



Cultivating the next generation of character

Quantifying the impact of extracurriculars, including sports, on youth development

April 2023



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Section 1

Research introduction

Research methodology and
overview of key findings



Methodology

This survey was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of First Tee from March 17 to March 20, 2023, among 2,082 U.S. adults, including 542 parents of children under the age of 18.

We captured data on youth's involvement in extracurricular activities, including those who currently are involved (n=393), and those who are involved in sports (n=256). We also analyzed data by gender, age, race, education, and income, among other characteristics.

Parents are concerned about the next generation of character in America

The state of children's development and well-being is keeping parents up at night

87%

of parents are losing sleep at night due to concerns about their child's development.

6 in 10 say their children have a high level of stress, with majorities saying they are concerned about their children's emotional (60%), behavioral (59%), social (58%), academic (55%), and physical health (55%).

Character is a "lost value" driven by a lack of regular opportunities to cultivate and practice it

85%

of parents say, "Character is a lost value that should be more emphasized in today's society."

More than half (53%) of parents say, "I'm concerned my child doesn't have enough opportunities to build character in their day-to-day life."

Sports offer an opportunity to fill the character gap

95% of parents say, "It's important that children have regular opportunities to build character."

76% of parents say that playing golf helps children build character and teaches children important life skills.



Parents' priority outcomes from extracurriculars are building confidence and character

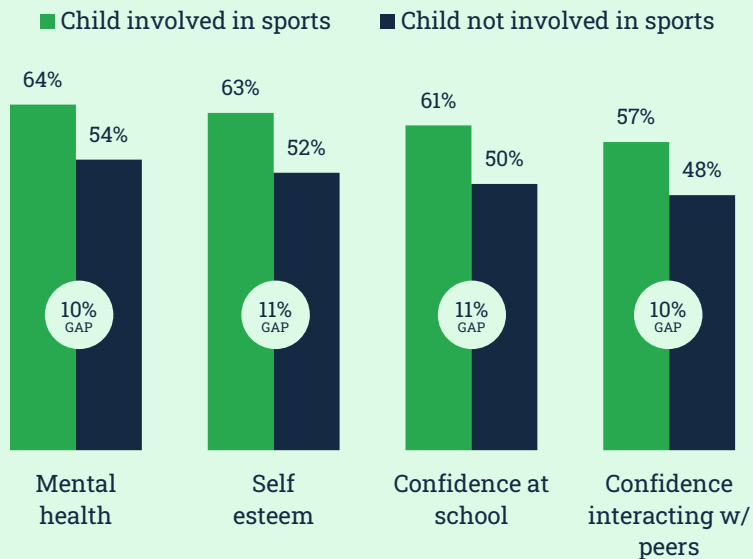
73% of parents say their kids are involved in extracurriculars, with sports being the #1 type of extracurricular activity.

80% of parents agree, "Participation in extracurricular activities is more about development than recreation."

60% of parents enroll their children in extracurriculars to build confidence; many also do so for ongoing character development (43%) and as an emotional outlet (42%).

The top values parents are hoping to cultivate from extracurricular participation are self-confidence (64%), character (62%), fitness (57%), and leadership (57%).

Children who participate in extracurriculars have higher levels of well-being and confidence



*Gaps may differ from their visual appearance due to rounding

Youth sports cultivate well-being and character

Parents attest that sports not only boost their children's physical well-being, but also their social, behavioral, emotional, and academic health. Parents also say sports are effective for improving children's mental health (95%), creating opportunities to learn life skills and build character (95%), and providing supportive adults to help strengthen their child's character development (94%).

Parents whose children play sports say their activities have a positive impact on their children's:

94%

Social
health

93%

Physical
health

93%

Behavioral
health

92%

Emotional
health

76%

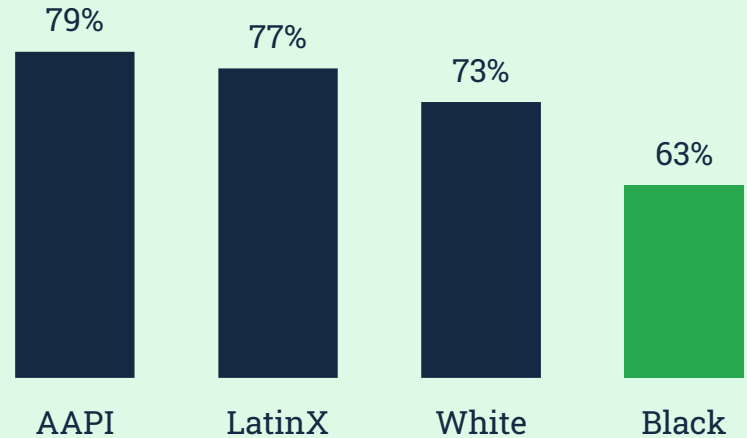
Academic
health



But it's not an even playing field...

- **93% of Black parents** have lost sleep at night due to concerns about their child's development (vs. 87% total)
- **90% of Black parents** say, "Character is a lost value that should be more emphasized in today's society" (vs. 85% total)
- **65% of Black parents** are concerned their child doesn't have enough opportunities to build character in their day-to-day life" (vs. 53% total)

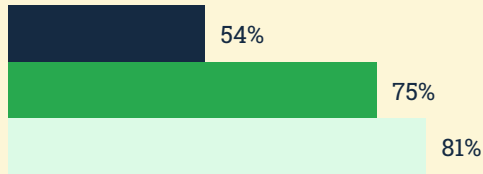
Participation in extracurriculars by race



Lower income families are also impacted by lower rates of extracurricular participation

Participate in extracurriculars

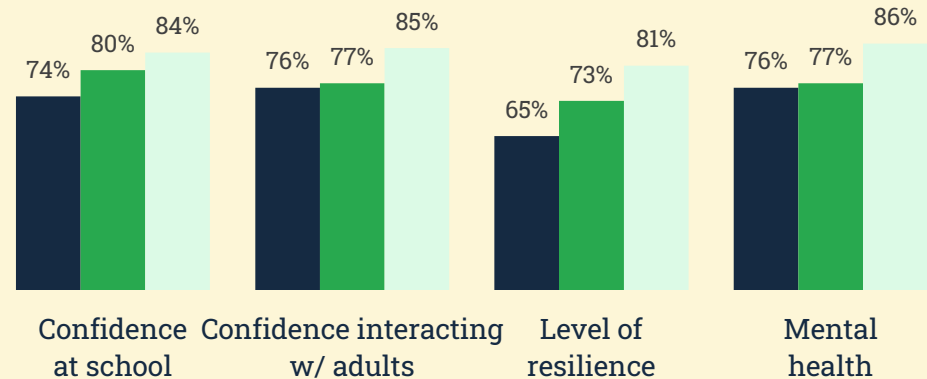
■ Less than \$50K ■ \$50K - \$99.9K ■ \$100K+



Only 41% of low-income parents (<\$50K) say their children belong to at least one youth organization (vs. 52% total).

Confidence, resilience, and mental health by income

■ Less than \$50K ■ \$50K - \$99.9K ■ \$100K+



Section 2

The next-generation character gap

Parents are concerned about their children having adequate development opportunities

87%

of parents lose sleep at night, thinking about the impact of these factors on their child's development

93% Black

Parents are losing sleep over the current state of their children's development

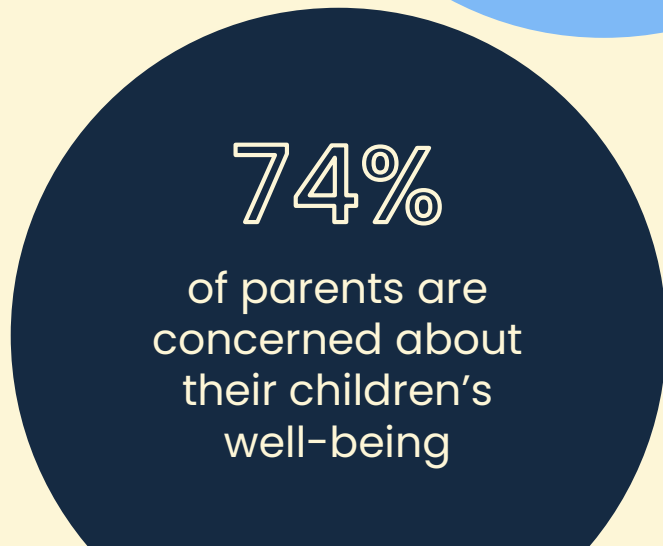
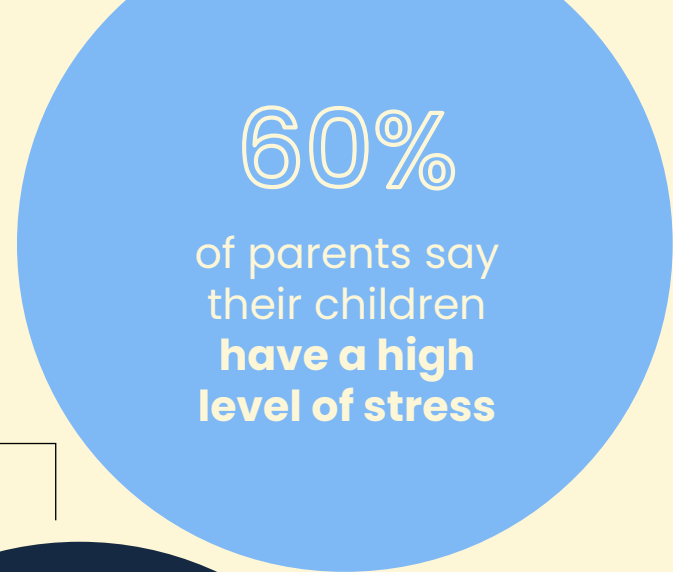
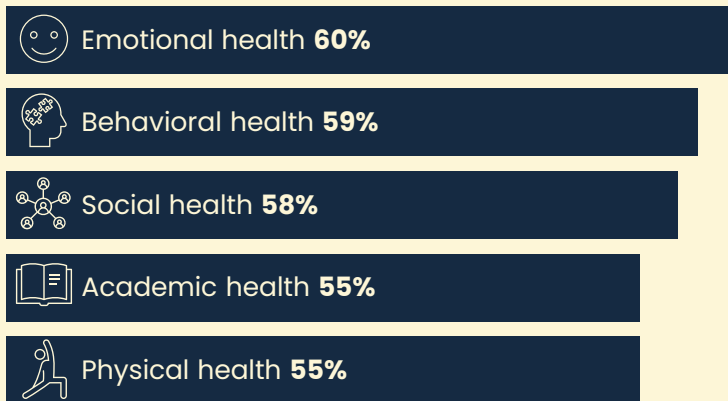
Factors that have caused parents to lose sleep when thinking about the impact on their child's development

Bullying	41%	Exposure to ideals I disagree w/	24%
Impact of social media	37%	Access to quality education	23%
Peer pressure	36%	Insecurity (food, housing, finance)	22%
Influence of technology	35%	Environmental health	21%
COVID-19	35%	Discrimination	20%
Exposure to explicit content	30%	Effective support system	14%
Threats to personal safety	24%	None of these	13%

QSIQ4: Which of the following factors, if any, have caused you to lose sleep when thinking about the impact they may have on your child's development? Please select all that apply. (n=542 parents of children under the age of 18)

Parents are concerned about their children's well-being amid a stressful day-to-day reality

Percent of parents who are concerned about their child's...



QS1Q3: On a scale from 1-10, how concerned are you currently about each of the following aspects of your child's development? (Top 5) | QS1Q5: On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate each of the following for your child? (Top 5) (n=542 parents of children under the age of 18)

Parents fear that today's youth are experiencing a worrisome character-building gap

While an overwhelming majority of parents agree on the importance of building character in the next generation, most also attest that it is not valued enough in today's society.

More than half of parents are **concerned their child doesn't have enough opportunities to build character** in their day-to-day life, such as mentors who care about their growth, and activities that require sacrifice and/or resilience (53%). This is especially true for Black parents (65%) and those whose children are ages 13-17 (63%).

95%

of parents say, "It's important that children have regular opportunities to build character."

85%

of parents also say, "**Character is a lost value that should be more emphasized in today's society.**"

Section 3

Extracurricular engagement

Parents turn to extracurriculars to cultivate character and confidence

Nearly three-quarters of parents say their kids are involved in extracurriculars

For the vast majority, participation is driven by the child's interests. Eighty-four percent of parents say, "My child is in control of their extracurricular activities (e.g., decision to participate, activities chosen, etc.)."

73%

More than half (52%) of parents say their children belong to at least one youth organization.

of parents say their child(ren) are involved in extracurriculars

Participation in extracurricular activities by race

AAPI	79%
LatinX	77%
White	73%
Black	63%

73% of those whose children are not involved in extracurriculars would like for them to participate in them in the future.

From socialization to education, parents say that extracurriculars are all about development

Most popular reasons for participating in extracurricular activities

Socialization	66%	Occupies time	33%
Physical outlet	62%	Ongoing education	31%
Build confidence	60%	Mentorship/support	29%
Pursue interests	53%	Improves resume	18%
Exposure to new things	52%	Serves as a childcare option	10%
Ongoing character development	43%	Requirement	9%
Emotional outlet	42%		

Moms are especially interested in extracurriculars for socialization (71%), pursuing interests (60%), and exposure to new things (59%). Younger and lower income parents tap into more practical benefits: Gen Z and Millennial parents are more likely to choose extracurriculars as a childcare option, while those who make less than \$50,000 a year cite occupying time as a priority.

QS1Q9: Which of the following are reasons why extracurricular activities? Please select all that apply. (n=496 parents of children under the age of 18 that participate now in extracurriculars or will do so in the future) | SIQ6: How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? (Top 2=Strongly/somewhat agree) (n=542 parents of children under the age of 18)

80%

of parents say, "Participation in extracurricular activities is **more about development than recreation.**"

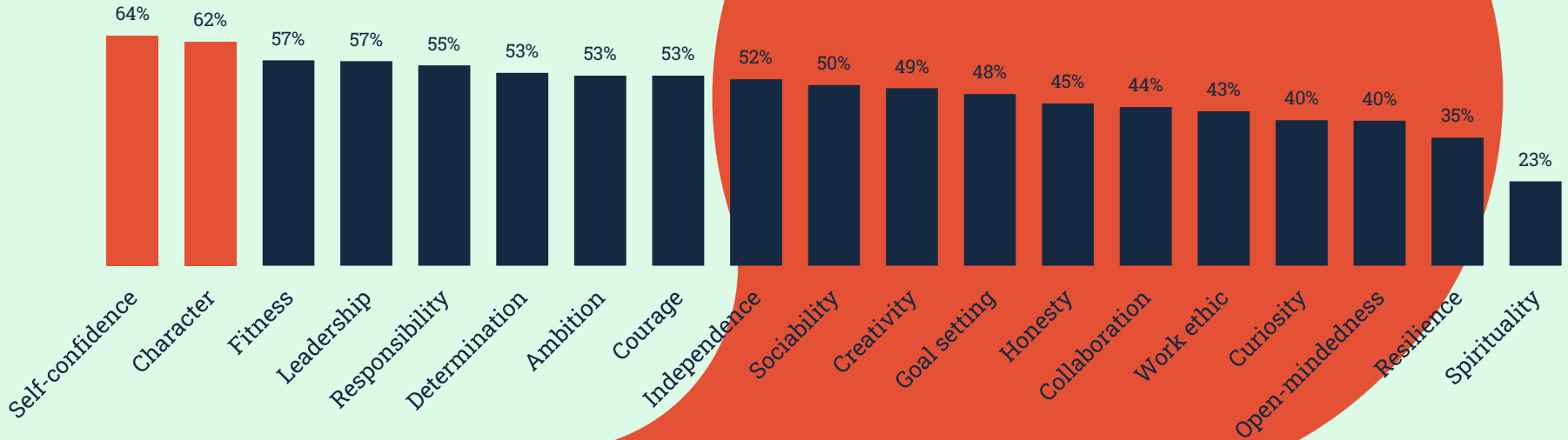
Pre-teen developmental phase:

Parents of children ages 10 to 12 are more likely to agree that extracurriculars are more about development than recreation (89%) and to cite building confidence as a reason for participating (71%).



Confidence and character rank as the most sought-after values from extracurricular activities

Top skills and values desired from participation in extracurricular activities

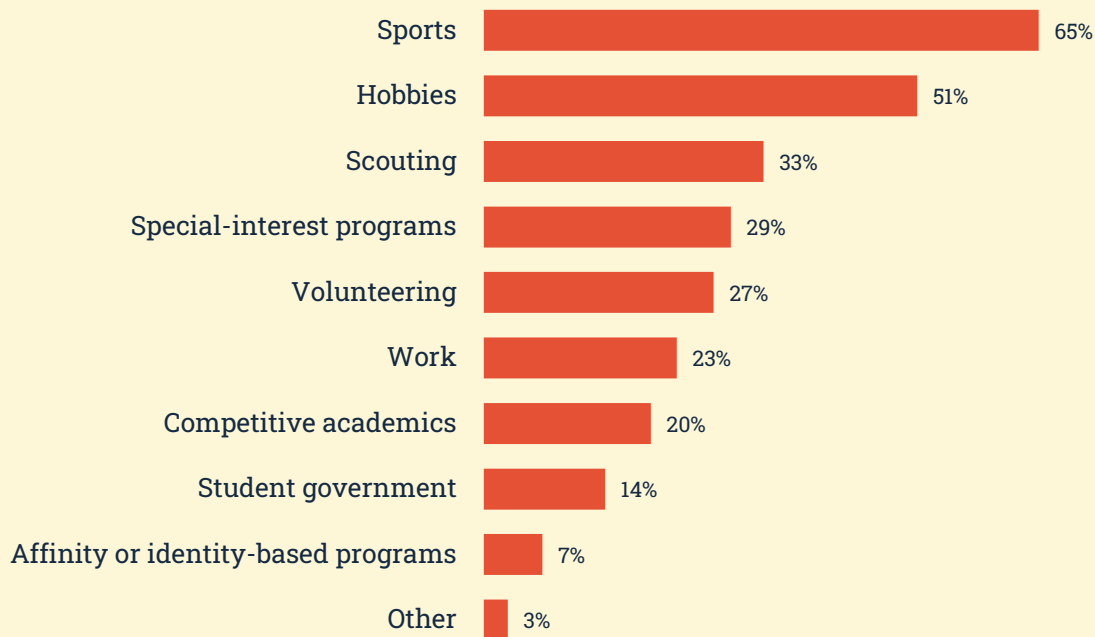


As parents turn to extracurriculars to cultivate confidence and character, sports are the most popular choice

Sports, followed by hobbies (such as coding, music, and art), and scouting are the top types of extracurriculars today. Special-interest programs and volunteer work round out the top five, with particularly strong engagement among low-income families (34% and 36%, respectively).

Work and competitive academics fall next in the ranking, with the latter being particularly popular for AAPI families (33%). Finally, a smaller portion of parents say their children participate in student government and affinity or identity-based programs – though the latter is nearly twice as popular among Black families (13%).

Top youth extracurricular activities



QS1Q13: Which of the following types of extracurricular activities, if any, does your child currently participate in (e.g., at school, through a youth organization)? Please select all that apply. (n=393 parents of children under the age of 18 who are currently involved in extracurriculars) | Low-income families are those with <\$50K HHI annually

Basketball is the most popular sport, though parents also see the character-building benefits of golf

Top youth sport activities

1 Basketball	47%	8 Gymnastics	17%
2 Soccer	34%	9 Tennis	16%
3 Football	33%	10 Hockey	8%
4 Baseball or softball	32%	11 Lacrosse	8%
5 Track & field	22%	12 Golf	7%
6 Swim & dive	20%	13 Other	7%
7 Dance	18%		

SIQ14: Which of the following sports does your child play as an extracurricular activity (e.g., on a school team, through a youth organization)? Please select all that apply. (n=256 parents of children under the age of 18 who are currently involved in sports). | SIQ16: How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? (Top 2=Strongly agree/somewhat agree); (n=542 parents of children under the age of 18, n=72 First Tee participants)

“

76%

of parents agree, “Playing golf helps teach children important life skills.”

94% First Tee Participants
82% Black

76%

of parents also agree, “Playing golf helps children build character.”

88% First Tee Participants

”

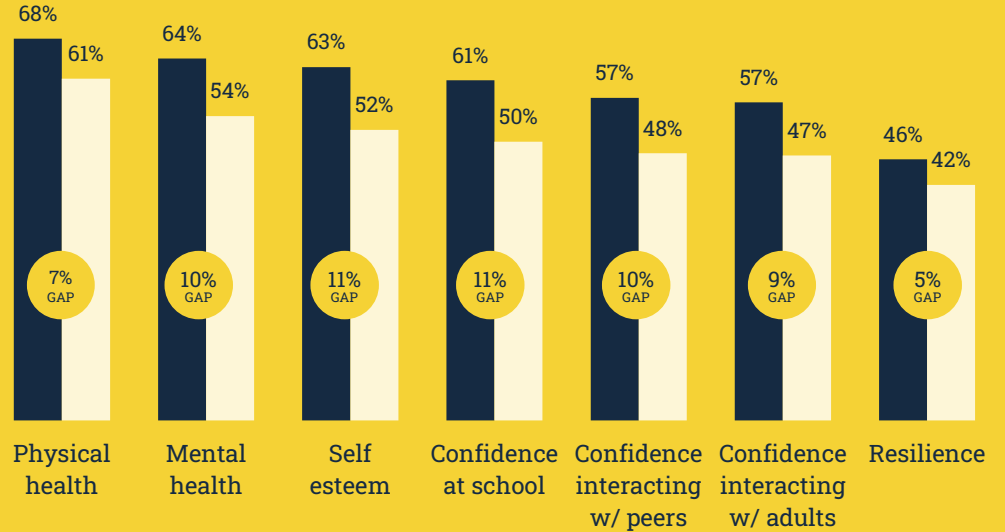
Being involved in sports has numerous developmental benefits, including building confidence and character

Parents of children who play sports report higher levels of mental and physical health, confidence at school and with others, as well as self esteem and resilience in their children, compared to those whose children do not play sports.



Perceived characteristics of children involved in sports

■ Child involved in sports □ Child not involved in sports



QSIQ5: On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate each of the following for your child? (Top 3) (n=542 parents of children under the age of 18); *gaps may differ from their visual appearance due to rounding

The vast majority of parents say sports are also effective for creating long-term life skills

Parents say their child's activities are effective for...
(among parents whose child plays sports)

95%

Improving children's mental health

95%

Creating opportunities to learn life skills and build character

94%

Providing supportive adults to strengthen character dev.

94%

Creating opportunities to work with others

93%

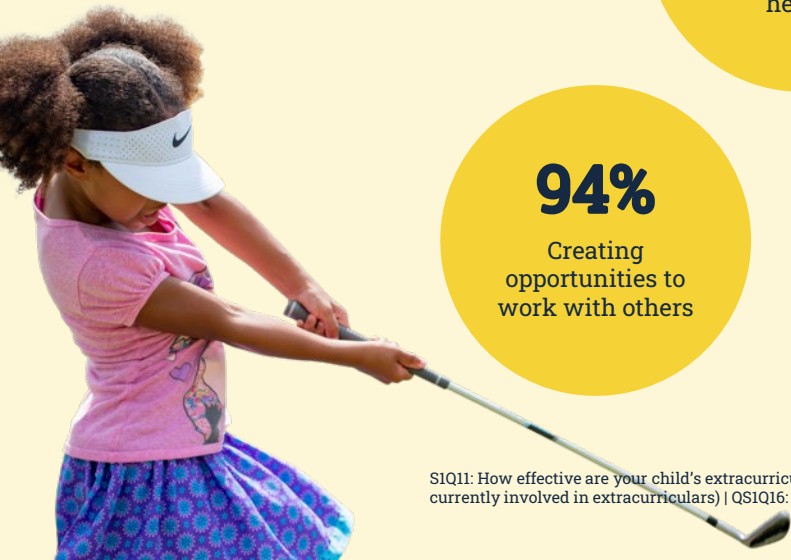
Exposing to new things

91%

Offering mentorship/support

92% of parents agree, "Positive coaches of youth sports provide a good source of external mentorship (i.e., from a non-family member)."

SIQ11: How effective are your child's extracurricular activities at each of the following? (Top 2= Very/somewhat effective) (n=393 parents of children under the age of 18 who are currently involved in extracurriculars) | QSIQ16: How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? (n=542 parents of children under the age of 18)



Sports are a critical tool for well-being and character-building

Parents say their child's activities have a positive impact on...
(among parents whose child plays sports)



Social health **94%** (+8% vs. children in non-sports activities)



Physical health **93%** (+11% vs. children in non-sports activities)



Behavioral health **93%** (+10% vs. children in non-sports activities)



Emotional health **92%** (+7% vs. children in non-sports activities)



Academic health **76%**

91%
of parents agree,
"Playing sports
**helps children build
character."**

91%
of parents also agree,
"Playing sports
**teaches children
important life skills."**



SIQ12: What type of impact has participating in extracurricular activities had on each of the following aspects of your child's development? (Top 2= Very/somewhat effective) (n=393 parents of children under the age of 18 who are currently involved in extracurriculars) | QSIQ16: How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? (Top 2 = strongly / somewhat agree) (n=542 parents of children under the age of 18)

Thank you!



x

