for the project would be developed and evaluated based upon a strategic planning and continuous quality improvement model to ensure the consistent use of best practices and outstanding outcomes.

PROGRAM PURPOSE

The purpose of The 32 is to create a community athletic space that is focused on supporting the positive development of youth. This purpose requires a space that engages all of the individuals that help develop children and young adults in understanding, supporting and maintaining best practices for positive development. This creates an overall goal of community education and health promotion. The public health model identifies that working with multiple messengers at multiple points in time provides the most effective mechanisms for changing negative individual, community and society norms into positive, health promoting behaviors which develops new norms in time. Creating a space that offers activities, classes and programming for a diverse group of individuals focused specifically on the concept of positive, healthy, active lifestyles will create meaningful change for youth in the community. Research in the fields of public health, youth development and sports show a critical need for investing resources in positively youth development and promoting life-long healthy behaviors in youth and adults. Farrey (2009) makes a compelling case throughout his book, *Game On*.

Today, kids start playing sports earlier than ever before. And when they quit or get cut, they're often gone from the game for good. From the grassroots up, more than ever the sports structure is configured in a manner designed to identify and promote the next generation of athlete-entertainers – whether for the pro leagues, colleges, or just the Friday night lights of New Britain. These talented children become the focus of the youth sports system, which leaves few options for the teenager of low or average ability.

(p. 80)

Training coaches, parents, siblings and community members that interact with youth will create multiple support points for positively developing active and balanced youth athletes. (Principles of Community Engagement, 2011) (see fig1) The 32 will offer classes, activities and programming based on the core concepts of positivity, inclusiveness, health and community. Essential offerings will include leadership development for youth, training for volunteer coaches, featured events and speakers who are knowledgeable experts regarding healthy lifestyles, youth sports and positive development, non-competitive athletic training and development for beginning athletes and mental and physical wellness for competitive athletes. The 32 will provide a space that is relevant to individuals of all athletic levels; ensuring those who are physically disabled, economically disadvantaged, late bloomers athletically or suffering from health challenges can all be engaged in a way that is not intimidating. It will also be a home to those who excel athletically and want an environment that supports their continued competitive success and development. As the executive director of The 32 I do not feel supporting the athletic excellence of elite athletes is antithetical to creating an environment that is not intimidating to beginners; the community and youth development focus of The 32 will support the creation of a space that engages both ends of the competitive spectrum and welcomes everyone on the athletic continuum. (Abrahms, 2011 as cited in Learning Culture Through Sports, 2011)

CONTEXT OF PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

The 32 is designed to begin as a small non-profit recreation center; initially centering on the expertise of myself, serving as Executive Director, and colleagues with expertise in non-profit

management and program development, youth sports development and coaching, and personal training and health center management. The 32 would be built in a rural setting, where space for initial building and expansion are more readily available and where best-practice, community-based health programs are in shorter supply. (Gamm, Castillo and Williams, 2010) The first building would house indoor courts, a gym space, a play area for younger children, a small concessions space for accessing healthy snacks and beverages, an office and locker rooms. We would also have an outdoor area allowing for a multi-purpose sports field and a small playground. Ideally the gym space would allow some areas to have views of the courts, outside field or play area. Initial funding would be provided by grant solicitations to area foundations and government organizations, community fundraising, sliding-scale membership fees for gym use, concessions, hosting adult and young adult recreational leagues and rental of the space for events. Oversight and fundraising would be managed by a Board of Directors, a Youth Advisory Committee and staff to ensure program purpose and objectives are being met and that best practices are consistently utilized. Initial programming would include volunteer coaching clinics, youth leadership development classes and camps, classes for beginning athletes of various ages, and fitness classes designed to build exposure to multiple sports and enhance the idea of athletic activity being enjoyable. (Farrey, 2009)

Alongside these priority programs, The 32 would also offer gym memberships, child care as an upgrade for gym members or those enrolled in 32's classes, CPR and First Aid certification classes and recreational leagues. The primary purpose of these additional offering is to increase access and minimize the costs of central programming for community members.

CONTEXT OF PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

Upon successfully opening The 32, and operating for an initial period, the funds gained will be combined with additional grants and community dollars to expand the space. The expansion would be based upon an initial five year strategic plan built during the first years of operation. This plan would include the input of the Board, Youth Advisory Committee, staff, parents, community members and other key stakeholders. (Principles of Community Engagement, 2011)

Options that would be explored for expansion under the plan would include: additional courts, both indoor and outdoor, expansion of field space, increased indoor and outdoor play areas, classrooms for offering programming and allowing quieter study space for student athletes between activities, an expansion of the gym space, increased space for fitness classes, an indoor and/or outdoor track, and a community demonstration kitchen for cooking classes and offering additional food choices at the concessions. These options would be revisited in every five year strategic plan and added as community need dictated and funding allowed. It would be the goal of the programming and staff at The 32 to engage, support and develop the interests and abilities of participants so the expansions to more diverse offerings would be a natural process for the community. By offering a single location for multiple sports and fitness activities, related classes and events, and healthy snacks The 32 would greatly increase opportunities for individuals to try new activities and for families to spend time together focused on healthy pastimes. (Farrey, 2008) It would reduce the stress of traveling to multiple locations for multiple family members and instead focus on skill-building and positive development for youth, parents and coaches in a supportive environment.

Staffing and programming would be expanded to match the increased space. The new staff members, while potentially highly skilled in a particular sport or area of expertise, will be required to have a diverse athletic background and a proven track record of positive coaching, teaching or management. All staff will participate in extensive training and regular professional development to ensure they are able to maintain an encouraging, supportive and community-responsive environment. Hiring of staff will focus on balancing areas of expertise, creating a strong team, promoting an ability to work collaboratively and a strong understanding of overall youth development. (Ehrmann, 2011) Knowledge of best practices from the related fields of community engagement, serving underserved or unique populations, youth empowerment, conflict management and public health will be encouraged amongst all staff. (Learning Culture Through Sports, 2011) The primary job of all staff will be to focus on creating an inclusive and supportive space that builds the skill and character of every member and participant of the 32 community. (Farrey, 2009)

With the increase in staff, popular classes and events will be offered at multiple times to increase accessibility. Advanced youth leadership and advanced volunteer coaching classes will be added building upon the skills developed in initial offerings. Youth and young adults who have completed the youth leadership development sessions would be eligible to volunteer or intern in skill-building or leadership classes for younger athletes. The Youth Advisory Council would also be expanded by providing additional leadership opportunities and skill-building sessions and a Parents Advisory Council would be added to provide another mechanism for feedback, input and community engagement. Additional recreational leagues and sport-specific

classes would be added and a discount would be offered to members who engage in a variety of sports or more advanced athletes who register for a beginner course in an unfamiliar sport. In addition to expanded training for volunteer coaches, we would add classes for paid coaches, certification for referees for the high school level and below, and sport specific, hands on training opportunities. Programming and events would be added to increase awareness regarding gender and sport, race and sport, health disparities, cultural and religious relevancy in health, youth empowerment and disabilities and sport. (Learning Culture Through Sports, 2011)

As a community-based organization, options would also be made available to other sports and health programs in the community to utilize space for free and/or co-sponsor community events. These opportunities would be used as tools to encourage those programs staff and volunteers to participate in training and promote the same best practices as those implemented at The 32. Collaborations with these organizations, schools and the community could lead to community enhancements such as running and biking trails, obstacle or fitness courses, climbing walls, ropes courses or a community pool as examples. They could also lead to partnerships for summer day camps, focusing on well-rounded youth who participate in a variety of activities including and beyond sports. (Farrey, 2009) These would create opportunities for over-scheduled children and young adults to promote skills and values that will be beneficial across their lives, try new activities, and develop advanced techniques in their areas of interest. The 32 staff and Board would utilize these collaborations as an opportunity to develop youth leadership by ensuring their Youth Advisory Committee played an active role in

the selection, design and implementation of these community-based, collaborative projects.

(Sustainability Planning Guide for Healthy Communities, 2011)

COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS

Rural communities in Michigan have higher rates of obesity, poverty and unemployment. Just over two thirds of Michigan's population over the age of 18 is overweight or obese and in rural locations this rises to over 67% of the population. (Michigan Rural Health Profile, 2008) Rural adults are less likely to meet moderate or vigorous physical activity recommendations and cite having reduced access to locations that promote healthy physical activity for their inability to meet health guidelines. (Health Disparities: A Rural-Urban Chartbook, 2008) The low socioeconomic status (SES) that denotes high rates of unemployment, poverty and diminished educational opportunities and/or achievements is reinforced by these realities in rural Michigan.

Data suggest that individuals who reside in lower SES neighborhoods may have little ability to control their physical activity in the face of inaccessible environments. Lower SES neighborhoods have fewer physical activity resources and, of the resources available, a lower proportion is free for use. To date, physical activity promotion interventions have typically relied on individual-level approaches, frequently showing limited success in promoting sustained behavior change. Taken together, these findings and existing research suggest that individual approaches need to be expanded to include environmental strategies that accommodate or influence the availability and

accessibility of physical activity resources to enhance intervention

sustainability. (Estabrooks, Lee, Gyurcsik, 2003, p. 102)

The realities of these statistics would only be further exacerbated by continued economic decline in Michigan, in general, and rural communities specifically. The implications for youth sports, both school-based and community-based, appear to follow the same pattern as pay and free physical activity resources. Provision of a community-based, community-relevant sports center will create an affordable, accessible space for parents and youth. It would allow the community and schools to leverage resources to increase recreational leagues, activity resources and youth sports. The 32 would provide the community opportunities to engage in new sports, enjoy physical activities as a family, and improve the overall health and development of the community. (see Fig2)

YOUTH CHARACTERISTICS

The primary focus of The 32 and its programming is to provide opportunities for rural youth and the community members who develop, train, engage and support them. Given the ever growing emphasis on competition, winning and athletic specialization at an early age there is little opportunity for enjoying athletics or engaging in sports for fun. (Shields and Bredemeier, 2009) The focus on specialization increases the likelihood of burnout, diminishes opportunities to try new sports and increases the risk of injury from overuse of developing muscles.

Early specialization often puts those who stay in the sport through mid-adolescence into a developmental rut and presents them with the challenge of digging themselves out if they wish to move successfully into adulthood.

This occurs when young people focus so exclusively on their sport that they

have little time to expand their interests, identities, and experiences beyond the confines of their sport. This compromises the normal development that occurs during adolescence. (Coakley, 2011 as cited in Learning Culture Through Sports, 2011, p. 15)

This process also excludes children who are late bloomers and/or those who do not have the financial resources to engage in sports at the more competitive levels, which are frequently costly.

Youth who have a lower socioeconomic status are excluded from a variety of sporting opportunities beyond these competitive leagues, especially as the material requirements of sports increase with age. It will be the goal of The 32 to provide scholarship opportunities to manage equipment costs. Fees for activities and programs will also be provided on a sliding fee scale. These limitations reinforce other disparities, children with poor health miss more classes and youth who miss more class perform poorly in school which in turn reduces their success in finding meaningful employment. The current laser focus on the idea of athletic excellence leading to college scholarships may be misguided; however, health and regular physical activity have shown to have an overwhelming number of positive outcomes including better academic performance and overall achievement. (Farrey, 2009) (see fig3) There are similar correlations and increased negative outcomes for children of color, females and individuals with physical and mental disabilities due to their lack of engagement and participation in physical activity and youth sports. Although some of these disparities are or have diminished for young men from specific racial groups, low socioeconomic status and rural locations both intersect with racial

disparities, diminishing these gains. (Whitt-Glover et al. 2009) Addressing these disparities is critical for overall positive youth development and would be an essential component of all of the services and activities provided by The 32. Having a community-based, non-profit to provide opportunities focused on the holistic needs of youth is essential as not all approaches will work with all youth. The purpose for The 32 and the subsequent design provides that meaningful training will be delivered to staff regarding cultural competency, gender construction and orientation, accessibility and related concepts. This will ensure that all members of the community feel represented in the work of The 32 and specifically youth will be empowered to participate in new activities, develop their leadership skills and learn positive habits for life.

Along with maintaining relevancy for the diverse backgrounds of the youth to be served, a system will also be put in place for developing appropriate options for youth at various stages of physical, mental and athletic development. The initial participation would be based upon the following age groups: 6 and under, 6-9, 9-12, 12-16 and 16-18. Within each age group children will be divided into subsets based upon their emotional, physical and cognitive development, as well as, athletic skill. Children would also be moved up and down age groups based on their familiarity with a given sport, their physical size and abilities and their emotional preparedness for the challenges and opportunities presented by their selected class or sport. Additionally, beginning children with excellent emotional, cognitive and physical development may be co-mingled with more advanced athletes of their same age group to increase enjoyment and teach sportsmanship, leadership and related concepts. (Shields and Bredemeier, 2009) There will be

minimal, if any, competitive opportunities for the youngest age groups, beginning players, and those not physically, emotionally or cognitively prepared. Any competitive opportunities will be based on skill mastery, positive attitude and effort and designed to maximize the fun and enjoyment of the participants. “You have to love a sport to play it well and love grows out of enjoyment.” (Nicklaus as cited in Shields and Bredemeier, 2009, p. 71) As, abilities, age and preparedness advance the competitive opportunities for youth engaged at The 32 will also increase. While there will be score keeping, with winners and losers, the primary focus of these games will be athletic excellence and improving specific skills with the opportunity each game presents. At the highest age and ability level, there will be an emphasis on individual skill development, mastering all relevant techniques required and developing strong ethics, personal accountability and leadership. Competitions at this level will provide the athletes opportunities to attempt and develop new techniques and strategies, which will be praised regardless of the outcome of their attempts. (Farrey, 2008) This structure will provide competition which fuels the development of positive habits, fosters a love of athletics, encourages consistent effort and rewards enjoying a particular sport and trying new sports. It will build youth leaders who are enhanced by their athletic opportunities, engaged in growing their community and are not hindered or hampered by excessive competition.

PROGRAM STRUCTURE

The programming structure at The 32 will be designed so that fee-based classes will be provided with the goal of diminishing costs for those most in need of access and opportunity. Programming will also be designed with the program goal of engaging and educating an entire community in one location constantly in mind. This will include the best available instruction in

family fitness classes (i.e. parent and me, family yoga), family recreational leagues (i.e. flag football, basketball, Frisbee golf, tennis), physical activity safety education for parents and CPR, infant CPR and first aid instruction. There will be discounted classes for siblings, discounted or free child care for gym members, individuals enrolled in classes or siblings enrolled in activities and events for parents with infants/toddlers (i.e. running and biking groups) and family-focused fitness fun events (i.e. run/walks, silly races). The inclusion of the entire family will provide numerous opportunities for active parents to set great examples for their children and to increase parent education about healthy competition and positive youth development.

(Sustainability Planning Guide for Healthy Communities, 2011)

A wide range of traditional sports, uncommon sports, intro to sports and seasonal sports classes emphasizing variety, healthy lifestyle classes (yoga, nutrition, first aid, strength training) and leadership development will be provided as youth options. Discounts will be provided for enrolling in multiple activities to encourage all members to try new sports and diverse classes. However, those who opt to take single sport classes will still be exposed to new skills, activities and sports as one practice a week will be devoted to a useful but not directly related activity or sport. (Learning Culture Through Sports, 2011) Coaches from high schools, colleges, community members, college athletes will be invited regularly to share experiences and knowledge about the role of sports, physical fitness, leadership and healthy competition in their lives. (Ehrmann, 2011) While components of these events will be for all members, youth-only sessions will be the priority. The 32 will also host a semi-annual banquet with awards presented for improvements, attitude, leadership, sportsmanship, academic achievement, volunteerism and

other contributions and developmental successes. Awards would include free classes, donations to charities in their honor, savings bonds, field trip opportunities and sentimental award (i.e. engraved photo frames, place on a wall of fame). (Shields and Bredemeier, 2009) Older youth and young adults will also have access to leadership development and mentorship, volunteer and internship opportunities. This will include participation in the Youth Advisory Committee, working on the development of programming, community outreach and social media, organizing and implementing events and working with staff, coaches and officials during practices, games and classes for younger members.

The 32 will also offer youth development trainings for coaches who are not affiliated with The 32 but desire to improve their coaching abilities. If they are volunteer coaches, the classes will be free of charge but they will be open to any interested community member including high school and college students. (Vealey, 2005) After completion of the class they will be provided opportunities to assistant coach under the supervision of a 32 coach for the class or sport of their choice for the following season. Additional education classes provided by The 32 will include referee certification, opportunities for certified referee's to have professional development and support, classes designed to develop the skills of parents, teachers and other likely spectators on utilizing specific praise and positive language to create a competitive and enjoyable atmosphere. Healthy lifestyle classes, including use of a demonstration kitchen for cooking classes, will be offered to promote lifelong positive behaviors and meaningful support of healthy youth development. Health promotion and upstander/bystander strategies will also be taught to diminish athletic bullying and encourage the participation and enjoyment of all

individuals regardless of their ability or sports background. (*Sustainability Planning Guide for Healthy Communities*, 2011)

PROGRAM EVALUATION

The 32 will have numerous methods of program evaluation. Included in the evaluation design will be regular office hours by executive staff for feedback from program participants, staff and volunteers. Feedback forms will be created for all sessions, classes and sport seasons utilizing both electronic and hard copy options to ensure accessibility and high feedback ratios. There are existing forms available through the Positive Coaching Alliance that can be utilized as a template and have shown a high rate of return for similarly designed recreational teams, classes and sessions. Community review and evaluation would be promoted by electronic survey tools providing discounts for events upon completion. Office hour reports, feedback form data, and community review information will be compiled and reported regularly to the Board of Directors, Youth Advisory Committee and Parent Advisory Committee for problem solving and inclusion in strategic planning. (Ridge, 2010) Executive staff and overall programming will also be evaluated twice a year by anonymous employee and Board of Directors review. Their feedback will be utilized in updating executive position descriptions, organizational duties, pay scale and program implementation and development. The 32 executive staff will provide evaluation of staff, interns and volunteers monthly with an annual performance review for paid employees and interns. (Fetterman, D. M., Wandersman, A., Millett, R. A., 2005) These evaluations will be coupled with participant and community feedback to determine employee success in creating the desired positive atmosphere, developing youth who are athletically skilled and consistently engaging community members. (Ridge, 2010)

Additionally, all staff, interns, volunteers and Board members will be required to provide self-assessments and staff will develop professional development plans yearly. The information gathered from the various evaluation methods will determine the professional development plans ensuring a process of continuous quality improvement regarding staff skills and knowledge.

Program evaluation will also be implemented based upon continuous quality improvement models to ensure best possible programming and to support fundraising and grant writing efforts. This will include monitoring of the successes and shortcomings of coaches and youth athletes following completion of relevant classes/activities. Before and after each new class, activity or season participants will be given a sport confidence inventory as a self-assessment tool. (Vealey, 2005) They will also be asked to fill out pre and post-tests/surveys with additional multi-month follow-up for relevant classes/activities. These will be designed to capture changes in the individuals' knowledge, attitudes, skills and behavior, as well as, their experience at The 32 and their feedback regarding programming and staff. (Fetterman, D. M., Wandersman, A., Millett, R. A., 2005) An increase in participant numbers for multiple sports and increased enrollment in sports with low initial numbers will be signs of program success. High turnout and engagement in beginner classes and high enrollment numbers for mid- to advanced athletes in new sports and/or leadership and healthy lifestyle classes will show positive benefits on their evaluations and be examples of program success. (Ridge, 2010) Ultimately a component of evaluation would be to utilize key card technology, similar to those utilized by casinos and retail stores, which will note members' participation in varied activities, the amount of time

spent being active, time spent volunteering at The 32 and partner organizations and completion of feedback surveys. These activities will result in points being awarded that can be redeemed for free classes, food from the concessions, athletic gear and equipment, spa visits and gift cards. This system would produce a tremendous amount of additional data for evaluation and would encourage greater feedback returns due to the reward opportunities. Strategic planning, every five years, will incorporate the feedback and opinions of community members, Youth Advisory Committee, Parent Advisory Committee, coaches, youth development specialists, staff and Board. A paid or volunteer evaluator will help ensure all strategic plan goals are measurable and that appropriate evaluation measures are in place.

Figure 1

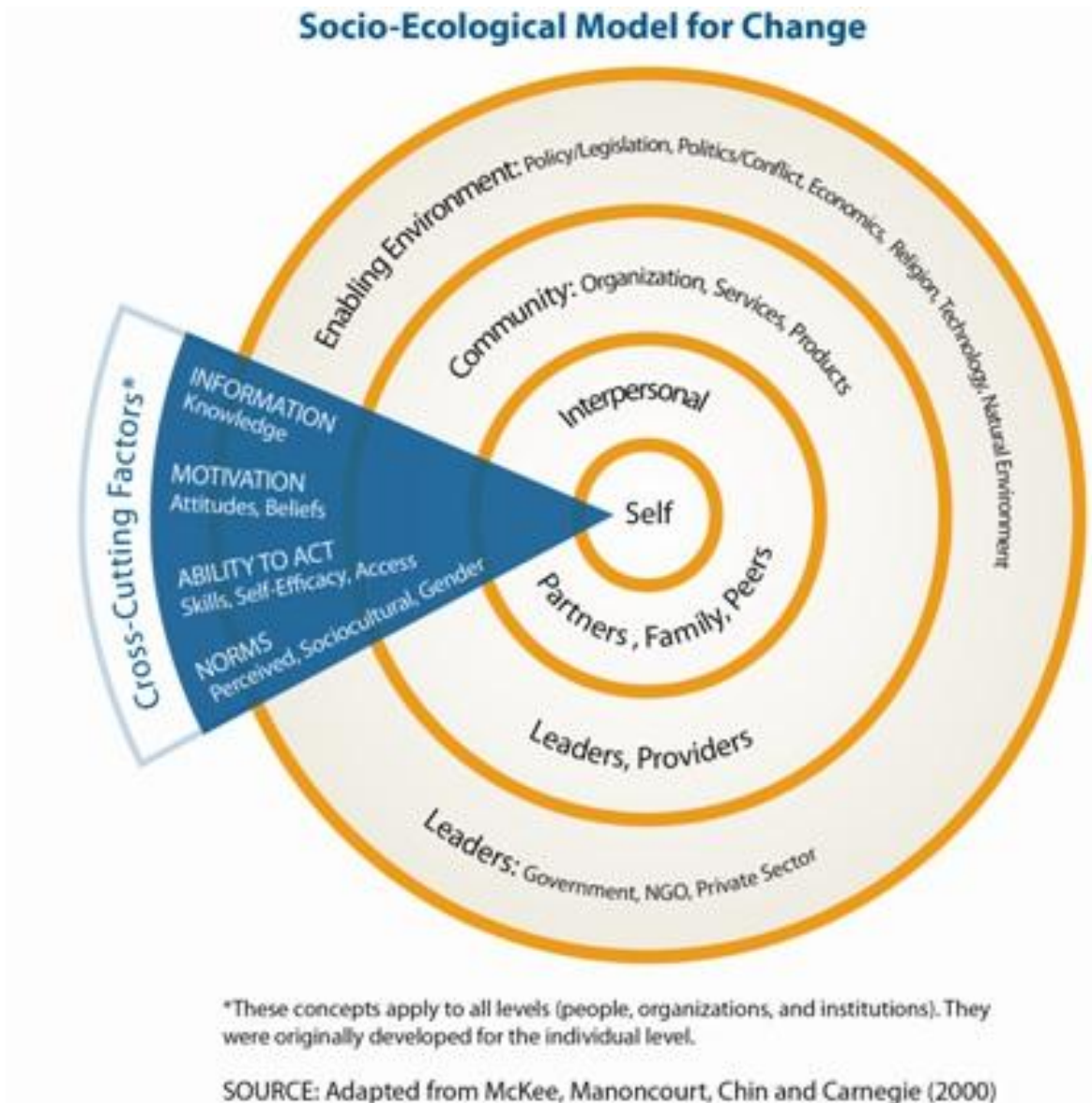


Figure 2



Figure 3

**THE MORE THEY BURN
THE BETTER THEY LEARN**

YOUR CHILD + **AMOUNT OF ACTIVITY** (60+ MIN) = **VARIOUS ACTIVITIES** (Basketball, Bicycle, Swimming) = **ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT** (Report Card: A, A, B, A)

Did you know that kids who are physically active get better grades?

Research shows that students who earn mostly **A**s are almost twice as likely to get regular physical activity than students who receive mostly **D**s and **F**s.

Physical activity can help students focus, improve behavior and boost positive attitudes. Do what you can to help your child be physically active, be it running, biking or swimming. Any type of physical activity is good, and 60 minutes a day is best. Their grades will thank you!

CDC

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT MakingHealthEasier.org/Burn2Learn

SOURCES | CDC. Physical Activity and Unhealthy Dietary Behaviors and Academic Achievement. CDC. The association between school-based physical activity, including physical education, and academic performance. Atlanta, GA: US DHHS, 2010.

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