

Clarke County School District Youth Development Initiative

Objective: To create a Youth Development Initiative by providing positive, structured sports programs for the youth of Clarke County that develops values and skills that will serve them well as they prepare for the rest of their lives.

Benefits of Youth Sports

Effective youth sport programs actively work to assure positive outcomes through developmentally appropriate designs and supportive relationships. Research supports that participating in youth sports can lead to immediate and long-term benefits for youth, their families, and communities. Youth who have the desire to participate in youth sports should have the opportunity regardless of their race, ethnicity, sex, or ability.

The following information published by the President's Council on Sports, Fitness & Nutrition Science Board in 2020 demonstrates the wide range of benefits of participating in youth sports:

- Mental, Emotional, and Social Health
 - Lower rates of anxiety and depression
 - Lower amounts of stress
 - Higher self-esteem and confidence
 - Reduced risk of suicide
 - Less substance abuse and fewer risky behaviors
 - Increased cognitive performance
 - Increased creativity
 - Greater enjoyment of all forms of physical activity
 - Increased life satisfaction
- Physical Health
 - Improved bone health
 - Improved weight status
 - Increased cardiorespiratory and muscular fitness
 - Reduced risk of cancer and diabetes
 - Improved cardiovascular fitness
 - Decreased body fat percentage
 - Increased overall quality of life
- Educational and Career Success
 - Improved teamwork, social skills, and social responsibility
 - Improved life skills (e.g., goal setting, time management, work ethic, empathy, negotiation)

- Increased empowerment, personal responsibility, and self-control
- Improved educational and occupational skills (e.g., determination, perseverance, grit, resilience, critical thinking)
- Higher levels of academic achievement
- Greater leadership qualities

Limited Opportunities for Clarke County Youth to Participate Sports

When compared to surrounding counties, the opportunities for the youth of Clarke County to participate in youth sports programs are limited. There are two primary factors that limit the youth sports opportunities in Clarke County:

1. Athens Clarke County Leisure Services does not offer comparable youth programs as the Recreation Departments in surrounding counties.
2. Cost-barriers exist for many of the youth in our community. Expenses related to youth sports programs include not only registration and participation fees, but also transportation cost to practices and out of town games, required equipment and gear expenses, and facility usage fees.

Clarke County School District Youth Sports Programs

CCSD provided opportunities for 4th and 5th graders to participate on school-based basketball and soccer teams for 2022-2023. These initial sport programs have been a success and provided the foundation to offer more opportunities for youth sports programs. Providing youth positive, structured programs to counter the lure of negative influences in our community is of paramount importance.

CCSD will build upon the success of the basketball and soccer programs and provide the following sports programs for the youth of Clarke County for the upcoming school year as part of the Youth Development Initiative.

- Basketball: Continue school-based 4th and 5th grade school-based teams. 6th grade boys and girls teams will be added for each middle school. Each middle school will have a boys and a girls 6th grade basketball team through the Community Youth and Development Organization. In addition, 4th, 5th, 6th and 7th grade CCSD teams will compete in the [Athens Premier Basketball League](#) for the boys and the [Northeast Georgia Feeder League](#) for the girls. Fundamental and skills development camps will be offered throughout the year.
- Cross Country: 6th grade students will be allowed to try out for their middle school cross country team.
- Cheerleading and Football: The Gladiator Youth Football program and the Jaguar Youth Football program will provide football and cheerleading opportunities for CCSD students. The teams will compete in the [NGYFA](#). Participation will be determined by the students' high school attendance zone. Each organization will offer 7U, 8U, 9U, 10U, 11U, and 7th grade football teams and cheer squads. Fundamental and skills development camps will be offered throughout the year.

- Soccer: Continue school-based 4th and 5th grade school-based teams. 6th grade students will be allowed to try out for their middle school soccer team. Fundamental and skills development camps will be offered throughout the year.
- Track and Field: 6th grade students will be allowed to try out for their middle school track and field team. Training sessions, practices, and meets for 4th, 5th, and 6th grade track athletes will be held at each high school track and field facility.
- Volleyball: 6th grade students will be allowed to try out for their middle school volleyball team. Training sessions, practices, and matches for 4th, 5th, and 6th grade volleyball players will be held at each high school gym.

Expectations of Coaches

Participation in athletics should provide a well-rounded experience in which youth grow not only as an athlete, but as a person. Youth coaches can have an affirmative effect on the overall experience by focusing on athletic performance, behavior expectations, and character development of young athletes.

The Youth Development Initiative will ensure that all coaches will:

- Meet CCSD requirements for working with youth
- Receive professional development and training support
- Cultivate a community atmosphere through open, positive communication

Benefits of the CCSD Youth Development Initiative

- Community: The CCSD Youth Development Initiative will provide a means in which all community stakeholders (i.e., CCSD, UGA, ACC government, private businesses, etc.) can provide support as an investment in the youth and future of our community.
- Literacy: The CCSD Youth Development Initiative will provide an opportunity for participants to be on Reading Teams through their respective After School Programs. These teams will provide a means to encourage and monitor active reading - a cornerstone of increasing literacy.
- Wellness: As previously noted, one of the primary benefits of participating in youth sports programs is mental, emotional, and physical wellness.

Summary

The Clarke County School District's Youth Development Initiative will increase the opportunities for the youth of Clarke County to participate in positive, structured youth sports programs which not only benefits our youth, but our entire community for years to come.