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Requirements for Completion:

- **Attend the session in its entirely**

UTHealth Houston School of Public Health | MICHAEL & SUSAN DELL CENTER for HEALTHY LIVING

University-Community Partnerships for Advancing Active Living in Texas: Co-Learning about Needs, Assets & Opportunities with Under-Resourced Communities

April 29, 2026

Presenter: Andrew Springer, Associate Professor – Health Promotion & Behavioral Sciences, Dell Center for Healthy Living, UTHealth Houston School of Public Health-Austin

Moderator: Warinda Harris, Organizer, Central Texas Interfaith & Parks, People and Power (P3)

Today's Session

- Place and health
- Travis County Physical Activity Landscape Assessment
- Acres Homes Child OST Physical Activity Opportunity Study – Houston, TX
- Mapping Opportunities for Roadway Safety and Active Commuting in Partnership with the Montopolis Community - Austin, TX

Learning Objectives

1) Describe current disparities in leisure-time physical activity in Texas children and adults
2) Identify helpful community assessment toolkits and participatory learning methods
3) Describe common barriers, facilitators and opportunities for active living promotion in under-resourced communities

Place & Health "When it comes to health, your zip code is more important than your genetic code." –Anthony Iton

U.S. Life Expectancy: 79.0 in 2024 (81.4 yrs: females; 76.5 yrs: males) (CDC, 2026).[1] ~4 years less vs. comparable countries (e.g., Australia, Europe, Japan).[2]

"The United States is failing at a fundamental mission – keeping people alive." –Achenbach et al. (*Wash. Post*, 2023)

- ✓ **Chronic diseases** "...erase more than twice as many years of life among people < 65 as all the overdoses, homicides, suicides and car accidents combined...."
- ✓ **Geographic disparities**: Ashtabula, OH "more likely to die young" (smoking, diabetes, motor vehicle) vs. Eerie, PA & Chautauqua, NY = State policy differences: Medicaid and safety net funding, tobacco taxes & seatbelt laws.[3]

Chetty et al. (JAMA, 2016)[4]: United States

- ✓ Inequality in LE increased: 2001-2014
- ✓ Higher income = more years of life
- ✓ Life expectancy varies by geographic area for low-income individuals
- *Healthy living-related differences* (e.g., less smoking, greater physical activity)
- *Geographic characteristics*: higher college, immigrants, and gov't social expenditures. *Didn't have to do with:* access to health services or income inequality

Where you live (area characteristics) and individual behaviors = how long you live

Physical activity is the "magic pill" for health...

Immediate Benefits

- ✓ Improved Mood
- ✓ Better Sleep
- ✓ Increased Energy

Long-Term Benefits

- ✓ Chronic Disease Prevention
- ✓ Weight Management
- ✓ Enhanced Bone and Muscle Health[5]

Recommendations

Adults: 150 minutes of moderate or 75 mins. of vigorous aerobic activity each week PLUS strengthening activities on ≥2 days/week

Children/Adolescents: 60 mins. of daily moderate-to-vigorous physical activity[5]

...yet not everyone has access or support

Necessity vs. Choice (Salvo et al., 2023)[6]: *Labor-based PA = increased health risk, versus*

- Leisure-time physical activity
- Outdoor activity and nature
- Active commuting = *health benefits*

Barriers for Physical Activity (PA)

Communities experiencing economic disadvantage: less supports & more barriers.[7-18]

Aims

1.) Explore needs, assets and opportunities for active living in under-resourced communities:

- Travis County, TX
- Acres Homes, Houston, TX
- Montopolis, Austin, TX

2.) Describe a helpful community assessment toolkit for conducting active living assessments via university-community partnerships

ACTIVATING ENVIRONMENTAL SUPPORTS FOR CHILD PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

A COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE ACRES HOMES COMMUNITY OF HOUSTON, TX

Springer, Momin, Chandler, Gardiner, Mims, Hernandez, Pfledderer, Salvo, Rechis, McNeil & Basen-Engquist (2024-25)[20]

VISION ZERO

Mapping Opportunities for Roadway Safety in Partnership with the Montopolis Community

TRAVIS COUNTY PHYSICAL ACTIVITY LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT

Springer, Momin, Amin, Fraenkert, Gardiner, Rogers, & Rechis (2023-24)[19] Springer, Trevino, Salvo, Thomas, Ramesh, Meyer, Vo et al. (2024-25)[21]

Methods

Intervention Mapping – Needs/Asset Assessment *& IM Core Processes*[22]

**Comm. Assessment Team!*

- Question posing & brainstorming
- Reviewing literature
- Applying theory
- Analyzing existing data
- Primary data collection

Study Design: Mixed Methods, Cross-Sectional Com. Assessment

Theoretical Orientation: "Upending the Social Ecol. Model"

Travis County Physical Activity Landscape Assessment (2023-24)

- ✓ Scoping Review: Comm. assessments (2011-2023)
- ✓ Travis County Data Analysis
- ✓ Key Informant Interviews with Travis County leaders

Acres Homes Child Physical Activity Oppty. Study (2024-25)

- ✓ Texas SPAN Data Analysis
- ✓ Parent Survey & Semi-structured Interviews
- ✓ School/Com. Leader Interviews
- ✓ Structured observations of schoolyard OST use (n=2 schools) using SOFIT-R

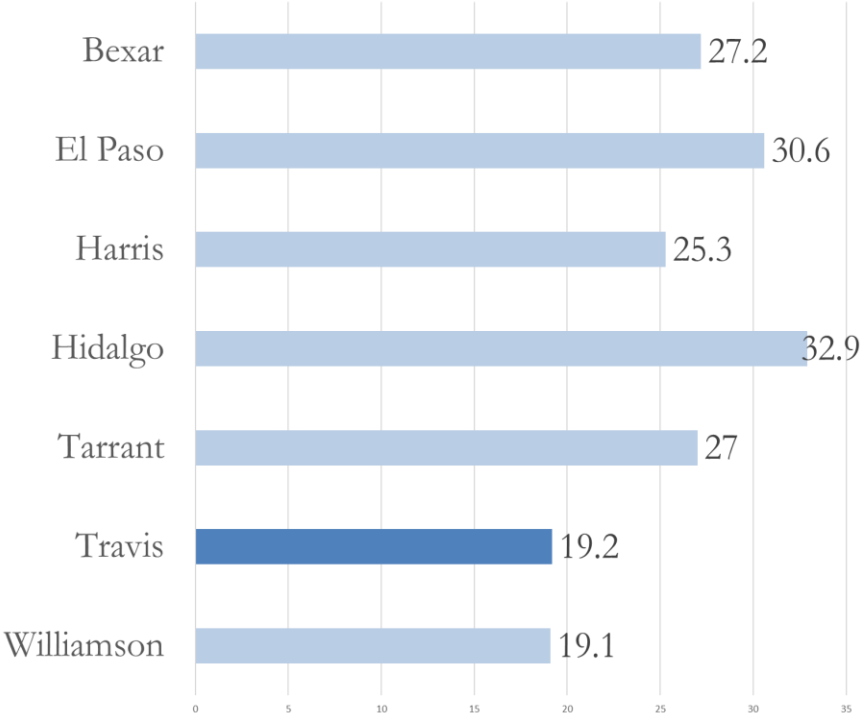
Mapping Opportunities for Roadway Safety & Active Commuting with Montopolis Com. (2024-25)

- ✓ TXDOT Data Analysis
- ✓ Participatory Learning & Action Workshops
- ✓ Photovoice
- ✓ Walkability Audits
- ✓ Peer Interviews

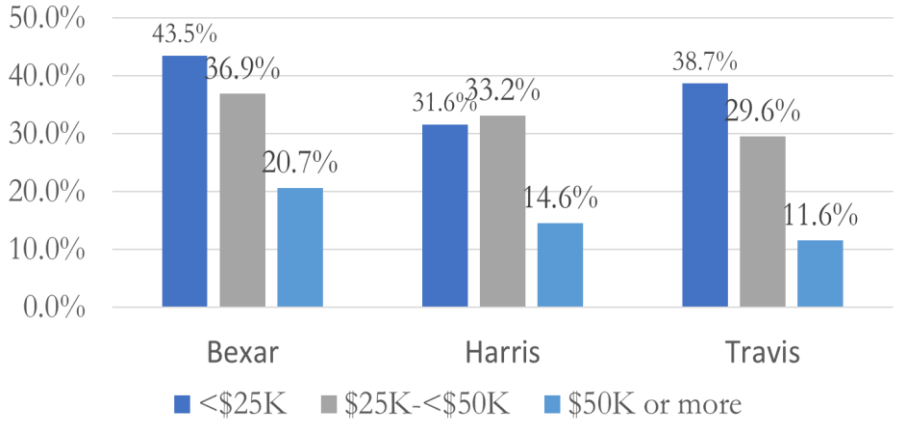
Montopolis Assessment Team

Travis County Physical Activity Landscape Assessment – Key Findings

% No Leisure-Time PA in Adults 18+ (Past Month) - *Texas Counties* (2023)[23]

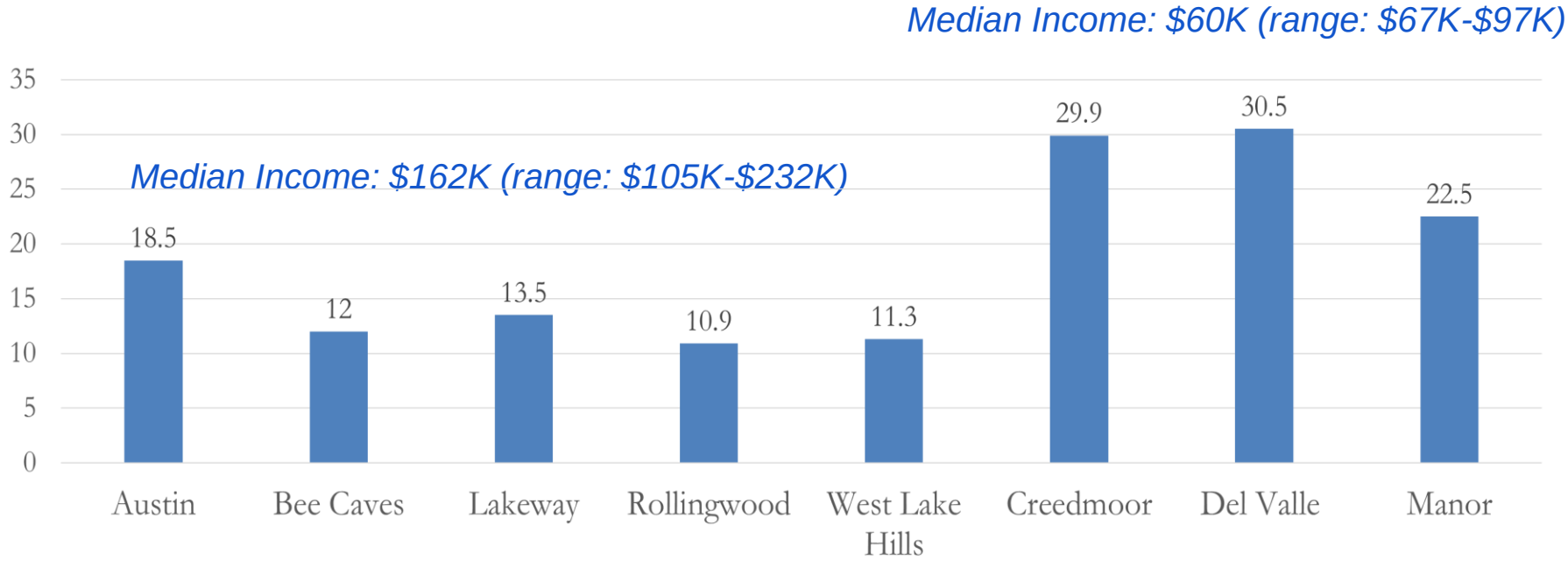


% No LTPA by Income (2023)



Source: *Texas Department of State Health Services BRFSS*

Highest and lowest % No Leisure-Time PA by Travis County Cities/Communities, *Stratified by Median Income ≥$100K & <$100K* (2023)



Source: % No LTPA: *CDC PLACES 2023*; Median Income: *U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts and Census Reporter* (2022 Census data).
Note: Does not include cities that cross counties, such as Cedar Park, Elgin, Leander, Pflugerville, Round Rock

Example Community Assets - *Austin/Travis County*

Practice Pilgrimage: walking the distance of a pilgrimage with a religious context for physical activity (e.g. replicating the distance walked for Hajj for muslims)

Austin Mobility Bond ('16, '18, '20): improvements to sidewalks, bike lanes, and transportation safety

Bros for Yoga: yoga classes to promote physical activity for men of color

Nature Smart Libraries: increase nature play in children through libraries

New Park Trail from Manor to Austin

Central Texas INTERFAITH

IT'S TIME TEXAS

AUSTIN PARKS & RECREATION

Cities Connecting Children to Nature AUSTIN, TX

AGING IS COOL STRONG SMART SOCIAL

MARATHON KIDS CATCH GLOBAL FOUNDATION

AUSTIN YOUTH FITNESS

A ROCHA USA

APH Austin Public Health PREVENT. PROMOTE. PROTECT.

MAYOR'S HEALTH & WELL-BEING COUNCIL AUSTIN TEXAS

AUSTIN PARKS FOUNDATION

the YMCA

Scoping Review of Austin/Travis County Community Assessments (2011-2023) (n=18 reports)- *Social Determinants of Physical Activity*

Economic-Related Barriers

- *Time & Work:* Insufficient time to exercise due to work schedules[24,25]
- *Housing & Displacement to Under-resourced Areas:* Increases in housing costs have displaced low-income Travis County residents outside of Austin[26]
- *Transportation:* Moving can add to commute times and inaccessibility to PA resources.[24,25]
- *Cost of Gym Memberships, PA equipment (clothes)*[27]

Built Environment-Related Barriers

- *Infrastructure:* Inaccessible sidewalks, traffic, proximity to freeways, and other features of the built environment are a barrier for PA[26, 28,29]
- *Park Access:* 35% to <50% of Travis County residents lack access to parks[26,30]
- *Park Amenities:* Lack of amenities or poor park conditions are a barrier to PA[26,30]

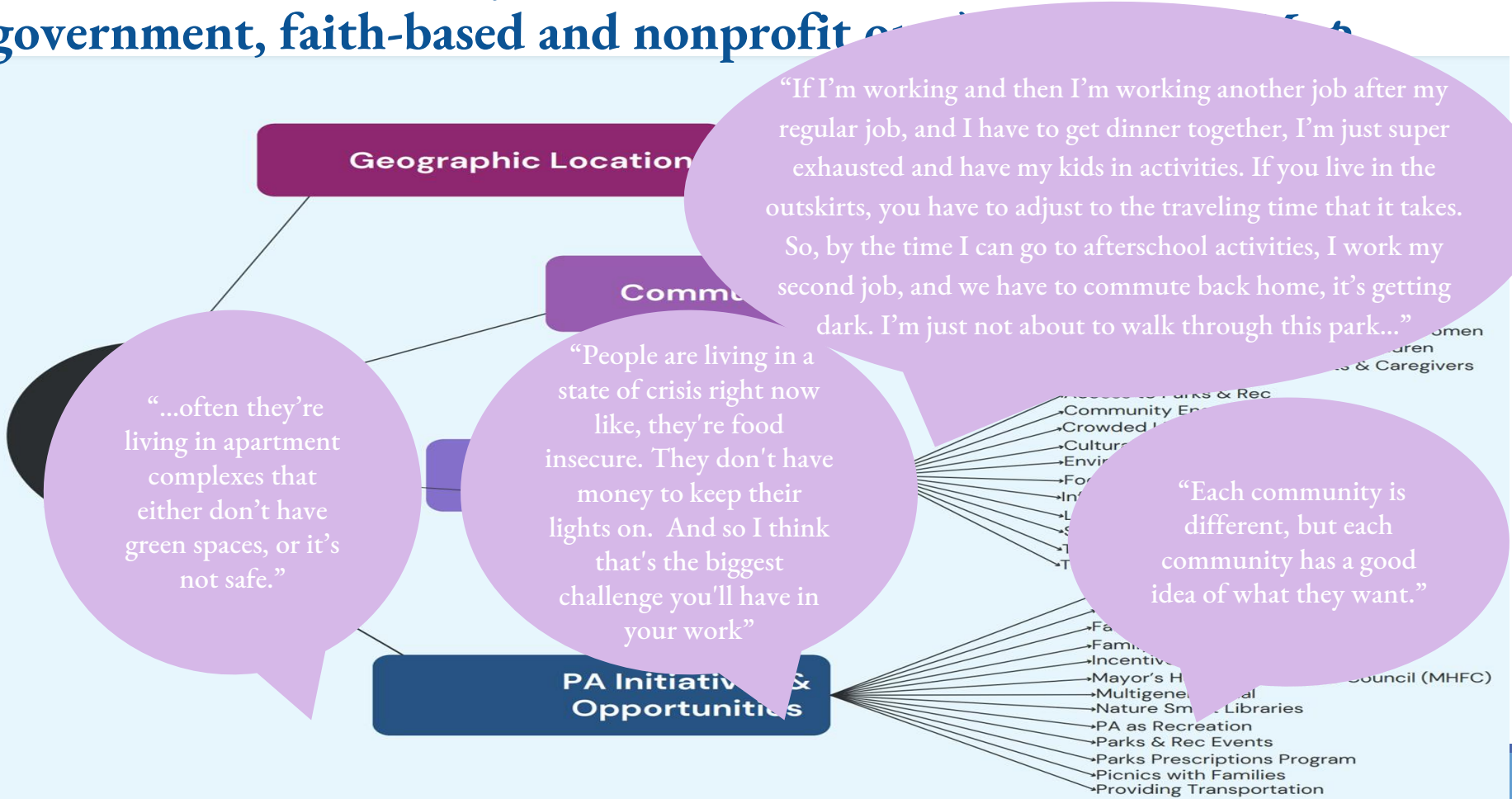
Social & Community Context-Related Barriers

- *Lack of PA Opportunities/Support for Specific Groups:* Caregivers, communities of color, people with disabilities, and the LGBTQ+ community were cited as groups in need of increased PA programming/supports[24,29]
- *Safety/Crime*: common barrier cited for not going to parks,[28-30] not engaging in active commuting,[28] and/or other physical activity in one's neighborhood[24]
- *Redlining and Discrimination* has led to disparities in healthcare access, food security, and education for Black and Hispanic communities[31]
- *Transportation* and long commutes are barriers for park utilization[24,25]

Climate-Related Barriers

- Hot weather during summer months presented a barrier to outdoor PA in multiple reports[24 ,26,30]

Austin/TC Community Leader Interviews (n=26 leaders from government, faith-based and nonprofit



ACTIVATING ENVIRONMENTAL SUPPORTS FOR CHILD PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

A COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE ACRES HOMES COMMUNITY OF HOUSTON, TX

Acres Homes Child Out-of-School-Time Physical Activity Opportunity Study – Key Findings

Study Overview

- ✓ PA tracks into adulthood,[32] yet 80% of TX & U.S. children do not meet guidelines.[33,34]

- ✓ Acres Homes
  - Established 1910; Annexed by Houston in 1967[35,36]
  - Deprived of basic resources (sewers, roads, fire serv.): mid-70s[35,36]
  - Median income: ($41K) vs. Houston ($65K) & TX ($67K)[37]

- ✓ Resource-deprived communities: Fewer supports and greater barriers for active living; greater risk for chronic disease (diabetes, hypertension, cancer).[38-42]

Acres Homes Child Out-of-School-Time Physical Activity Opportunity Study

Aims: To describe out-of-school-time (OST) physical activity practices and related needs, facilitators & opportunities among a sample of 4th-6th grade children & schools in Acres Homes.

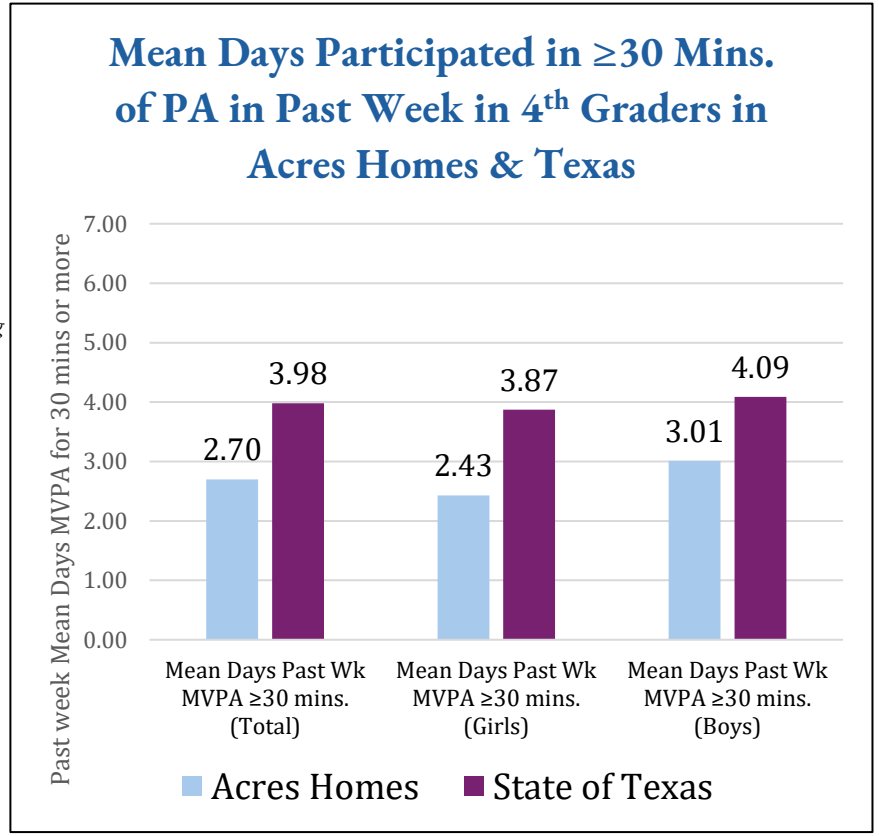
OST physical activity practices explored:

- OST program participation[16]
- Walking and biking to/from school[17]
- Use of parks/trails & recreation centers[18-23]

Child Physical Activity

Source: *Texas SPAN*

- ✓ Acres Homes: n=343 4th graders (n=5 schools) *(spring 2024)*
- ✓ TX: n=3,843 4th graders (n=92 schools) *(2021 & '23)*



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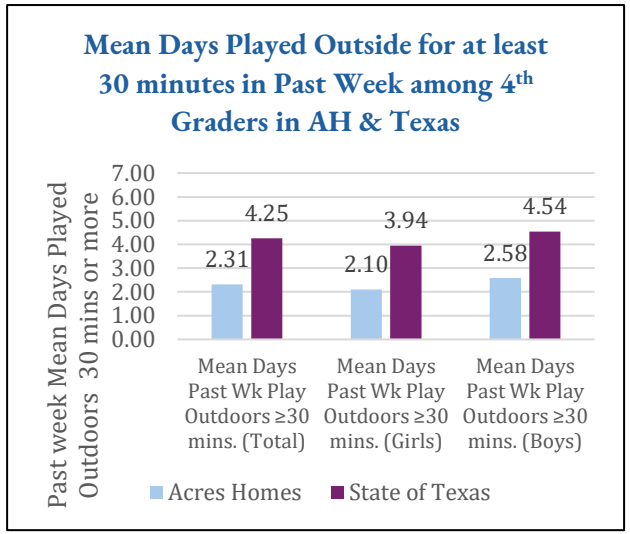
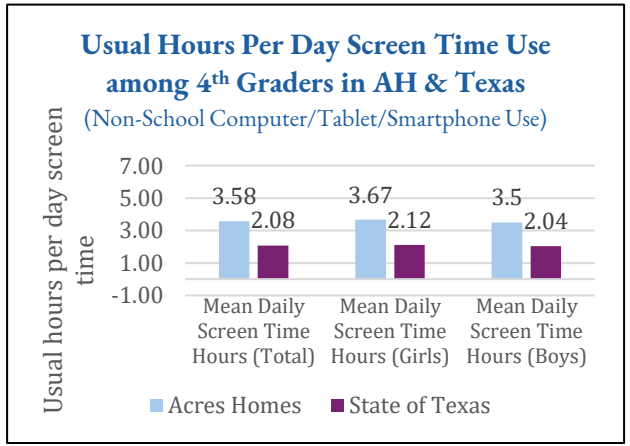
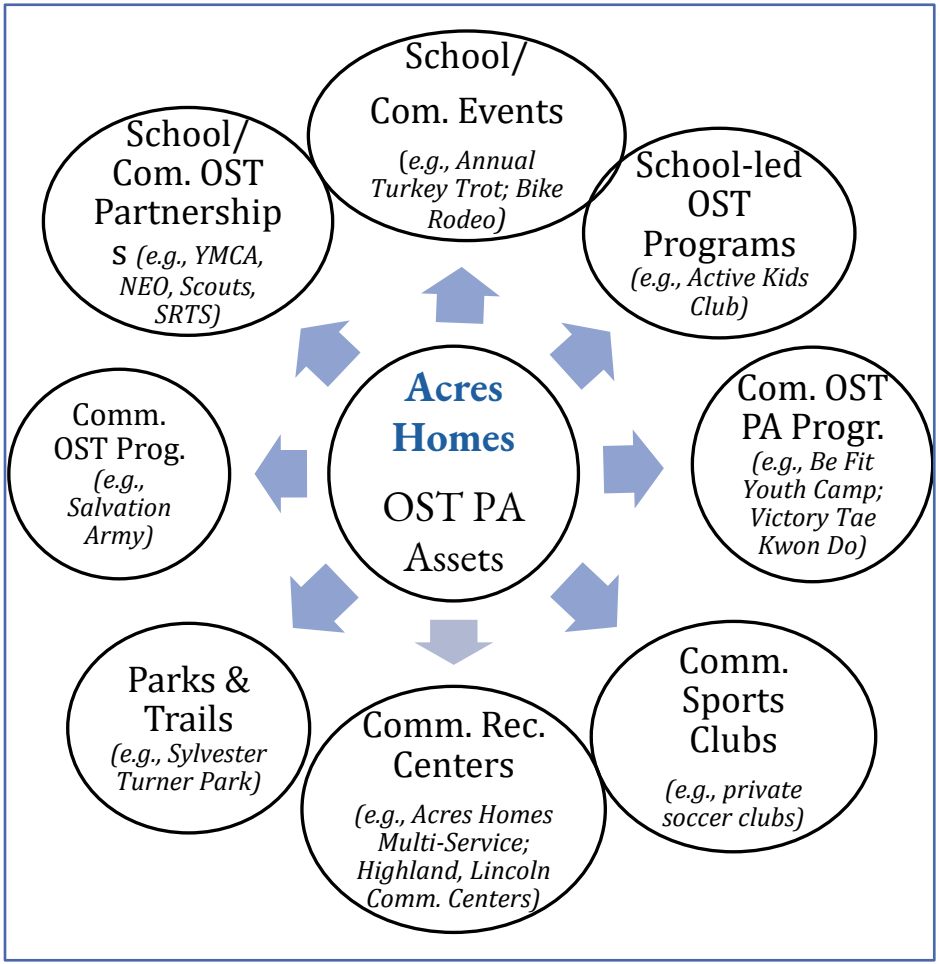




Community Strengths & Assets

- ✓ Parent Survey (open-ended questions) (n=64)
- ✓ Key Informant Interviews (n=21)
- ✓ Google Searches



Acres Homes Communication Channels

- ✓ Flyers
- ✓ Emails/Class Dojo/Text msg
- ✓ Social media
- ✓ Comm. newspaper
- ✓ Websites
- ✓ School & Comm. Events
- ✓ Parent meetings
- ✓ Posters/Yard Signs
- ✓ Word of mouth

Barriers to Out-of-School-Time Physical Activity as reported by Parents, School & Community Leaders

Lack of Availability: "...me gustaría que hubiera más actividades para que así los niños se mantengan ...en otras actividades que sean más saludables para ellos."
–Parent, Acres Homes

Lack of Infrastructure: "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

Safety & Time: "No visitamos mucho los parques. No vamos por la seguridad y por el tiempo." *–Parent, Acres Homes*

Lack of Transportation: "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*

Key Informants (n=21)
- Parents (n=7)
- School leaders (n=5)
- Comm. PA providers (n=5)
- OST providers (n=5)

School Park Observations (n=2 sch
20 obs.; spring 2025)

- Safety concerns (traffic-related and violence/crime-related)
- romotion of OST programs
- Lack of transportation
- barriers
- ffing for
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- reness of parks/
- programming

Lack of Funding: "...[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

Awareness: "Parents, even though they pull up and they see the park at the school, 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*

Common Barriers
- ✓ Lack of availability (OST program, infrastructure)
- ✓ Lack of transportation
- ✓ Lack of funding
- ✓ Time/schedule barriers
- ✓ Safety
- ✓ Lack of parent awareness

Facilitators for Out-of-School-Time Physical A… as reported by Parents, School & Community

Social Support: "…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*

Inclusivity: "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*

Time Policy "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 …rents are actually putting in …ke off half a week. And …ls are coming back and …, 'Oh, we went to the … for a day' or 'Hey we …nt 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*

Comm. Partnerships/Access: "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*

Common Facilitators

- ✓Social suppor… comm. lead…
- ✓Community …
- ✓Access (OST pr… infrastructure, park)
- ✓Time/schedules

	OST Program Participati…	Active Commuting	Park/Trail & …
• Community involvement • …living activities	• • • in neigh… 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	• • • promotion/educ…ation about walking/biking • Crossing guards • Community design/ infrastructure • Sufficient time to walk/bike • Feel safe • Weather/climate	• • • partners… safety &… improve… • Resident… • Building trust via …enforce… safety support • School schedules that support family time

Mapping Opportunities for Roadway Safety & Active Commuting in Partnership with the Montopolis Community– Key Findings

Co-Learning & Action Planning to Advance Vision Zero in Partnership with the Montopolis Community

Montopolis bridge

Project Aims: Identify barriers and supports for safe transportation and active commuting among young adults in and around the Montopolis community of Austin, TX

Study Partners: n=11 'change agents'; n=41 young adult interviewees (18-28 years).

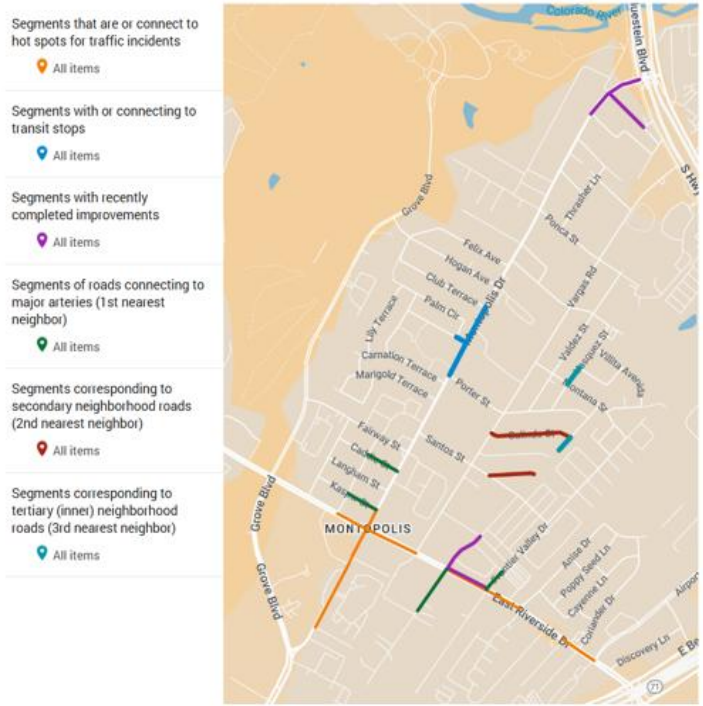
Timeframe: October 2023 – January 2025

Funder: City of Austin Transportation Dept.

Planning & Assessment Team

Springer, Trevino, Salvo, Thomas et al. (2025)

Walkability Audits using MAPS Instrument

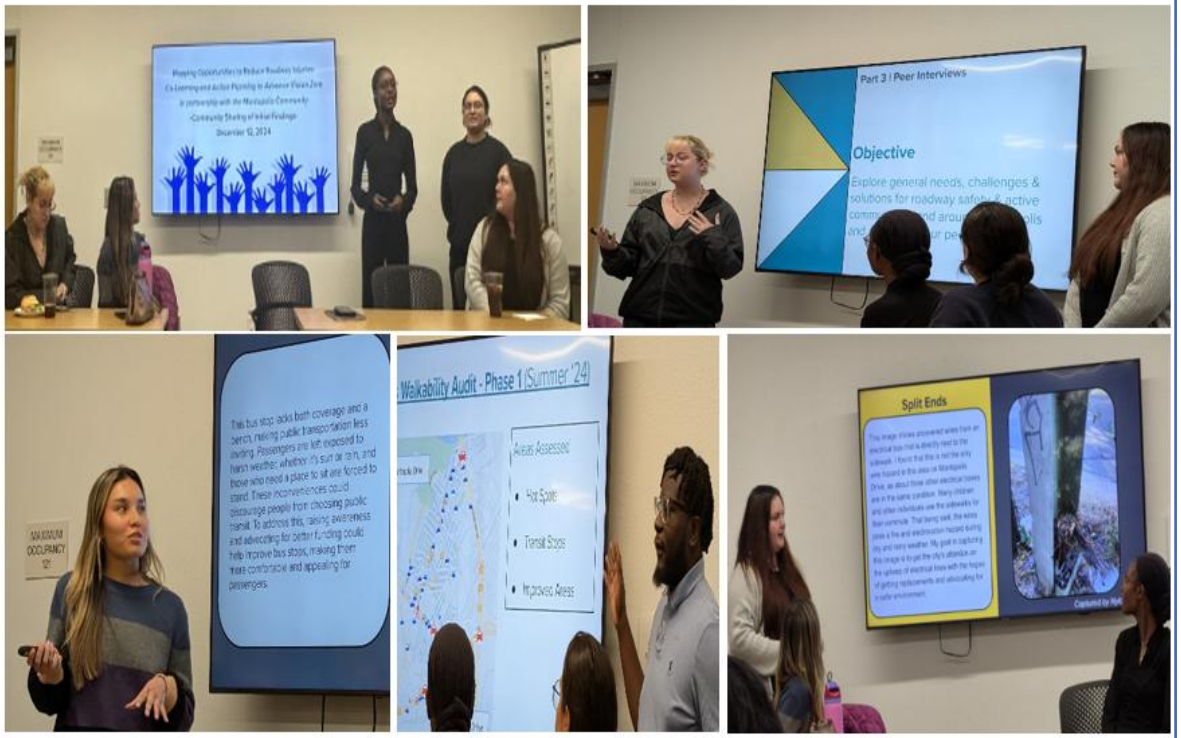


- *Sample*: 10 geographic areas (hotspots, bus stops, improved areas, and neighborhoods) and 24 street segments
- *Assets*: Among road segments assessed, 77.8% had sidewalks, with 66.7% having road buffers.
- *Need for improved community infrastructure:* sidewalks, lighting, bikeways, shade and crosswalks noted across assessment methods (e.g., 47.8% of road segments assessed lack crosswalks).

*Microscale Audit of Pedestrian Landscapes (Sallis et al.)

Community Sharing of Findings

Across Community Assessments



Vision Zero community scientists present findings

Community Forums

- ✓ Montopolis Rec Center (Summer 2024, Fall 2024, Spring 2025)
- ✓ Austin/Travis County Chronic Disease Work Group (Fall 2024)
- ✓ Dell Center Webinars (Fall 2024)
- ✓ MD Anderson Acres Homes Cancer Prevention Collaboration Scientific & Community Meetings (Fall 2025)

Conferences

- ✓ American Academy of Health Behavior (Spring 2026)
- ✓ American Association of Cancer Research (Fall 2025)
- ✓ Texas Association of City & County Health Officials (Spring 2026)

Organizational Websites

- ✓ City of Austin
- ✓ UTHealth School of Public Health

Summary & Discussion

Physical Act. Security (Lampert et al., '20)
"When all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and enjoyable physical activity to meet, not only their health needs, but to promote physical and emotional well-being and social connectedness, for an active and healthy life."

...non Themes Across Studies

Ongoing need and opportunity to support active living in TX.

- ✓ 12% of adults & 20% of children meet PA recommendations.

Disparities in physical activity

- ✓ Travis County & Harris County communities experiencing economic disadvantage = less LTPA among children & adults
- ✓ Montopolis: higher roadway injury & barriers for active commuting

Common Barriers *(Social Drivers of Health)*

...Climate: Hot weather; lack of shade

Economic: Time poverty (e.g., working two jobs; demanding schedules); cost of gym memberships/OST programs; rising housing costs that displace residents.

Neighborhood & Built Environment: Poor infrastructure and community design (e.g., lack of sidewalks/crosswalks; unsafe conditions to walk/bike; distance); park access

Social and Community Context: Lack of access to programming for specific groups (need for age/culturally relevant); safety and crime; transportation to parks/OST programs

Facilitators & Opportunities

Eco-system of PA Comm. Assets: How to further activate and grow?

Access/Availability of Programming & Rec. Areas/Facilities: Free/low cost at school, neighborhood, w/trusted others.

Social Support for Physical Activity (e.g., parents, teachers/principals, comm. partners; comm, events; shared history)

Supportive Schedules & Time Off (schedule flexibility, vacation days)
Transportation!

Inclusivity! (Cultural, language, age, underserved groups, all abilities)

Discussion How do we harness *social drivers of health* to support leisure-time PA and active commuting for all Texans?

Poverty rate: Texas 13.4% vs. U.S. 12.1% (2024)[44]

*Texas: 2nd state with highest average hours worked/week (35.8 vs. LA (highest) at 36.5 hours) (vs. DE (lowest): 31.1 hours)[45,46]

- Economic benefits for reducing youth PA disparities: "For every 1% in disparity reduction (in PA), total productivity losses would decrease by about $83.8 million, and total direct medical costs would decrease by about $68.7 million." (Powell-Wiley et al., 2024)[47]
- Vacation time improves employee well-being, with PA being a key factor (Grant et al., 2025: meta-analysis of 32 studies)[48]
- Public transit use (bus) increases PA (Evans et al., 2024)[49]
- Community design *(sidewalks, connectivity, safety, etc.)* increases walking, biking (CDC, n.d.)[50]
- Access to parks & recreational facilities = PA (CDC, n.d.)[50]

Example efforts in Austin and beyond:

Community Design

- Active Middle School Communities Study (Austin) (Hoelscher & Salvo)
- TAPREN (State) (Kellstedt & Lopez)
- Vision Zero (Austin & State)
- Living Streets (COA Transportation)
- Shared Use Agreements (COA)

Community Organizing, Networking & Promotion

- Austin/Travis County Active Living Collaborative *("Move your way"; PA Dashboard; Nature Prescriptions)*
- Cities Connecting Children to Nature
- Parks, People and Power (P3) - Central Texas Interfaith (Harris et al)

Acknowledgements – *Travis County Physical Activity Landscape Assessment*

- Community leaders ! (who gave input into this assessment)
- Haley Gardiner, MPH, Director, Be Well Communities, UT MD Anderson Cancer Center
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- Sana Amin, MPH, UTHealth Houston School of Public Health-Austin, Research Assistant
- Greta Frankert, MA (candidate), Maastricht University, Research Assistant
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Acknowledgements – *Acres Homes Child OST PA Study*

Project Partners

Acres Homes Community Partners

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- Alonzo Mims, Community Advisor & Teacher, AISD & Executive Director, Kings Bike & Hike Community

UTHealth Houston School of Public Health

- Nida Momin, Project Coordinator; Elysia Chandler, MPH, Research Assistant; Chris Pfledderer, Assistant Professor, Health Promotion/Behavioral Sciences

UT MD Anderson Cancer Center & Be Well Acres Homes

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Acres Homes Community

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- Acres Homes Community Advocacy Grouup

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University-Community Partnerships

An opportunity for advancing co-learning and action for active living promotion

Thank You!

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