

# **SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON YOUTH SPORTS**

**March 19, 2024 at 6:00 PM**

Chairman Morgan called the meeting to order.

The Clerk called the roll.

Present: Aldermen Morgan, Goonan, O'Neil, Vincent, Thomas

Messrs.: C. Telge, J. D'Onofrio

1. Discussion regarding the current state of youth sports in Manchester and the possibility of creating a Manchester Youth Sports Association.

Chairman Morgan stated the goal of this committee is to shine the light on the current state of youth sports in Manchester. We want to recognize and support all current leagues, find ways to create new leagues and offer more opportunity for kids to play sports at a low to no cost opportunity. I believe it is very important that the City of Manchester takes the lead with youth sports. Recognizing the current state of youth sports, I have attached a list of all of the current youth leagues, school leagues and others as of this month. This is a list of current leagues up to middle school and youth leagues as well. Is there any discussion on this list?

Alderman O'Neil asked how accurate do you think this is.

Chairman Morgan replied I got some of this from the Parks & Recreation website, which I believe is very accurate and talked to the school athletic director and it is also from general awareness of what I know. I think it is pretty accurate. There may be one or two missing but I think it is fairly accurate. If you see something, we can make a change. It is an ongoing process so this is not a final list.

Alderman Vincent stated middle school baseball.

Alderman O'Neil asked did I see skateboarding. I know Alderman Thomas has talked about that. I don't see it on here.

Chairman Morgan responded we can add that to the list under other recreation sports offerings/non-league. I would also like to introduce the concept of creating a Manchester Youth Sports Association similar to what other surrounding towns have successfully created and currently operate which is the governing body for all youth sports. This is the place where all families would go to find sports opportunities. I realize this is a big first step and a big idea for Manchester and there are a lot of moving parts to make this happen but moving forward, this direction will provide many benefits such as one place for all families to go to find opportunities, centralized registration process, pooling of resources for all leagues such as insurance, accounting and equipment ordering, greater fundraising opportunities to bring in more revenue for the association in support of the leagues, better management of athletic facility use, maintenance and support when needed. In addition, and most important is bringing unity for youth sports here in Manchester.

Alderman O'Neil asked is that a role that the city should be in or is it something that needs to come together from the various non-profits themselves. I don't know the answer.

Chairman Morgan responded that is why we are here; to try to figure it out. That is a good point.

Alderman Goonan asked what role are the schools going to have in this. It has been my experience with my kids that there is a lot more youth sports in schools or certainly more than when I was growing up. I see Christine at I think every baseball game and every softball game and she must go to most of the basketball games. I am curious on how you think something like that would work with the schools.

Alderman O'Neil asked based on this information, do you we know how many young people are participating in each one of them.

Chairman Morgan replied well we are going to bring Christine up and she...

Alderman O'Neil interjected I am not talking about schools but about the others that are listed.

Chairman Morgan stated that is something that we can definitely inquire about. It is just a matter of going to each league to find out how many kids are playing and then finding out how many kids are out there that could be playing. If there are no further questions, I will bring Christine and Jordan up here and we can have them make their presentation. This is agenda Item #2.

**2. Presentation by Christine Telge, Manchester School District Director of Athletics, regarding the impact of youth sports on school sports.**

Christine Telge, MSD Director of Athletics introduced herself and Jordan D'Onofrio who is the newly appointed Assistant Athletic Director. What we have done is put together a presentation that will talk a lot about the demographics and socio-economic changes within our city. We hope that you as our aldermen are aware of these changes. The presentation will specifically deal with how these change have affected athletic participation in the City of Manchester, as well as our overall competitiveness. We are going to talk a little bit about some national trends and go into how those national trends look on a Manchester basis. We are also going to talk briefly about the current state of recreational sports. I know you guys had some questions about that. I did start a focus group for some of our recreational sports leagues back in 2021 and we will share some of the information that those leagues were able to bring forward to us as we try to develop a plan going forward. We will also talk a little bit about our middle school feeder programs and the current state of those sports. Just a little bit of information about both Jordan and I. We both were born and raised in the City of Manchester. Both of us are public school graduates. Both of us are school athletes. I would say Jordan was a much better athlete than I was. Both of us agree that the current state of athletics is a lot different than it was when I graduated and even more so a lot different than when Jordan graduated. If you can't tell, he is quite a bit younger than I am. We have talked a lot about the changes. This presentation really talks about how do we be

more creative. How do we think outside the box? How do we become more mindful of our community and what our community needs for resources to help our athletes in the City of Manchester become better people? We have put a lot of thought into how this presentation will work and are mindful of what our students and athletes in the city need. I will turn it over to Jordan who is going to talk a little bit about the nationwide trends.

Jordan D'Onofrio, Assistant Athletic Director, stated through some research of current nationwide trends, 70% of students in the United States are dropping out of organized sports by the age of 13. There are a variety of reasons that we will get into throughout the demographic data that we have following this. From 2008 until 2016, and this is a little outdated, but this trend still holds true and that is that participation in organized sports among kids 6-12 decreased 7% and we continue to see that decrease for a variety of reasons. On this slide we have sports participation rates collected by the Sports Fitness Industry Association. They have the top part split by ages 6-12, 13-17 and then the total age group of 6-17. The total team sport is a student that participates in one sport occasionally. From 2019-2022, that number for younger kids from 6-12 rose about 3.3%. For the 13-17 age group, it dropped about 6% and then overall it was roughly no change. The big one is the core team sport and that is an athlete that participates at a consistent level on a regular basis in at least one sport and that is down for both age groups by roughly 5% and overall 5.5%. Overall, nationwide we are seeing a decrease in the amount of student athletes at the sub-high school and high school level. This chart is compiling all of the major sports. You will see core participation and again that is playing a sport regularly whether that is practices 3-4 times a week or what have you, from 2022 we have seen a staggering decrease in most sports with the exceptions of basketball and soccer which are staying relatively the same and rising a little bit. With baseball, we see a 20% decrease from 2019-2022 in the overall amount of athletes. Cheerleading is down 23%. Tackle football is down 13%. Softball is down 15%. Swimming is down 26%. Many of these sports are sports that we offer and we are seeing a decrease nationwide in the amount of kids participating. We were able to look through some census data from the 2020 census and we looked at it under the lens of the National Center of Health Statistics that did research in 2020 on participation numbers by athletes. This first graph is showing the amount of education a parent has achieved and the rates at which their kids participate. With a high school education or less, we see kids participate at 36.8% nationally in athletics. With an associate's degree or some college, it is about a 50-50 opportunity. With a bachelor's degree or higher, you see 67% of students participate in athletics. When we take this information from the US Census out, we compared ourselves to Goffstown, Nashua, Bedford, Londonderry and Hooksett. We tried to include towns nearby and include our sister city, Nashua. Overall, we are only below Nashua by about 4% in terms of a bachelor's degree and high school graduates but we are significantly lower compared to the surrounding times in the amount of 25 year olds that have achieved a high school diploma or higher and we are only about 32% in the 25 year olds that have achieved a bachelor's degree or higher. If we go back to that previous slide, that is a significant decrease compared to Bedford, which is 97% high school graduate or higher and 63% bachelor's degree or higher. Londonderry is 97% and 48% and Goffstown is 95% and 35.5%. That can lead to kids not having the understanding of the importance of playing sports or having the ability to do that. The next part is parent/guardian income and social vulnerability level. Again, this data is compiled from the National Center of Health

Statistics from 2020. When families earn less than 100% of the federal poverty line, 31% of those students participate in sports. This is the age group from 6-17 years old. From 100% to 400% of the federal poverty line it was about 50% and 400% and above we saw students participate at a 70% rate. These are consistent with looking at high school diploma or bachelor's degree. Little to no social vulnerability, 61% of those students were participating in sports. Low social vulnerability 56% and medium and high you saw a decrease in that. We have a very high population of high social vulnerability amongst our students as we are going to get to in the next slide. That is a significant drop of 20% from vulnerability and also when you look at the income, it is a 40% drop for someone less than 100% of the federal poverty line participating in sports. When we look at our district, our district in 2023 has a 57.4% free and reduced lunch rate. It is the highest in the state by far and that influences the students' ability to be able to not only afford the opportunities such as recreation leagues or private leagues that we will talk more about, but it is a significant hurdle for our students in the district to overcome. When we compare ourselves to Nashua, they are 15% below us in free and reduced lunch with a similar population of students. Hooksett is around 18.8% lower. Goffstown is 16.7%, Londonderry is 10.9% and Bedford 5.6%. The unique thing with those last four towns is they have very strong athletic programs at the high school, middle school and youth levels. Nashua is a little bit behind us in terms of trends that we are seeing but they are starting to experience more struggles when it comes to fielding teams and the competitive nature that we will get into later on. Over the course of the last 12 or so years going back to 2012, we decreased about 4,000 students but we increased by about 8% free and reduced lunch students. That is a significant hurdle that is going to affect the abilities of kids to be able to participate whether it is their parents being able to afford those recreation leagues or buy the equipment such as hockey equipment like sticks, gloves, etc. I coach lacrosse. A lot of my student athletes struggle to be able to afford that stuff and we have to find it. Many of them come from that free and reduced lunch situation. When we look at ourselves in income and poverty, our per capita income is comparable to the surrounding towns other than Londonderry and Bedford with around \$40,000 per capita. The interesting thing is we are 7.9% above in poverty rate compared to Nashua and Hooksett. That is significant and it is significant for the fact that many of these students, as we get into more of this data, have to help put food on their table or their parents do not have the time to bring them to opportunities whether it is a practice across the city or to any of the surrounding recreational opportunities. Housing. This lends itself to vulnerability statistics. Manchester has a 48.2% owner-occupied housing rate meaning most of our families in the city are renters and rents are starting to increase and when you add in the per capita income that also affects the stability of a kid's home and how important sports can be in their lives when they don't have that stability. When you compare us to Bedford, Goffstown, Hooksett and Londonderry, we are about 40% below them in terms of owner-occupied housing. When we look at living arrangements in terms of being in the same house for one year, that plays a role in the vulnerability of our students. If they are constantly having to move, even if it is just one street over, that is upheaval that again doesn't put sports at the top of the pecking order for them to want to participate in. We sit at around 82.6% which is about 4% below Nashua and roughly 10% below the other four surrounding towns. That is a hurdle that we have to find a way to get over to help our students. The last part is we are going to focus on the race and ethnicity part of it. These statistics are again from the Sports Fitness Industry Association. Comparing numbers from 2019-2022, students who are Caucasian

competed or participated in a very similar rate over those three years. When we look at African American students, there is a drop of about 1.6%. With Hispanic students, we saw a drop of about 3%. As we look at our demographic data in the city, it is one of our strengths; having so many different ethnicities and students from different cultures is one of the coolest things about not only me working in the school district but being part of this city because you get to learn so much about so many different cultures. It is a hurdle that we have to work through in terms of education about the sporting opportunities we have here and the importance that American society puts on sports. When you look at our foreign born citizens, that is 15% of our population in Manchester. I know the Manchester school district has the largest English Language Learning population in the state and that is a significant hurdle. Many students do not understand the sports that are offered or can even understand when they are being offered because of the language barrier, whether it is at home or in school. That is another hurdle that we have to be able to get over. The other part too is the importance of their understanding of the sports that are offered. Many of these students come from countries where soccer is the number one sport. As Christine will get into, that is one of our programs that is not dying. It is doing tremendously because of that culture shift in terms of who we have in the district. These are demographic trends over the course of that 11-year period from 2013 to 2022. Compared to our 2012 population, we lost about 23.7% of our school district. In that time, we decreased in white/non-Hispanic student population by about 20% and we saw an increase of 15% in Hispanic population, African Americans and multi-race. If you go back to the previous slides, there is not a strong a culture of participating in school athletics across the nation, not just in NH, when you look at this change in demographics.

Ms. Telge stated based on that data, we also looked at some further points to consider. Feeder town information. It is important to note that Bedford, which was once a feeder town for Manchester West High School, last year had 18 state title teams for the 2022-2023 school year. Central Girls Soccer. We took this as one example of how the feeder towns and the loss of those has directly affected athletics in the City of Manchester. Central Girls Soccer in 2015 was the last official year for the Hooksett and Candia students at Manchester Central. Slowly between 2015 and 2019, those students phased out of the Manchester school district. In 2015, 50% of the female starters on the Central Girls Soccer team were from Hooksett/Candia. In 2016, 63% of those starters. In 2017, 72% of the starters were from Hooksett/Candia. In 2018, 63% and in 2019, 54%. A large percentage of those female athletes came from our feeder towns. Now in talking to the coach who coached for many years at Manchester Central, he will tell you that the recreational feeder program at Hooksett and Candia directly affected the skill level of those girls coming to Manchester Central High School. They had a very strong recreational program where they offered both club and travel soccer at a very young age where those female athletes could participate and work on their skill development and by the time they came to Central, they were starters for the program there. The second issue we looked at was parent choice and the change in the lines for the Manchester school district. Hillside is the feeder school for Central with a small percentage of the students from McLaughlin going to Central. We have seen the effects of the district line change, which was in 2018. Back to the district line changes, in 2018 the lines were changed so those students that attended Weston Elementary School, which originally fed into Central, changed and now fed into Memorial. In 2023, Hillside girls' basketball for instance, had five 8<sup>th</sup> grade athletes.

Three of those five chose Trinity as their high school, thereby leaving that feeder program of one middle school feeding Central with two female athletes with playing experience into the high school team. The next issue we looked at was the recreational leagues on the west side. When I was growing up, the west side of Manchester had recreational leagues for baseball, football, basketball, softball and soccer. That is no longer the case. Besides the Manchester Angels that play spring and summer soccer, there are no longer recreational programs on the west side for our students and youth population K-8. That is a big impact as far as what we are seeing coming into our middle schools, as well as coming into our high schools. These are athletes with little to no experience in the sport that they want to play. This year, Jordan and I also ran an athletic survey where we surveyed our high school students. We had 510 respond to our survey. Jordan and I really feel that our athletes responded more than non-athletes but it was very telltale, especially for those students who were not athletes or didn't consider themselves athletes as far as their barriers to playing school sports. The number one barrier was work or school conflicts. A lot of our students need to work to support their family or they need to work to support themselves. That is directly affecting their participation in school sports at middle school and especially at our high school level. You will also see that 20% of these students responded that they had family responsibilities that did not allow them to participate in sports. Transportation, which is a big concern, especially at the middle school level. 10% of our athletes are not participating because of transportation. Specifically, you will see that transportation has a bigger effect on those students coming from the inner city who want to play sports at McLaughlin but do not have a way to get back and forth for practices and game play. Play for travel or AAU teams was only 4% and success of teams 4%. We are going to talk a little bit about that. You can see some data about who the students were who responded to the survey on the left-hand side and some of the barriers, as well as what they felt would help athletics as we go forward into the future. We wanted to include the Manchester teams win/loss ratios. As we see our surrounding towns be successful on the playing surface, we have struggled and we will continue to struggle. We are at a point right now where we are fielding teams, not putting forth competitive teams in most of our sports. This is the win/loss from the last five years. Our most successful teams, as Jordan said, are the boys' soccer and basketball. Those are the programs in some of our schools that have JV and Freshman if we are lucky enough. Boys' basketball has been one of the only programs to have made cuts in the last few years. Participation numbers. We looked from 2014 to the present. If you look at 2014, it is important to note that Central number included Hooksett and Candia students. We are down right now over 300 athletes at Central. That is affecting everything else that we see. Memorial, while we see 20-30 athletes down, the change in district lines and bringing Weston to Memorial did help with those numbers and bringing them close to what we saw in the past. You will see a big decline in the numbers at West. The positive on this slide is the increase in the participation numbers at our middle school level. With the continued options that we have added in during the last two years which includes boys and girls' soccer, baseball, softball, wrestling and flag football, we are seeing the numbers increase. All of these sports are being offered free of charge with skill development. So you are seeing those numbers increase and I would expect those numbers to continue to rise as we go. Right now, those numbers for 2023-2024 are lower than 2022-2023 because our middle school has not started. We tend to have parents that register late or when tryouts start. Those numbers have gone up just since

we created this slide and we will continue to see them rise. I would assume that all of those numbers will come up and if not match, surpass the numbers we saw previously.

Chairman Morgan stated I don't want to interrupt but we only have three minutes left. I know we have a ton of questions. We will bring you back for our next meeting. I apologize to you and Mark Gomez for not having enough time.

Alderman O'Neil stated something that would be important to me is data from last year and this year as far as how many kids tried out for teams and how many got cut. Kids get cut in elementary and middle school and I especially want those numbers for the two sports that are the most popular and those are soccer and basketball. That is very important and that is where I think we have a chance to capture kids for those two sports. If you can come back with some data on how many kids made teams and how many kids got cut for last year and this year, that would be great.

Ms. Telge responded okay we can do that. We can share this presentation with the committee so you can have all of this information.

3. Overview of relationship between Parks & Recreation and youth sports, as well as the condition and use of athletic fields by Mark Gomez, Chief of Parks, Recreation and Cemetery.

*There being no time left for the meeting, on motion of **Alderman Vincent**, duly seconded by **Alderman O'Neil**, it was voted to adjourn.*

A True Record. Attest.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Matthew Normand". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Clerk of Committee