

Getting Children Outdoors

Goal: Improve and create new opportunities for children to be active in the outdoors.

Public open spaces play a major role in getting people outdoors, creating a sense of community and well-being. More importantly, these places provide a means for both children and adults to be physically active and to live healthy lifestyles. This is critical when childhood obesity is an epidemic nationally and in Delaware. Park and recreation facilities including trails and community pathways provide an outlet for everyone to engage in positive lifelong activities. Most adults who participate in outdoor recreation were introduced to outdoor activities as a child. With the growing number of electronic distractions (TV, computers, smartphones, video games, etc.), engaging youth participation is critical to sustain future generations of outdoor enthusiasts and land stewards.

The Outdoor Foundation's study, entitled *Exploring the Active Lifestyle*, looked at what sparks consumers' involvement in the outdoors and barriers to participation. According to the study, 90 percent of adults who participate in outdoor recreation were



introduced to outdoor activities between the ages of 5 and 18 - making today's youth participants critical to building future generations of healthy, outdoor participants. Close to 60% of children and young adults ages 6 through 24 participate in some type of outdoor recreation, but this statistic has consecutively decreased over the past few years. Minority populations are severely under represented with only 21% participating in outdoor recreation.

Studies indicate a discrepancy in how children and adults participate in outdoor recreation activities.

National surveys indicate that youth in America tend to participate in more

'extreme' outdoor activities such as skateboarding, BMX bicycling, snowboarding, climbing, and triathlons. It is interesting to note that though certain popular youth activities like skateboarding, BMX bicycling, and mountain biking all have less than 10% youth participation however, the frequency of participation is much higher in these activities. There may not be as many participants, but those who are participating are doing so twice or three times as much as other activities.

Recommendations:

Continue to conduct outdoor recreation participation studies aimed at specific user groups and demographics to better understand outdoor recreation in Delaware.

The Delaware Children in Nature Task Force was formed to address the challenge of reconnecting children with nature. The Task Force is Delaware's commitment to the nationwide No Child Left Inside movement. Two Task Force committees have focused on different approaches to get kids outside: school-based and community-based education. Both committees strive to ensure that every Delaware



child has the opportunities and benefits of exploring, growing, and learning from our diverse natural environment.

Recommendations:

Provide technical assistance to the Children In Nature Task Force.

Schools are an often overlooked resource for helping children reconnect with the outdoors. Growing research indicates that children who have meaningful outdoor experiences have higher rates of achievement than those who do not. In December 2011, Nemours Health and Prevention Services (NHPS) along with representatives from the Delaware Department of Education announced the results of a recent study that demonstrated a clear and consistent relationship between fitness and academic achievement regardless of a student's gender, race, family income or school district. The data showed students who are more physically fit perform significantly better in both reading and math.

These findings are consistent with a number of research studies suggesting a link between physical activity, student behavior, and academic achievement. Studies have shown that physical activity is linked to better concentration, reduced disruptive behaviors and higher test scores in reading, math and writing. This Nemours Health and Prevention Services study is the first to demonstrate these relationships among Delaware students. Studies like this only reinforce the necessity of parks and recreation



facilities for the social and mental development of our young citizens.

Recommendations:

Provide training to develop schoolyard habitats, outdoor classrooms and/or school gardens to assist in reconnecting youth to their environment.

Establish and maintain an environmental education resource clearinghouse.

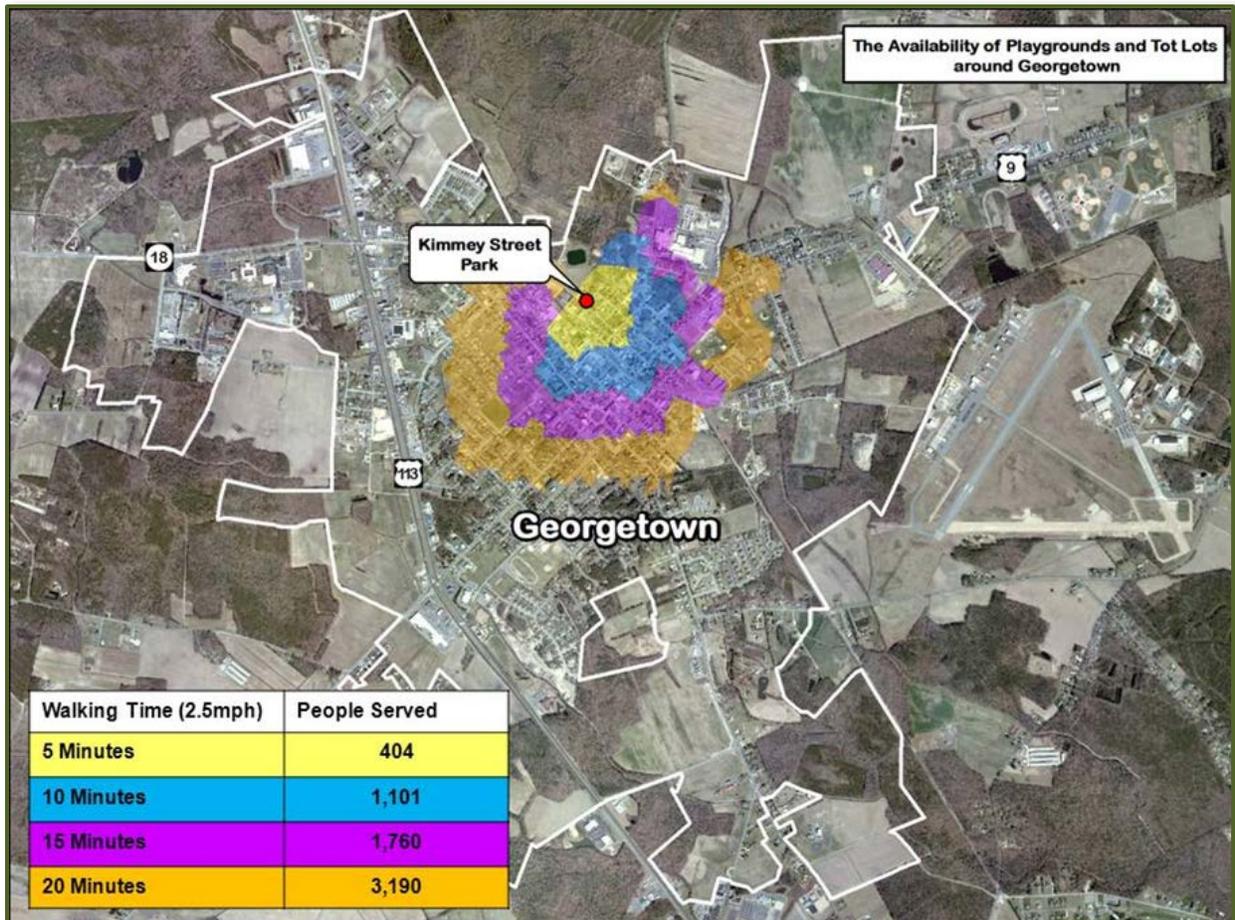
Importance of School Facilities

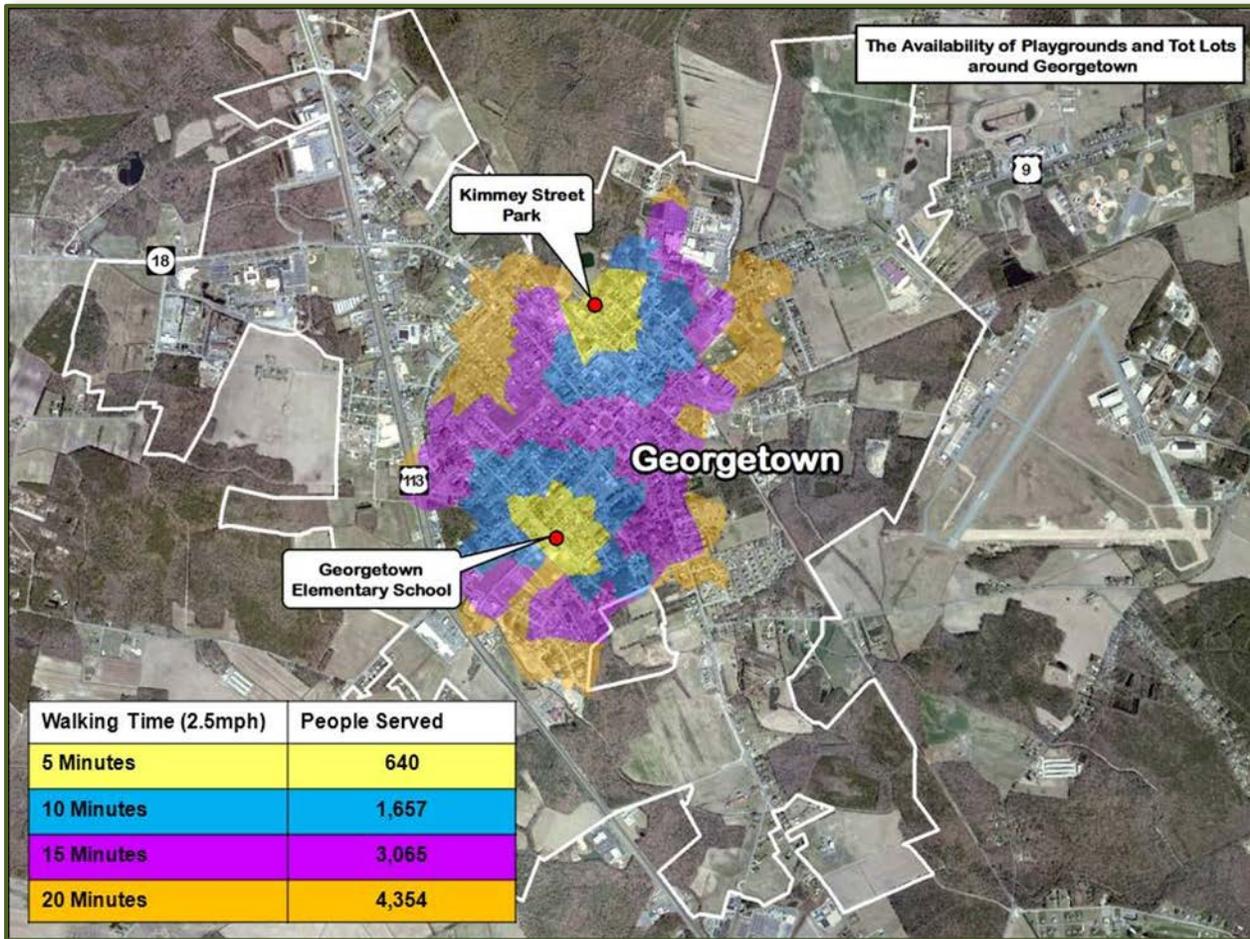
Today, more than ever, there is a lack of integration between indoor classroom instruction and experiential outdoor learning and free play exploration. What is widely perceived by the public as the ‘culture of testing’ in our schools has taken precedence and funding away from experiential outdoor learning. Twentieth century land use patterns, school design (no windows) and community design have moved schools away from community centers creating an atmosphere of isolation, and thus, misses the opportunity to engage children in walking and bicycling to school. The closure of a school facility during non-school hours combined with vehicle only access to schools drastically decrease available outdoor recreation spaces and facilities. Opening a



school’s outdoor facilities for community use at times schools are closed drastically increase the availability of outdoor spaces for youth and families, promote healthy lifestyles, and foster stewardship of our schoolyards.

Schools play a role in providing recreational opportunities for kids and young adults. But not all school facilities are available after school hours. Spatial analyses tools can determine the disparity in the number of people served when school facilities remain closed to the public. As an example, conducting a network analyses for playgrounds and tot lots, it becomes clear that there is a large gap in services around Georgetown, DE. This example shows the value of school facilities remaining available for public use after school hours. Kimmey Park is the only public recreation area that provides play equipment in Georgetown. In no other public park or open space in Georgetown is there a playground or tot lot. A walk-shed analysis for Kimmey Park shows that approximately 404 people live within a five minute walk to that tot lot. In this example, there is nearly an entire municipality with little to no close to home access to public active play facilities. This is alarming when the population of Georgetown has





grown 38.3% to 6,422 people between 2000 and 2010 and 29% of those residents are under the age of 18.

If the analysis includes school playground and tot lots, the number of residents served increases to 640. For an accurate analyses, more information would be needed to determine individual school policies and the actual availability of their recreation facilities. This type of analysis strengthens the need for joint use agreements with schools.

Recommendations:

Coordinate discussion between the Department of Education, the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control, and other outdoor recreation providers to share outdoor recreation facilities and resources.

Increase community access to school recreational facilities by reducing barriers associated with use.

Identify public school facilities that are not publicly available during non-school time. An analysis will identify gaps in services essential for demonstrating the importance of schools in meeting outdoor recreation needs.

Ensure the long-term maintenance and safety of all recreation facilities by encouraging schools to participate in playground safety certification courses.

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<i>RECOMMENDATIONS</i>	<i>IMPLEMENTERS</i>	<i>AGO</i>
1. Continue to conduct outdoor recreation participation studies aimed at specific user groups and demographics.	<i>DPR, Nemours, DF&W, DE Greenways, DEDO, local governments</i>	
2. Provide technical assistance to the Children In Nature Task Force.	<i>DNREC, DOE, DNS, DAEE, DE Center for Inland Bays, USFWS, NHPS, Delaware Greenways, DPH, local governments, DelDot, DE Wildlands, OSPC, USDA-NRCS, Girl Scouts/Boy Scouts of America, DE Dept. of Agriculture, UD, DSU</i>	
3. Provide training to develop schoolyard habitats, outdoor classrooms and/or school gardens to assist in reconnecting youth to their environment.	<i>Center for Inland Bays, Delaware Nature Society, Delaware Dept. of Agriculture</i>	
4. Establish and maintain an environmental education resource clearinghouse.	<i>DNREC, Delaware Dept. of Agriculture, DNS, Delaware Greenways, UD, DSU, DAEE</i>	
5. Coordinate discussion between Department of Education, the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control and other outdoor recreation providers to share outdoor recreation facilities and resources.	<i>DNREC, DOE, American Heart Association, DE HEAL</i>	
6. Increase community access to school recreation facilities by reducing barriers associated with use.	<i>OSPC, DNREC, DelDot, DOE,</i>	

7. Identify public school facilities that are not publicly available during non-school time.	<i>DOE, DE HEAL</i>	
8. Ensure long-term maintenance and safety of all recreation facilities.		