

Exploring the activation of environmental supports for child out-of-school-time physical activity in partnership with the Acres Homes community of Houston, Texas: A pilot community assessment study of needs and opportunities

FINAL REPORT – August 31, 2025

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background. Physical activity (PA) is associated with lower risk of several types of cancer and other chronic disease conditions, as well as increased life expectancy and overall quality of life. Children are an important priority population as PA practices established during childhood tend to track into adulthood, yet a large percentage of school-aged children in Texas and the U.S. (~80%) do not meet recommendations of 60 minutes of daily PA. Out-of-school time (OST) PA has been found to contribute to children's meeting of PA recommendations, yet children and residents living in economically underserved communities have been found to have increased barriers for PA engagement. Given declining levels of child PA during the COVID-19 pandemic and the large number of children in Texas who do not meet PA recommendations, research is needed to better understand and support child OST PA, especially among children in economically underserved communities.

Purpose. This pilot community assessment study aimed to describe the barriers, facilitating factors and opportunities for OST PA among a sample of elementary school-aged children and schools in the Acres Homes community, a culturally rich yet historically under-resourced and economically underserved community in Houston, Texas. The specific OST PA practices explored were: *OST program participation, active commuting to school, and parks/trail and recreation center utilization.*

Methods. This pilot study was implemented within the context of the Acres Homes Cancer Prevention Collaboration (Multi-PIs: Basen-Engquist, McNeil, & Rechis), an NIH-funded, community-engaged initiative led by MD Anderson Cancer Center in collaboration with the Acres Homes community and supported by the Be Well™ Acres Homes Steering Committee. Guided by Intervention Mapping (IM) Step 1 (needs and asset assessment) and the IM Core Processes, this cross-sectional, mixed methods study included a *secondary analysis* of SPAN data on child PA (n=783 Acres Homes 4th/5th graders), a *parent survey* of parents/guardians of 4th-6th graders from n=4 public schools in Acres Homes (n=64 parents), *interviews* with parent, school and community leaders (n=21 key informants), and an *observational assessment* (SOPARC) of OST school park use (n=2 schools; n=20 observations). Analyses included descriptive and bivariate analyses of quantitative data and thematic analysis of qualitative parent survey and key informant data.

Results. We identified multiple strengths and assets of the Acres Homes community that support and hold promise to further support child PA engagement, including strong community partnerships; some availability of school and community-based OST programming; and availability of parks, trails and recreation centers, among other assets. Despite these strengths, Acres Homes 4th/5th graders (n=783) engaged in roughly 1.5 fewer days of PA per week (2.56 days/week) in spring 2024 compared to a Texas statewide student sample (n=3,484) (3.98 days/week) (2021-23), with similar disparities for outdoor play, and higher risk for screen time (SPAN analysis). Based on our parent survey (spring 2025), we found low to moderate participation in the three OST PA practices assessed: current OST program participation (31.3%); active commuting (12.7%-16.1% walk to/from school); past-year park/trail (65.7%) and recreation center use (44.8%); and spring 2025 school park use (35% of observations). Key *barriers* included: challenges with parent schedule and time; safety concerns; limited OST opportunities; cost and transportation barriers; lack of parental awareness; weather; and lack of supportive infrastructure for active commuting. Key *facilitators* included: parent/teacher social support; parks/trail and recreation center availability; and some school and community OST programming. We also identified community-informed recommendations as well as school/community communication channels to further promote OST PA, and created an initial resource guide for child OST PA and an initial proof-of-concept OST PA dashboard for Acres Homes.

Conclusion: Findings document key strengths, needs and opportunities for enhancing community supports for promoting child OST PA in partnership with the Acres Homes community.

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INTRODUCTION

Physical activity has been coined *the magic pill* for health given its association with multiple positive health outcomes, including lowered risk of several types of cancer and other chronic disease conditions, improved musculoskeletal health, enhanced mental health, and increased life expectancy.¹⁻³ Despite the multiple benefits of physical activity, not all people have the same opportunities and supports to engage in leisure-time physical activity or active commuting (walking/biking), key forms of physical activity that contribute to physical activity recommendations for children and adults.³ As chronic disease disproportionately affects specific racial/ethnic groups and populations experiencing poverty in the United States (U.S.),⁴⁻⁷ with disparities in physical activity engagement representing a key risk factor,^{3,8,9} research is needed to better understand how to best support physical activity engagement for socially and economically vulnerable populations.

Social ecological theory posits that our health and behavior are influenced by the *space outside the individual*, including the settings (e.g., school, work, and neighborhood) and the multiple environments within settings (e.g., built, social/organizational, policy and information environments) that surround us.¹⁰⁻¹³ In support of the impact of place on health, a growing body of evidence finds that where we live, learn, work, pray and play shape our behavior, health conditions and life expectancy.¹⁴⁻¹⁹ This evidence extends to physical activity engagement, with a growing number of studies finding that community design related to walking and biking, proximity to parks and trails, and access to recreational facilities and physical activity programming, among other features of the environment, influence physical activity participation.²⁰⁻²⁵ This theoretical and empirical foundation guides us from focusing solely on individual-level change strategies to promote health, to focusing more explicitly on ways we can harness and activate the environmental space to support individual and community engagement in physical activity.

Children are an important priority population for physical activity (PA) promotion as PA practices established during childhood tend to track into adulthood,^{26,27} yet a large percentage of school-aged children in Texas and the U.S. (~80%) do not meet recommendations of 60 minutes of daily PA.^{28,29} In supporting PA among young people, recent research with U.S. adolescents by co-author Dr. Chris Pfladderer and colleagues finds that engaging in out-of-school-time (OST) activity, including sports, PA lessons, and community service and volunteer work, is associated with meeting PA, discretionary screentime, and sleep recommendations.³⁰ In addition to ensuring accessibility and availability of OST program opportunities within children's *social/organizational environment*, increasing infrastructure supports for walking and biking as well as access to parks, trails, playgrounds, and shared use agreements for use of existing spaces represent evidence-based strategies within *the built* and *policy environments* to support PA among children and their families.^{3,20-24}

Despite the promise of these approaches, economically underserved communities in the U.S. have been found to have greater barriers for PA engagement, including distance to and lack of access to PA spaces and facilities - with evidence of persisting effects of redlining;^{Footnote(FN)1;31-34} traffic and crime-related safety concerns; time poverty; and lack of social and community supports.^{3,20-22,35-42} In recent years, climate change resulting in increased temperatures and natural disasters has been identified as an additional barrier for PA engagement.⁴³ As economically underserved communities in the U.S. have recently been cited by the Environmental Protection Agency as an especially vulnerable population for the disproportionate harms of climate change,⁴⁴ there is also a pressing need to understand how climate change affects PA in underserved communities. Given barriers for PA in low-income communities as well as the declining levels of child PA during the COVID-19 pandemic,⁴⁵ current research is needed to better understand access to environmental supports for OST PA, especially among children in underserved communities.

PROJECT AIMS

With the overarching aim of exploring ways to activate environmental supports for children's OST PA, we implemented a pilot community assessment study to better understand the barriers, facilitating factors and opportunities for OST PA among a sample of elementary school-aged children in the Acres Homes community, a culturally rich yet historically under-resourced and economically underserved community in Houston, Texas. In building from the [Acres Homes Cancer Prevention Collaboration](#) (Acres Homes CPC), an NIH-funded U54 initiative aimed at reducing chronic disease by addressing behavioral and social determinants of health in partnership with the Acres Homes community, the specific aims of the [Acres Homes Child Out-of-School-Time Opportunity Study](#) were to:

- 1.) Describe current *participation in OST PA programming, child active commuting practices (walking/biking), and utilization of community spaces* (e.g., schoolyards, parks, recreation centers), along with related barriers, facilitating factors, and recommendations for these PA practices according to Acres Homes parents/guardians;
- 2.) Identify community places and spaces where children and parents go for PA in Acres Homes community, Houston, Texas along with perceived barriers and opportunities for utilization of these spaces according to parents, school/community leaders, and PA providers working in Acres Homes, Houston, Texas; and
- 3.) Explore the perceived role of increased temperatures in shaping child outdoor PA in Acres Homes and recommended mitigating strategies among Acres Homes parents, community leaders and PA providers.

¹Communities that have been the target of racialized zoning practices that deprive them from various resources, including loans and city services.^{54,55}

METHODS

Study Design, Theoretical Foundation, and Assessment Framework. This pilot community assessment study was guided by a mixed-methods cross-sectional study design aimed at exploring barriers, facilitating factors and opportunities for *OST program participation, active commuting to school, and utilization of community spaces for PA* among Acres Homes public school-aged children and their parents. With foundation in social ecological theory that posits that people's behavior is shaped by the environment (e.g., via interpersonal, organizational, community, and societal factors),¹⁰⁻¹³ we embraced an *upending the social ecological model* perspective,⁴⁶ which begins with first describing the environmental space for the targeted behavior (PA), and then exploring how to further enhance and tailor environmental supports for health behavior change. In guiding our assessment, Intervention Mapping (IM) *Step 1- Needs and Asset Assessment* provided a helpful framework.⁴⁷ IM Step 1 tasks included *establishing a small planning group* and *conducting a needs assessment* guided by the IM Core Processes as presented in **Box A** and described below. In strengthening scientific rigor, we followed the STROBE guidelines for the reporting of cross-sectional studies.⁴⁸

Box A. IM Core Processes

- *Question Posing* to inform specific aims (see above).
- *Literature Review* to explore barriers for PA in low-income communities.
- *Analysis of Existing Data (SPAN)* to assess PA engagement among Acres Homes children.
- *Primary Data Collection* via a parent survey, key informant interviews, and observations of schoolyard OST use to assess OST PA-related practices, barriers & facilitating factors.

Setting, Partnerships, and Study Population. This study was conducted as part of the *Acres Homes CPC*, an NIH-funded U54 cancer prevention research and practice partnership with the Acres Homes community of Houston, Texas and several academic and community-based partners, including The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center and Be Well™ Acres Homes (host; Multi-PIs: Basen-Engquist, McNeil, Rechis), the UTHealth Houston School of Public Health (PI: Sharma), and school, government and community-based organizations. This study takes place within the context of Be Well Communities™ and specifically Be Well Acres Homes. Be Well Communities is MD Anderson's place-based strategy for comprehensive cancer prevention and control, working with communities to promote wellness and address modifiable risk factors for cancer. The model centers on working with community-based organizations to build their capacity to

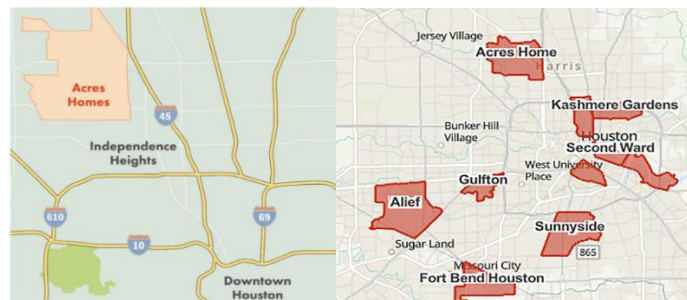


Fig. 1. Acres Homes, Houston, Texas. *Map Source:* City of Houston and Drue Wagner as cited in: "Building Trust" by M. Kimble, *Texas Observer*, April 20, 2020.

deliver and evaluate evidence-based interventions in cancer prevention and is guided by a Steering Committee which includes individuals and organizations that live, work, and serve the community of Acres Homes. This Steering Committee also serves as the Community Advisory Board of the Acres Homes CPC. Acres Homes, a 9-square-mile area located in northwest Houston, Texas ([Fig. 1](#)), is a culturally and historically rich community founded by Black Americans that once represented the largest unincorporated Black community in the south of the U.S.⁴⁹ Established in 1910 and annexed by the City of Houston in 1967,^{49,50} Acres Homes had a population of 54,736 in 2021 based on American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates, of whom 45.7% were Black, 43.4% Hispanic, 7.6% white, 2.0% Asian, and 1.3% were of 'other' ethnicity.⁵¹ Among adult residents, 25.6% had less than a high school education, 30.7% had a high school degree or equivalent, and 43.6% had some college or higher education.⁵¹ Based on the 2021 five-year ACS estimates, the median household annual income (\$41,294) was lower compared with Houston (\$65,788) and Texas (\$67,321),⁵¹ with four of 11 census tracts within Acres Homes meeting the criteria for persistent poverty,^{FN2} defined as a poverty rate of 20.0% or higher during the three decades period from 1989 to 2015-2019.^{FN3}

Despite multiple community strengths, including a strong sense of community and rich history; access to parks, trails, library, recreation/multiservice centers, faith-based institutions, schools from three school districts, a community college, and other strengths such as businesses and restaurants, Acres Homes is one of many Black communities in the U.S. that has been historically deprived of basic resources, with city services that include sewers, modern roads, and fire service not provided until the mid-1970s.^{49,50} As residents of historically under-resourced and redlined communities^{FN4} have been found to have fewer environmental supports and greater barriers for active living³¹⁻³⁴ and to be at greater risk for multiple adverse health outcomes- including chronic disease,^{52,53} Acres Homes represents a community that merits increased public health and social investment. The *Acres Homes CPC*, with the overall goal of increasing health and wellness of the Acres Homes community, presents a promising initiative for advancing co-learning with residents about how to improve environmental conditions for healthy living.

Children in 4th-6th grades from four public schools based in Acres Homes (3 elementary schools and 1 intermediate school) represented the primary population of interest for this pilot study. In understanding barriers and facilitators for OST PA for this population, data were collected from parents/guardians, school leaders and staff, and community leaders and PA providers, with the exception of our school park observations,

²Basen-Engquist K, McNeill L, Rechis R et al. U54 NIH Proposal: The Center for Transformative Community-Driven Research to Prevent Obesity-Related Cancer (2022).

³ Benson C, Bishaw A, Glassman B. Persistent Poverty: Identifying areas with long-term poverty. [U.S. Census Bureau](#) (2023).

⁴Communities that have been the target of racialized zoning practices that deprive them from various resources, including loans and city services.^{54,55}

which included children. In addition to the large percentage (80%) of school-aged children in Texas who do not meet recommendations of 60 minutes of daily PA,²⁸ disparities for PA engagement and environmental supports have been found for economically disadvantaged children in the U.S.⁵⁴⁻⁵⁷ For the current study, schools were selected based on: a.) location in the Acres Homes community; b.) composition of economically disadvantaged students; and c.) existing school partnerships with the U54 Acres Homes CPC hosted by MD Anderson and Be Well™ Acres Homes. A total of six schools from one public school district [de-identified] were initially invited to participate, of which four agreed to participate.

Research Team & Reflexivity. This study was co-led by a small team of researchers (A.S., N.M., and E.C.) in partnership with two Acres Homes school leaders - a school district health and PE coordinator (K.H.) and an elementary school teacher and nonprofit director (A.M.), four physical activity and community health researchers and leaders from MD Anderson Cancer Center (H.G., R.R., L.M., K.B.E.) who bring deep experience in community health promotion, and two university-based PA researchers (C.P., who was also a previous K-12 teacher, and D.S., an expert in community PA). The lead author (A.S.), a bilingual white male from the U.S., is a health promotion university-based researcher and practitioner with over twenty years of experience implementing community-based health promotion research and interventions in Latin America and the U.S. N.M., a multi-lingual U.S. woman of South Asian heritage, is a public health researcher and practitioner who recently completed her Master of Public Health degree. E.C., a bilingual white U.S. female with an Ed.M. degree, is a public health researcher and practitioner who is currently completing doctoral studies in public health. A.S., N.M., and E.C. led the data collection, analysis and write-up of findings. All co-authors provided input into the study aims, protocols and/or review of findings. Additional review of the *Acres Homes Out-of-School Child & Family Physical Activity Resource Guide* was provided by MD Anderson Community Advisors, who all live, work, or worship in Acres Homes.

Study Measures and Data Collection Procedures. Primary data collection methods consisted of: a *parent survey* (n=64 parents; data collected spring 2025), *key informant interviews* with parents/school/community leaders (n=21 key informants; data collected fall and spring 2025), and an *observational assessment* of OST schoolyard utilization (n=2 schools observed and 20 SOPARC observations conducted between February and April, 2025). In addition, we conducted *secondary analyses* of data on child PA from the Texas School Physical Activity and Nutrition Survey (SPAN) (n=783 4th & 5th graders), as described below. All research team members were certified in the protection of human subjects, and study procedures were reviewed and approved by the UTHHealth Houston School of Public Health Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects and our partner school district.

The parent survey was a self-administered questionnaire delivered both online (REDCap) with a link to the survey sent to parents via school communication channels, and via hard copy, with surveys sent home with students. The parent survey consisted of 27 closed and open-ended questions that explored OST child PA practices and related barriers, facilitating factors and recommendations ([Appendix A](#)). The survey included items created by our research team as well as items adapted from previous measures and published literature on *barriers* and *facilitating factors* for: OST programs,⁵⁸⁻⁶² walking/biking to school,⁶³ and park utilization.⁶⁴ The survey was delivered by our research team in English and Spanish and included an informed consent that described the study aims and voluntary and confidential nature. As an incentive for participation, participants were invited to participate in a gift card drawing for a \$50 gift card (5 cards provided per school).

The key informant interview, also delivered in English and Spanish, was created by our team and included ten closed-ended demographic-related questions and nine open-ended questions related to types, needs/barriers, facilitating factors and recommendations for OST program participation (at school and community), walking/biking to/from school, and park/trail utilization ([Appendix B](#)). Eligibility for key informant interview included: parent/guardian of a child at one of the partner study schools, a school teacher or administrator at one of the study schools or district level, a community PA provider, an afterschool program provider, and/or an Acres Homes community leader. Key informants were identified in partnership with Be Well Acres Homes leaders and via a snowball sampling approach with school partners. Key informants were provided an email invitation and informed consent for study participation, and a \$50 gift card. Interviews were conducted by our research team (AS, NM) in English and Spanish via phone or virtual platform, recorded with participant permission, and transcribed for thematic analysis.

Structured observations of schoolyard/trail utilization were conducted at two of our partner elementary schools using a modified SOPARC measure (System for Observing Play and Recreation in Communities) ([Appendix C](#)). SOPARC is a validated public observation assessment that collects data on park use, including park users' gender, estimated age and ethnicity groupings, activity modes/types and levels, and accessibility, usability, supervision, and organization of park areas.⁶⁵ For the current study, we selected two of our four study schools for the observations based on the presence of a shared schoolyard/park that was intended to be open to the community outside of school hours. In conducting the observations, our research team (A.S., N.M., E.C.) first trained in the SOPARC protocol, which included a workshop on SOPARC observation protocol and a joint observation session to ensure the observation procedure was tailored to this study. During our pilot training observations, we systematically mapped each site to identify clearly defined target areas of the most common activity zones accessible to children and youth outside of school time. (e.g., playgrounds, fields, courts) in the school park that would be used for observation. Observations were then carried out by one research team member (E.C.) from February to

April 2025, with the goal of conducting observations across three months of the spring semester. For each month, data collection included two weekday sessions at each site (3:30 PM–5:30 PM) and one weekend session at each site (9:00 AM–12:00 PM). School A was observed three times per month, and School B was observed twice per month. This schedule aimed to capture usage patterns across different times and days of the spring semester. At both sites, we conducted SOPARC scans of the pre-identified target areas, including school playgrounds, fields, and sport courts. The observer used modified SOPARC forms⁶⁵ to record findings for: a) site-level information, including park name, mapped target areas, and signage content (e.g., public use, hours, language), and b) target area data, including time, park/area identification, contextual characteristics, and momentary time sampling scan results.

Lastly, *secondary analyses of Texas School Physical Activity and Nutrition (SPAN) data* as well as additional *Google searches* of existing OST programs and PA places (parks) were conducted. We analyzed existing data from SPAN, which provides statewide surveillance on various child health indicators,⁶⁶ to generate estimates of child engagement in PA and sedentary behavior, with data collected in spring 2024 from five Acres Homes elementary schools and compared with statewide data collected in 2021-23.^{FN5} As an additional deliverable, we developed an initial proof-of-concept *Acres Homes Out-of-School-Time Physical Activity Resource Guide* ([Appendix D](#)). In developing this guide, we included OST programs and places cited from our parent survey and key informant interviews, and conducted Google searches to identify additional resources for this guide.

Analysis. Basic descriptive statistical analyses were conducted (e.g., frequencies, percentages and means) to assess the prevalence of child PA practices, perceived barriers and facilitating factors, community PA places and spaces (*SPAN* and *parent survey* analyses), and park utilization based on SOPARC. Additional bivariate analyses (chi-square, two-sample t-tests, and ANOVA with Bonferroni correction) were conducted to assess subgroup differences in PA-related practices (*SPAN*) and OST program participation (*parent survey*) (e.g., by gender, race/ethnicity, parent education, and income). Quantitative analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 29). Qualitative analysis of key informant data and parent survey open-ended questions was guided by a phenomenological research orientation, based on the lived experience of parents and school and community leaders, and thematic analysis using an inductive approach.⁶⁷⁻⁶⁹ Coding was conducted using NVivo software (QSR International Pty Ltd. Version 12). Analyses were led by two research team members (N.M. and A.S.) and consisted of familiarizing ourselves with the data by first reading through all open-ended responses; attaching a descriptor (code) to the data; creating categories; and identifying key themes.

⁵ SPAN data for Acres Homes was made possible by a collaboration between UT MD Anderson Cancer Center and Be Well™ Acres Homes, with funding from UT MD Anderson Cancer Center.

RESULTS

In the following section, we present findings organized by each of our primary data collection methods: *parent survey*, *key informant interview*, and *SOPARC assessment*. In introducing our findings, we first share prevalence estimates of PA engagement and sedentary behavior of public elementary school-aged children in 4th and 5th grades attending public schools in the Acres Homes community based on a *secondary analysis* of SPAN data.

SPAN Child Physical Activity Analysis Findings

In exploring overall physical activity engagement and sedentary-related behavior among Acres Homes elementary school-aged children, we compared prevalence estimates of PA for 4th and 5th grade children from five Acres Homes public elementary schools (n=783) based on SPAN data collected in spring 2024 with statewide SPAN data from Texas (n=3,484; n=92 schools) collected in 2021 and 2023 with 4th grade students.

In presenting these findings, we first share a note of caution. The different time periods in which the data were collected, with Acres Homes data collected in spring 2024, and statewide Texas data collected in fall and spring of 2021 and 2023, represent one potential limitation in our comparison. However, as children have been found to be the most active in the spring,⁷⁰ this difference in the seasons in which data were collected represents a potential bias in favor of Acres Homes children (i.e., we may expect that children would be more active in the spring). Second, we note that our Acres Homes data included some 5th-grade students (n=430) along with 4th grade students (n=343). While this sample aligns with our current study population, Texas statewide data only includes 4th-grade students. As such, we conducted an additional subgroup analysis with Acres Homes 4th graders to compare with our Texas statewide sample of 4th graders. Lastly, the statewide Texas moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (MVPA) question (“Last week, on which days were you physically active for a total of at least 60 minutes per day?”) referred to a 60-minute per day timeframe, while the Acres Homes MVPA question referred to 30-minute per day timeframe. This difference also represents a potential bias in favor of Acres Homes children given that the question has a shorter PA time frame for recording their activity. These differences in measurement notwithstanding, our analysis provides an initial comparison to better understand PA levels in Acres Homes elementary school children.

Participation in MVPA. Acres Homes 4th/5th graders reported roughly 1.5 fewer days of PA per week (mean: 2.56 days/week, 95% Confidence Intervals (CI): 2.38-2.74) compared to the Texas 4th student sample (mean: 3.98 days/week, 95% CI: 3.61-4.35), with similar differences found by gender (Fig. 2). Additional subgroup analyses with Acres Homes 4th graders found similar disparities for the total sample (mean: 2.70 days/week, 95% CI: 2.47-2.93). Non-overlapping CIs for both 4th/5th and 4th graders indicate significant differences.

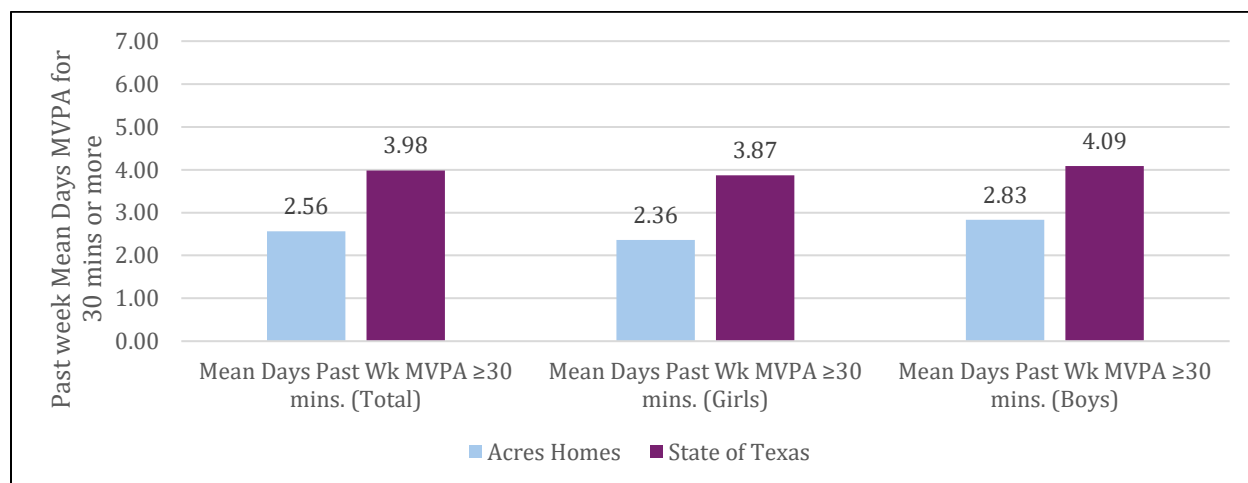


Fig. 2. Mean Days Participated in ≥30 minutes of Moderate-to-Vigorous Physical Activity in Past Week: Acres Homes (4th/5th Grade, n=783; n=5 schools) vs. Texas (4th Grade, n=3,484; n=92 schools). *Source:* Texas SPAN (Acres Homes: Spring 2024; Texas: 2021 & 2023).

Outdoor Play. We also note similar differences in the number of days that elementary school children played outside for at least 30 minutes based on the question: “Last week, on which days did you play outdoors for 30 minutes or more? (Bubble in answer for each day).” Acres Homes 4th/5th-grade students engaged in 1.8 fewer days per week (mean: 2.35 days/week, 95% CI: 2.19-2.51) compared with 4th-grade students from across the state of Texas (mean: 4.25 days/week, 95% CI: 3.96-4.54), with similar differences found for girls and boys (Fig. 3). Subgroup analyses with Acres Homes 4th graders found similar disparities (mean: 2.31, 95% CI: 2.08-2.54). Non-overlapping CIs indicate significant differences.

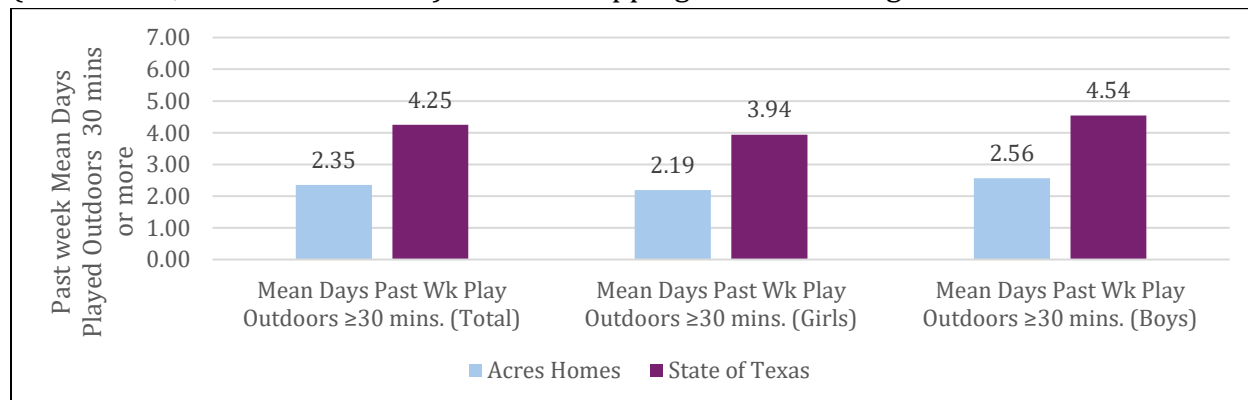


Fig. 3. Mean Days Played Outdoors for at least 30 minutes in Past Week: Acres Homes (4th/5th Grade, n=783; n=5 schools) vs. Texas (4th Grade, n=3,484; n=5 schools). *Source:* Texas SPAN (Acres Homes: Spring 2024; Texas: 2021 & 23).

Screen Use. Lastly, we compared the usual hours per day of screen time use based on the question: “How many hours per day do you usually spend using a computer, tablet/iPad®, Smartphone, or Smart Watch/Apple Watch® away from school for anything except school work?” Acres Homes 4th/5th graders reported a higher number of usual hours per day of screen time (mean: 3.48, 95% CI: 3.32-3.64) compared to 4th graders from across Texas (mean: 2.08, 95% CI: 1.88-2.28) (Fig. 4), with similar disparities by gender. We found similar disparities with our subgroup analysis of Acres Homes 4th graders (mean: 3.58, 95% CI: 3.32-3.54). Nonoverlapping CIs indicate significant differences for both comparisons.

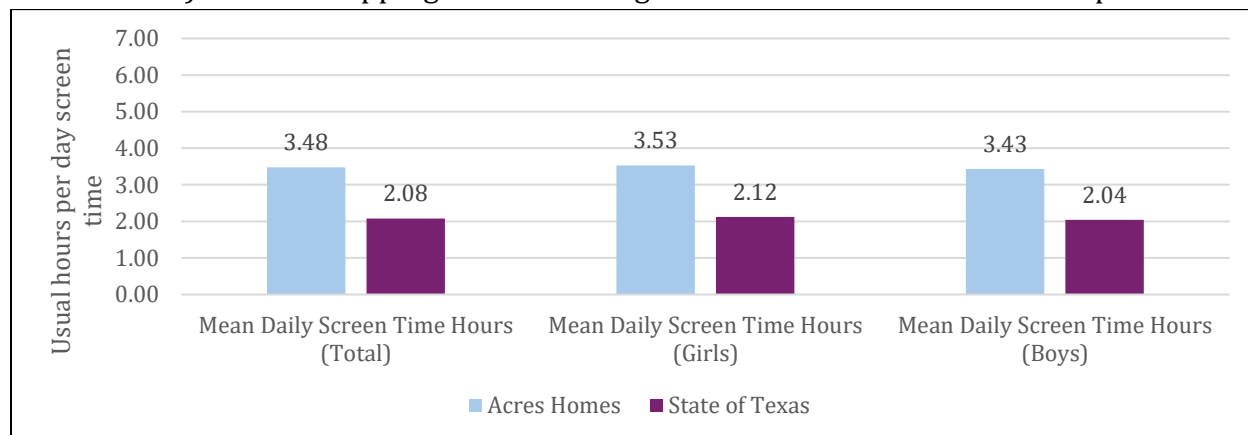


Fig. 4. Usual Hours Per Day Screen Time Use (Non-School Computer/Tablet/Smartphone Use): Acres Homes (4th/5th Grade, n=783, n=5 schools) vs. Texas (4th Grade, n=3,484, n=92 schools). *Source:* TX SPAN (Acres Homes: Spring 2024; Texas: 2021 & 23).

Subgroup Differences. We also explored gender and race/ethnicity subgroup differences in the PA-related indicators within Acres Homes 4th and 5th grade students based on SPAN spring 2024 data. Boys were found to report a significantly higher number of days per week of 30 minutes or more of MVPA (2.83) compared to girls (2.36) ($p=.003$), and a higher number of days of playing outdoors for 30 minutes or more per week (2.56) compared to girls (2.19) ($p=.02$) (Table 1a). While boys reported a higher number of hours per day playing video or computer games compared to girls (3.61 vs. 3.22, $p=.045$), no significant gender differences were found for overall screen time use or watching TV, DVDs or movies (Table 1b). Regarding differences by race/ethnicity, we found that Black students reported the highest number of days of MVPA per week (2.96) compared to Hispanic (2.53), White (2.02), and students of other race/ethnicity (2.00) ($p=.0025$). While Hispanic students reported a higher number of outdoor play days in the past week (2.50 days/week) compared to Black (2.28), White (1.74), and ‘other’ racial/ethnic group students (2.10), these differences were not statistically significant. While no significant differences in video game playing were found by race/ethnicity, Black students reported more hours of screen time use (4.10 hours/day) compared to Hispanic (3.15), White (3.31), and other race/ethnic students (3.65) ($p=.0001$), and higher hours/day watching TV/DVDs/movies, with significant differences between Black and Hispanic students ($p=.038$) (Table 1b).

Table 1a. Mean days of physical activity participation in past week (n=783 4th and 5th students; n=5 schools^a).
SPAN Study (Spring 2024), Acres Homes Public Elementary School Students^a

	Total Sample	Mean days per week did MVPA for 30 mins.		Mean days per week played outdoors for at least 30 minutes	
	n (%)	Mean (SD)	<i>p-value</i>	Mean (SD)	<i>p-value</i>
<i>Total</i>	783 (100%)	2.56 (2.15)		2.35 (2.34)	
<i>Gender</i>					
Girl	402	2.36 (2.04)	0.003	2.19 (2.17)	0.022
Boy	355	2.83 (2.23)		2.56 (2.29)	
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>					
Black	212	2.96 (2.36)	0.0025^b	2.28 (2.34)	0.087 ^b
Hispanic	427	2.53 (2.08)	0.002 ^c	2.50 (2.23)	
White	43	2.37 (2.02)		1.74 (1.93)	
Other	98	2.00 (1.89)		2.10 (2.09)	

^aSchool district and schools de-identified; Bold text= statistically significant difference at p<.05; Bold text= statistically significant difference at p<.05

^bp-value across racial/ethnic groups

^cp-value comparing Black and Other racial/ethnic groups. All other comparisons: p > 0.05

Table 1b. Mean hours per day of screen time (n=783 4th & 5th graders, n=5 schools^a).

SPAN Study (Spring 2024), Acres Homes Public Elementary School Students^a

	Total Sample	Usual hours per day spent playing video or computer games away from school		Usual hours per day spent using computer, tablet, or smartphone for anything other than school		Usual hours per day spent watching TV, DVDs, or movies away from school	
	n (%)	Mean (SD)	<i>p-value</i>	Mean (SD)	<i>p-value</i>	Mean (SD)	<i>p-value</i>
<i>Total</i>	783 (100%)	3.39 (2.53)		3.48 (2.35)		3.21 (2.29)	
<i>Gender</i>							
Girl	402	3.22 (2.67)	0.045	3.53 (2.31)	0.585	3.19 (2.29)	0.686
Boy	355	3.61 (2.34)		3.43 (2.39)		3.27 (2.28)	
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>							
Black	212	3.62 (2.53)	0.14 ^b	4.10 (2.31)	0.0001^b	3.58 (2.24)	0.055 ^b
Hispanic	427	3.21 (2.49)		3.15 (2.28)	0.0001^c	3.02 (2.26)	0.038^c
White	43	4.00 (2.75)		3.31 (2.60)		3.37 (2.43)	
Other	98	3.39 (2.58)		3.65 (2.39)		3.21 (2.39)	

^aSchool district and schools de-identified; Bold text= statistically significant difference at p<.05

^bp-value across racial/ethnic groups

^cp-value comparing Black and Hispanic/Latino racial/ethnic groups. All other comparisons: p > 0.05

Parent Survey Findings

In this section, we present findings from our *parent survey* with parents/guardians of 4th-6th graders attending our four Acres Homes partner schools, with findings organized by child *participation in OST* programs, *active commuting to school*, and *park/trail and recreation center utilization*. We introduce this section with a brief overview of our sample.

Descriptive Characteristics of Sample. A total of n=64 parents participated in the survey and provided complete responses (n=48 hard copy survey; n=16 online survey). With our target sample size of n=384 parents, this represents a 16.7% response rate, which is much lower than our targeted goal. Despite our efforts to increase response, which included identifying a point person within schools to help facilitate the survey, requests to send reminders on three or more occasions, and providing a drawing for a \$50 gift card, we suspect that several factors may have influenced our lower response rate, including the short time for the survey- with data collection limited to spring 2025, potential concerns about requiring parents to provide a signature for the consent – recognizing the anti-immigrant political climate, and other common barriers such as time and competing priorities for parents. Our low response rate notwithstanding, we succeeded in recruiting a diverse sample, with roughly half of the sample representing parents of girls (48.4%), Black (42.2%) and Hispanic (53.1%) students, and good representation of English (53.1%) and Spanish-speaking (46.9%) parents. Among our sample, 76.2% were parents/guardians of 5th or 6th graders, with 23.8% being parents/guardians of 4th graders. Most respondents were mothers (87.3%), followed by fathers (6.4%) and guardians/grandmothers (6.4%). Approximately a third of parent respondents had less than a high school education (30.5%), and over half of respondents (60.7%) had an annual income of \$34,999 or less ([Table 2](#)).

Table 2. Descriptive characteristics of parent/guardian sample and percentage of 4th-6th graders participating in afterschool programs. *Acres Homes Child Out-of-School-Time Physical Activity Opportunity Study, Houston, Texas (Spring 2025).*

	Total Sample		No Afterschool Program	Participate in Afterschool Programs	
			Activity Participation	at School or Outside of School ^f	
	n	%	%	%	<i>p-value</i> ^h
<i>Total</i> ^a	64	100.0	68.9	31.3	
<i>Child Gender</i>					
Female	31	48.4	78.6	21.4	0.17
Male	33	51.6	60.6	39.4	
Trans/NonBinary	0	0.0			
<i>Child Race/Ethnicity</i>					
Black	27	42.2	42.3	57.7	<.001
Hispanic	34	53.1	90.9	9.1	
Other ^b	3	4.7	N/A ^g	N/A ^g	
<i>Language Survey Taken In</i>					
English	34	53.1	50.0	50.0	<.001
Spanish	30	46.9	89.7	10.3	
<i>Grade Level of Child</i> ^c					
4th	15	23.8	76.9	23.1	0.522
5th/6th	48	76.2	66.0	34.0	
<i>Respondent Relationship to Child</i>					
Parent (Mother)	55	87.3	N/A	N/A	N/A
Parent (Father)	4	6.4	N/A	N/A	N/A
Guardian/Grandmother	4	6.4	N/A	N/A	N/A
<i>Respondent Highest Grade Completed</i> ^d					
Grades 1-11	12	30.5	88.2	11.8	0.011
Grade 12 or GED (HS)	17	28.8	76.5	23.5	
College (1-3yrs or 4 or more)	24	40.7	45.8	32.8	
<i>Average Number Children in Household: mean (range)</i>					
	58	4.8 (range: 2-13)	N/A	N/A	N/A
<i>Average Number Children <18 in Household: mean (range)</i>					
	57	2.7 (range: 1-8)	N/A	N/A	N/A
<i>Annual Income</i> ^e					
\$0 - \$34,999	31	60.7	83.9	16.1	<0.001
\$35,999-\$100,000+	19	37.3	31.6	68.4	
<i>Healthcare coverage (% yes)</i>	61	52.5	N/A	N/A	N/A

Abbreviations: N/A: Not applicable. Bold indicates statistically significant at p<.05. Survey type: Paper (n=48); Online (n=16).

^aSample includes parents/guardians of 4th/5th graders from n=3 elementary schools and n=1 intermediate school (school A: n=20; B: n=12; C: n=5; & school D: n=27).^bOther ethnicity not reported for confidentiality purposes as less than 5.^cGrade level: n=1 missing; n=41 5th grade; n=7 6th grade; ^dEducation: n=5 missing/prefer not to respond; Grades 1-8 (n=12); Grades 9-11 (n=6); Grades 12 or GED (n=17);^dCollege 1-3 yrs (n=14); College 4 or more (n=10); ^eIncome: prefer not to respond (n=10); missing (n=3); \$0-\$9,999 (n=11); \$10K-\$14,999 (n=6); \$15K-\$19,999 (n=5); \$20K-\$34,999 (n=10); \$35K-\$49,999 (n=7); \$50K-\$74,999 (n=7); \$75K-\$99,999 (n=2); \$100K or more (n=3).^fAfterschool Program Participation: Do not participate (68.9%); Participate at school (23.0%); at place other than school (3.3%); at school/outside of school (4.9%)^gNot applicable (N/A) as n<5; ^hBased on Pearson Chi-Square Test

Participation in OST Programs. Among our parent sample, just under one third (31.3%) reported that their child currently participates in afterschool program activities (Table 2), based on the question: “Does your elementary school-aged child currently participate in any afterschool program activities during the school week?” While no significant differences in OST program participation were found by gender, we found a higher OST program participation among Black (57.7%) compared to Hispanic (9.1%) students ($p<.001$), and higher participation among children of English-speaking parents (50.0%) compared to Spanish-speaking parents (10.3%) ($p<.001$) (Fig. 5). Among children who participate in OST programs, most participate at their school ($n=14$ or 73.7%), with fewer students who participate in a place outside of school ($n=2$) or both at school and outside of school ($n=3$). Concerning frequency of participation, just over half (52.6%) participate one day a week, with 15.8% participating two days a week, 21.1% participating three days a week, and 10.5% ($n=2$) participating five days a week [data not shown in tables]. Of note, when parents/guardians were asked: “How many days per week would be ideal for your child to attend an afterschool program?”, the average number of days was three days (40% of parents), followed by two days (21.7%), five days (20.0%), one day (13.3%), and 4 days (5%) [data not shown in tables].

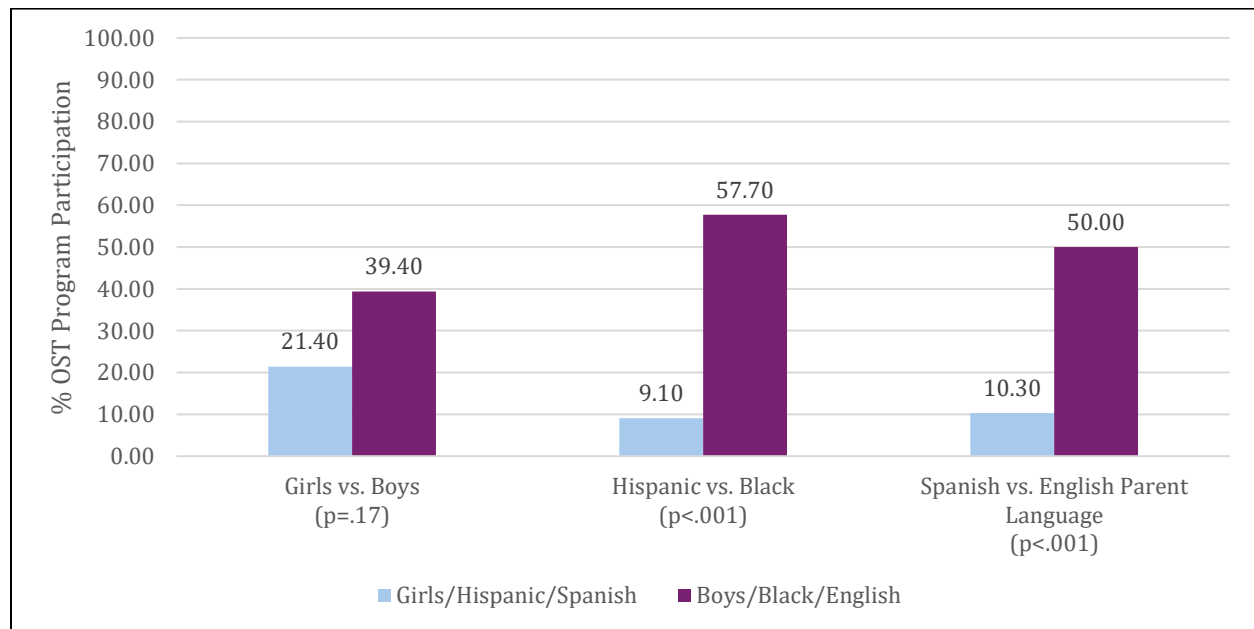


Fig. 5. Percentage of 4th-6th Graders Participating in Out-of-School-Time Program Activities. *Acres Homes Child Out-of-School Time Physical Activity Opportunity Study (Spring 2025)* ($n=64$ parent/guardians from $n=4$ Acres Homes public schools).

Types of OST Program Activities – Current Participation. While the majority of parent respondents indicated that their child is not currently participating in OST program activities, among children who are participating in OST school-based or community-based activities (n=22), the most common activities cited by parents were physical activity-related activities (sports, dance, active games, swimming), followed by mentoring/tutoring, and STEM-related activities (school only) (Fig. 6). While seven parents indicated their child was participating in music-related activities at school, fewer parents indicated their child was currently participating in art-related activities (n=4 parents for school and n=2 for community), and no parents indicated that their child was participating in theater or service-related activities such as scouts.

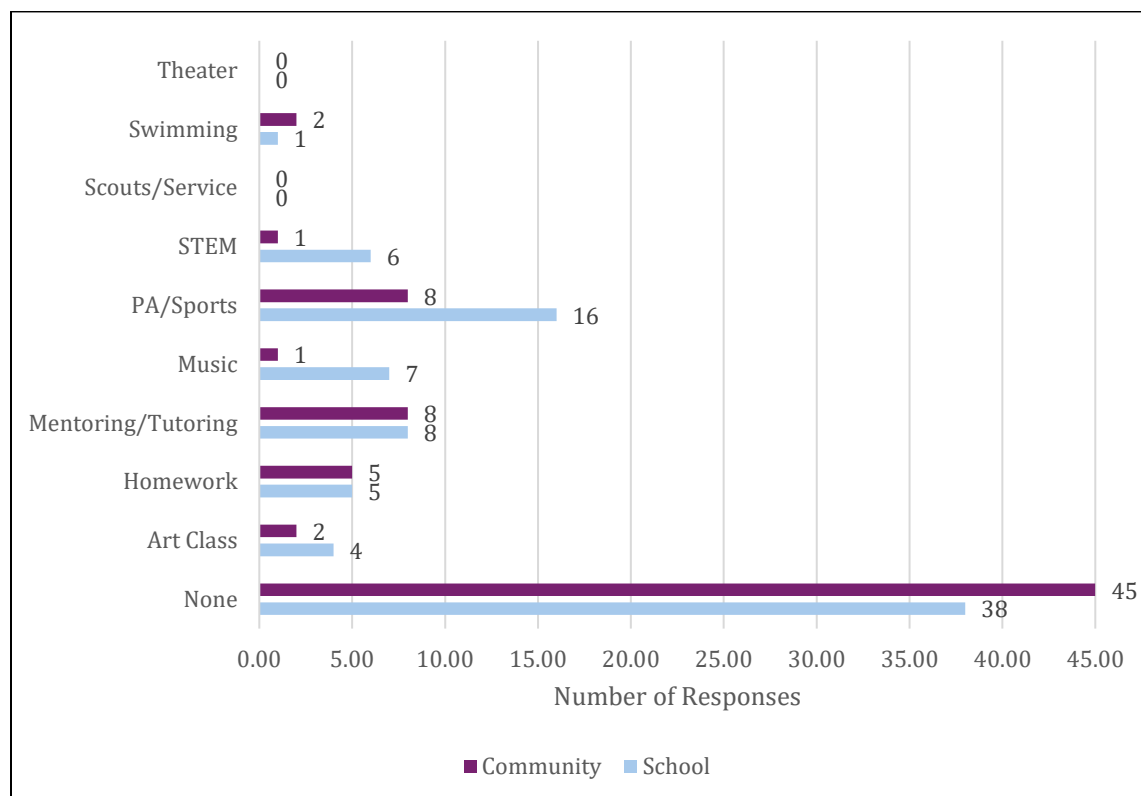


Fig. 6. Types of out-of-school-time activities child currently participates in, by school and community settings (based on number of responses per item) (n=85 total responses for school; n=71 total responses for community). *Acres Homes Child Out-of-School Time Physical Activity Opportunity Study (Spring 2025)* (n=64 parent/guardians; n=4 Acres Homes public schools).

Types of Physical Activity-Related OST Activities – Preferences. We also explored with parent respondents the types of PA-related out-of-school-time activities they would like to see offered for their children, using an open-ended format question (see **Box B** for recommended activities). While parents cited a range of sports-related activities, we note that not all parents want sports-related activities, with several expressing their interest in fun, active games (“juegos activos”), as well as parents who recommended other types of activities that may include PA but are not traditionally considered ‘physical activity’, including art classes, STEM-related activities, and theater arts. Of note, one parent shared: “? we are more nerds”, which is a helpful reminder of the need to develop a range of activities for all children.

Box B. Types of Physical Activity-Related Activities Parents/Guardians Recommend for Their Children (n=105 responses)

- Active Games (*juegos activos*): including game night (kickball, dodgeball)
- Art Classes
- Baseball
- Basketball
- Cooking
- Cycling
- Dance
- Football
- Gymnastics
- Mentoring
- Music Lessons
- Ping Pong (pin pon)
- Running clubs/Track
- STEM-related activities
- Taekwondo
- Theater Arts
- Volleyball
- “All of them”/“Everything”/ Every kid is different”

Barriers for OST Program Participation. In exploring barriers for OST program participation, we asked parent respondents: “What prevents your child from participating in after-school activities?” using a closed-ended format, with an option to ‘fill in’ reasons. As presented in **Table 3**, among parents whose children are not currently participating in OST programs, the most common reasons were lack of transportation (23.2% of responses), lack of availability of afterschool programs (20.3%), cost of programs (20.3%), and lack of programs that interest my child (17.4%), which mirror responses for the total sample.

Table 3. Perceived Barriers for Afterschool Program Activities among 4th-6th Graders (n=64 parents/guardians, n=4 public schools). *Acres Homes Child Out-of-School-Time Physical Activity Opportunity Study, Houston, Texas (Spring 2025).*

	Total Sample (n=64)		Among Those Not Currently Participating (n=44)	
	n	%	n	%
<i>What prevents your child from participating in afterschool activities?</i>				
Nothing. My child currently participates	17	19.77%	N/A	
Lack of transportation	16	18.60%	16	23.2
Lack of availability of afterschool programs	14	16.28%	14	20.3
Lack of programs that interest my child	12	13.95%	12	17.4
Concerns about safety	8	9.30%	8	11.6
Cost of programs	14	16.28%	14	20.3
Prefer to have child home	5	5.81%	5	7.2
<i>Total responses</i>	86	100.00%	69	100.0
Other: “ADHD meds do not last long and behavior is disrupting to others”; “no hay de futbol” (there is not soccer); “No se de que actividades hay para que ella participe” (I don't know what activities there are for her to participate)				

*Represents number of responses based on ‘check for all’ question. % represents percentage in relation to total responses.

Active Commuting to School. In addition to the opportunity to increase children's engagement in leisure-time PA via OST program participation- with recent evidence indicating that young people's PA can be enhanced with multiple types of OST programming,³⁰ *active commuting* via walking, biking, and use of other non-motorized vehicles represents another key form of PA that positively contributes to children's overall PA engagement.⁷¹ In exploring children's active commuting to school, we found that over half of our sample (71.2%) lives within two miles or less from school (Fig. 7), yet just between 12.7% to 16.1% of their children walk to or from school, respectively, based on this pilot sample of parents/guardians (Fig. 8). The school bus was the most common mode of transportation for traveling to/from school as reported by just under half of respondents (44.4% and 46.8%, respectively), followed by family car (41.3% and 37.1%, respectively for going to and from school), with 12.7% and 16.1% reporting walking to and from school, respectively. No respondents indicated their child travels by bike to/from school (Fig. 8).

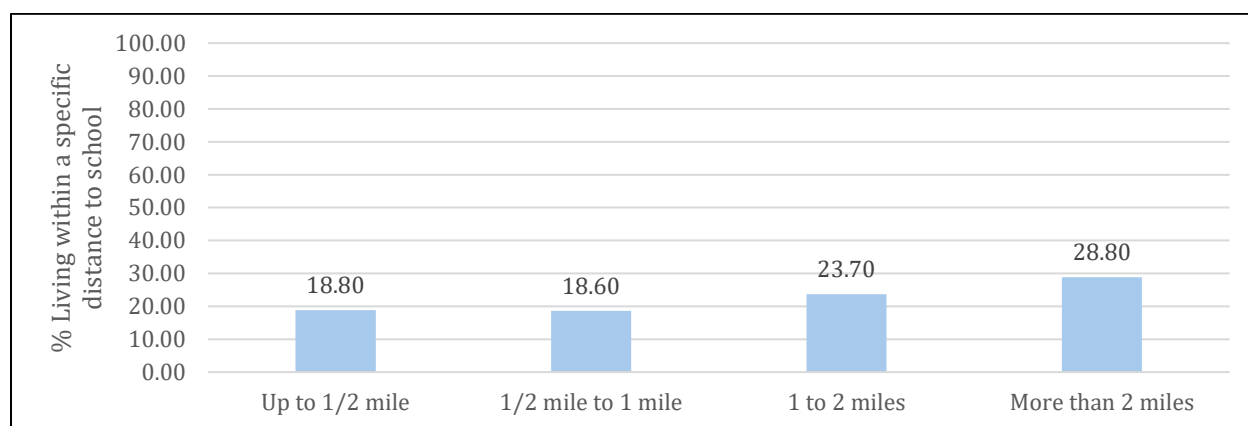


Fig. 7. Percentage of children living within proximity to school based on parent/guardian report. *Acres Homes Child Out-of-School Time Physical Activity Opportunity Study (Spring 2025)* (n=64 parent/guardians; n=4 Acres Homes public schools).

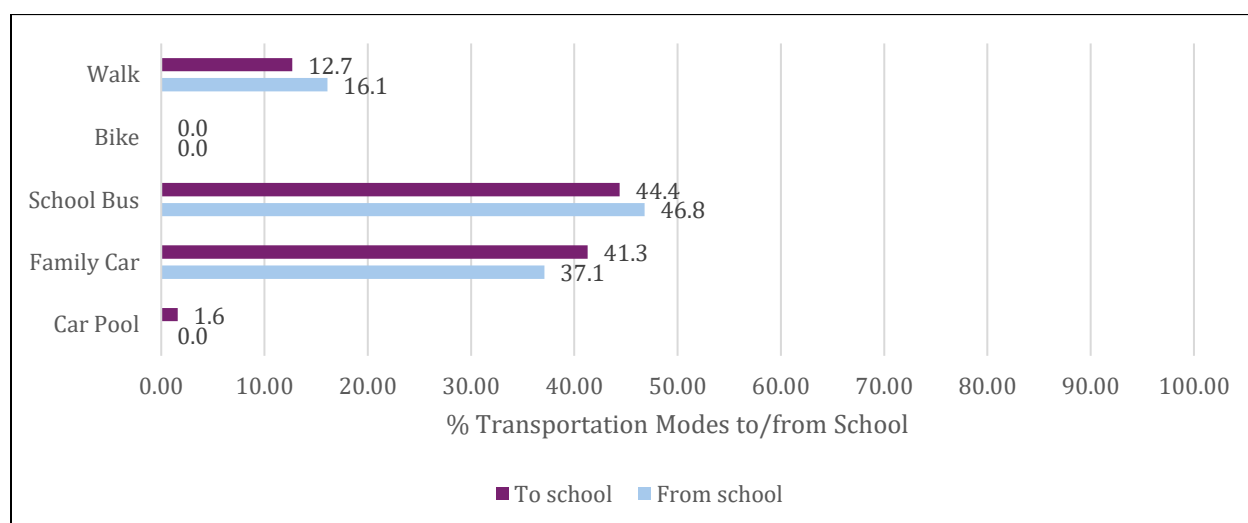


Fig. 8. Percentage of children who arrive to and from school via different transportation modes. *Acres Homes Child Out-of-School Time Physical Activity Opportunity Study (Spring 2025)* (n=64 parent/guardians; n=4 Acres Homes public schools).

Barriers & Facilitators for Active Commuting to School. In better understanding the context surrounding children's active commuting within our four partner Acres Homes schools, we asked parent respondents to select from a list of reasons why their child does not walk or bike to/from school (*barriers*), as well as the reasons for why their child walks or bikes to and from school (*facilitators*).

Barriers: As presented in Fig. 9, responses were fairly well distributed across the potential barriers for active commuting, with lack of crossing guards (14.1%), concerns about violence or crime (13.2%), weather or climate concerns (12.7%), long distance (11.7%), lack of street supports (e.g., sidewalk, crosswalks) (11.2%), and lack of adult to walk/bike with (10.2%) representing the top reasons.

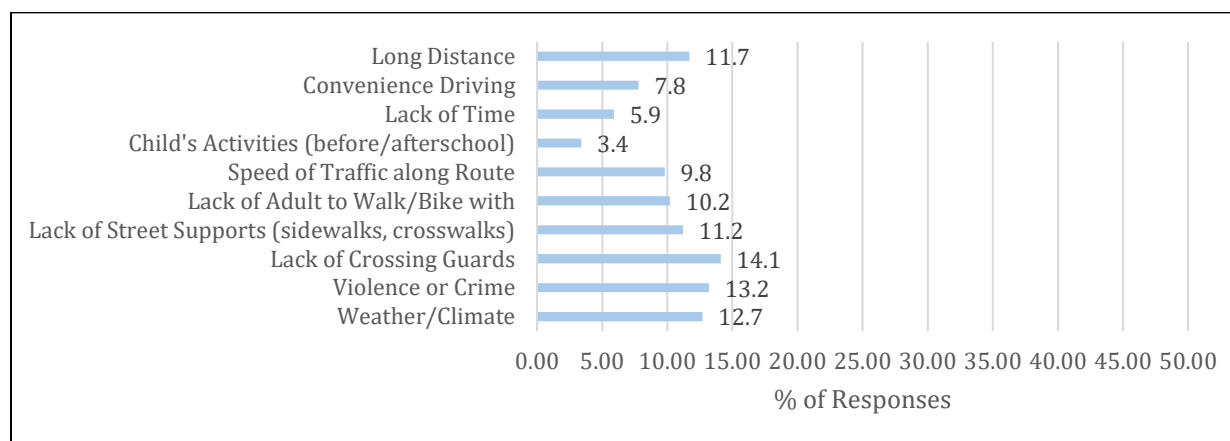


Fig. 9. Reasons (barriers) for child not actively commuting (walking or biking) to/from school based on percentage of total parent/guardian responses (n=205 responses based on 'check all' response format). *Acres Homes Child Out-of-School Time Physical Activity Opportunity Study (Spring 2025)* (n=64 parent/guardians; n=4 Acres Homes public schools).

Facilitators: The top reasons parents selected for why their children walk/bike to school were: short distance (24.5%), 'they enjoy walking/biking' (16.3%), 'an adult is available to walk/bike with my child' (12.2%), sufficient time to walk/bike (8.2%), 'my child's school provides support/encouragement' (8.2%), and weather (8.2%). (Fig. 10).

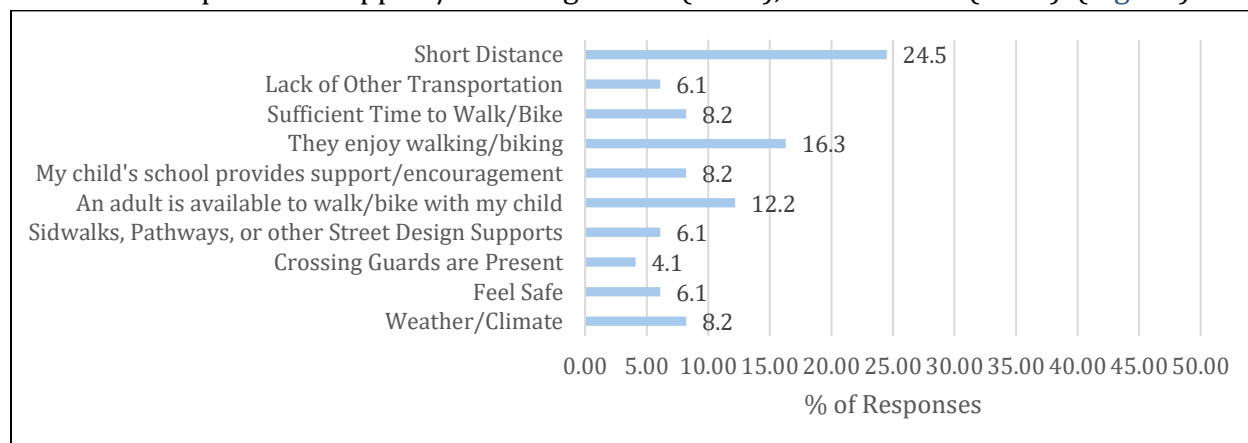


Fig. 10. Reasons (facilitating factors) for child actively commuting (walking or biking) to/from school based on percentage of total parent/guardian responses (n=49 responses based on 'check all' response format). *Acres Homes Child Out-of-School Time Physical Activity Opportunity Study (Spring 2025)* (n=64 parent/guardians; n=4 Acres Homes public schools).

Park/Trail and Recreation Center Use. As part of our efforts to describe PA engagement among children and their families outside of school time, we also explored park/trail and recreation center utilization. Parent respondents were asked to indicate their frequency of park/trail and recreation center use in response to the question: “In the past year, how often did you visit parks/trails and recreation center with your elementary school child in the Acres Homes area of Houston?,” with separate response items for each PA place. While just over a third (34.3%) of parent respondents indicated they had not visited a park/trail, and just over half (55.2%) indicated they had not visited a recreation center in the past year in the Acres Homes area, 54.1% indicated they visited parks/trails between weekly and monthly and 32.8% visited recreation centers with this same frequency (Fig. 11). Recognizing some opportunity to further promote park and recreation center use, the overall high percentage of park and recreation center visitation is encouraging.

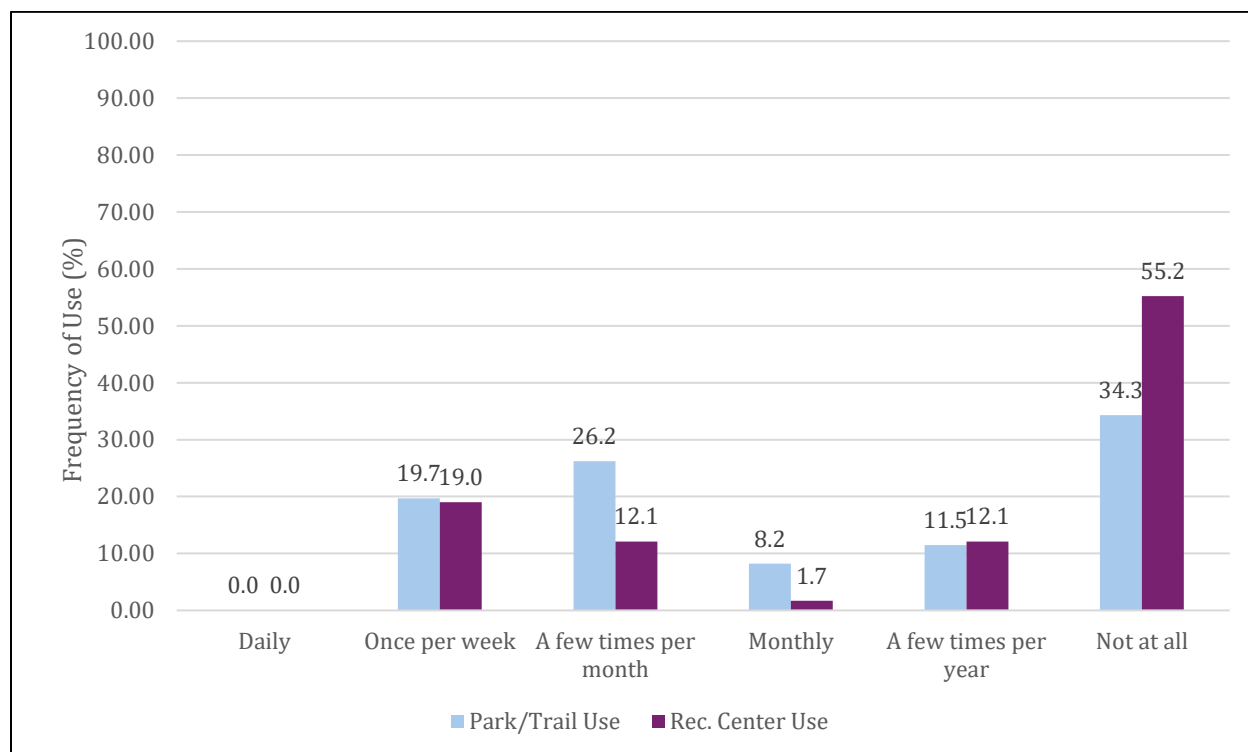


Fig. 11. Frequency of child and family visitation to parks/trails and recreation centers in past year, as reported by parents/guardians. *Acres Homes Child Out-of-School Time Physical Activity Opportunity Study (Spring 2025)* (n=64 parent/guardians; n=4 Acres Homes public schools).

In exploring the specific parks and recreation centers visited, parent respondents were asked to select from a list of parks and recreation centers in and around the Acres Homes area and the broader Houston area based on the question: “In the past year, did your family visit any of the following parks/recreation centers in the Acres Homes and Houston area?” Below, we share findings for Acres Homes and for the broader Houston area.

Acres Homes Parks/Recreation Centers Visited. Among the parks/recreation centers visited in Acres Homes area in the past year, the most popular were Sylvester Turner Park (31.3% of responses), followed by Acres Homes Multi-Service Center (20.0%), Winzer (Carver) Park (17.5%), Lincoln Park (13.8%), and Highland Park (11.3%) (Fig. 12).

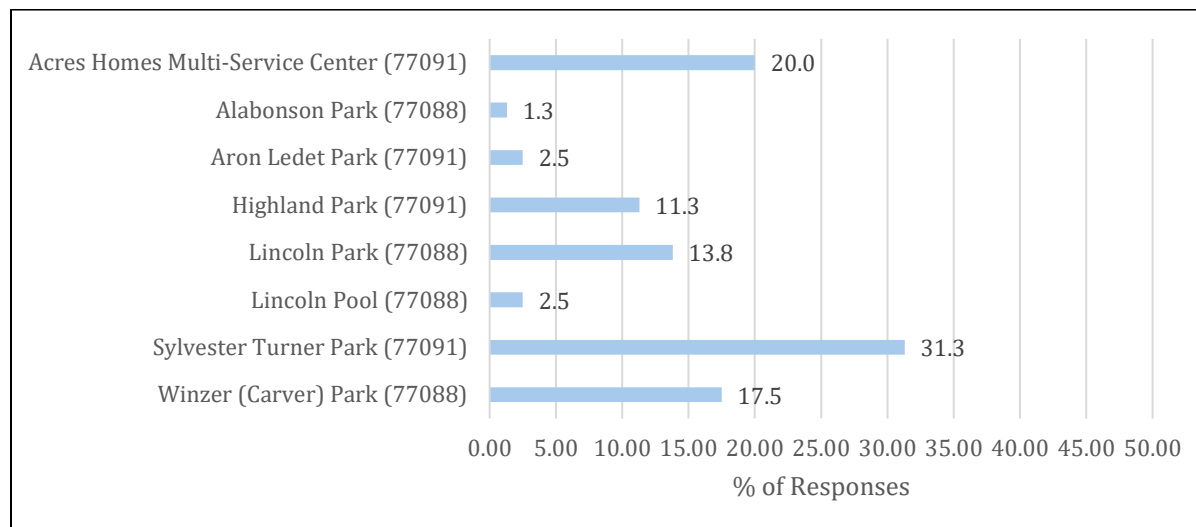


Fig. 12. Parks and recreation places visited in Acres Homes area within the last year (n=80 responses based on 'check all' response format). *Acres Homes Child Out-of-School Time Physical Activity Opportunity Study (Spring 2025)* (n=64 parent/guardians; n=4 Acres Homes public schools).

Houston Area Parks and Recreation Centers Visited. Among the parks/recreation centers visited in the Houston area in the past year, the most popular were TC Jester Park (26.2% of responses), followed by Doss Park (16.4%), Oak Forest Park (14.8%), and Cole Creek Park (13.1%). Other parks visited are listed in Figure 13.

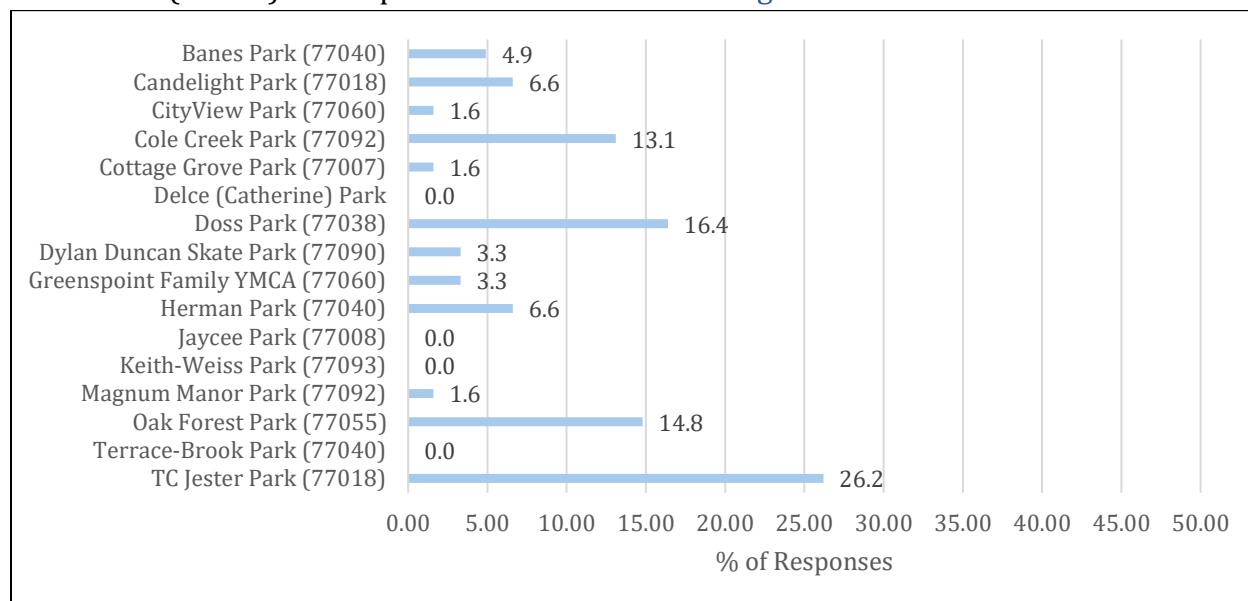


Fig. 13. Parks and recreation places visited in Houston area within the last year (n=61 responses based on 'check all' response format). *Acres Homes Child Out-of-School Time Physical Activity Opportunity Study (Spring 2025)* (n=64 parent/guardians; n=4 Acres Homes public schools).

Barriers & Facilitating Factors for Park and Recreation Center Visitation. In better understanding park and recreation center use and visitation, we asked parent respondents to select the factors that prevent their family from visiting parks and recreation centers (“What keeps your family from visiting parks? What keeps your family from visiting recreation centers?”), as well as the factors that help support park and recreation center visitation (“What would help your family visit parks/recreation centers more?”).

Barriers for Park and Recreation Center Visitation. The top barriers reported by parents for visiting parks included: lack of time (23.2% of all responses), distance (13.0%), lack of transportation options (11.6%), lack of programming (11.6%), weather/climate (11.6%), and safety concerns (10.1%), with other barriers listed in Figure 14. Top barriers for recreation center visitation included: cost (17.3%), lack of time and lack of programming (16.0% each), distance (14.7%), lack of transportation options (13.3%), and lack of interest (12.0%), with other reasons listed in Figure 14.

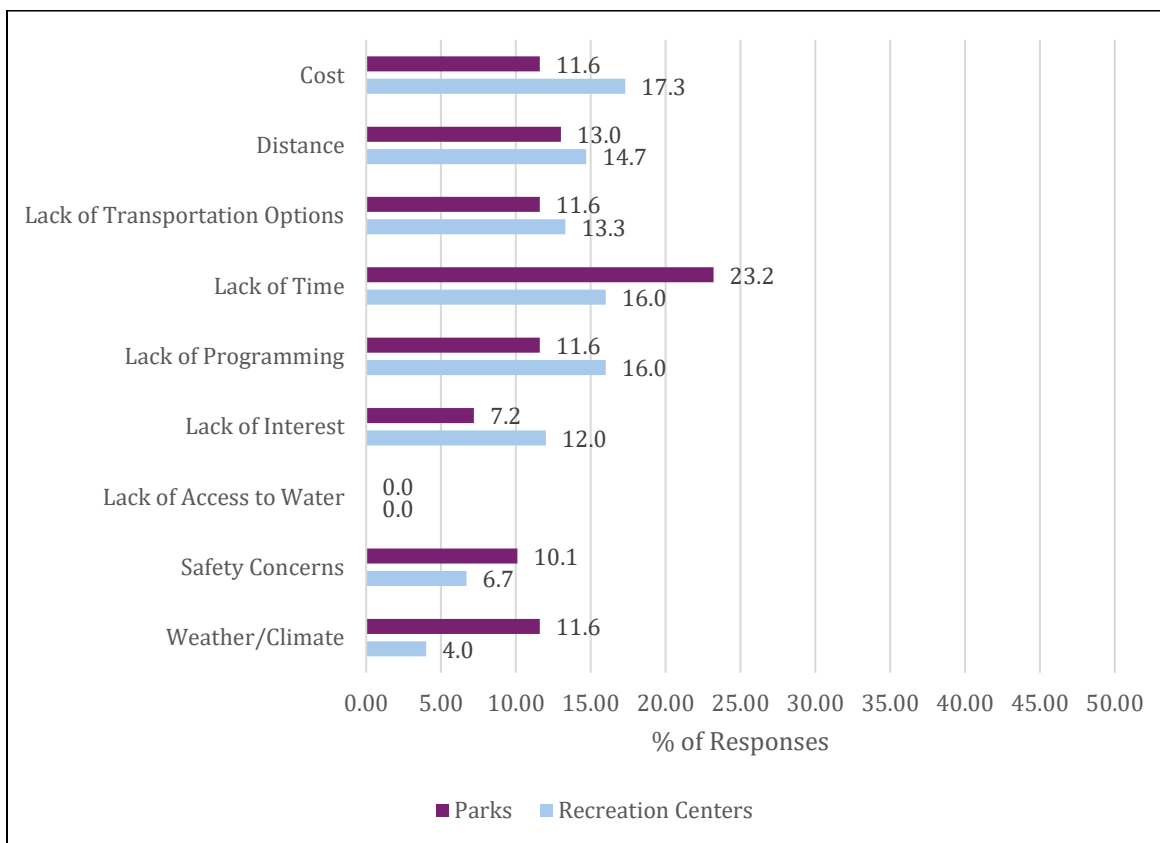


Fig. 14. Barriers that keep families from visiting parks (n=69 responses based on ‘check all’ response format) and recreation centers (n=75 responses). *Acres Homes Child Out-of-School Time Physical Activity Opportunity Study (Spring 2025)* (n=64 parent/guardians; n=4 Acres Homes public schools).

Facilitating Factors for Park and Recreation Center Visitation. The top facilitating factors that would help families to visit parks more often included: enhanced safety (19.2%), increased access to shade/sunshades (18.4%), increased child playscapes (16.0%), increased programming (14.4%), enhanced trails (12.8%), better transportation options (10.4%), and increased access to water (8.8%) (Fig. 15). The top facilitating factors that would help families visit recreation centers more often included: increased child playscapes (22.0%), increased programming (19.8%), enhanced safety (17.6%), increased access to shade/sunshades (16.5%), better transportation options (13.2%), and enhanced trails (11.0%) (Fig. 15).

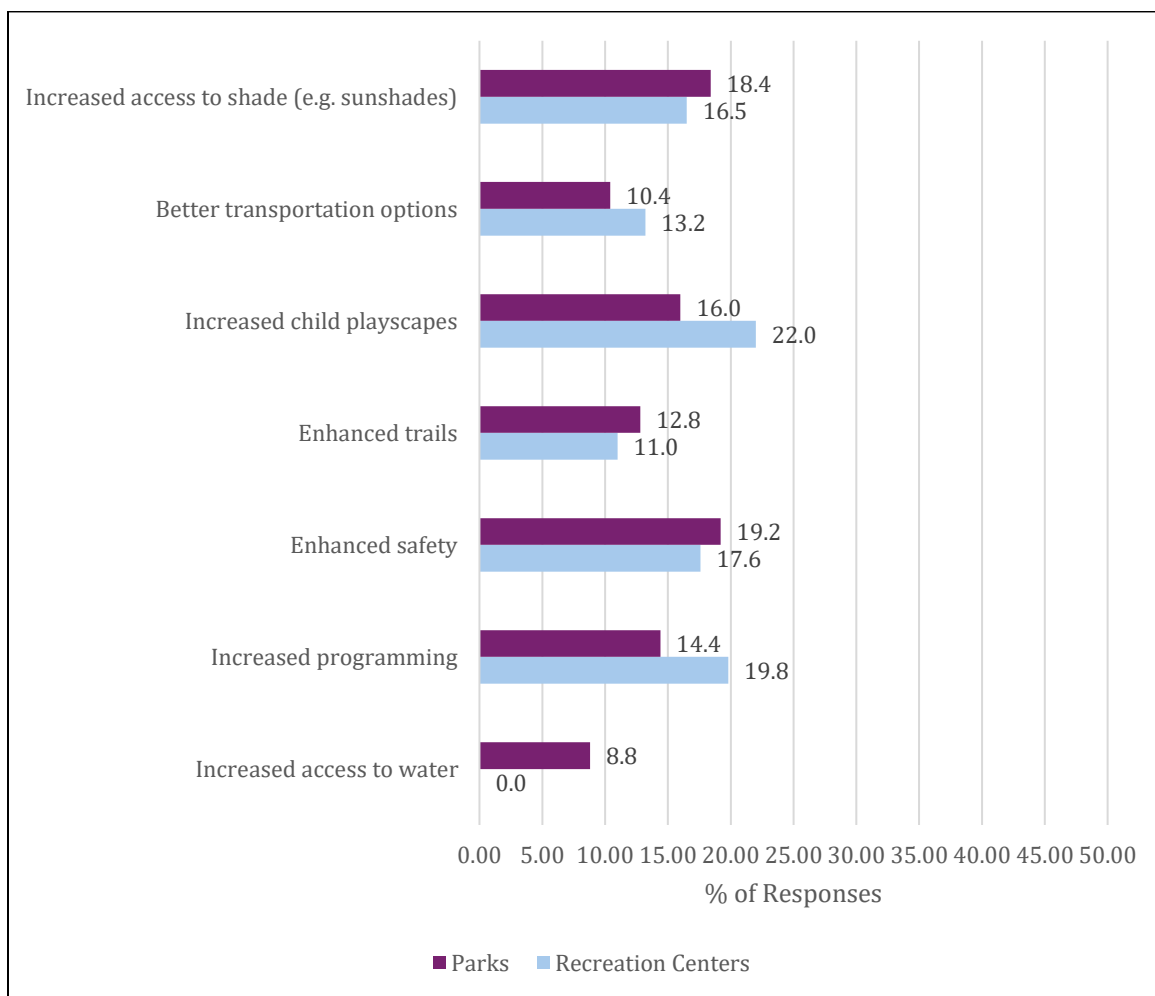


Fig. 15. Facilitators that would help families to visit parks (n=125 responses based on 'check all' response format) and recreation centers (n=91 responses) more often. *Acres Homes Child Out-of-School Time Physical Activity Opportunity Study (Spring 2025)* (n=64 parent/guardians; n=4 Acres Homes public schools).

Family Physical Activity Engagement & Recommendations for Other Families. Lastly, we explored with parents how their children and family currently engage in physical activity, along with their recommendations for PA for other families (Table 4). Using an open-ended question format, parents/guardians were asked: “What are ways your child and family engage in physical activity? What recommendations for active living do you have for other families in Acres Homes?” Parent respondents cited multiple ways their children and family engage in PA, with common activities that included *bike riding, going to parks and playgrounds, engaging in different types of sports (baseball, basketball, soccer, swimming), running and jogging, and family walks*, among other activities listed in Table 4. Of note, several parents underscored the importance of incorporating activity into their daily routines, with one parent sharing: “...getting physical exercise around the house: cleaning, exercising, yardwork, games and family quality time,” while another parent cited “walk[ing] to the mailbox or store.” Other innovative approaches for engaging in active living included “community involvement”, as well as recommendations for more fun and interactive games with children and families at school: “Me gustaría que en su colegio hagan cosas creativas con los padres de familia, [incluyendo] juegos y actividades creativas.” [*“I would like [children] to do creative things with their families at their school, including games and creative activities.”*]

“We go once a week to the park and play and enjoy.” -Parent, Acres Homes

“We engage in physical activities by riding our bicycles, playing with our two dogs... And sometimes my son will cut the grass. He goes fishing with his grandfather.” -Parent, Acres Homes

“My daughter is in Praise Dance at church. We practice weekly 3-4 times, and we also dance at other churches and worship services as well.” -Parent, Acres Homes

Table 4. Ways families and their children engage in physical activity and recommendations for other families – Parent Survey. *Acres Homes Child Out-of-School-Time Physical Activity Opportunity Study, Houston, Texas (Spring 2025).* (n=64 parents/guardians; n= 4 public schools)

Theme	Example Quotes
Active Games & Fun Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Playing tag indoors, brain breaks on YouTube, kid workout videos at home to follow along." "Realizar actividades divertidas que impliquen actividad física y a la vez divertidas para los niños." [<i>"Implement fun activities that include physical activity and at the same time are fun for children."</i>] "Me gustaría que en su colegio hagan cosas creativas con los padres de familia, [incluyendo] juegos y actividades creativas." [<i>"I would like [children] to do creative things with their families at school, including games and creative activities."</i>]
Bike Riding (and other)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "andar en bicicleta" [<i>"go bike riding."</i>] "We engage in physical activities by riding our bicycles, playing with our two dogs... And sometimes my son will cut the grass. He goes fishing with his grandfather."
Calisthenics/Training/Exercise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Calisthenics, high intensity training" "My kids and I sometimes work out together at home or take walks at TC Jester Park."
Community Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Community involvement"
Daily Living Activities/Active Lifestyle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Family structure: healthy living, getting physical exercise around the house: cleaning, exercising, yardwork, games and family quality time...." "...[W]alk to mailbox or the store." "Mantener un estilo de vida activa y saludable es fundamental para gozar de bienestar físico y mental. Con pequeños cambios en nuestra puebla diaria podemos prevenir los riesgos de enfermedades crónicas." [<i>"Maintain an active lifestyle is fundamental for enjoying mental and physical fitness. With small changes in our daily living we can prevent chronic disease risks."</i>]
Dance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "My daughter is in Praise Dance at church. We practice weekly 3-4 times and we also dance at other churches and worship services as well."
Fishing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Fishing is an interest of my child, kids and brother. [They] visit bayou and other surrounding pools of water to fish. Also visit Galveston for fishing." "...my son...goes fishing with his grandfather"
Parks/Playgrounds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "We go once a week to the park to play and enjoy." "... playgrounds (,) walking trails as well." "We love to play outside and go to parks. The bathrooms are always dirty so we leave if someone needs to go."
Playing Outside	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "juegos al aire libre." [<i>"Playing outside."</i>] "I will love my kids to be in some type of activity. Instead of being home, going outside."
Recreation Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Visit to YMCA when I can afford the monthly fee."
Running/Jogging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Correr" [<i>"Running"</i>]; "Trotar" [<i>"Jogging"</i>].
Sports (baseball, basketball, soccer, swimming)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "If you have transportation, find a sports team. My son being involved in Little League has made and continues to keep him active." "Mi hijo 2 meses al año juega béisbol, y quiere otros [deportes] más, pero no hay donde vivimos." [<i>"My son plays baseball 2 times a year, and wants other [Sports], but there are none where we live."</i>] "Playing on basketball courts..." "futbol en familia y amigos." [<i>"Soccer with family and friends."</i>] "natación." [<i>"swimming."</i>]
Walking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Family walks." / "Andar caminando" [<i>"Go out walking"</i>] "Salir a caminar todos los días." [<i>"We take walks every day."</i>]

Barriers for Active Living: In exploring what families do for physical activity via an open-ended parent survey question, some parents also shared the challenges they face with engaging their children in PA, including *challenges with time and busy schedules, need for diverse types of programming, need for greater access to active spaces, and safety concerns*. Concerning the challenges with time and busy schedules, one parent shared:

"Está todo casi bien. Lo único [es] que el estilo de vida es más ajetreada (movida) y casi [no] nos queda tiempo para compartir o andar. Se sacrifica tiempo para poder llevar a la familia y pasar tiempo de calidad." [*"Everything is almost fine. The only thing is that the lifestyle is more hectic, and we hardly have time to share or go out. We sacrifice time to be able to take care of the family and spend quality time."*] -Acres Homes Parent.

Related to the challenges of busy schedules, another parent shared: "I believe summertime is better for physical activity when school is out. The hustle and bustle of work and school causes less time for physical activity. Acres Homes has plenty of areas to get active."

In addition to time as a barrier for family PA, other parents shared the need for diverse types of PA programming: "Most of the things close to me is baseball, but my kids love basketball. Parks pretty much got rid of basketball goals and put in soccer fields." This parent also noted the need for other types of programs, as well as coaches that can support children with specific needs:

"I would love for my kids to take drum, guitar and piano lessons but here in the 44 [nickname for Acres Homes] there's nothing like that. Born and raised in the 44 and still no really good programs that I know of. My kids have ADHD and coaches need to be mindful their brains think a little different." -Acres Homes Parent

Related to the need for more programming, parents also shared the need for greater access to places and other supports for physical activity. One parent shared: "que hubiera parques más cercanos con canchas de futbol, y áreas para hacer ejercicios con la familia." [*"that there would be more parks close by with soccer fields, and areas to do exercise with the family"*], while another parent underscored the need to: "...have access to park and free swimming classes, safer bike paths and mentors." Another parent shared the need for better upkeep of parks: "We love to play outside and go to parks. The bathrooms are always dirty, so we leave if someone needs to go."

Lastly, some parents cited safety as a key barrier for physical activity with their children- a common theme that emerged in our key informant interviews in the next section. Illustrative of this theme, one parent shared in their open-ended response:

"My child and I really don't engage in much physical activity in the area due to lack of security. When outside cars drive way too fast and we don't have sidewalks, [and] we all have to watch out for dogs that run wild." -Acres Homes Parent.

Parent, School & Community Leader Key Informant Findings

In this section, we present findings from our *key informant interviews* with parents, school leaders, and community leaders. These interviews aimed to explore the different types of OST PA-related programming, parks, and other community assets for OST PA in Acres Homes; the needs/barriers, facilitating factors, and recommendations for OST programs, walking/biking to/from school; and park/trail and recreation center utilization.

Descriptive Characteristics of Sample. Our key informant sample consisted of 21 parent, school, and community leaders, of whom n=7 were parents of students attending one of our four partner schools; n=5 were school leaders (n=1 district PE leader; n=1 school principal, n=1 classroom teacher; n= 2 PE teachers); n=5 were community PA leaders who work with a government agency that delivers community PA programming; and n=5 were community nonprofit leaders delivering PA or OST programming in Acres Homes (n=1 faith-based leader; n=4 nonprofit leaders delivering PA programming or OST programs) (*We note that one of our key informants is both a school leader and also leads a PA-related nonprofit) (see Table 5).

Table 5. Descriptive characteristics of Key Informant Interview sample (n=21). *Acres Homes Child Out-of-School-Time Physical Activity Opportunity Study, Houston, Texas (2024-25).*

Total Sample		
	n	%
Total	21	100.0
Key Informant Type		
Community Leader		
Government (<i>Parks & Rec</i>)	5	23.8%
Nonprofit ^a	4	19.0%
School Leader ^b	5	23.8%
Parent	7	33.3%
Key Informant Gender		
Female	12	57.1%
Male	9	42.9%
Key Informant Race/Ethnicity		
Black	8	38.1%
Hispanic	11	52.4%
White	2	9.5%
Annual Income^c		
\$0 - \$34,999	3	16.7%
\$35,000-\$49,999	6	27.8%
\$50,000-\$74,999	6	33.3%
\$75,000-\$100,000+	3	72.2%
Respondent Relationship to Child (n=7 Parents)		
Parent (Mother)	7	100.0%
Parent (Father)	0	0.0
Guardian/Grandmother	0	0.0
Grade Level of Child^d (Parent participants)		
1st-3rd	5	55.6%
4th-6th	4	44.4%
Average Time of Interviews	37.9 (range: 24-55 min)	

^aIncludes: n=1 faith-based leader, n=3 nonprofit leaders. ^bIncludes: n=1 district leader; n=1 school leaders, n=2 PE teachers

^cMissing three responses. ^dIncludes: n=6 boys and n=3 girls. n does not equal 7 parents who participated as some parents had more than one child in different grades.

Community Assets for OST Physical Activity in Acres Homes. Throughout our interviews, we aimed to learn more about the strengths and current opportunities for child OST PA in and around the Acres Homes community. A first key theme that emerges from our interviews is that Acres Homes is a community with multiple assets and strengths that can further promote and support child OST physical activity. Figure 16 presents example school and community assets in support of child OST PA in Acres Homes, with a brief description that follows. Based on our interviews, we also developed an initial ‘proof-of-concept’ *Acres Homes Child and Family Out-of-School-Time Physical Activity Resource Guide*, which includes PA resources and parks for Acres Homes and the Greater Houston area along with an interactive [resource map](#) (Appendix D).

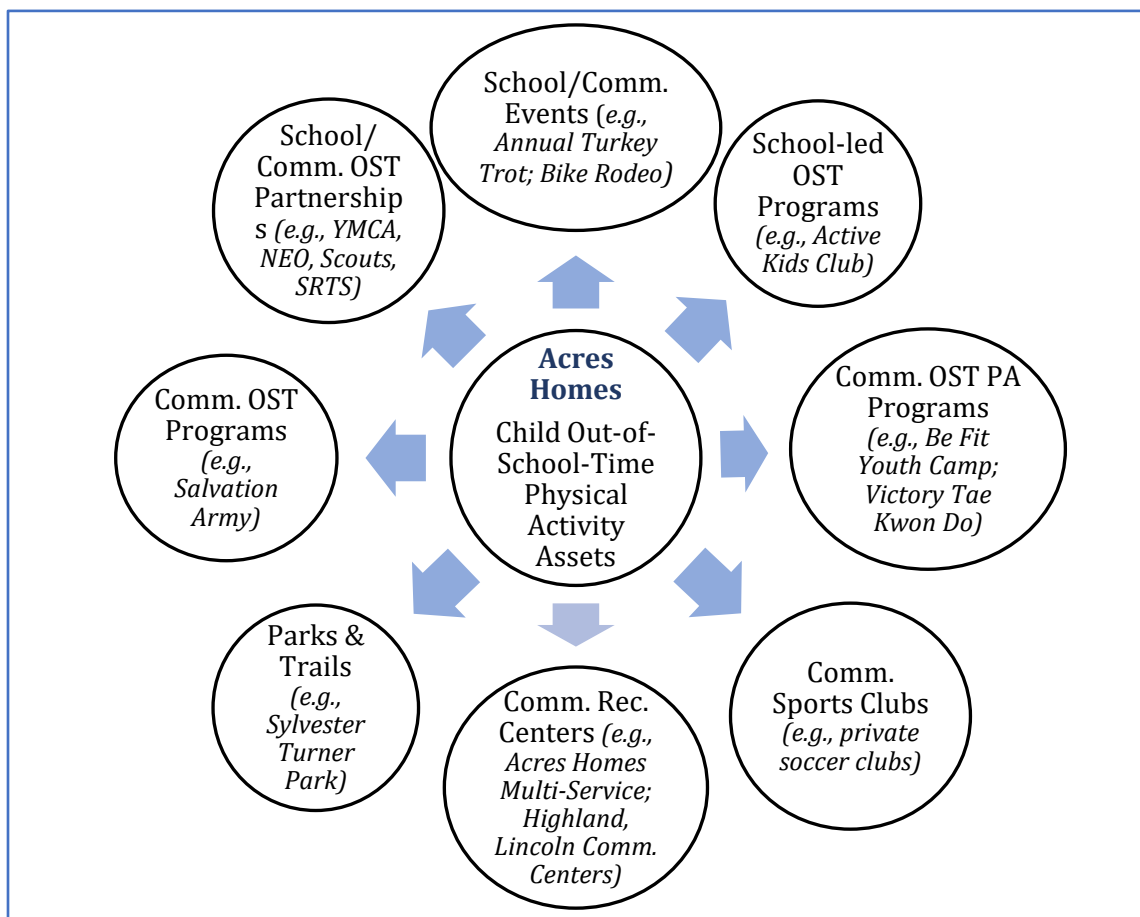


Fig. 16. Example Child Out-of-School-Time Physical Activity School & Community Assets in Acres Homes, Houston, Texas – Key Informant Interview & Google Searches. *Acres Homes Child Out-of-School-Time Physical Activity Opportunity Study, Houston, Texas (Spring 2025).*

- *School and community PA-related events:* We learned about multiple events taking place in the Acres Homes community that can support child and family PA, including the *Annual Turkey Trot*, a 3-mile run and 1-mile run/walk hosted by Aldine ISD and open to all students, their families and the community (40th event: November 2024); *Kings Bike Rodeo*, an annual event hosted by Kings Bike and Hike Community, a

nonprofit based in Acres Homes, where children participate in fun activities that promote safe bike use (last event: May 2025); and *Annual Family Day at the Park* at Sylvester Turner Park (17th event celebrated: April 2025) hosted by community leaders- including Ashley Turner Captain, among other events. The *Acres Homes Community Advocacy Group: What's Good in The Neighborhood* [community calendar](#) is a helpful resource for the community to learn about these and other events.

- *School-led Afterschool Programs and School & Community Out-of-School-Time Partnerships and Programs:* While a common theme from our key informant interviews was the need for more school-based OST programs with more grade levels, all study schools are providing some, yet limited, enriching OST programming, including scouts and the recently launched *Afterschool Active Kids Club* funded by MD Anderson Be Well Acres Homes and hosted by Aldine ISD, a program being implemented at our four partner schools for 4th-6th graders (once a week). School/community partnerships with nonprofits such as NEO ([Nature & Eclectic Outdoors](#)), aimed at promoting “outdoor-oriented lives for better health, well-being and resilience”, represent key assets for child OST PA. Previous PA-related programs have included Safe Routes to School (SRTS), Marathon Kids, and YMCA, yet these programs were not being implemented in our study schools at the time of the study.
- *Community OST Programs:* Out-of-school-time (afterschool) programs offered in Acres Homes include the Salvation Army (formerly with Boys and Girls Club), which offers “academic support, enrichment, life skills, recreation, and sports programs,” with a key focus on character development. While we learned of other daycare-type programs, we were not able to interview people who oversee these programs.
- *Community OST PA Programs* represent another great asset for supporting child OST PA in Acres Homes, which range from paid sports leagues and martial arts classes, to free or low-cost programming such as the Be Fit Youth Exercise Camp, YMCA, Houston Parks and Recreation, and Harris County Parks programming (see [Appendix D](#) for a community guide of Acres Homes OST programs developed from this study).
- *Community Recreation Centers & Parks and Trails:* We also learned about some of the great recreational facilities and parks and trails available to the Acres Homes community, including [Highland Community Center](#) located in 77091 (Houston Parks and Recreation Department), with amenities that include park, track, basketball court, baseball field, volleyball court, and tennis court); [Lincoln Park](#) located in 77088 (Harris County Parks), with amenities that include baseball field, tennis court, jogging trail, playground, picnic area, and pool. among other parks, including Sylvester Turner Park (e.g., walking trails) (77091), Stuebner-Airline Park (77088), West Mount Houston Park (77088), Aron Ledet Park (77088), Winzer Park (77088), among others nearby (see [Appendix D](#) for full list of parks in and around Acres Homes).

Barriers for Child Out-of-School-Time Program Participation. In exploring barriers for OST program participation, we asked key informants: “Why do you think some children do not participate in out-of-school-time physical activity programming?” Key barriers for OST program participation based on our thematic analysis are presented below in Fig. 17, with example quotes presented in Tables 6a-6c.

“...me gustaría que hubiera más actividades para que así los niños se mantengan más atentos y ocupen su mente en otras actividades que sean más saludables para ellos.” “...I would like there to be more activities so that the children stay more engaged and also occupy their minds with other activities that are healthier for them.”
 –Parent, Acres Homes

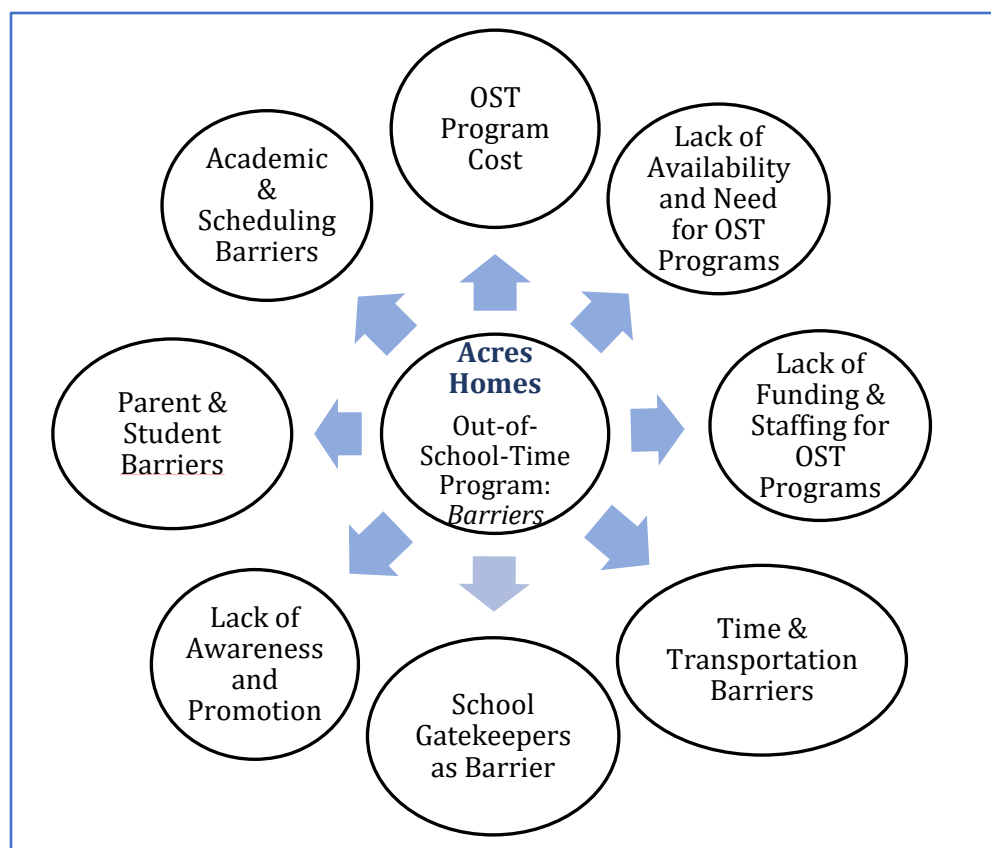


Fig. 17. Barriers for Out-of-School-Time Program Participation –Themes from Key Informant Interview. Acres Homes Child Out-of-School-Time Physical Activity Opportunity Study, Houston, Texas (Fall & Spring 2025). (n=21 parent, school and community key informants).

Cost, Availability, Time, & Transportation. Among the most common barriers cited were the high cost of some OST programs – both for private sports clubs (e.g., soccer) and community recreational programs - when taking into consideration larger families. Key informants also cited the lack of availability and overall need for OST programs; lack of funding for programs; staffing challenges for implementing programs; and time and transportation challenges related to the logistics of picking up children while also managing work schedules.

"Last year we offered cheerleading, but it became a financial strain for the campus, so we're not able to offer it this year..."-PE Teacher, Acres Homes

"That's the problem because you can have students who would want to participate, [but] being able to get there, since they might be with a single mom or whatever, and you might be using the vehicle only for the purpose of employment, so the child is not able to attend."

-Classroom Teacher, Acres Homes

Gatekeepers, Awareness, Academic & Scheduling Barriers. Other common themes included challenges with implementing school-based programming due to school gatekeepers, which may prevent community-based organizations from implementing programs at schools; lack of awareness among parents about program opportunities; lack of promotion of OST program opportunities with parents; parent and student-specific social/cultural barriers for participation; and academic and scheduling barriers- including the need to prioritize academics for some schools over extracurricular activities. We also note that some parents cited that their children prefer to be at home, and that some prefer screentime or video game playing, as one parent shares:

"Los niños de hoy pues prefieren estar en el Internet, en el TikTok, prefieren estar solos. Mucho lio. Ya me cansé. El de 11 no aguanta estar fuera. Prefiere estar en el Playstation." [“Today’s children prefer to be on the Internet, on TikTok; they prefer to be alone. It’s a big problem. I’m already tired. The 11-year-old can’t stand being outside. He prefers to be on the Playstation.”] -Parent E

Table 6a. Barriers for out-of-school-time program participation – Key Informant Interview. *Acres Homes Child Out-of-School-Time Physical Activity Opportunity Study, Houston, Texas (Fall & Spring 2025)* (n=21 parent, school & community key informants).

Barrier	Example Quotes
<i>Cost-Related Barriers of OST Programs</i>	
OST Program Cost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "I believe [cost] is also another reason because I know, at least in soccer, a lot of them are pretty high priced especially those bigger clubs... I have ref'd [referred] before and some parents are paying thousands of dollars for the clubs...[Some clubs] charge \$40 a month plus, which is pretty cheap for soccer, and then to buy the uniforms,...it's about two uniforms... Plus, also, there's the referee fee, and a lot of parts when you enter a tournament, you have to pay for that tournament as well." -PE Teacher, Acres Homes public school "If you're looking at say a [community afterschool program], you're looking at upwards over a hundred dollars a week for afterschool care." -Comm. Afterschool Program Provider "Yeah the interesting part is even with it being low cost and for us, right, if we find out that for childcare, where it's typically like \$300, you get it for \$65 or \$70, you're thinking 'Man, I could pay that,' but for some families even that is still a challenge. And then the families we work with, it's not just one kid. They have 2, 3, or 4 kids. So think about \$65 times four. And so even though we do highly subsidize the cost, we have recognized that.. for some of our families, that's still just too much..." -Comm. PA Provider "Hay unos [programas] que le pueden cobrar para recaudar fondos para una necesidad o una emergencia, me entiende. Por ejemplo, si hay actividades del futbol - o veo que uno tiene que comprar un uniforme y todo eso. A veces que nosotros como padres vamos casi al día con el dinero..." ["There are some [programs] that can charge you to raise funds for a need or an emergency, you understand. For example, if there are soccer activities, or one has to buy a uniform and all that. Sometimes we as parents are almost living paycheck to paycheck."] -Parent C
<i>Lack of Availability and Need for OST Programming</i>	
Lack of Availability and Need for OST Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "No estoy muy familiarizada en esos eventos, pero me gustaría que hubiera más actividades para que así los niños se mantengan más atentos y ocupen su mente en otras actividades que sean mas saludables para ellos." ["I am not very familiar with those events, but I would like there to be more activities so that the children stay more engaged and also occupy their minds with other activities that are healthier for them."] - Parent C. "Well, I definitely believe there's more need for [afterschool programs] for sure. So, I think that the kids want to be a part of the afterschool program that's going on here, but again, I believe there are a limited number of kids that can be involved [in the current program], and then it's also limited to one day a week. But I believe that if there was more opportunity, I think kids would stay as often as they possibly could, and I believe there's a need for it..." -PE Teacher "Some of the high schools in Acres Homes and middle schools, they don't have athletics at their campuses...[T]he students are missing out on those opportunities. Especially at the elementary level... [We] have a lot of students who, right after school, they're going home." -School Leader "....[R]ecently...we completed our 2023 master plan. And we had a citywide needs assessment survey....[O]ne of the greatest needs that we saw is for more health and fitness related programs, both for youth and for adults too. And then the other big request was for the renovation of existing facilities to make them a little nicer, safer, more appealing to keep people active." -Comm. PA Provider
<i>Lack of Funding & Staffing for OST Programs</i>	
Lack of Funding for OST Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Yeah once upon a time, there were 21st century monies....I know there were some schools that had the 21st century monies as well. I don't know if any of the schools here have that money." -Comm. Afterschool Program Provider
Financial Constraints & Staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Last year we offered cheerleading, but it became a financial strain for the campus, so were not able to offer it this year...A lot of things are coming down to budget and then personnel because you have to have personnel that can dedicate to the safety of the kids and go through all the trainings to make sure that if anything happens, we're good. So, they have to be First Aid trained, they have to be CPR trained, so that if something happens, they're good. And then they also have to be willing to stay until the last student." -School Principal

Table 6b. Barriers (continued) for out-of-school-time program participation – Key Informant Interview. *Acres Homes Child Out-of-School-Time Physical Activity Opportunity Study, Houston, Texas (Fall & Spring 2025)* (n=21 parent, school & community key informants).

Barrier	Example Quotes
<i>Time and Transportation-Related Barriers</i>	
Transportation and Large Area	"A big challenge in Acres Homes is that it is such a large community, and it's spread over such a large space. So there are safety challenges, there are logistical challenges in being able to participate in out of school programming, having to work, you know, how you go pick up your kids or get them shuttled from here to there - it's a challenge. Thankfully, you know, there are partners like Safe Routes to School that have been doing a lot of great work in Acres Homes. But still even with that great work, again, Acres Homes is much more challenged than the average kind of urban community because it is those acreage home sites which just automatically make it a much bigger expansive land to navigate." -School/Comm. PA Provider
Time and Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Pienso que un factor sería la falta de tiempo. Porque muchos padres trabajan hasta bien tarde... y si quedan jugando futbol...y juegan hasta 5 o 5:30, todavía el tráfico está bien pesado." ["I think one factor would be the lack of time. Because many parents work until quite late...And if they stay playing soccer, and play until 5 or 5:30, the traffic is really heavy."]-Parent B "...I feel like it's just a matter of convenience. I feel like there are parents out there that are busy. I mean sometimes I feel like we get lazy during the day, after especially after working all morning, you know; we just wanna stay at home and like relax and not have to worry about, oh. 'Well, I have to pick up so and so from school.' I feel like that probably has a lot to do with it...Maybe they only have one form of transportation." -Parent F "Como en mi caso, era porque...me la veía muy apurada por el trabajo. Porque, entraba yo a la 6 de la tarde [al trabajo]. Yo llegaba a la seis a la casa. Corríamos, porque mucho correr por el viaje. El tiempo." [<i>In my case, it was because...I saw her very rushed because of my work. Because I started work at 6 p.m. in the evening. We would rush, because of a lot of running due to the trip. The time.</i>]-Parent E "[W]hen they have maybe their job or more than one job, it's hard for them then to be able to take their kids...Yeah, and I do tell those parents, 'I completely understand. I am also a working parent. I also can't take my child to dance class or anything because I am working, so I completely understand and I'm right there along with you...So it's tough.'" -Comm. PA Leader "That's the problem because you can have students who would want to participate, [but] being able to get there [is a challenge] since they might be with a single mom or whatever, and you might be using the vehicle only for the purpose of employment, so the child is not able to attend." -School Teacher, Acres Homes "[T]ransportation is probably the largest barrier [for OST program participation]. We have been able to overcome that challenge to some degree. Right after, for instance, the pandemic our administration decided we weren't going to transport and our attendance, you know, fell way off. Yep and you know parents held some parent meetings and that was the number one thing that they wanted was to have that transportation, you know, reinstated. So we went back to transporting and you know that that has since, you know, obviously raised our average daily attendance, you know." -Comm. Afterschool Program Provider
Time and Staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "So I I think the barrier is probably one of the barriers I think is again like you know transportation and then staffing, you know, having. Getting people to stay, you know, there are, I know there's, in, you know, they have an incentive for staying there, there, you know, they get a stipend. [Coach X and Teacher Y], they get a stipend for your staying, and I I think if it were in, you know, incentivized like that, then more people would be involved." -PE Teacher, Acres Homes
<i>School Gatekeepers as Barriers</i>	
School Gatekeepers as Barriers	"Gatekeepers are a challenge sometimes, and it could be a gatekeeper on the school level or a gatekeeper at the district level. Sometimes it's hard to get past a gatekeeper that will even let you talk to a person that would be involved in the decision of programming it all. So that, I think that's probably a challenge for most organizations is navigating the gatekeeper situation because that can be different from school to school or district to district." -School/Comm. PA Provider

Table 6c. Barriers (continued) for out-of-school-time program participation – Key Informant Interview. *Acres Homes Child Out-of-School-Time Physical Activity Opportunity Study, Houston, Texas (Fall & Spring 2025)* (n=21 parent, school & community key informants).

Barrier	Example Quotes
<i>Lack of Awareness and Promotion of OST Program Opportunities</i>	
Lack of Parent Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "No sé mucho sobre las oportunidades [extracurriculares] de la comunidad [en Acres Homes]." <i>"[I don't know much about the [OST] opportunities in the Acres Homes community.]" -Parent C</i> • "...[T]he only programs that I know about are the ones that were in, like she's in that gifted and talented program, the GT program. Okay. And then Tae Kwon Do..." <i>-Parent D</i> • Solo conozco [sobre los programas extracurriculares] a través de la escuela." <i>"[I only know [about OST programs] through the school.]" -Parent E</i>
Lack of Promotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "But not all of them [OST sports clubs] have actually sent, like, information to parents to be able to join other soccer clubs in the past." • "...But the school districts...don't typically pass out flyers for other organizations because if they did it for one, they'd have to do [it] for everybody...It would be awesome if they did [provide communication about OST programs]." <i>-Comm. Afterschool Program Provider</i>
Lack of Awareness among Parents about Benefits of OST Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "We do CATCH, we do coding. Kids have taken drone classes and got a license to apply drones that we're partnering with like different organizations. Kids are building computers, taking them apart, getting the computer at the end of the session. We're doing some really good things. However, parents just want their kids to go home. And so I think for me, that's probably the biggest barrier in that community specifically is getting them to understand the importance of building the whole child even outside of just the school day." <i>-Comm. PA Provider</i>
<i>Parent Social/Cultural Barriers and Lack of Prioritization of OST Program Participation</i>	
Social/Cultural Barriers for Physical Activity	"One big barrier is just social and cultural barriers that we may have because the families may not prioritize physical activity. And it's within that culture of their family and or as far as the social barrier kids, they may not feel as comfortable working with these groups of participants or working with groups. They might be introverts, they may want to just work alone by themselves and not come out to community centers and get engaged with groups like that." <i>-Comm. PA Provider</i>
Lack of Commitment due to Free Programming	"[For] most of the families, there's not necessarily a sense of obligation when some of our events or some of our products that we offer are free. So it's kind of been it's kind of treated as though it's a placeholder versus more of it there being some type of obligation based on the availability and them having the leisure [activities]." <i>-Comm. PA Provider</i>
<i>Academic & Scheduling-Related Barriers</i>	
Need for Schools to Prioritize Academics over Extracurriculars	"So, our campus is a turnaround campus, meaning our academic performance has not been at state expectations. And because of that, there are additional requirements that our teachers have regarding their craft, right? So, they're having to spend a lot more time in their planning time. A lot more time in preparation to make small groups to make sure that our 3rd 4th and 5th graders are still reading at a grade level have access to instruction. And because they are so focused on that, sometimes the extracurriculars lose out..." <i>-School Principal, Acres Homes public school</i>
Tutoring as a Priority	"...[El maestro] estuvo dándoles tutorías a todo el grupo. Entonces [los estudiantes] no podían participar en [los programas extracurriculares] porque se quedaban en tutorías." <i>"[The teacher] was giving them tutorials to the whole group. So [the students] couldn't participate in the [extracurricular programs] because they were stuck in tutorials.]" -Parent A</i>
Scheduling Conflicts	"So the things that I've noticed is sometimes it's just the timing of the program. Sometimes the school may have something going on at the same times that our afterschool programs are happening. So the participants are kind of occupied with another event that's going on outside of Parks and Rec...Their participation or their attention is elsewhere versus being at the recreation centers or facility." <i>-Comm. PA Provider</i>
<i>Screentime and Student Activity Preferences</i>	
Screentime	"Los niños de hoy pues prefieren estar en el...internet, en el TikTok, prefieren estar solos. Mucho lio. Ya me cansé. El de 11 no aguanta estar fuera. Prefiere estar en el Playstation." <i>"[Today's children prefer to be on the Internet, on TikTok; they prefer to be alone. It's a big problem. I'm already tired. The 11-year-old can't stand being outside. He prefers to be on the Playstation.]" -Parent E</i>

Facilitators for Out-of-School-Time Program Participation. In identifying facilitators for OST program participation, we explored with key informants: “What might help to further support children and their families to participate in out-of-school-time physical activity programming?” Key themes are presented in Fig. 18 and Tables 7a & 7b.

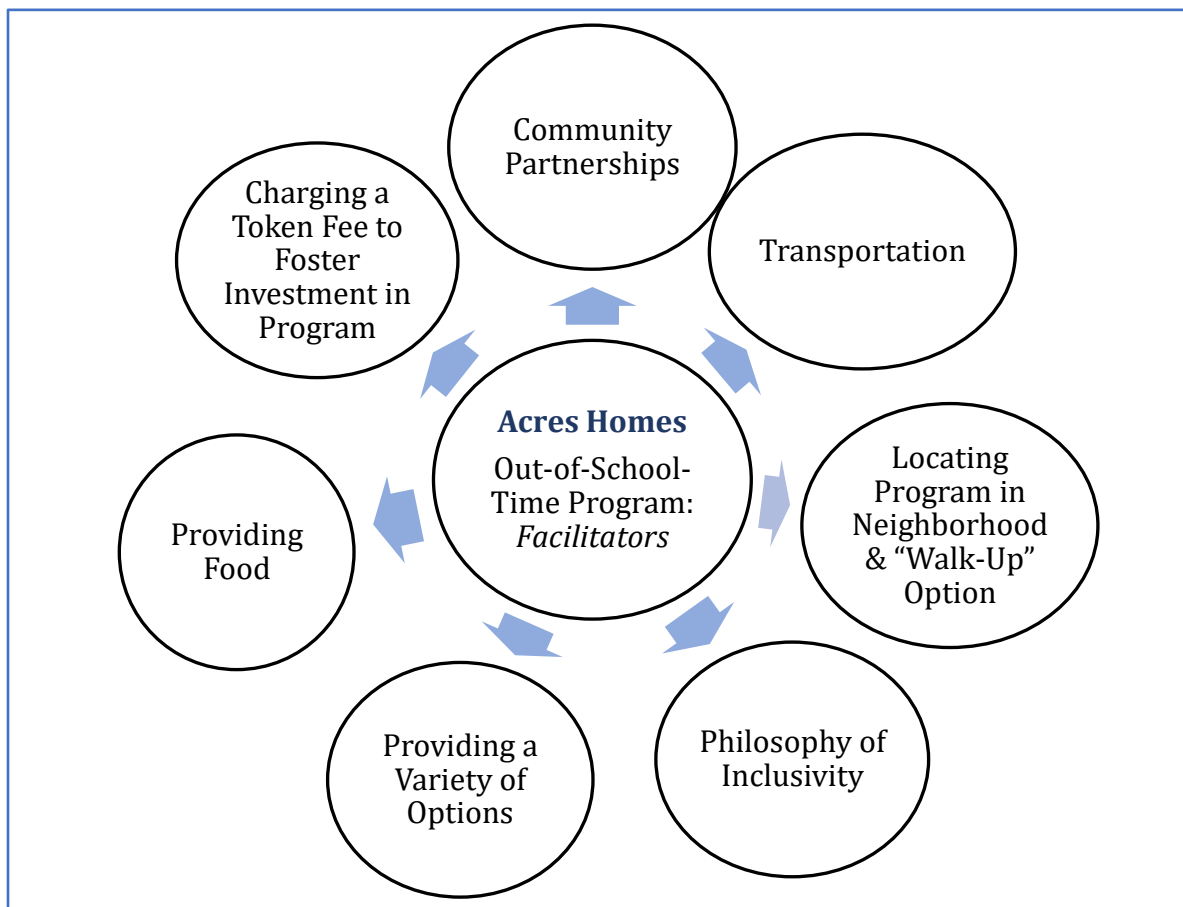


Fig. 18. Facilitators for Out-of-School-Time Program Participation –Themes from Key Informant Interview. *Acres Homes Child Out-of-School-Time Physical Activity Opportunity Study, Houston, Texas (Fall & Spring 2025)*. (n=21 parent, school and community key informants).

Community Partnerships. Among the key facilitators for OST programs were the importance of *community partnerships* to support OST program implementation. Key themes included: fostering community partnerships to facilitate funding and broader community support - with examples that include Be Well Acres Homes’ funding *Afterschool Active Kids Club* and “sports club”; directly providing OST programming to schools, with examples of new partnerships with martial arts academies; and fostering volunteer support for OST program activities (Table 7a).

“As far as extracurriculars, sports club has been our biggest hit...We averaged about 40 or so kids...So our sports club actually was started through a grant.” -*School Principal, Acres Homes*

Transportation & Locating Program within Neighborhood or School. We also learned about the importance of *facilitating transportation* for students to OST programs. Given that transportation has been identified in our previous section as among the biggest barriers for OST program participation, some schools and community groups are directly providing transportation. One community PA provider shared their experience in which school staff will help walk students to their afterschool program, while another community OST provider directly provides transportation for students. Related to transportation, we also learned the importance of locating OST programs within locations such as schools or neighborhoods in order to facilitate both accessibility and trust (Table 7a).

“We also have what we call a walk-up program, so a lot of our community centers are located within communities and neighborhoods to where they're walking distance from the residential areas...”

-Community PA Provider

Philosophy of Inclusivity: In facilitating OST program participation, key informant community leaders discussed the importance of fostering a culturally inclusive and welcoming environment – including developing programs that incorporate the diverse languages and music of students and their families. In addition, PA provider key informants noted the importance of creating programs for students of all athletic abilities (Table 7b).

“I always just have someone who's going to be the Emcee who is bilingual...For instance, we have a DJ, and even music is catered to each side. So you want to make everybody feel that they're welcome.” -PE Teacher, Acres Homes

Providing a Variety of Options, Food, and a Token Fee. Other key facilitators for increasing participation in OST programs included providing a variety of options of activities and providing food – recognizing that many students need an afternoon snack and may not have the resources to bring food. With regard to providing options, one of our community PA providers emphasized the need to try to learn more directly from participants about the interests of the students, and not just assuming that PA providers know what will resonate with students, emphasizing “youth choice and youth voice.” Lastly, some of our community PA providers touched on the importance of having families provide some contribution to the program in order to foster more ownership and commitment to the program: “You know, you want them to have some buy-in and value your services. If it's totally free, then a lot of times people don't respect that and they don't value what we do here.”

“I think another thing that we're recognizing is we need to add in our program like youth choice and voice, because a lot of it sometimes is so structured, like we have to have this [activity]...” -Community PA Provider

Table 7a. Facilitators for out-of-school-time program participation – Key Informant Interview. *Acres Homes Child Out-of-School-Time Physical Activity Opportunity Study, Houston, Texas (Fall & Spring 2025)* (n=21 parent, school & community key informants).

Facilitator	Example Quotes
<i>Community Partnerships & Opportunities for Volunteers/Leadership Ladder</i>	
Community Partnerships that facilitate funding and volunteer support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "I would say, partnerships. We get involved with various community groups or businesses and organizations that can either provide financial resources, or, sometimes volunteer resources... [L]ike, we have our youth soccer program that's aligned with the United States soccer foundation. So that that association with the very credible organization. You know, gives us a better name and attracts more kids to be a part of our program. Plus it does help when they contribute a very generous amount of funding towards the program in order to make it free... So I would say partnerships is definitely a big part..." -Comm. PA Provider "As far as extracurriculars, <i>sports club</i> has been our biggest hit. Years past, we've done YMCA... Sports club is 4th and 5th grade and they change sports quarterly. [Sports club] is two days a week for two hours... We averaged about 40 or so kids. And I would say consistently about 25 to 30 we're gonna show up every week...So our sports club actually was started through a grant." -School Principal, Acres Homes
School/Community Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Campuses have reached out to local martial arts academies where they can come in and do martial arts instruction at the campus once again using it as a central place where the students are right there, so it's more accessible. So they've just signed an agreement with [our school district]." -School District Leader
Volunteers & Leadership Ladder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "We are primarily volunteer-driven. We have a lot of just fantastic volunteers...Depending on the activity, most of our volunteer activities are very accessible to high school students that are required to put in so many service hours for their programs or whatever they're doing. So we have a lot of high school students that volunteer as well and we sign off on their service hours." -Community Organization Leader "So we, for instance, we have a young man who started doing programming out of Acres Homes, started doing programming with us when he was in high school through the programming we were doing at his school, and then he just started showing up at like Neo events, like our big community celebration events that we do to volunteer on his own completely outside of school and not wanting anything in return. He just enjoyed it and he enjoyed learning. And then his family, like his parents started doing it with them too. And then they started just attending all kinds of Neo events all over the state...So that young man does a lot of work [now] as a contract person to help out with camp... [And] we've hired another high school student to be our interpreter for some of our programming that we knew had a high percentage of Spanish language speakers. So yeah, we, if people through NEO show that they're committed to the mission...then we bring them on..." -Community Organization Leader
<i>Transportation</i>	
Instrumental Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Our staff is able to go and pick up children. If the school is in a walking distance, there's a possibility that we can coordinate something where the kids are brought onto our property and then we just take them from there." -Comm. PA Provider "We transport from about nine different schools during the school year that are about five to 8 miles [away]." -Comm. Afterschool Program Provider
<i>Locating Programs within Neighborhoods and "Walk Up" Programming</i>	
Location within Neighborhoods as Facilitating Factor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "We also have what we call a walk-up program, so a lot of our community centers are located within communities and neighborhoods to where they're walking distance from the residential areas. So a lot of you can walk up, and it's just based on parents' permission. [The students] can walk and sign themselves in and out of programming opportunities at the community centers." -Comm. PA Provider "Right, and one of the unique things about these two centers, Highland and Lincoln is that they're right in the middle of a neighborhood, you know, and there's a lot of the children, a lot of the participants walked there. It's a pretty close bike ride and some of them I'm sure get a ride from their parents, but both of these centers are very neighborhood oriented." -Comm. PA Provider

Table 7b. Facilitators for out-of-school-time program participation (cont.) – Key Informant Interview. *Acres Homes Child Out-of-School-Time Physical Activity Opportunity Study, Houston, Texas (Fall & Spring 2025)* (n=21 parent, school & community key informants).

Facilitator	Example Quotes
<i>Inclusivity: Language, Culture, and Athletic Ability</i>	
Language & Cultural Inclusivity and a Welcoming Environment	"[L]anguage is a big consideration for us because we have a huge influx of Latino population...And I found that they are big supporters when it comes to their kids being involved...So to have someone else to be able to communicate [is important]. I always just have someone who's going to be the Emcee who is bilingual. Even when, for instance, we play music...We have a DJ, and even music is catered to each side. So you want to make everybody feel that they're welcome. And so that's one of the things that we really work on also is to make sure that everyone feels comfortable." - <i>School Principal, Acres Homes</i>
Philosophy of Athletic Inclusivity	"...[T]he first two to three years, [our sports program] was mainly focused on the kids that had good ability, but at a certain point I decided, 'hey, I should try to help out the kids that have lower ability and just kind of separate them and teach them different things than the kids that have a higher ability.'" - <i>PE Teacher, Acres Homes</i>
<i>Providing a Variety of Options</i>	
Variety of Options	"Yeah, we will allow time for, for homework. We do have tennis twice a week. We have an instructor that comes twice a week and he has his program. And then we do, you know, we do some sports, we do some cross, we do some board games, and some puzzle games. We just play with them." - <i>Comm. PA Provider</i>
<i>Providing Food</i>	
Providing Food	"... [T]o have an activity after school or later on before a child goes home, they're usually not eating. So you also have to keep that in mind that for a lot of our students especially in the community, they're on a real low income. And so some of them, they only come to school. It's the only meal that they get is when they're here at school. So to have a program, [you] at least have to have some type of snacks or nourishment while they're participating in the program." - <i>School Principal</i>
<i>Charging a Token Fee to Foster Investment in OST Program</i>	
Charging a Fee to Foster Investment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "When we do like camping on campus, sometimes we'll do something like charge a \$10 fee, and that fee is designed for a family... [T]hat fee basically covers if stuff is damaged... And it also just ensures that if people sign up, they actually show up... So it just encourages them, even paying \$10 makes them want to come. They don't want to lose that.... So a lot of our stuff is free. If there is a charge, it's a very minimal." -<i>Comm. Organization Leader</i> "You know, you want them to have some buy-in and value your services. If it's totally free, then a lot of times people don't respect that and they don't value what we do here." -<i>Comm. Afterschool Provider</i>

Barriers for Active Commuting to School. We also explored with parents (n=7) their children's experience with walking and biking to/from school, and with all key informants (n=21) the challenges for students to walk or bike to/from school, with key barriers identified presented in Fig. 19 and Table 8. Among the most common barriers, safety concerns, lack of built environmental supports for walking/biking, distance to school, and lack of time were most frequently cited, with other barriers described below.

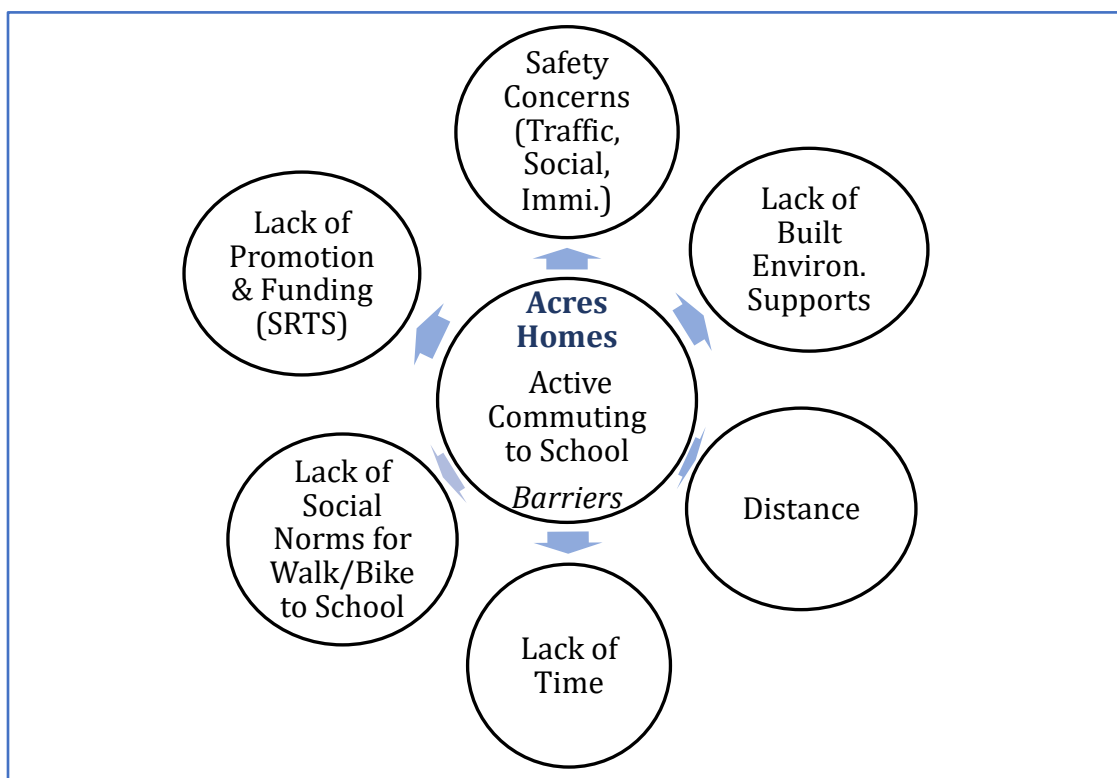


Fig. 19. Barriers for Active Commuting to/from School –Themes from Key Informant Interview. *Acres Homes Child Out-of-School-Time Physical Activity Opportunity Study, Houston, Texas (Fall & Spring 2025)*. (n=21 parent, school and community key informants).

Safety Concerns. With regard to traffic-related safety, parent key informants expressed concerns with speeding cars, busy streets for crossing, and lack of safety supports for walkers and bikers (Table 8). As shared by one parent:

"Yo los traigo en carro. Yo también vivo cerca, pero tenemos que cruzar la avenida, y está muy fea... Los carros pasan muy rápido. Los carros vuelan...Los carros no respetan el semáforo."
 ["I bring them by car. I also live nearby, but we have to cross the avenue, and it's very ugly...Cars pass by very quickly. Cars fly by. Cars do not respect the traffic light."] -Parent A, Acres Homes

Parents also noted concerns about social-related and immigration-related safety that prevent them and their children from active commuting to school. One parent shared: "But honestly, like personally, it's just like there's so much going on right now in the world, and

honestly, we never know in terms of just the safety issues." Another parent shared: "Yeah, safety issue, and I don't know if you're also referring to the migration issues or that as well or more just crime safety...I'm married to a Salvadoran. There's concerns right now about the visa issues."

Lack of Built Environment Supports: Related to traffic safety concerns, our parent and community key informants cited the lack of built environmental supports such as sidewalks, crosswalks, and bike lanes as a key barrier for walking and biking to and from school. As shared by one parent: "La escuela no está muy retirada, pero no hay un espacio para que los niños vayan caminando. Es un peligro para ellos." [*The school isn't very far, but there is no space for the students to go walking. It is a gander for them.*].

*"Ir en bicicleta está peligroso porque no hay banquetas, no hay donde uno camine...Es muy peligroso. Tendrían que ir en la calle con los carros." [*Going to school by bike is dangerous because there are no sidewalks, no place to walk. They would have to go in the street with the cars.*]* -Parent, Acres Homes

Distance and Lack of Time. Related to transportation barriers, some parent key informants shared the challenges with the distance to school as well as the lack of time to walk with their children to or from school. With regard to distance, one parent shared: "...la escuela queda retirada porque es una escuela magnet." [*For example, the school is very far away because it is a magnet school.*]. Another parent underscored challenges with active commuting due to time and work schedules: "Even when I work from home those days, like I still have to be logged on by a certain time, right? ...[W]e [also] have to leave a lot earlier just to get here on time. So time might be a barrier for you, at least to walk to school."

Lack of Norms for Walking & Biking and Need for Promotion of Active Commuting. We also learned that, for some schools, active commuting was not common among students. As shared by one Acres Homes school principal: "I'm guessing [there are] around 450 students both grade levels [4th and 5th]. I'm not exactly sure on this, but I'm saying there's about 10 or 15 walkers. Okay, and bike riding, I really do not know if there's any at the moment. And sometimes, about one or two, but not the last couple years." In promoting active commuting, several key informants noted the support provided by *Safe Routes to School* in previous years, which included developing a safe routes plan, educational activities, and other supports for walking and biking to school ([Harris County Public Health](#)). Unfortunately, the funding for that program was cut for this year, which has limited school leaders' ability to promote active commuting.

*"...[The funder] basically said we don't have funding for [*Safe Routes to School*] anymore...I'm hopeful that we can reconnect early next year to resume safe routes activity."*
-PE Teacher, Acres Homes

Table 8. Barriers for child active commuting to/from school – Key Informant Interview. *Acres Homes Child Out-of-School-Time Physical Activity Opportunity Study, Houston, Texas (Fall & Spring 2025)* (n=21 parent, school & community key informants).

Barrier	Example Quotes
<i>Safety Concerns</i>	
Safety: Traffic-Related	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Yo los traigo en carro. Yo también vivo cerca, pero tenemos que cruzar la avenida, y está muy fea... Los carros pasan muy rápido. Los carros vuelen... Los carros no respetan el semáforo." [<i>"I bring them by car. I also live nearby, but we have to cross the avenue, and it's very ugly... Cars pass by very quickly. Cars fly by. Cars do not respect the traffic light."</i>] - Parent A, Acres Homes "En mi caso, la escuela no queda lejos. Queda aproximadamente a 5 minutos. Pero tienen que cruzar la calle. El segundo es que no hay banquetas." [<i>"In my case, the school isn't far away. It's about five minutes. But [the students] have to cross the street. Secondly, there are no sidewalks."</i>] - Parent G, Acres Homes "I think it is mostly a safety issue [regarding low biking and walking to school]. Okay. I believe that is the main reason since they're in 5th and 6th grade, and I guess they still don't trust that they can get to school safely or get back home safely." - PE Teacher, Acres Homes "Yeah, not many bikers. You know, it's not really a safe path for biking. So, unless they're gonna ride their bike on the sidewalk, which is not really [good], you know what I mean, when there's walkers; it's not safe. I've actually seen a student get hit by a car when he was leaving this the school....[I]t turned out he was ok, but yeah, it's not really safe. I wouldn't let my child walk [to school]." - PE Teacher, Acres Homes
Safety: Social and Immigration Related	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "But honestly, like personally, it's just like there's so much going on right now in the world, and honestly, we never know in terms of just the safety issues." - Parent C, Acres Homes "Yeah, safety issue, and I don't know if you're also referring to the migration issues or that as well or more just crime safety... I'm married to a Salvadoran. There's concerns right now about the visa issues." - Parent F, Acres Homes
<i>Lack of Supportive Built Environment</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "La escuela no está muy retirada, pero no hay un espacio para que los niños vayan caminando. Es un peligro para ellos." [<i>"The school isn't very far, but there is no space for the students to go walking. It is a danger for them."</i>] - Parent C, Acres Homes "Ir en bicicleta está peligroso porque no hay banquetas, no hay donde uno camine... Es muy peligroso. Tendrían que ir en la calle con los carros." - Parent E, Acres Homes "You know, we had individuals come out and look at [the built environment] for us to walk... But our school is so busy for us due to the traffic outside. So, we're trying to look at a way to... set up an easier route for [students] to be able to have access to the school because the traffic is so terrible in front of the school". - Classroom Teacher, Acres Homes
<i>Distance</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Por ejemplo, la escuela queda retirada porque es una escuela magnet." [<i>"For example, the school is very far away because it is a magnet school."</i>] - Parent E, Acres Homes
<i>Lack of Time</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Even when I work from home those days, like I still have to be logged on by a certain time, right? And obviously now it's more difficult [as] we have to leave a lot earlier just to get here on time. Yeah. So time might be a barrier for you, at least to walk to school." - Parent D, Acres Homes
<i>Lack of Social Norms for Walking & Biking</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "I'm guessing [there is] around 450 students both grade levels. I'm not exactly sure on this, but I'm saying there's about 10 or 15 walkers. Okay, and bike riding, I really do not know if there's any at the moment. And sometimes, about one or two, but not the last couple years." - PE Teacher, Acres Homes
<i>Lack of Promotion and Funding (Safe Routes to School)</i>	
Lack of Promotion	Is there an initiative to encourage students to walk or bike to your understanding? "Not really, at least not this year." - PE Teacher, Acres Homes
Lack of Funding	"And then shortly after that they [Harris County SRTS] met with me and basically said we don't have funding for this anymore... I'm hopeful that we can reconnect early next year to resume safe routes activity." - PE Teacher, Acres Homes

Facilitators for Active Commuting to School. In guiding future action, we also explored facilitators for active commuting (e.g., “Are there any programs or initiatives at your school that promote walking and biking to or from school?”). Facilitators cited by key informants included: *social support for walking and biking*- with examples that included teachers who accompany the children halfway home as well as biking clubs for some schools (outside of our study sample) in which teachers meet up with students to ride to school; the importance of *proximity to school*; *promotion and education programs* such as Safe Routes to School and *promotional events* such as the Bike Rodeo hosted by Kings Bike and Hike Community, a local Acres Homes nonprofit that provides bike rodeos and other supports for active commuting; and the importance of *crossing guards*, as shared by one parent:

“...Por lo regular, los maestros los acompañan a medio camino, y los papás los recibimos.”
 [“Usually, the teachers accompany [the students] halfway, and [then] the parents receive them.”] -Parent, Acres Homes

“...[I]f there's like a patrol officer out, just patrolling that area around that time [that helps to support walking/biking to school].” (See Fig. 19 and Table 9 for further detail).



Fig. 19. Facilitators for Active Commuting to/from School –Themes from Key Informant Interview. Acres Homes Child Out-of-School-Time Physical Activity Opportunity Study, Houston, Texas (Fall & Spring 2025). (n=21 parent, school and community key informants).

Table 9. Facilitators for child active commuting to/from school – Key Informant Interview. *Acres Homes Child Out-of-School-Time Physical Activity Opportunity Study, Houston, Texas (Fall & Spring 2025)* (n=21 parent, school & community key informants).

Facilitator	Example Quotes
<i>Social Support for Walking/Biking</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Por lo regular, los maestros los acompañan a medio camino, y los papás los recibimos." [<i>Usually, the teachers accompany [the students] halfway, and [then] the parents receive them.</i>] -Parent B, Acres Homes "In some of the schools I've seen where they have like a biking club, so like two or three of the teachers actually will go into like the neighborhood on bikes, and all the kids kind of meet up together and they're on their bikes and then they bike to school. Yeah I've seen that quite a bit." -Comm. PA Provider, Acres Homes
<i>Proximity to School</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Mis niños van caminando porque vivimos cerca." [<i>My children go walking [to school] because we live close by.</i>] -Parent B, Acres Homes "A good 40 % are walking from their apartment that's connected directly to our school, one of the largest apartments in our area. And then we have some houses in the front of our building that people walk over. And then I would say another 40 % are gonna be car riders. And a lot of times...we start the year with less car riders, but as specials and apartments start going up, and people start moving to catch a new special, we get more car riders because our kids NO longer are zoned to our school but they don't want to tell us, so they will just drive them every day because of the distance...So it depends on the day, but because that, like I said, that apartment complex is connected to the school. They don't even have to walk on a major street. They just walk across the field." - School Principal, Acres Homes
<i>Promotion and Education about Walking/Biking</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "So we may get a biker every now and again... We offer what we call the Bike Rodeo, and it's a bike safety training that we offer to the entire school 1st through 5th grade and we give away free bikes, with helmets, we teach them bikes safety, we teach them how to, you know, if you're at a red light, this is how you cross the red light, how to use the crosswalks appropriately, and that's in collaboration with the county. They actually bring everything on campus and we do a full day, like, 'here's how to ride your bike safely event', so the kids can do that during the summer. We do know that they do keep bikes at their apartments and they have them at home, but they don't necessarily ride them to school." So, did you say that's like one day during the Spring you do that? "Yeah, so that's right. We do it right before the end of the school year. So this year's I think is scheduled for like mid-May, somewhere in there, and it's our way to make sure that they're prepared for the summer because they will be on their bikes for weeks." -School Principal, Acres Homes "Well, I guess at the beginning of the year or you send like, you know, there's ClassDojo where you send messages school-wide...That might help out and tell them that if they live close that they can go ahead and walk to school or bike to school if they want." -PE Teacher, Acres Homes "I wanna say there used to be [a Safe Routes to School Program], but I don't think there is this year." -Parent F, Acres Homes
<i>Crossing Guards</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "...[I]f there's like a patrol officer out, just patrolling that area around that time [helps to support walking/biking to/from school]." -Parent F, Acres Homes

Barriers for Park/Trail & Recreation Use. Recognizing the valuable assets that Acres Homes has related to parks, trails, and recreational centers, we asked parent, school and community leaders to share why some children and families may not use existing recreational spaces and opportunities in their neighborhood or the broader Acres Homes community. Key barriers for park/trail and recreation center use are presented in Fig. 20, with illustrative quotes presented in Table 10.

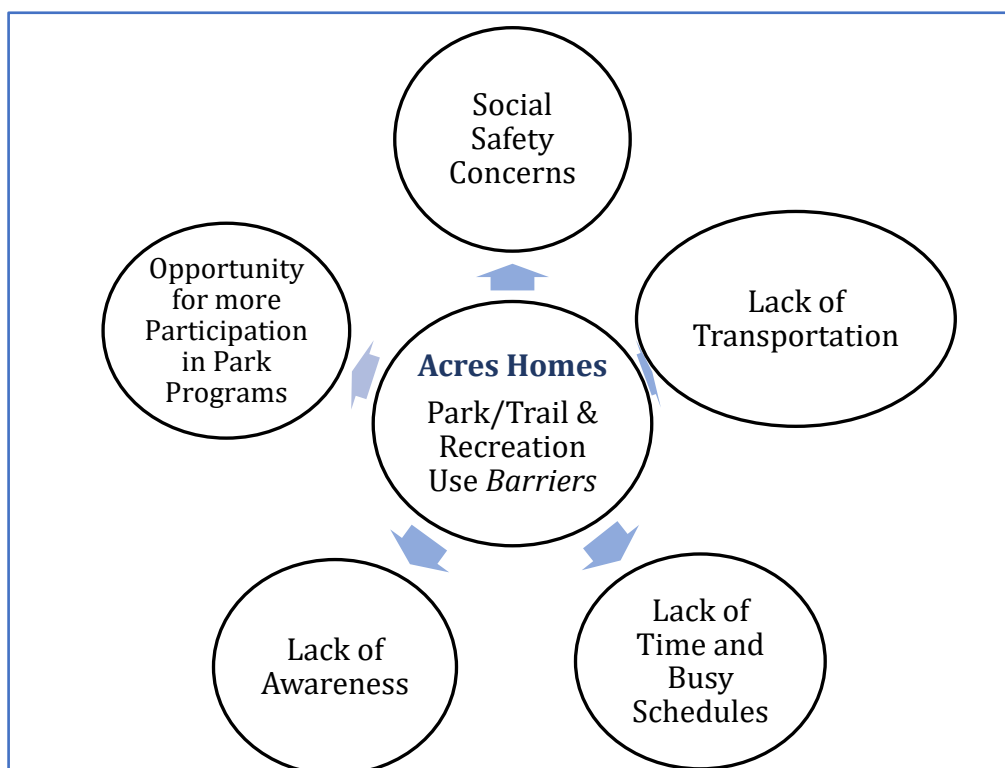


Fig. 20. Barriers for Park/Trail & Recreation Use –Themes from Key Informant Interview. *Acres Homes Child Out-of-School-Time Physical Activity Opportunity Study, Houston, Texas (Fall & Spring 2025)*. (n=21 parent, school and community key informants).

Safety Concerns: Among these barriers, key informants shared some safety concerns about visiting parks. Among the safety-related themes, respondents noted that *lack of adult supervision* is an important barrier for park use among children, as shared by one school leader: "[I]f you have parents who are working, 'cause some of these students will walk home or take the bus home and their parents may be at work, they're not going to go out to the park. They're told to go home and stay inside with the door locked." We also learned about how the *time of day* may influence safety perceptions and overall safety at the park, with one parent sharing the need to leave once it gets dark:

"Pues, como a las 8 de la noche (en Doss Park), salimos corriendo porque está feo. Está peligroso. Hay otro parque donde no hay luz. Hay *homeless*, y hay drogas. Salimos temprano." [*"Well, around 8 in the evening (in Doss Park), we ran out because it's ugly. It's dangerous. There's another park where there's no light. There are homeless people, and there are drugs. We leave early."*] -Parent, Acres Homes

Lack of Transportation. In addition to being a key barrier for OST program participation, lack of transportation was also cited as a reason some children and their families may not visit parks. The challenge of transportation is well described by one of our community leaders who brings many years of experience working and living in Acres Homes:

"...[T]he parks are not easily accessible. They're very spread out. They're down in the communities. And so the bus routes only go down the primary or main streets... And most persons in that section of [Acres Homes], what I would even call the most immediate section, are not within walking distance of the car. On the other side of Westman and Montgomery, down by the police station, for instance, there are NO parks in that area. Okay....And then of course you have the Sylvester Turner Park, which is at Little York close to TC Jester, and between Little York and Victory. And again, you would have to get off the bus at TC Jester and walk down, and that only serves a smaller population of the [name removed] community. So yeah, transportation." -*Community Leader, Acres Homes*

Lack of Time, Lack of Awareness, and Opportunity for Greater Participation. Other barriers that keep families from visiting parks and recreation centers and related programs as shared by key informants included *lack of time* and *busy schedules*. One parent shared how her and her children's busy schedules keep them from visiting parks:

"When I would have more time, it would be three, maybe three times out of the week, like through the whole weekend. But lately I do not have a lot of time to go there [to the parks]...Yep that's really about it; the kids being busy and really didn't have too much other time to get to know other places or to go to other places." -*Parent, Acres Homes*

While park opportunities in Acres Homes have been growing in recent years with the addition of school parks and trails, some key informants questioned whether all families are aware that they can access these spaces and PA opportunities (see call-out quote), representing another potential barrier for use of recreational spaces (*lack of awareness*).

"[Parents], even though they pull up and they see the park at the school, you know, if they weren't here when we opened the park a few years ago, maybe they don't know that it's available all the time. Maybe they don't know that that's something that they can really go to."

-*PE Teacher, Acres Homes*

Lastly, we learned about some of the great recreational programming and recreational spaces (e.g., tennis courts, trails, swimming) that are available in and around Acres Homes (as shared above), including at Highland Community Center and Lincoln Park Community Center. Despite this availability, the lower numbers of children attending afterschool programs for some sites this year have resulted in reduced designation of "summer sites" for programming, as shared by one community PA provider: "Unfortunately, because I don't meet 20 or more kids on average, I am not gonna be a summer site. This is the first time that I hear that not all parks will be summer sites. So the plan is right now to be a social site where parents can bring their kids..." The lack of awareness of park availability and OST programs, as noted here and with our previous findings, and the lower participation for some OST programs, represent important opportunities for further promotion with Acres Homes families.

Table 10. Barriers for park/trail & recreation center use – Key Informant Interview. *Acres Homes Child Out-of-School-Time Physical Activity Opportunity Study, Houston, Texas (Fall & Spring 2025)* (n=21 parent, school & community key informants).

Barrier	Example Quotes
<i>Safety Concerns</i>	
Lack of Parental Support due to Work Demands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "[I]f you have parents who are working, cause some of these students will walk home or take the bus home and their parents may be at work, they're not going to go out to the park. They're told to go home and stay inside with the door locked." -School District Leader, Acres Homes
Concerns about Social Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Yo tengo el parque a un lado, Sylvester Park. Íbamos seguido, pero en los últimos dos meses que pasaron, ha habido este accidente en que mataron a un señor porque mataron a dos personas entonces no [hemos ido]." <i>["I have the park next to me, Sylvester Park. We used to go often, but in the last two months, there have been these accidents where they killed a man because they killed two people, so we haven't gone."]</i> -Parent B, Acres Homes "Pues, como a las 8 de la noche (en Doss Park), salimos corriendo porque está feo. Está peligroso. Hay otro parque donde no hay luz. Hay homeless, y hay drogas. Salimos temprano." <i>["Well, around 8 in the evening (in Doss Park), we ran out because it's ugly. It's dangerous. There's another park where there's no light. There are homeless people, and there are drugs. We leave early."]</i> -Parent E, Acres Homes "Depending on the time, there's not a lot of police presence out there. The area starts to change as the sun starts to set, and a different crowd shows up. Which kind of goes back to the safety component... If I don't have an adult that can go to the park with you, you're not going to go." -School Principal, Acres Homes
Concerns about Social Safety & Time Constraints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "No, no visitamos mucho los parques. No vamos por la seguridad y por el tiempo. Es más por la seguridad.... Yo soy mamá de dos niños. Y las mujeres somos más vulnerables al peligro. Se me hace más difícil sacarlos por la noche tarde a un parque por el miedo." <i>["No, we don't visit the parks much. We don't go for safety and for the weather. It's mostly about safety.... I am a mother of two children. And women are more vulnerable to danger. It makes it more difficult for me to take them to a park at night because of fear."]</i> -Parent G, Acres Homes
<i>Lack of Transportation</i>	
Lack of Transportation & Walkable Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "And then transportation is always just another issue. If even a park is a mile away from you, if you don't have a car to get there, then it's gonna be hard to walk there or ride back there, especially when some of these areas don't have the sidewalks to be able to safely get there." -School District Leader
Lack of Public Transportation for Some Parks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "...[T]he parks are not easily accessible. They're very spread out. They're down in the communities. And so the bus routes only go down the primary or main streets... And most persons in that section of [Acres Homes], what I would even call the most immediate section, are not within walking distance of the car. On the other side of Westman and Montgomery, down by the police station, for instance, there are NO parks in that area. Okay....And then of course you have the Sylvester Turner Park, which is at Little York close to TC Jester, and between Little York and Victory. And again, you would have to get off the bus at TC Jester and walk down, and that only serves a smaller population of the [name removed] community. So yeah, transportation." -Community Leader, Acres Homes
<i>Lack of Time & Busy Schedules</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "When I would have more time, it would be three, maybe three times out of the week, like through the whole weekend. But lately I do not have a lot of time to go there [to the parks]...Yep that's really about it; the kids being busy and really didn't have too much other time to get to know other places or to go to other places." -Parent D, Acres Homes "The other factor would be just so many different things going on. So I know you come home and you may have homework. To do cleaning to do and then by before you know it, it's too late to go out to the park." -School Principal, Acres Homes
<i>Lack of Awareness of Availability</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Parents, even though they pull up and they see the park at the school, you know, if they weren't here when we opened the park a few years ago, maybe they don't know that it's available all the time. Maybe they don't know that that's something that they can really go to." -PE Teacher, Acres Homes
<i>Opportunity for more Participation in Park Programs</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Unfortunately, because I don't meet 20 or more kids on average, I am not gonna be a summer site. This is the first time that I hear that not all parks will be summer sites. So the plan is right now to be a social site where parents can bring their kids. Let's say I'm doing a garden activity; parents can bring their kids. Let's do the activity and then, you know, do whatever they want after that or come to the next activity." -Comm. PA Provider

Facilitators for Park/Trail and Recreation Center Visitation. In addition to exploring barriers, we also asked parent, school and community leaders to share what might further support children and their families to visit park, trails and recreation centers in their neighborhood and the broader Acres Homes community. Fig. 21 presents facilitators for park/trail and recreation area/center use based on our thematic analysis, with a brief summary provided below (see also Table 11 for example quotes).

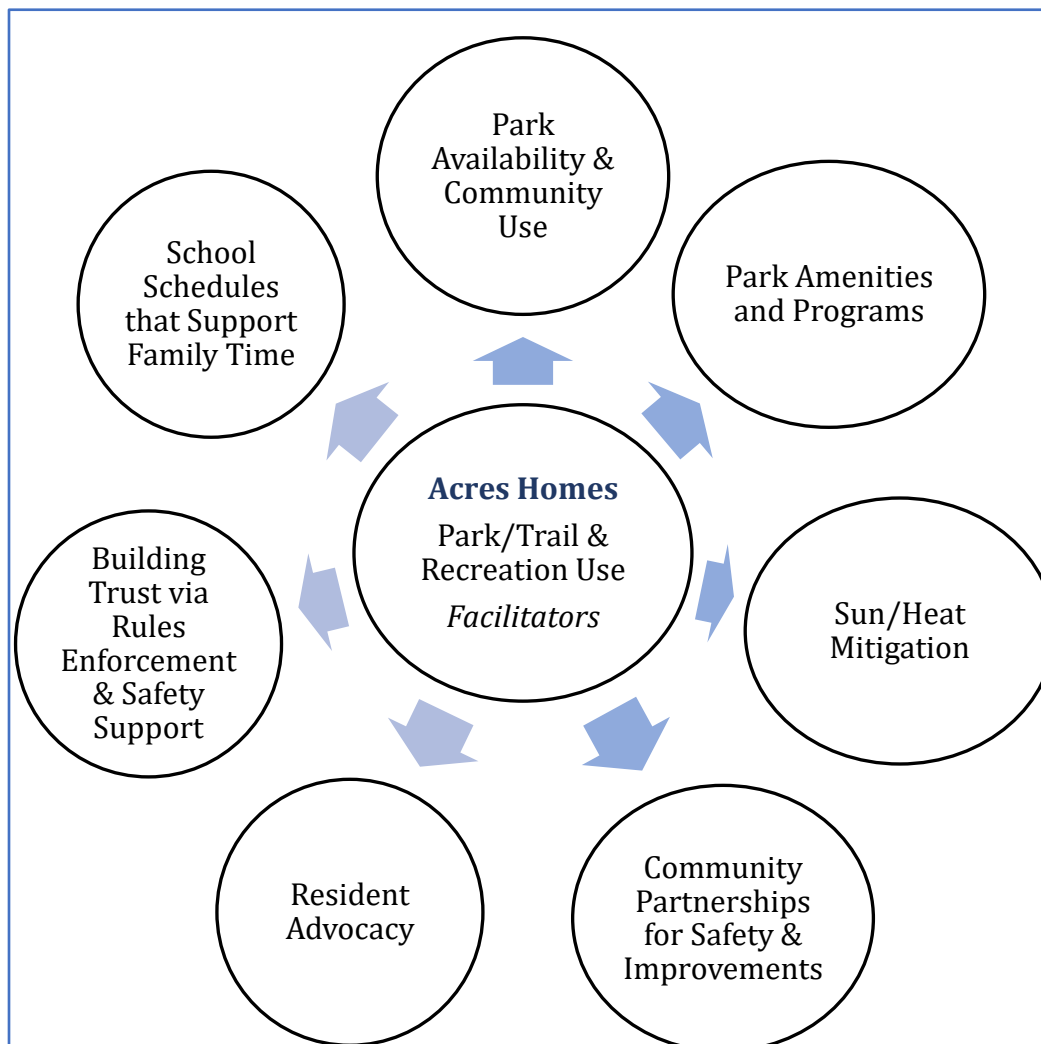


Fig. 21. Facilitators for Park/Trail & Recreation Use –Themes from Key Informant Interview, *Acres Homes Child Out-of-School-Time Physical Activity Opportunity Study, Houston, Texas (Fall & Spring 2025)*. (n=21 parent, school and community key informants).

Park Availability and Community Use. While access to parks was cited as a potential barrier for park use, the availability of parks (*physical/natural environmental assets*) and their common use (*social assets*), as noted by some parents, represent important resources and facilitating factors for park use:

"Nosotros siempre vamos a los parques como familia." ["We always go to the park as a family."]- Parent, Acres Homes

"[The park] is small, but the kids love it. So we either go there, they play... The kids ride their bikes, we go walking, they have like small little playgrounds, like little structures that the kids play on. As well as of course, when the summer comes, there's the swimming pools. We'll [also] venture off, from like Acres Homes, and we'll go to like different parks like JV Park and, you know, Herman Park, of course, downtown...Yes, so there's a pool attached to well right literally next door to the playground that we go to on Victory and Antoine. And then there's also another pool. Or we'll go to TC Jester Park. They have a pool." -Parent, Acres Homes

Park Amenities and Programs. We also learned about facets of parks that attract children and families, including park amenities such as basketball courts, playgrounds, sports fields and trails, as well as park programming, such as baseball, football, soccer and swimming, among other offerings. The richness of parks for the Acres Homes families is well highlighted by one Acres Homes school leader:

"I would say a lot of our families prefer to go to the public park over the park in their apartments, which is what I was alluding to earlier. One because of the water features that are still kid-safe - there's a lot of toddler-safe water features; two is more open space so that they can kind of move around, and if they have a larger family or more kids, you can still see everybody.[T]here are days that after school I'll walk by or I'll drive by the parks and you still see kites out there, and you see families having family time..." -School Principal, Acres Homes

Among the park improvements that would further support park visitation included heat mitigation strategies. Underscoring the need for protection from the heat, one parent shared: "Por el calor bien difícil, entonces hace falta también que quizás sombra." *[It's very difficult due to the heat, so shade is perhaps also needed.]*

Community Partnerships and Safety Improvements. In improving parks and facilitating park and trail use, key informants highlighted the key role that community partnerships play. As noted above, we learned about how various community partners have played key roles in supporting, improving, and activating parks for community use, which includes sponsoring community events such as Bike Rodeos (Kings Bike and Hike Community) and the *Annual Family Day at the Park* at Sylvester Turner Park (community leaders). Other partnerships with groups such as UT MD Anderson and Be Well Acres Homes have provided funding to support park improvements that include an outdoor fitness center and walking trail. In recognizing the importance of community partnerships, one community leader shared:

"Since Be Well [Acres Homes] has been in the neighborhood, and there are some other partners, the parks have been made safer. I would say that there's been great strides, and [the parks] have been upgraded with new equipment that's workable as well. For the most part, prior to that, most of the equipment had not been functional. The grass has been overgrown, and it has been being basically unsafe place to be- definitely not conducive to children... So, we are making strides." -Community Leader, Acres Homes

Resident Advocacy and Organizing: Related to the importance of community partnerships, our community leader interviewees also noted the key role that community residents have played in advocating for increasing access to recreational opportunities, including park improvements:

"We've gotten the support from other persons, outside the community, I believe has really made the difference because the community, the people within the community, have been advocating for quite a few years to get the support and the assistance, but the spotlight, I believe, was put on this situation, which helps to make people move into some actions and to funnel some resources into the area." -*Community Leader, Acres Homes*

Building Trust via Safety Support at Parks. Another facilitating factor for increasing park usage noted by our community key informant partners was the importance of promoting safety of parks and enforcing existing rules, as shared here:

"Well, here [participation at parks] has been growing since I've arrived. One of my goals was to bring families to the park, and so that's definitely working. People now feel that it's a safe place to come, as before COVID, they didn't have that. They didn't want to come... Another goal of mine was to build the sports programs so that it can bring families, and that's also working.... Because here and at Lincoln City, we have the community centers, and we have staff there. And we monitor a few programs, but we [also] monitor the park itself. ... Yeah, we had soccer last night. Then I smelled it., and I'm looking, like, 'who's smoking it?' And I saw it, and I go over and I asked them, and that was the end of that. So just reinforcing you know the rules and keeping the park safe." -*Community PA Provider*

School Schedules that Support Family Time: While time was cited as a barrier for OST program participation, active commuting, and park and recreation center visitation, we also learned how time and school schedules can play a key role in supporting child and family use of community recreation spaces, as shared by one Acres Homes school principal:

"So, you know, we get the extra week off in October and then again in February. And what we're seeing is an increase of family time during those weeks. So our parents are actually putting in to take off half a week. And then kids are coming back and saying, 'Oh, we went to the beach for a day' or 'Hey we went outside and did things together for this extra time that we've been afforded because I couldn't come to school and my parents couldn't pay for a [day care]. I think it's an unintended benefit." -*School Principal, Acres Homes*

Table 11. Facilitators for park/trail & recreation center use – Key Informant Interview. *Acres Homes Child Out-of-School-Time Physical Activity Opportunity Study, Houston, Texas (Fall & Spring 2025)* (n=21 parent, school & community key informants).

Facilitator	Example Quotes
<i>Park Availability & Community Use</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "[The park] is small, but the kids love it. So we either go there, they play... The kids ride their bikes, we go walking, they have like small little playgrounds, like little structures that the kids play on. As well as of course when the summer comes, there's the swimming pools. We'll [also] venture off, from like Acres Homes, and we'll go to like different parks like JV Park and, you know, Herman Park, of course, downtown...Yes, so there's a pool attached to well right literally next door to the playground that we go to on Victory and Antoine. And then there's also another pool. Or we'll go to TC Jester Park. They have a pool." -Parent F, Acres Homes "Nosotros siempre vamos a los parques como familia." [<i>"We always go to the park as a family."</i>] -Parent C, Acres Homes "So the [school] park does get some use, and we can just tell that people are there...So we have kids, you know, teenagers, sometimes even, you know, younger adults they come and use the basketball courts outside the gym and are active out there like that on their own." -PE Teacher, Acres Homes
<i>Park Amenities & Programs</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "I would say a lot of our families prefer to go to the public park over the park in their apartments, which is what I was gonna alluding to that earlier. One because of the water features that are still like kids safe - there's a lot of toddler safe water features; two is more open space so that they can kind of move around and if they have a larger family or more kids, you can still see everybody. And then as far as, like, there are days that after school I'll walk by or I'll drive by the parks and you still see kites out there, and you see families having family time..." -School Principal, Acres Homes "They also have parks where they have baseball programs that are available for students to be involved in. And one of the major ones is [one that the]...Houston Nationals are involved in... [T]hey have this major youth baseball program that goes on there. There also are some leagues for football that students are involved in, but I think these are independent...So much opportunities to open different things for kids to be involved in. It's a lucky because there are a lot of parks, but I think the manpower and the way to go by to develop, certain things are is lacking. So yeah, I think there's an opportunity for more." -Classroom Teacher/Nonprofit Leader, Acres Homes
<i>Sun/Heat Mitigation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Por el calor bien difícil, entonces hace falta también que quizás sombra." [<i>It's very difficult due to the heat, so shade is perhaps also needed.</i>]. -Parent B, Acres Homes
<i>Community Partnerships with Parks for Safety & Improvements</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Since Be Well [Acres Homes] has been in the neighborhood, and there are some other partners, the parks have been made safer. I would say that there's been great strides, and [the parks] have been upgraded with new equipment that's workable as well. For the most part, prior to that, most of the equipment had not been functional. The grass has been overgrown, and it has been being basically unsafe place to be- definitely not conducive to children... So, we are making strides." -Comm. Leader, Acres Homes
<i>Resident Advocacy</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Why and how are these changes taking place?</i> "We've gotten the support from other persons, outside the community, I believe has really made the difference because the community, the people within the community, have been advocating for quite a few years to get the support and the assistance, but the spotlight, I believe, was put on this situation, which helps to make people move into some actions and to funnel some resources into the area." -Community Leader, Acres Homes
<i>Building Trust via Rules Enforcement & Safety Support</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Well, here [participation at parks] has been growing since I've arrived. One of my goals was to bring families to the park, and so that's definitely working. People now feel that it's a safe place to come, as before COVID, they didn't have that. They didn't want to come... Another goal of mine was to build the sports programs so that it can bring families, and that's also working.... Because here and at Lincoln City, we have the community centers, and we have staff there. And we monitor a few programs, but we [also] monitor the park itself. ... Yeah, we had soccer last night. Then I smelled it., and I'm looking like 'who's smoking it?' And I saw it, and I go over and I asked them, and that was the end of that. So just reinforcing you know the rules and keeping the park safe." -Comm. PA Provider
<i>School Schedules that Support Family Time</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "So, you know, we get the extra week off in October and then again in February. And what we're seeing is an increase of family time during those weeks. So our parents are actually putting in to take off half a week. And then kids are coming back and saying, 'Oh, we went to the beach for a day' or 'Hey we went outside and did things together for this extra time that we've been afforded because I couldn't come to school and my parents couldn't pay for a [day care]. I think it's an unintended benefit." -School Principal, Acres Homes

Communication Channels to Promote Child OST Physical Activity. In identifying ways to further promote OST PA among Acres Homes elementary school-aged children, we ended our interview by exploring the communication channels that are commonly used by Acres Homes parents and residents, building from the question: “What do you think would be the most helpful way to promote existing opportunities for physical activity with children and parents/guardians in the Acres Homes community?” While we learned about some rich resources for promoting community events opportunities, including the new “What’s Good in the Neighborhood” newsletter hosted by the [Acres Homes Community Advocacy Group](#), as well as other websites of specific groups such as the YMCA and Houston Parks and Recreation Department, a common theme among parents and school leaders was the lack of a central communication platform for promoting and learning about OST opportunities in Acres Homes. Despite the lack of a central hub, key informants described multiple ways that parents and residents in Acres Homes learn about school and community initiatives, as presented in Fig. 22 (see Tables 12a & 12b for example quotes).

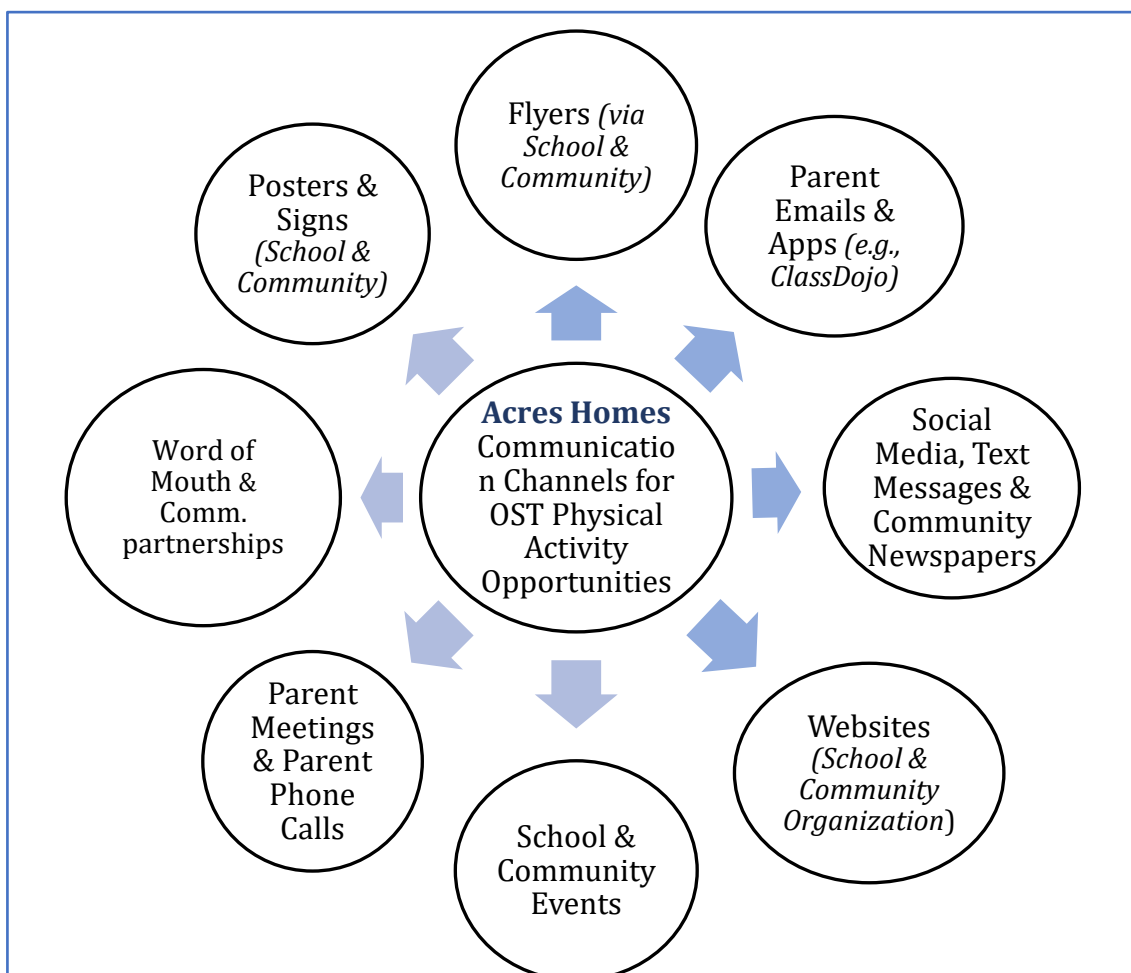


Fig. 22. Communication channels for reaching families about out-of-school-time (OST) physical activity opportunities – Themes from *Key Informant Interview*. *Acres Homes Child Out-of-School-Time Physical Activity Opportunity Study, Houston, Texas (Fall & Spring 2025)*. (n=21 parent, school and community key informants).

Flyers, Emails, Text Messages, Social Media & Websites. Among the most common methods for receiving information about child and community-related activities and events cited by parent, school and community leader key informants was flyers, which included both hard copy flyers delivered to parents via student folders and directly to their residence ("A veces yo me entero [de las oportunidades de la comunidad] porque ponen en las puertas los volantes." [*Sometimes I find out [about community opportunities] because they put flyers on the doors.*]), as well as flyers and other announcements delivered via email, with ClassDojo being the most common platform for transmitting information to parents. While some parents noted their limitations with online communication: "Yo soy poco de la tecnología. [Mi preferencia es] más por los folletos o papel. Antes así los mandaban." [*I am not very into technology. [My preference is] more for brochures or paper. That's how they used to send them.*]), others expressed their preference for online communication: "Pienso que sería mejor a través de un correo electrónico, porque a veces los niños pierden el volante, o se les olvidan entregar a tiempo." [*I think it would be better through an email, because sometimes the kids lose the flyer, or forget to hand it in on time.*]). Beyond flyers, other common electronic-related channels included texting, social media, and websites, with one Acres Homes community leader who supports faith-based OST PA programming sharing:

"We send our flyers to [the school] and they send them directly to the parents, so it's not like you have to give them the paper flyers anymore, and they never make it home or they stay in the backpacks forever. It's going directly to their phones in most cases. And of course, the community newspapers and media outlets, you know, social media; those are definitely what we use." -Community Leader, Acres Homes

School & Community Events, Parent Meetings & Parent Calls. Other common communication forms cited by key informants for reaching families and community residents were school and community events as well as parent meetings at school and parent call-outs (mass calls) (Table 12a). One community PA provider summarized well their outreach efforts:

"...[W]e actually do a marketing booth, and we get invited to certain events, whether it be the mayor's back-to-school event, whether it's a holiday event, whether it's a councilman doing an outdoor event, we're out there. [W]e definitely promote our after-school programming and any other programming that might benefit the community that we're being invited into." -Community PA Provider

In addition to the opportunity to promote one's program, one Acres Homes community leader underscored the value of community events for building community trust:

"I would just say, get into as many of the schools for their different programs because that's where you're going to meet parents. Also, the community events. The more they see you know in the spaces that they're comfortable with, then the more they'll engage with you." -Community Leader, Acres Homes

Word of Mouth & Community Partnerships. Importantly, we also learned about the value of word of mouth as well as community partnerships for raising awareness about school and community opportunities for children and their families. Key informants noted the power of teachers, parents and students themselves in communicating information about school and community programs and events to their parents. In underscoring the power of word of mouth, one community PA provider noted: "...And a lot of is word of mouth. You know, you run a good program and one parent tells another parent." Among the innovative approaches, we also learned from one school leader who serves on a community nonprofit board about how they will work with corner stores to hang their flyers- as well as provide their business cards with a QR code at the check-out counter to help promote their initiatives.

"So, a lot of it kind of comes through a teacher at one school telling it to a teacher at another school. And then they invite us in and we do something with their families, and then those families are telling other families, and suddenly the school's asking if we can do it at the other family school. So it's a lot of word of mouth. -Community PA Provider

Posters & Signs. We also learned about the power of posters and community yard signs in promoting OST programming and events. One Acres Homes parent shared, when asked about how they learned about a community PA program their child attends: "Había poster en la escuela, y mi hijo me dijo que quería quedar para el soccer." [*"There was a poster at school, and my son told me that he wanted to stay for soccer."*]. Another underscored how they learned about an upcoming event that was taking place at Sylvester Turner Park via yard signs on the side of road that were presented in English and Spanish:

"Bueno, el próximo sábado va a haber un evento del día de la familia en el Parque Sylvester Turner y han puesto anuncios o carteles sobre todas las calles. A veces la misma escuela manda las mismas publicaciones del evento (de la comunidad) por correo electrónico." [*"Well, next Saturday there is going to be a family day event at Sylvester Turner Park and they have posted announcements or posters all over the streets. Sometimes the same school sends the same (community) event publications via email...and the announcements are in Spanish and English."*] – Parent, Acres Homes

Multiple Ways: Lastly, our key informants noted the importance of sharing school and community opportunities via multiple communication channels:

"I think it does take a combination of as many [communication channels] as you can. So if you have it on the website and then you're gonna reach some of the parents who check it religiously. And then some may never go to the website, so they may get those flyers sent electronically to text message directly to their phone if they've signed up to receive...And then lastly, it is that communication from the PE teacher. We had an event last weekend called the Turkey Trot, and I'm in charge of it, but I don't advertise it too much other than to the PE teachers and then a couple of like local district meetings...We had over 600 people there because those PE teachers were advocating for it and, you know, making sure they sent flyers home. So I think the combination of all three of those things that we were talking about electronic communication, the physical flyer, and then getting the word out as well." -School District Leader, Acres Homes

Table 12a. Communication channels to promote child out-of-school-time physical activity – Key Informant Interview. *Acres Homes Child Out-of-School-Time Physical Activity Opportunity Study, Houston, Texas (Fall & Spring 2025)* (n=21 parent, school & community key informants).

Communication Channel	Example Quotes
Interview Question: <i>“What do you think would be the most helpful way to promote existing opportunities for physical activity with children and parents in the Acres Homes community? Are there specific communication channels such as websites, newsletters, or specific settings where most people go where we could include signage or posters to promote physical activity?”</i>	
<i>Flyers (via School & Community)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “A veces yo me entero [de las oportunidades de la comunidad] porque ponen en las puertas los volantes.” [<i>“Sometimes I find out [about community opportunities] because they put flyers on the doors.”</i>] -Parent C, Acres Homes • “Yo soy poco de la tecnología. [Mi preferencia es] más por los folletos o papel. Antes así los mandaban.” [<i>“I am not very into technology. [My preference is] more for brochures or paper. That’s how they used to send them.”</i>] -Parent C, Acres Homes • “Yeah, sometimes it does help having that flyer sent home in, whether it’s a Tuesday folder or if they know each week the parents are looking for, especially at that elementary level, they’re looking for that folder that comes home on a certain day. That’s where all the information is, they have that flyer, that they get.” – School District Leader, Acres Homes • “[Some] provide flyers to us to pass out to the children, you know, about opportunities for certain things. I know there was a recent soccer clinic or soccer team. So [Mr. Salinas- name changed], he’s an excellent resource for our students, he sends those [home].” -PE Teacher, Acres Homes • “They’ll show like, ‘hey you have a certain amount of flyers for all of the area’. Okay. So, I received [flyers] for my son... So Peach Tree is a company that does flyers.” Parent D, Acres Homes • “We will pass out flyers, also go together to different community stores and things like that... Yeah, we’ll go around to the neighborhood just walking around and putting up flyers and things like that, depending on what area particularly that we’re concentrating on.” -Classroom Teacher/Nonprofit Leader, Acres Homes
<i>Emails & Apps</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Pienso que sería mejor a través de un correo electrónico, porque a veces los niños pierden el volante, o se les olvidan entregar a tiempo.” [<i>“I think it would be better through an email, because sometimes the kids lose the flyer, or forget to hand it in on time.”</i>] -Parent G, Acres Homes • “También papel volantes y también a través de clases y aplicaciones como ClassDojo (via emails)” - [<i>“Also, paper flyers and also through classes and apps like ClassDojo.”</i>] -Parent A, Acres Homes • “The best way to promote existing opportunities would be Class Dojo.” -Parent G, Acres Homes
<i>Social Media, Text Messages & Newspapers</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “We send our flyers to [the school] and they send them directly to the parents, so it’s not like you have to give them the paper flyers anymore, and they never make it home or they stay in the backpacks forever. It’s going directly to their phones in most cases. And of course, the community newspapers and media outlets, you know, social media; those are definitely what we use.” -Community Leader, Acres Homes
<i>Websites (School & Community Organization)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “So yeah. And through other websites that other community partners come in involved, they were also posted on their websites and whatnot.” -Classroom Teacher/Nonprofit leader, Acres Homes • “Well, we do have a website, that lists [our] six different clubs around the city, and it lists the activities that go on in those particular clubs.” -Afterschool Program Provider, Acres Homes
<i>School & Community Events</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “...[W]e actually do a marketing booth, and we get invited to certain events, whether it be the mayor’s back-to-school event, whether it’s a holiday event, whether it’s a councilman doing an outdoor event, we’re out there. [W]e definitely promote our after-school programming and any other programming that might benefit the community that we’re being invited into.” -Comm. PA Provider • “I would just say, get into as many of the schools for their different programs because that’s where you’re going to meet parents. Also, the community events. The more they see you know in the spaces that they’re comfortable with, then the more they’ll engage with you.” -Community Leader, Acres Homes • “Yes, that would be through the <i>HoustonParksRec</i> webpage, but then the schools I know, they promoted at the beginning of the year as well when they have back-to-school meet-the-teacher nights.” -School District Leader, Acres Homes
<i>Parent Meetings</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Reuniones con los padres de familia”. [<i>“Meetings with the parents.”</i>] -Parent G, Acres Homes
<i>Call-Outs</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “...[S]ometimes in the past, our new principal hasn’t really used that as much, before he was doing callouts to parents. He would do call-outs like say...mass call.” -PE Teacher, Acres Homes

Table 12b. Communication channels (cont.) to promote child out-of-school-time physical activity – Key Informant Interview. *Acres Homes Child Out-of-School-Time Physical Activity Opportunity Study, Houston, Texas (Fall & Spring 2025)* (n=21 parent, school & community key informants).

Communication Channel	Example Quotes
Interview Question: <i>“What do you think would be the most helpful way to promote existing opportunities for physical activity with children and parents in the Acres Homes community? Are there specific communication channels such as websites, newsletters, or specific settings where most people go where we could include signage or posters to promote physical activity?”</i>	
<i>Word of Mouth (Parents, Teachers & Students)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Probably the best way that people find out is, you know, we do flyer the neighborhood. And a lot of is word of mouth. You know, you run a good program and one parent tells another parent.” -Comm. OST Program Provider • “Si hay reuniones, como le digo, los niños de sexto, si les interesa una cosa, ellos mismos vienen a decirme. Ellos mismos le dicen a uno si les interesa.” [“If there are meetings, as I told you, the sixth graders, if they're interested in something, they come to tell me themselves. They themselves will let you know if they're interested.”] -Parent G • “Por medio de mi hijo. Y también porque a veces mandan los boletines de la escuela. Es a través de una aplicación [Class Dojo].” [“Through my son. And also, because sometimes they send the school newsletters. It's through an application (Class Dojo).”] -Parent C, Acres Homes • “Cuando yo me entere mi hijo me comentó que un amiguito del el que jugaba [fútbol] después de la escuela. Él le pregunto a su amigo, y su amigo le dio la información, y él se acercó a su maestro.” [“When I found out, my son told me that a little friend of his who played [soccer] after school. He asked his friend, and his friend gave him the information, and he approached his teacher.”] -Parent C, Acres Homes • “So, a lot of it kind of comes through a teacher at one school telling it to a teacher at another school. And then they invite us in and we do something with their families and then those families are telling other families and suddenly that school's asking if we can do it at the other family school. So it's a lot of word of mouth.” – Comm. PA Provider • “The PE teachers helped me out at each campus and then I also met with the principal. And they would promote [‘active kids club’] during PE class, letting them know that they're gonna have this opportunity to be part of this program.” -School District Leader, Acres Homes
<i>Business & Community Partnerships</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “So, I'm a part of a nonprofit board. We have learned that partnering with a lot of local or community small businesses has been very helpful. So, like getting in good with some of the shops that the parents go to a lot, I can't really say grocery stores, they don't really go to grocery stores as much. But a lot of those businesses like bake shops, which is not a place a lot of people think of the corner stores. I mean the corner stores and gas stations because those are a lot of times the places they frequent the most. Those types of partnerships are really beneficial, and then I don't know if you all are connected with the acres home chamber... Like a lot of the churches cause a lot of the churches are members of the chamber [of commerce], and a lot of notable, if you will, community members that can help. So sometimes they'll let us leave flyers on the door; sometimes they'll let us leave them on the counter. So we, like my organization, we tend to do a lot of the flyers, the like cardboard, we call them like club flyers that has a QR code to pull. But to get a digital reference card, they will take those. And then we just track interaction, we track the interactions. Like a card yeah like a little card or a little, you know, postcard size.” - School Principal, Acres Homes
<i>Posters & Signs (School Posters & Community Yard Signs on Roads)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Había poster en la escuela, y mi hijo me dijo que quería quedar para el soccer.” [“There was a poster at school, and my son told me that he wanted to stay for soccer.”] -Parent E, Acres Homes • “Bueno, el próximo sábado va a haber un evento del día de la familia en el Parque Sylvester Turner y han puesto anuncios o carteles sobre todas las calles. A veces la misma escuela manda las mismas publicaciones del evento (de la comunidad) por correo electrónico.” [“Well, next Saturday there is going to be a family day event at Sylvester Turner Park and they have posted announcements or posters all over the streets. Sometimes the same school sends the same (community) event publications via email...and the announcements are in Spanish and English.”] -Parent A, Acres Homes
<i>Multiple Ways</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “So, we do still send papers, but our children don't give papers and parents just don't go through backpacks. A text message and email has been our best ways to get in contact. However, text messages and emails change very frequently with our new families. So that's why we have to send in multiple ways. Because we have some families that change their phone numbers every couple weeks. We have some of them that are using, we call them like, Wi-Fi numbers, which means the phone is turned off, but if they get in Wi Fi then they can still access WhatsApp, and that gives them a temporary phone number. So, when we send things out, we always have to look at the report to see ‘has it [been] received?’ Yeah. ...Because sometimes in a school year that number of returned items can be up above 50 %. Okay, so you can start calling the parents...” -School Principal, Acres Homes • “I think it does take a combination of as many as you can. So if you have it on the website and then you're gonna reach some of the parents who check it religiously. And then some may never go to the website so they may get those flyers sent electronically to. Either text message directly to their phone if they've signed up to receive.” - School District Leader, Acres Homes • “And then lastly, it is that communication from the PE teacher. We had an event last weekend called the Turkey Trot, and I'm in charge of it, but I don't advertise it too much other than to the PE teachers and then a couple of like local district meetings...We had over 600 people there because those PE teachers were advocating for it and, you know, making sure they sent flyers home. So I think the combination of all three of those things that we were talking about electronic communication, the physical flyer, and then getting the word out as well.” -School District Leader, Acres Homes

SOPARC School Park Use Findings

Background: In exploring the utilization of community resources for physical activity, we also conducted structured observations of OST school park/play area utilization with two of our partner schools that allow shared use of their school park with the community. A growing body of evidence finds that facets of *the built and natural environment*, including access to parks and playgrounds with quality features such as fitness equipment, walking tracks, fencing, landscaping, lighting, and improved surfaces, as well as improved street infrastructure for walking, is associated with increased PA levels in both children and adults.^{3,20-24,72} Young people from both low and high income neighborhoods and households have also been found to engage in more PA if they live near and have easy access to parks and recreational facilities,^{73,74} with recent evidence finding that access to parks within a ten-minute walk is associated with greater child and adolescent PA, regardless of income.⁷⁵

A promising strategy for increasing access to PA spaces for young people is the establishment of shared use agreements that allow the use of school facilities, including sports fields and play areas, to be used by community-based organizations outside of regular school hours.⁷⁶⁻⁷⁸ In a study of 30 public middle schools in North Carolina's largest school district, policies enabling greater community use of school facilities resulted in increased student participation in afterschool PA programs.⁷⁸ Notably, the study found a stronger and more consistent positive association between greater shared use and higher participation in programs for girls compared to programs for boys, suggesting that shared use policies may be particularly effective in addressing gender disparities in PA engagement.⁷⁸ Furthermore, these schools did not bear significant additional costs for operating expenses, despite providing more programs, as utility, maintenance, and custodial labor costs were maintained regularly throughout the year irrespective of additional programming from shared use.⁷⁷

SOPARC Aims. In better understanding how school assets such as school play areas and sports fields may be further activated for community use, we conducted a pilot observational assessment of OST utilization of outdoor play areas of two of our partner study schools. Using the SOPARC method at three time periods during spring 2025, with two days observed per assessment period (weekday and weekend) (*see Methods section above for further detail*), we aimed to:

- Assess the number of people using school outdoor play areas outside-of-school-time (*week and weekend*) and describe users (*gender, ethnicity, age*)
- Assess activity levels of people using school play areas and describe the activities of people using areas, and
- Describe features of playground (*signage, amenities, activity spaces (e.g., fields, playgrounds)*).

Results

Descriptive Statistics of OST School Park Observations: A total of 20 observations were conducted over 10 days between February and April 2025 of two Acres Homes elementary school parks [de-identified for report]. Each school was observed 10 times, with observations distributed across seven weekday afternoon sessions (3:30–5:30 PM) and three Saturday morning sessions (9:00 AM–12:00 PM). During the fifth observation at School B, a new target area—the walking path encircling the school—was added to better capture usage of this frequently utilized but previously unmapped area. This addition increased the total number of observation zones at School B and expanded the contextual understanding of how children and other community members used the school grounds for physical activity. Subsequent observations at School B included this walking path in the SOPARC scan protocol. All scheduled observations were completed with compliance of SOPARC protocol.

Demographic Characteristics of OST School Park Users. A total of 37 people were observed using the school parks/play areas over the course of our spring 2025 assessment (n=20 observations). We observed people at School Park A 1 out of 10 observations (10% of all visits); at school B, we observed people during 6 of the 10 visits (60% of all visits), resulting in 7 out of 20 observations in which people were using the school park (35% of total visits) [data not shown]. [Table 13](#) summarizes the distribution of 37 participants by gender, age, and ethnicity. Just over half of the people observed were children (54.1%, n=20), with 45.9% classified as adults (n=17). Among the children observed (n=20), 75% were observed to be male, with 47.1% of adults observed to be male. There were no teens or seniors observed. While assessing gender and ethnicity via observation is not without limitations and has potential for bias, some research finds high interobserver reliability in assessing ethnicity;⁷⁹ research is needed on the reliability of assessing sex and gender.

Table 13. Estimated age and ethnicity among out-of-school-time users at two school parks. *Acres Homes Child OST Activity Opportunity Study, Houston, Texas* (n=37 park users, n=20 observations) (Spring 2025).

ALL AREAS	PEOPLE	AGE GROUP							
		Child		Teen		Adult		Senior	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
	<i>Participants</i>								
	Female	5	25%	0	0%	9	52.9%	0	0%
	Male	15	75%	0	0%	8	47.1%	0	0%
	Total (n=37)	20	54.1%	0	0%	17	45.9%	0	0%
		ETHNICITY							
		L		W		B		O	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
	Female	4	44.4	4	66.7	6	27.3	0	0
	Male	5	55.5	2	33.3	16	72.7	0	0
	Total (n=37)	9	24.3	6	16.2	22	59.5	0	0

Physical Activity Levels of OST School Park Users. In School A, physical activity was observed in one out of five target areas – specifically, target area 1 ([Appendix C](#)– Form A). A total of nine people were observed for physical activity, 0% of whom were sedentary, 44% were moderately engaged, and 56% were vigorously engaged [data not shown]. In School B, physical activity was observed in two out of seven target areas – specifically, target areas 3 and 7 ([Appendix C](#)– Form A). Across target areas 3 and 7, a total of 28 people were observed participating in physical activity, 14% of which were sedentary, 32% were moderately engaged, and 54% were vigorously engaged. In target area 3, 14 total people were observed, of which 100% of vigorous physical activity observed consisted of 12 children, and 2 coaches (spectators) were engaged in sedentary activity. In target area 7, 14 total people were observed, with 14% (n=2) engaged in sedentary activity, 64% (n=9) engaged in moderate activity, and 22% (n=3) engaged in vigorous activity [data not shown]. [Table 14](#) presents the combined activity scores for schools A and B, indicating that school park users were observed to be in vigorous activity for 54.1% of observations, followed by moderate activity (35.1%), and sedentary activity (10.8% of the time). Among females observed, 92.8% of the observed time was moderate or vigorous activity; among males observed, 87.0% of the time was observed as moderate or vigorous activity [data not shown] ([Table 14](#)).

Table 14. Physical activity engagement (%) by intensity level and gender among park users at two Acres Homes school parks. *Acres Homes Child Out-of-School-Time Physical Activity Opportunity Study, Houston, Texas* (n=37 park users; n=20 observations)(Spring 2025).

Physical Activity (PA) Observations	ACTIVITY LEVEL					
	Sedentary		Walking		Vigorous	
	n	% of total Sedentary	n	% of total Walking	n	% of total Vigorous
Female PA (n=14)	1	25%	9	69.2%	4	20%
Male PA (n=23)	3	75%	4	30.8%	16	80%
Total PA (n=37)	4	10.8% <i>(of total PA)</i>	13	35.1% <i>(of total PA)</i>	20	54.1% <i>(of total PA)</i>

Types of Activities of School Park Users: Of the seven observations in which we observed people using the school parks, two had teacher-led activities. The primary activity observed for School A was flag football, with only children observed engaging in this activity. For School B, the only primary activity observed in target area 3 was running drills for both male and female children within the context of a basketball activity. In the same target area, two adult coaches were identified as spectators of this activity, observing children engaged in vigorous running. For School B, target area 7, the majority (64%) of the primary physical activity observed on the walking path was walking and was categorized as moderate physical activity. The second most popular activities observed were running (categorized as vigorous) and sitting on a bench (categorized as sedentary). Biking (categorized as vigorous) was the least common, with one person observed engaging in this type of physical activity (see Table 15 for combined findings).

Table 15. Types of Physical Activities among School Park Users. *Acres Homes Child Out-of-School-Time Physical Activity Opportunity Study, Houston, Texas* (n=37 park users; n=20 observations) (Spring 2025).^{Footnote6}

Areas (n=3)	Children		Adult	
Primary Activity	n	%	n	%
Flag football	8	40%	0	0
Running	12	60%	2	14.3
Biking	0	0	1	7.1
Walking	0	0	9	64.3
Sitting on a bench	0	0	2	14.3
Total	20	100%	14	100%
Spectator	n	%	n	%
Coach	0	0	3	100%

Environmental Features. Park signage was observed for each school and documented on Form A (Appendix C). School A had school signage that posted information about public access, park hours, and is multi-lingual in both English and Spanish; School B did not have visible signage about the park in the front entrance at the time of the observation, but has since been provided.



Fig. 23. School Park Signage, Acres Homes.

⁶ Since each target area was observed multiple times, normalization adjustments were calculated by dividing the number of people observed doing an activity by the number of total observations, to calculate an average number of participants per observation for each activity type and gender.

Park Conditions: We assessed each school park assessment area (5 target areas for School A, and 7 target areas of School B) for accessibility, usability, supervision, organization, equipment availability, lighting (darkness), shade, and whether the area was empty. The average conditions observed across all visits are described in [Table 16](#).

Box C. Environmental features of two Acres Homes school parks – [SOPARC Assessment](#). *Acres Homes Child Out-of-School-Time Physical Activity Opportunity Study, Houston, Texas* (n=37 park users; n=20 observations) (Spring 2025).

School A	School B
<p><i>Accessibility:</i> All five target areas were consistently rated as 100% usable, indicating that the physical spaces were in good condition and suitable for recreation during each visit. However, accessibility remained limited, with only 10% of observations per target area accessible to the public because park entrance gates were locked. This suggests ongoing barriers to entry or unclear public access during out-of-school hours. Another notable finding was the high frequency of empty spaces. Target Area 1 was empty during 90% of visits, while the remaining four areas were empty 100% of the time, suggesting low utilization of the park spaces during the scheduled observation periods.</p> <p><i>Supervision and organized activity</i> were minimal. Only Target Area 1 showed any presence of supervision or structured programming, both observed during 10% of visits. The remaining areas had 0% supervision and organization, indicating a lack of adult presence or scheduled activities. Equipment availability was also limited, with only Target Area 1 showing equipment present during 10% of visits. No equipment was observed in the other four areas.</p> <p><i>Lighting conditions</i> were consistently adequate, as none of the areas were ever observed to be dark. However, shade coverage was minimal, as one out of five of the target areas was shaded during 100% of visits, and four out of five target areas without shading. The remaining areas had no observable shade, which may influence comfort and usability during warmer weather.</p>	<p><i>Accessibility:</i> Across ten observations conducted at School B school park, each target park area was evaluated for accessibility, usability, supervision, organization, equipment availability, lighting (darkness), shade, and whether the area was empty. An average for all conditions of each target area across ten observations was calculated. All target areas were rated as 100% usable, indicating that the physical infrastructure was consistently in good condition. However, none of the areas was accessible through the public entrances during any observation period, suggesting significant barriers to public entry and unclear access policies. Six of the seven target areas were empty during 90–100% of visits. Only Target Area 7, the public walking path adjacent to the school, showed use consistent use. Because this Target Area 7 was included in the observation process at a later point, there were six total observations, with only one of six observations (16.67% of visits) recorded as empty.</p> <p><i>Supervision, organization, and equipment</i> were observed only in Target Area 3, and only during 10% of visits. All other areas had 0% for these indicators, reflecting a lack of adult presence, structured activities, or recreational resources.</p> <p><i>Lighting conditions</i> were consistently adequate, with 0% of areas observed as dark. Shade was only present in Target Area 2 during 100% of visits, while all other areas lacked shade entirely.</p>

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This pilot community assessment study aims to contribute to the rich co-learning and community action currently taking place in the Acres Homes community of Houston, Texas to support active living for children, families, and the broader community. Recognizing the important contributions of out-of-school-time activity for children's PA,³⁰ we explored current out-of-school-time (OST) physical activity practices (*OST PA program participation, active commuting practices, and utilization of community PA spaces*) as well as the availability of and access to environmental supports for these practices among a sample of Acres Homes 4th-6th grade students, as reported by parent, school and community leaders, and through direct observations of school park use conducted by the study research team.

In embracing an *upending-the-social-ecological-model* perspective that first begins with describing the environmental supports for a given health behavior, we identified multiple strengths and assets of the Acres Homes community that currently promote, and have the potential to further support, child and family PA. These include a rich and culturally diverse community and history; strong community partnerships; some availability of OST PA-related programming; and availability of parks, trails and recreation centers, among other assets (Box D). Despite these strengths and assets, our findings based on an analysis of Texas SPAN data indicate disparities in PA engagement for Acres Homes 4th/5th graders compared with Texas estimates, as well as low to moderate participation in OST PA assessed via parent survey, interviews, and school park observations.

In understanding child PA and OST PA in Acres Homes, we provide below a synthesis of the barriers for child and family engagement in OST PA based on this pilot

community assessment. In looking forward, we also provide a synthesis of facilitating factors for OST PA as well as recommendations from Acres Homes parent, school and community partners that hold promise to inform community efforts to support child OST PA.

Box D. Strengths & Assets of the Acres Homes Community for Supporting Child Out-of-School-Time Physical Activity (2025).

- *School and community events*, such as the annual Turkey Trot hosted by Aldine ISD, Bike Rodeo hosted by Kings Hike & Bike Community, and the Family Day at the Park.
- *School-led OST programming* for selected grade levels at our four partner study schools (e.g., Be Well Acres Homes-funded *Afterschool Active Kids Club* and other programming)
- *Community-led OST programming* (e.g., Be Fit Youth Camp; Victory Tae Kwon Do)
- *Community sports clubs* (e.g., private soccer and baseball leagues)
- *Community recreation centers* (e.g., Acres Homes Multi-Service Center, Highland Comm. Center, and Lincoln Park Comm. Center)
- *Parks and trails* (e.g., Sylvester Turner Park; Doss Park; school parks)
- *Community OST Programs* (e.g., Salvation Army)
- *School/Community Partnerships* (e.g., NEO, Safe Routes to School, Scouts, YMCA)
- *Communication channels* that include both school (e.g., ClassDojo, flyers, posters, and parent meetings) and community channels (e.g., Acres Homes Community Advocacy Group: What's Good in The Neighborhood; yard signs; flyers; social media).

Child Physical Activity and Out-of-School-Time Physical-Related Practices.

Despite the multiple strengths and assets in Acres Homes for child OST PA, we documented disparities in the prevalence of PA, screentime, and OST activity participation among Acres Homes elementary school-aged children compared to a Texas statewide sample. These findings underscore the need for greater supports for child PA in the Acres Homes community, with opportunity for enhancing supports for child OST PA as relates to *OST program participation, active commuting, and park/trail and recreation center use*:

Physical Activity (SPAN; n=783 Acres Homes 4th/5th graders and n=343 4th graders; n=3,484 Texas 4th graders)

- Acres Homes 4th/5th graders (mean: 2.56 days/week, 95% CI: 2.38-2.74) and 4th graders (mean: 2.70 days/week, 95% CI: 2.47-2.93) reported roughly 1.5 fewer days of MVPA per week compared to a Texas statewide sample of 4th graders (mean: 3.98 days/week, 95% CI: 3.61-4.35), with similar differences found by gender.
- Acres Homes 4th/5th-graders (mean: 2.35 days/week, 95% CI: 2.19-2.51) and 4th graders (mean: 2.31, days/week, 95% CI: 2.08-2.54) engaged in approximately 1.8-1.9 fewer days per week of outdoor play compared with 4th-graders from across the state of Texas (4.25 days/week, 95% CI: 3.96-4.54), with similar differences found by gender.
- Acres Homes 4th/5th graders (mean 3.48 hours, 95% CI: 3.32-3.64) and 4th graders (mean: 3.58 hours, 95% CI: 3.32-3.54) reported ~1.5 hours more hours of discretionary screentime per day compared to 4th graders from across Texas (mean: 2.08 hours, 95% CI: 1.88-2.28), with similar gender differences.
- Significant Acres Homes within-group gender differences in PA (lower for girls), outdoor play (lower for girls), and video playing (higher for boys) ($p<.05$).
- Significant ethnic differences for PA, outdoor play, and screentime ($p<.05$).

OST Program Participation (Survey with parents of 4th-6th graders; n=64; n=4 Acres Homes schools)

- We found low-to-moderate out-of-school-time program participation among our small sample of Acres Homes 4th-6th graders (31.3%) (n=64) based on parent report.
- Parents/guardians of Black (57.7%) students reported higher OST program participation compared to Hispanic (9.1%) students ($p<.001$), and English-speaking parents (50.0%) compared to Spanish-speaking parents (10.3%) ($p<.001$).
- Among children who participate in OST programs, most participate at school (73.7%).
- Just over half (52.6%) participate one day a week, while 86.7% of the full parent sample expressed interest for 2 or more days per week for OST participation.

Active Commuting to School (Parent Survey)

- Over half of our parent sample (71.2%) lives within two miles or less from school, yet just between 12.7% to 16.1% of their children walk to/from school, respectively.

Park/Trail & Recreation Center Use

- *Parks & Rec Centers*: Just under two-thirds (65.7%) of families visited a park/trail in the past year; just under half (44.8%) visited a recreation center (*Parent Survey*).
- *School Parks*: We found limited OST use of two school parks observed, with use documented for 7 out of 20 observations (35%) for Feb. - April 2025 (*SOPARC*).

Barriers for Child Out-of-School-Time Physical Activity. We documented multiple barriers for OST program participation, active commuting to/from school, and park/trail and recreation center use according to parents and school and community leaders (Box E). Among the key barriers, time constraints and demanding schedules often limit parents' ability to transport their children to and from out-of-school-time (OST) programs, support active commuting, or visit parks and recreation centers. Safety concerns, related to both traffic and social environments, further discourage active commuting and park use. Environmental factors, particularly extreme heat, also pose significant limitations on outdoor physical activity. The absence of supportive infrastructure, such as safe sidewalks and bike paths, further restricts opportunities for active commuting and independent mobility. Financial barriers, including the cost of some OST and recreational programs, reduce access for many families. Additionally, gaps in parental awareness of available programming, limited availability of programs, and a lack of offerings that align with children's interests contribute to low participation.

Box E. Barriers for Child Out-of-School-Time Physical Activity Participation in Acres Homes. *Acres Homes Child Out-of-School Time Physical Activity Opportunity Study (2024-2025)* (n=64 parents; n=21 parent, school and community key informants)

OST Program Participation	Active Commuting to School	Park/Trail & Recreation Center Use
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of awareness and promotion of OST programs • Lack of transportation • Time & schedule barriers • OST program cost • Lack of availability of after-school programs/programs that interest my child • Safety concerns • Lack of funding/staffing for OST programs (school) • School gatekeepers that prevent OST programs • Parent/student barriers (e.g., cultural barriers; preference for screentime) • Academic priority and school scheduling barriers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safety concerns (traffic-related and violence/crime-related) • Long distance to school • Lack of crossing guards • Lack of street supports (sidewalks, crosswalks) • Lack of time • Weather/climate • Lack of adult to walk/bike with • Convenience of driving • Lack of social norms for walking/biking • Lack of promotion and funding (e.g., Safe Routes to School) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of time/busy schedules (both) • Weather/climate (parks) • Social safety concerns (parks) • Lack of programming (parks) • Lack of transportation and distance (both) • Cost (rec centers) • Lack of awareness of parks/rec center programming

Facilitators for Child Out-of-School-Time Physical Activity. Despite the multiple barriers identified, we also learned about the key role that Acres Homes families play in engaging their children in OST PA, from engaging in fun active games and sports, to visiting parks and playgrounds, supporting other recreational activities such as dance, fishing, and recreation center use, and engaging in daily utilitarian activities that include engaging their child to walk to the store. In addition to the important role of families, we also learned about other facilitating factors for OST program participation, active commuting to school, and park/trail and recreation center use, including the importance of community partnerships for funding and programming; convenience of family access and proximity to OST programs, schools, and parks/trails and recreation centers; and other adult social support (teacher/community OST providers) for providing transportation, walking/biking with children to school, visiting parks and/or providing PA programming ([Box F](#)).

Other innovative facilitators specific for OST program participation included the importance of fostering a philosophy of inclusivity - which includes creating programs that embrace the diverse cultures and language of children and their families as well as spaces for including parents as volunteers; designing PA-related activities for children of all abilities; and designing OST opportunities that are not only sports-related, recognizing the diverse interests of children, the lack for PA self-efficacy for some children, the recognition that activities such as theatre also involve PA, and that fun activity breaks and games can be inserted into non-PA activities (e.g. tutoring). Lastly, while time and schedules were cited as a barrier for parents to support overall child OST PA, key informants cited the importance of both flexible schedules and policies such as school holidays, as key for supporting child OST PA, whether for walking to school, going to the park, or engaging with their child in PA.

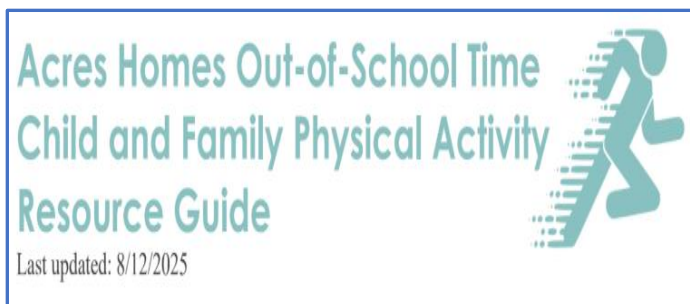
Box F. Facilitators for Child Out-of-School-Time Physical Activity Participation in Acres Homes. *Acres Homes Child Out-of-School Time Physical Activity Opportunity Study (2024-2025)*

Family Support: <i>Ways Acres Homes families support child Out-of-School Time PA</i>	OST Program Participation	Active Commuting to School	Park/Trail & Recreation Center Use
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active games & fun activities • Bike riding • Calisthenics/training • Community involvement • Daily living activities • Dance • Fishing • Parks/Playground visitation • Recreation center use • Running/jogging • Sports • Walking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community partnerships (<i>funding, programming, promot.</i>) • Transportation • Locating program in neighborhood and 'walk-up' options • Philosophy of inclusivity • Providing a variety of options (including arts and other activities) • Providing food • Charging a token fee to foster investment in the OST program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult social support for walking/ biking • Proximity to school • Enjoyment of walking/biking • School/community promotion/education about walking/biking • Crossing guards • Community design/ infrastructure • Sufficient time to walk/bike • Feel safe • Weather/climate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Park availability & comm. use • Park/rec. center amenities & programs • Sun/heat mitigation • Community partnerships for safety & improvements • Resident advocacy • Building comm. trust via rules enforcement & safety support • School schedules that support family time

Recommendations

In this last section, we provide recommendations for promoting and supporting out-of-school-time physical activity among elementary school-aged children and their families living in the Acres Homes community. These recommendations are informed both by our key findings summarized in the previous section as well as recommendations provided directly by our parent/guardian respondents via an open-ended question in the parent survey and key informant interviews, in response to the question: “Please share any final thoughts about how we can best support children’s physical activity outside of school time in the Acres Homes community. What would help further support physical activity for children in Acres Homes?” Our recommendations are organized by the OST PA practices explored in this pilot study: *OST program participation* (Tables 16a & 16b), *active commuting* (Table 17), and *park/trail and recreation center use* (Table 18).

In introducing our recommendations, we begin with presenting two recommendations from our research team aimed at supporting the overall ecosystem of supports for active living in Acres Homes. First, in response to parent, school and community leader input about the need for enhanced communication about child OST opportunities, we recommend exploration of strategies to further communicate and promote OST opportunities for children and family in Acres Homes. Towards this end, we have created an initial [Acres Homes Child and Family Out-of-School-Time Physical Activity Resource Guide](#). As part of the guide, we also created an initial [Acres Homes physical activity resource map](#). This guide was developed based on helpful input from our key informant interviews, Google searches, and review and additional input from Acres Homes Cancer Prevention Collaboration’s Community Advisors. This guide is not intended to be the end-all, but rather a first step toward identifying resources that can support child and family OST PA in the Acres Homes area. We look forward to the opportunity to further grow this resource with additional input from Acres Homes partners and share with the Acres Homes community.



Second, we recommend exploration of the creation of an [Acres Homes Out-of-School-Time Physical Activity community dashboard](#). A community dashboard holds promise to better understand disparities in OST PA for Acres Homes children, set goals for OST PA engagement, monitor progress, and provide community accountability to ensure the provision of resources to support child OST PA. In Fig. 24 below, we provide an initial proof-of-concept child OST PA dashboard, recognizing both the gaps in data for some proposed indicators as well as the ongoing need for surveillance systems such as Texas SPAN. We welcome further input into this dashboard along with community recommendations for improving this initial draft. Following our dashboard, we present additional recommendations to support child OST PA for consideration by Acres Homes parent, school and community leaders (Tables 16-18).

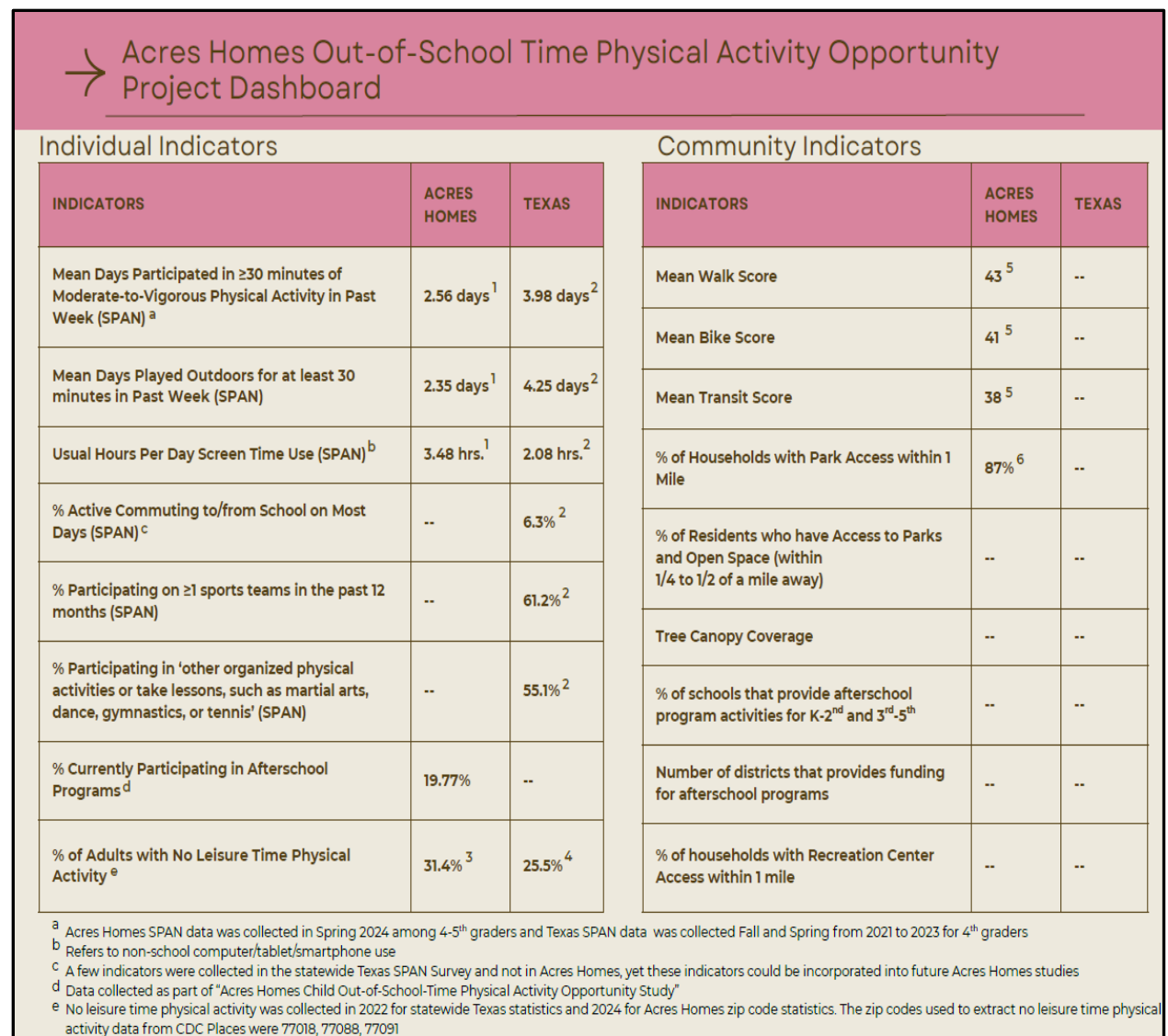


Fig. 24. Acres Homes Child Out-of-School-Time *Proof-of-Concept* Physical Activity Dashboard.⁷

⁷ 1. Acres Homes School Physical Activity and Nutrition (SPAN) Survey (Spring 2024). 2. The Texas School Physical Activity and Nutrition (SPAN) Survey (2021-2023). 3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Places: Local Data for Better Health; 2024. 4. Texas Health and Human Services. Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS); 2022. 5. Walk Score. Available at: www.walkscore.com. 6. Houston Complete Communities. [Acres Homes Community Data Metrics](#).

Table 16a. Recommendations for OST programming. *Acres Homes Child Out-of-School Time Physical Activity Opportunity Study (2024-25)*

<i>OST Program-Specific Recommendations</i>	
Recommendation	Source/Rationale
<p>1. Provide diverse and increased afterschool program opportunities for Acres Homes elementary school-aged children of all abilities and ages.</p> <p>Parents expressed interest in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Sports-related</i>: Basketball, baseball, dance, soccer, swimming, volleyball • <i>Community service</i> • <i>Life skills</i> (e.g., money management) • <i>Science/STEM-related</i> • <i>Theater and arts programming</i> 	<p>In addition to the low participation in afterschool programs based on our parent survey sample, we learned about the interest and need for more OST programs in the Acres Homes community. New programs such as “Afterschool Active Kids Club”, funded by Be Well Acres Homes (4th-6th graders), have received strong support; parents of children of lower grade levels have also expressed interest. Parents also noted the need for diverse types of OST programming, as noted in the recommendation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “If more after school programs were available, my kids would participate, because they are always eager to join any activity offered at their school.” -<i>Acres Homes Parent</i> • “We are close to capacity, you know. There’s definitely more need in the community than we could serve alone, for sure. So there’s definite need....” -<i>Comm. OST Provider</i> • “I believe that it’s just open and for someone to have an interest to come in and to start particular programs, I think there’s a whole huge audience that would be open to come into it.” -<i>Acres Homes Classroom Teacher</i>
2. Increase youth voice in determining OST program opportunities in Acres Homes	<p>Related to the expressed need to increase OST programming, we learned of the importance of creating more space for “youth voice and choice” in determining OST opportunities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “However, are we doing things that make kids wanna come to the program? ...Like, if I like soccer, but you don’t have a soccer club and all you have is a basketball club, ‘I don’t wanna go’ ...So that’s something we’re focusing on...is just making sure that our programs incorporate youth choice.” -<i>Community PA Provider</i>
3. Increase funding for the delivery of OST programs in Acres Homes	<p>Our findings also underscore the need for more funding to support OST programming. The recommendation for increased funding was also made by the 2023 Annual Action Plan for the City of Houston: “Fund youth enrichment and afterschool programs to children in low- and moderate-income areas”(p.95). On this note, recent unfreezing of federal funds may support OST programming in Texas.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “...[I]f the funding can exist from an outside source, like a company or an organization that’s willing to provide funding, I truly believe the demand in Houston is here for more youth programming in the areas of sports, fitness, cultural programs, outdoor recreation programs...” -<i>Community PA Provider</i>
4. Increase leadership, advocacy, and coordination of OST programming in Acres Homes via the establishment of an OST Program Champion and/or OST steering group for Acres Homes.	<p>We also learned about the opportunity to increase the leadership, advocacy and coordination of OST programming in Acres Homes via establishment of a “champion” role for OST programs within the school, district and/or larger community. As one community PA provider shared: “We may need to do something where we come together once a month and talk about the work that we’re doing and ways that we can collaborate because we do it in a lot of other areas across Houston, but I don’t see it being done [in Acres Homes].” Key resources may include Be Well Acres Homes, which provides community leadership for health promotion; the Acres Homes Complete Communities Action Plan (2018)- which includes ‘out of school enrichment’ as a key focus area; and the Out-2-Learn collaborative hosted by United Way of Houston, among other available school and community assets.</p>

Table 16b. Recommendations for OST programming (cont.). *Acres Homes Child Out-of-School-Time Opportunity Study (2024-25).*

<i>OST Program-Specific Recommendations</i>	
Recommendation	Source/Rationale
5. Make OST programming more accessible by delivering directly via schools and/or by providing transportation.	<p>A key theme that emerged from our interviews is the need to make OST programming easily accessible. Parents expressed a lot of trust in their local schools, and community PA providers also noted the importance of providing programming within neighborhoods to increase access. Transportation and parent schedules were also cited as key barriers for children’s participation in OST programs. As such, exploring ways to facilitate participation, either by delivering via schools and/or within neighborhoods, and/or providing transportation to existing programs, may help to increase OST program participation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "And I do believe sometimes it does have to do with the transportation or parents working and they're not able to provide that. I think if there was some kind of program like after school program here, it would be easier for a lot of parents to be able to just pick up their children instead of having to take them somewhere else and then having to stay there and then take them back home." -<i>Acres Homes School PE Teacher</i>
6. Increase promotion of OST opportunities and education about the benefits of OST program participation for Acres Homes children and parents.	<p>Another common theme in our key informant interviews and parent open-ended survey feedback was the need for increasing awareness about current OST program offerings as well as the benefits of OST program participation for children’s healthy development.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Que tuvieran más información e invitaciones para los niños con las que una pueda contar." [<i>"That they had more information and invitations for the children that one could rely on."</i>] -<i>Acres Homes Parent</i> • "I don't think...we've done the best job possible to let the public know about the various services and programs that are offered. I mean, I come across so many people in Houston that don't even know about, you know, our free swimming programs or don't even know about our afterschool programs and so forth. And they're actually surprised. That tells me we really should be doing much more in the area of marketing." -<i>Community PA Provider</i>
7. Ensure OST programming and promotional efforts are inclusive of children of diverse ethnicities and provide a safe space, especially for immigrant children and families.	<p>Given the disparity in OST program participation for Hispanic and Spanish-speaking children found in our parent survey, we see opportunity for increasing both programming and promotion of programming with the Hispanic population in Acres Homes. We also note that at least one parent cited concerns about immigration- and the need to create safe spaces for children and parents.</p>
8. Explore re-establishing school-community partnerships with past PA providers (e.g., Marathon Kids, YMCA).	<p>We learned about some of the great partnerships that have existed in the recent past, including partnerships with Marathon Kids, a nonprofit organization that promotes walking and running with children and parents, and YMCA, with past provision of OST PA-supportive programming.</p>

Table 17. Recommendations for active commuting to school. *Acres Homes Child Out-of-School-Time Opportunity Study (2024-25).*

<i>Active Commuting To School Recommendations</i>	
Recommendation	Source/Rationale
9. Continue to improve community infrastructure supports for walking and biking in Acres Homes (<i>e.g., sidewalks, bike lanes, traffic calming, crosswalks, crossing guards, signage and traffic lights</i>) and involve community members in conducting periodic walkability assessments to inform needed changes and provide community accountability for changes.	<p>A key theme from our parent survey and key informant interviews was the need for improved community infrastructure to support walking and biking to school given ongoing concerns about traffic-related safety.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Sidewalks/bike lanes:</i> “Pues, como aquí en la comunidad donde yo vivo, que hubiera más banquetas para que los niños pudieran más moverse en bicicleta...” [<i>“Well, like here in the Community where I live, there should be more sidewalks so that children could move around more on bicycles...”</i>] -Acres Homes Parent <i>Signage:</i> “I would just say to increase the number signs for biking or to say 'like watch for children'. I know like we've lost some beacons that used to work for school zones that kind of went down and never came back up...” -Acres Homes School Principal
10. Re-activate the <i>Safe Routes To School</i> (SRTS) initiative and partnership with Acres Homes schools.	Throughout our journey with this pilot community assessment we learned about the great work that was taking place with the Safe Routes To School initiative, which included promotion of walking and biking, assessment of community infrastructure, and assessment of walking and biking to school, among other contributions. Sadly, funding for this initiative by City of Houston was ended in 2024 (to our understanding). Despite barriers, there is a lot of interest and support among family, school and community leaders for SRTS.
11. Continue to provide community social support for active commuting for children.	<p>Related to the above recommendation, we also learned about the key role that parents, teachers, and community organizations and leaders play in fostering an active commuting culture and a culture of safety with active commuting, including parents and teachers who help walk with students, teachers in the past who have organized a ‘biking school bus’ to pick up students on their way to school, and school and community events such as the Bike Rodeo hosted by Kings Bike & Hike Community based in Acres Homes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Que hubiera más deporte con la bicicleta- no solo dando la vuelta. Que hubiera un torneo u otra actividad con la bici. El mío- le digo que va conmigo, se aburre. Les gusta la bicicleta, pero dar vueltas les aburre.” [<i>“I wish there was more sport with the bicycle- not just riding around in circles. That there would be a tournament or another activity with the bike. Mine- if I tell him to come with me, he gets bored. They like biking, but just riding around in circles bores them.”</i>] -Acres Homes Parent
12. Continue to promote a culture of active commuting via signage and other school and community communication channels	Lastly, we learned from some school leaders that there is opportunity to further foster a culture of active commuting to school, with some parents noting that their children pay attention to the posters at school for OST activity and teachers who promote specific activities and events. We appreciated observing schools that still have their Safe Routes to School promotional signage and encourage continued promotion of active commuting to school via the various school and community communication channels as well as teacher and parent social support.

Table 18. Recommendations for park/trail and recreation center use. *Acres Homes Child Out-of-School-Time Opportunity Study (2024-25).*

<i>Park/Trail and Recreation Center Use Recommendations</i>	
Recommendation	Source/Rationale
13. Continue to expand park/trail and recreation center access, amenities, and improvements in Acres Homes	<p>While the availability of parks was cited as a strength of the Acres Homes community, we also learned from some key informants about the need to expand access for residents to park areas, recognizing that park proximity is related to park usage.²²⁻²⁴ We also learned that amenities such as playgrounds, sports courts, and trails are a motivating factor for families to visit parks, with one parent also noting that increasing playground access at recreational centers (e.g. Acres Homes Multi-service Center) would also motivate greater use. As the lack of upkeep of some parks was also noted as a disincentive for use, exploring strategies such as “Friends of Parks” or “Adopt a Park” may also be helpful for upkeep.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I would definitely like to see more park areas, walking areas, trails around Acres Homes ... I think [if] there’s more of that offered to kids around and available, and more would take to it versus not having anything around maybe they feel limited or they can’t go so far, you know, to reach these areas.” -<i>Acres Homes Parent</i> • “...[T]he playground set there, like, it’s already falling apart. So it would be nice to maybe keep them maintained or even if it is too much to fix, then maybe like scrapping it and putting up a new one or, you know, just to keep it maintained.” -<i>Acres Homes Parent</i>
14. Enhance offering of events and programming at the parks in Acres Homes	<p>We also learned about how providing events such as <i>Annual Family Day at the Park</i> at Sylvester Turner Park and <i>Farmer’s Markets</i> as well as programming is really helpful for bringing children and families to the parks. Our school park observations also underscored the key role that teacher-led programming can have in increasing school park use.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I believe that if we want some of the activities back into the community for the children in the community, like the little league sports activities, that would be a greater attraction for persons coming to experience the park. And of course, once they come to experience the park in that way, they understand what other amenities are there for them all the time. Because one of the things that they gravitate to and all the kids, especially the younger kids look forward to doing, is the activities with football, basketball, baseball, those activities that are different... activities played year-round. Even some of the dance activities, or different kids exercise activities or clubs, riding clubs and things of that nature. I think if we had more things that would appeal to the children who would say, ‘Mom, I want to go there, I want to go here.’ They’ll again come to experience it and then find out that it is a safer place now...” -<i>Acres Homes Community Leader</i>
15. Provide sunshades and other weather mitigating features at Acres Homes parks/trails	<p>The hot weather was cited as a key barrier for using parks and trails by parents, underscoring the need to explore strategies such as shade structures to mitigate the sun and heat.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Por el calor, bien difícil. Entonces hace falta también que quizás sombra.” [<i>“Due to the heat, [it’s] very difficult. So it may also be necessary to have some shade.”</i>] -<i>Acres Homes Parent</i>
16. Increase safety at the parks in Acres Homes via surveillance and lighting	<p>Social/crime-related safety concerns were also cited as a barrier for park/trail use by some Acres Homes parents, underscoring the need for enhanced safety strategies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Está la caminata para toda la familia; para los niños, están los juegos. Para hacer ejercicio, están los aparatos, la cancha de básquet, de tenis, de voleibol. Está muy completo. Lo que no está es la seguridad. Ayudaría a tener más vigilancia y quizás luz también.” [<i>“The trail is there for the whole family; for the children, there are the playgrounds. For exercising, there are the fitness equipment, the basketball course, tennis court, and volleyball court. It’s very complete. What is lacking is security. It would help to have more surveillance and perhaps light as well.”</i>] -<i>Acres Homes Parent</i>
17. Increase transportation to parks/trails & rec center	<p>Lastly, we learned from our key informant interviews that some of the parks and recreation centers may not be accessible to Acres Homes residents who rely on public transportation. Exploring current bus routes to parks/trails and recreation centers in Acres Homes may be a helpful step toward increasing transportation access.</p>

Limitations and Strengths

This pilot community assessment of out-of-school-time physical activity had both limitations and strengths that merit mention.

Limitations. With regard to limitations, we first note the need for caution with interpretation of our parent survey findings, given our small sample size. Our small sample size limits generalizability of our findings across all 4th-6th grade students in our four schools. Furthermore, we note our small sample of four schools within Acres Homes. While we received strong support overall from our school district partner and school contacts for this study, some of the challenges with our administration of the parent survey included our short timeframe for the study, which was not officially approved until November 2024, resulting in just one semester to collect data. We also recognize that our request for a signed parental consent for the hard copy survey may have presented a barrier for some parents, recognizing the current political climate for immigrant families. While a gift card drawing incentive was provided, future studies should consider budgeting an incentive for all who complete the survey. Questionnaire length and the opportunity to better promote the survey within our schools via additional parent meetings are additional considerations for increasing response rate with parents. Despite our low response rate, our parent survey had good representation of parents of both Black and Hispanic student, English and Spanish-speaking parents, and gender and provided rich triangulation both via closed and open-ended questions on barriers and facilitators for child OST PA. We also recognize differences in our comparison of Acres Homes children (4th/5th graders) with statewide sample for our SPAN analyses (4th graders), including differences with the timeframe (Acres Homes: spring 2024; Texas: average estimates for 2021-23). These important differences notwithstanding, the biases for these differences are largely in favor of greater PA for Acres Homes children, and additional subgroup analyses with Acres Homes 4th graders provide further support for disparities in PA for Acres Homes children. Our SOPARC assessment was limited to two schools and to one weekday afternoon and one weekend day (Saturday morning) for each observation period, which limits generalizability across the week and weekend. We also learned during the assessment that both parks may not be fully accessible based on recent installation of fences around the play areas. Future research is needed to better understand how school parks are made accessible and promoted with the Acres Homes community. Other limitations that merit mention include: a lack of focus on summertime OST PA, which merits further focus for future studies; the opportunity to more fully explore community assets such as coalitions and faith-based groups that can further support child OST PA, and the opportunity to more comprehensively explore the impact of weather and weather-mitigating strategies on child and family OST PA. While weather was cited as a barrier in both our parent survey and key informant interviews, there is opportunity to go deeper in better understanding the strategies that parents, school leaders, and community PA providers are taking to mitigate the effects of hot weather on outdoor activity.

Strengths. These limitations notwithstanding, we also note key strengths and contributions of this pilot community assessment. First, as the first comprehensive pilot study of child OST PA in Acres Homes to the authors' knowledge, our experience- including the development of assessment protocols and measures, partnerships, and identification of our challenges and lessons learned, provide foundation to inform future planning and surveillance efforts of child OST PA within Acres Homes. Second, our mixed-methods study design based in SPAN secondary analyses of child PA data, a parent survey with closed and open-ended questions, key informant interviews with parent, school and community leaders, and SOPARC observations resulted in rich triangulation and learning about disparities in child PA, as well as the barriers, facilitators, assets and opportunities for supporting child OST PA in the Acres Homes community, which aim to inform future OST planning and promotional efforts.

CONCLUSION

As part of the larger Acres Homes CPC led by MD Anderson Cancer Center and funded by that National Institutes of Health via a U54 grant, this one-year, pilot community assessment study provides current insights about out-of-school-time physical activity among elementary school-aged children and related environmental supports in partnership with the Acres Homes community. Building from a mixed methods assessment approach, we identified multiple strengths and assets of the Acres Homes community that currently support and hold promise to further support child PA engagement, including strong community partnerships; some availability of OST PA-related programming; and availability of parks, trails and recreation centers, among other assets. Despite these strengths and assets, our findings identified important disparities in PA engagement for Acres Homes elementary school-aged children compared with Texas statewide estimates, as well as low to moderate participation in the three OST PA practices assessed of OST program participation, active commuting, and park/trail and recreation center use. Our identification of *barriers* (e.g., limited parental time due to work; safety concerns; limited OST opportunities, cost of opportunities and transportation barriers for opportunities; lack of parental awareness of OST opportunities; weather; and lack of supportive infrastructure for active commuting), *facilitators* (e.g., parent/teacher social support; availability of parks/trails and recreation centers; some programming offered at schools and in broader community; communication channels), and community-informed *recommendations* hold promise to inform future planning efforts to grow and activate environmental supports for child out-of-school-time physical activity.

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