



Australian Government
Australian Sports Commission



LA TROBE
UNIVERSITY

Addressing the decline in sport participation in secondary schools

Findings from the Youth Participation Research Project

SUMMARY

November 2017





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The Australian Sports Commission would like to acknowledge and thank La Trobe University's Centre for Sport and Social Impact as research partner in the Youth Participation Research Project.

Thank you to the national sporting organisations, sport deliverers, students, teachers, schools and parents/guardians who participated in the pilot.

The Youth Participation Research Project

In secondary school, many students disengage from sport. However playing sport offers many benefits for youth aged 13 to 17, and develops physical literacy for active and healthy lives. The Australian Sports Commission sought to identify what interventions engage and motivate young people to continue participating in sport and physical activity.

The Australian Sports Commission (ASC) partnered with La Trobe University's Centre for Sport and Social Impact to conduct a research pilot involving secondary schools and sport sector partners to evaluate, measure and report on the impact of interventions. The findings build upon existing global research to provide a better understanding of what is successful in the Australian school context.

The findings in this report will inform the actions that sport and education can take to increase youth participation. Particularly it will support sports' ability to develop youth specific products for the school market. The findings will also continue to support the ASC's expansion of the \$160 million Australian Government Sporting Schools program into secondary schools – targeting many of the cohorts that demographically make up a large portion of youth disengaged from sport.

THE PILOT



The pilot ran over
5 SCHOOL TERMS



RUGBY AU

netball

Athletics Australia

ROWING

Australian Sailing

tennis

AFL

Golf Australia

With 8
NATIONAL SPORTING ORGANISATIONS (NSOS)



Across
100 SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Our insights were gathered from



1,345

parent/guardian surveys



370+

teacher surveys/
interviews



6,600+

student surveys



100

sport surveys/interviews

THE RESULTS

The research identified:

- the groups of disengaged students, who they are, their barriers and motivations.
- the value of the sport-in-school relationship and how to build it.
- strategies to enhance engagement through program delivery, deliverer and design.

The research collated:

- 10 Recommended development areas for sporting organisations currently delivering in secondary schools
- 14 Program design and delivery principles for creating new secondary school sport programs

Understand the secondary school student demographic

Sport, as it is being delivered, is less able to meet secondary student needs. This is particularly true for disengaged students. It is important for those in sport and education to understand the barriers that impact students, and what can motivate them to participate in sport for active and healthy lives.

Disengaged and physically inactive students are likely to be:

- > female
- > older
- > from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.

They are:

- > less confident to participate in any sport
- > less likely to perceive their family and friends as supportive of them playing sport
- > less confident to try new sports
- > less likely to value sport.

What motivates them to participate in sport?

- > To improve their skills and fitness for a healthier, more energetic life
- > To spend time with friends whilst having fun



40% had not participated in organised sport in the last 12 months

Average age

13.9
YEARS OLD



38%



57%



41%

live in an area with a Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) of 5-7



20%

went on no holidays in the past 12 months

Four cohorts of disengaged students

Disengaged students can be grouped into four distinct cohorts. They each have unique barriers and motivations.

COHORT 1



Students who would like to participate in sport but are unable to due to environmental barriers

BARRIERS

- > Lack of experienced sport teachers, sport culture, facilities or equipment in school
- > Travel distance for deliverers or students in community
- > Family support for sport fees and transport

MOTIVATIONS

- > An interest or hobby
- > Be active
- > Learn new skills
- > Social connection

COHORT 2



Long-term disengaged students who do not currently participate in sport because they have never connected with sport

BARRIERS

- > Lack of interest, confidence, fitness, skill or motivation for sport
- > Family prioritising academic ability; not supporting girls' sport participation
- > Social norms of gender appropriate sports; peer pressure

MOTIVATIONS

- > Try alternative sports
- > Spend time with friends
- > Improve their fitness level and live a healthier lifestyle (after psychological barriers are overcome)

COHORT 3



Students who participate (are present) but do not engage i.e. stand around talking, sit on sidelines

BARRIERS

- > Lack of skill, fitness, motivation, confidence, interest; doesn't value sport; feeling self-conscious
- > Cultural practices that prevent mixing genders
- > Repetitive or unorganised activities; inexperienced deliverers

MOTIVATIONS

- > Try a new sport where all students have a low skill level
- > Spend time with friends
- > Improve their fitness level

COHORT 4



Students who have dropped out of sport i.e. who do not choose it as an elective

BARRIERS

- > Time pressures i.e. employment, academic, socialising
- > Sport is too competitive and is a large commitment
- > Females affected by gender stereotypes and social norms
- > Injured through sport; finding it challenging to return

MOTIVATIONS

- > Keep up their fitness and skills
- > The challenge of competition without the commitment and intensity
- > Stress relief

Access the Full Report for a detailed description of the barriers to sport participation for disengaged students.



Build successful sport-in-school relationships

A strong sport-in-school relationship is important to address the participation barriers that impact disengaged students. Successful relationships are founded on a shared understanding between the sport deliverer and the school of the program needs and the student group.

Sport and education can establish a successful sport-in-school partnership through these steps:

1 Understand what motivates schools to deliver a sport program

When determining which sport programs to deliver, teachers consider:

- › budget and cost
- › equipment
- › their own experience
- › the timing of sport competitions and gala days
- › community opportunities
- › the benefits gained from external providers, such as student and teacher development, links with the community and inspiration for lifelong participation.

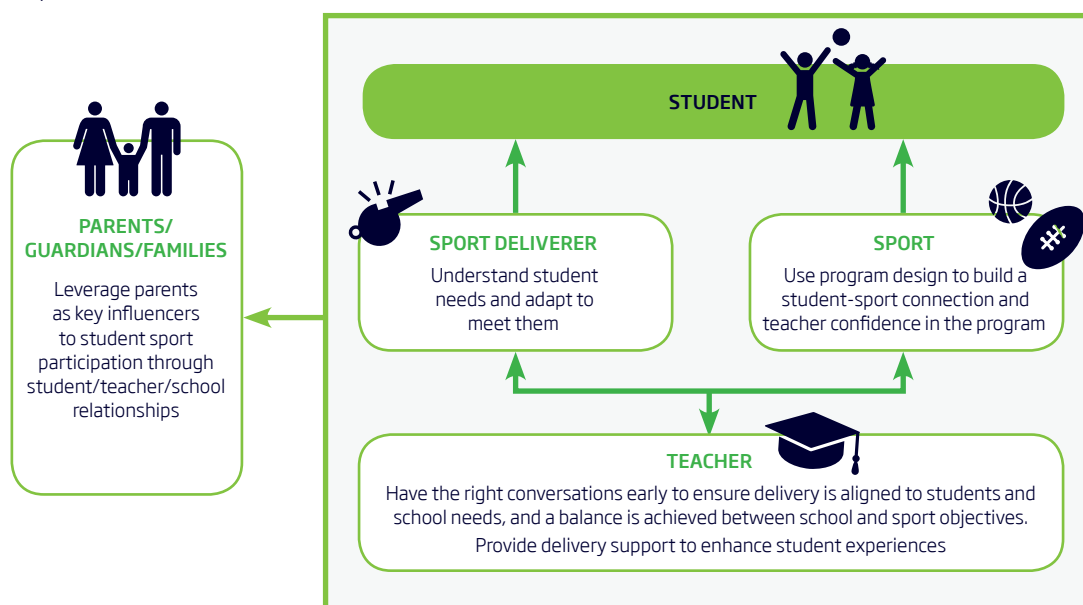
National sporting organisations (NSOs) can demonstrate the value of their sport program by:

- › justifying the time and resources required
- › demonstrating how the program can improve the sporting culture within the school
- › ensuring a high-quality program and deliverer
- › designing the program for the secondary school market.



2 Implement the key relationships to successful sport-in-school delivery

These key relationships within the school environment are critical for successful sport delivery that improves student sport participation.



Five ways sport deliverers and teachers can work together to support student sport participation:



LEARN

how to identify disengaged students, and how to innovatively engage them through program delivery, deliverer or design



USE

the 14 Pre-Program Questions to discuss administration and shared objectives of the sport program



UNDERSTAND

and clarify the roles of the sport deliverer and teacher in program delivery



DEVELOP

tools to build the school's positive sport culture, including reaching student families to encourage support



ESTABLISH

an open feedback channel between the school, the deliverer and the national sporting organisation, to continuously improve and maintain program quality

3 Transition students to community clubs for ongoing sport participation

Transition to community sport is most evident from school sport programs that are based on holistic design, and develop a positive connection between students and community sport opportunities.

When it comes to community sport organisations, disengaged secondary school students fear:

- > time pressures
- > competition
- > social pressures
- > embarrassment of making mistakes
- > financial cost to family.

Whilst a community sport organisation with a school presence overcomes some of the fear of the unknown for students, and increases the likelihood of transition, most secondary schools have reported having little to no contact with their local community sport clubs.

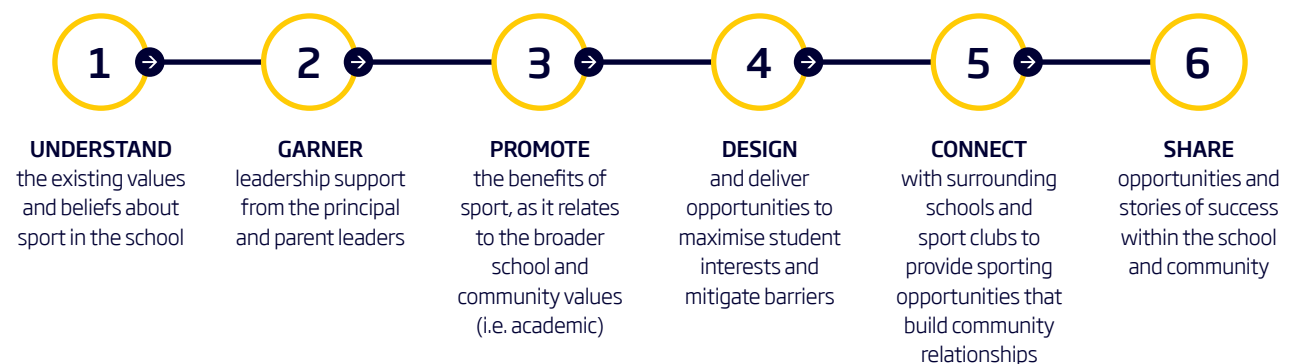
Transitioning students from sport in secondary school to community sport takes an integrated and long-term approach involving all key relationships. It includes:



4 Work together to build an inclusive and positive sport culture in secondary schools

Sport culture is built and maintained by the whole school community. To be more effective in engaging students, teachers and the wider school community, sport programs should include tools, resources and activities to promote and build a positive school sport culture.

The following six steps outline the actions teachers and sport deliverers can take to create and foster a more inclusive and positive sport culture.



Implement strategies to enhance engagement and participation

The following strategies for program delivery, deliverer, design and features, can be used to enhance engagement and participation in disengaged student cohorts.

Program delivery tips

Student recruitment	<p>Allow students to nominate and participate with their friends, or familiar groupings i.e. school houses. Recruitment to a program is most effective when it includes various contact points to the student through multiple stakeholders, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > email or newsletter > peers presenting the program > promotional material, posters, flyers, newsletters > house competitions > lunchtime launch events.
Program and session timing	<p>Program timing is influenced by the preferences of the sport and the school, location, facilities, and school sport culture.</p> <p>The most successful program times to engage students are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > during the school day > during class time to facilitate compulsory attendance. <p>Lunch or after school are also good alternatives, although can have additional challenges.</p>
Number of sessions and frequency	<p>Weekly sessions, with a total of 5-8 sessions, is recommended to engage and develop student skills. Fortnightly sessions are found to be too infrequent for skill development.</p>
Session length	<p>The ideal session length is 50-70 minutes (not including set-up or travel time).</p>
Deliverer to student ratio	<p>One deliverer to 15 students is ideal when delivering to groups including low skilled and/or disengaged students. Enlisting a teacher or utilising peers as coaches can assist with managing group size and skill level variations.</p>
Facilities and equipment	<p>Access to suitable facilities and the appropriate equipment is paramount to program success. An equipment-to-student ratio of 1:1 is recommended.</p> <p>Where school facilities are limited, off-site facilities such as local government recreation centres or sport clubs are options, however this can require organised transport such as buses.</p>
Number of participants	<p>Students in larger groups (i.e. 40 students) are less likely to engage regardless of adequate student/deliverer ratios.</p> <p>During planning, schools and sport deliverers need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > communicate ideal participant numbers to avoid idle time between activities or the inability to run a particular game or drill > adapt activities to accommodate and engage very small or large groups.
Intensive English language schools	<p>For schools with high CALD participants, deliverers need to adapt their instructions to include more body language and less verbal commands.</p>

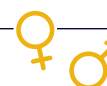


Program deliverer tips

Workforce recruitment	An effective and rigorous recruitment process for the sport deliverer workforce is essential to ensure the quality and quantity of programs.
Increasing workforce	<p>Funding bodies, sports and schools can be innovative in the ways they source deliverers by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > identifying individuals who have links to students i.e. chaplains and support officers > identifying sport-minded individuals in the community i.e. local gym instructors, personal trainers or community sport club coaches > diversifying the skills of individuals to deliver multiple sports.
Workforce skills, experience and training	<p>The most valued skills of a sport deliverer are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > an ability to communicate with, and engage and control, a large group of students > specific sport skill and technical knowledge. <p>Sport deliverers with experience in coaching or teaching in schools better demonstrate these attributes.</p>
Exhibits confidence and enthusiasm	<p>Students respond well to a confident, knowledgeable, engaging, attentive, energetic and enthusiastic deliverer. To maximise student engagement the deliverer should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > pay attention to the students > ensure an appropriate student-to-deliverer ratio > demonstrate sound class management skills > physically demonstrate skills and activities and be involved in playing games > provide expert advice and correction > provide a sense of fun. 
Building student confidence	<p>Teachers and sport deliverers can increase a student's confidence in sport by ensuring the student:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > understands the deliverer's instructions > feels encouraged by the deliverer, their friends and their family > feels they have improved their skills > has fun with their friends.
Organisation and communication	<p>It is essential for deliverers to be organised and communicate clearly with the school, which includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > being punctual to set up the activities > communicating the session aims and activities to the supervising teacher > explaining the aim of each of the activities to the students. <p>Deliverers who are organised, confident and can quickly engage students in an activity are more likely to hold a student's attention throughout the session.</p> 
Teacher presence	<p>Teacher presence brings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > a level of control > respect > the ability to discipline students if required.
Multiple deliverers	The provision of multiple coaches or deliverers greatly enhances student engagement and program outcomes in schools with large or mixed student cohorts (gender, skill or experience).
Mixed-gender deliverers	<p>For those schools with mixed-gender student groups, deliverers of both genders should be utilised. For example, schools with more diverse student cohorts or classes with female students should be coached by male and female deliverers.</p>
Peer-to-peer learning	<p>When learning new skills and participating in sports, students value feedback and guidance from their peers. For example, students prefer small teams with friends where they can receive instant, positive, empathetic feedback.</p> 
Empathy and resilience in design and delivery	To deliver a positive sport experience to students, sport programs need to be realistic about the level of skill required to complete activities, whilst including messages of resilience.
Link to a well-known brand	Student excitement and engagement increases when deliverers are associated with a recognisable brand, or have merchandise or branded uniforms for elite sport teams.




Program design tips

Student motivations	Students are motivated to participate in sport for these reasons: 1. Physical health and fitness 2. Learning or improving sport skills 3. Interpersonal skills i.e. teamwork 4. Mental stimulation and health 5. Social aspect and fun 6. Environmental benefits i.e. getting fresh air outdoors
First session or first activity	The initial activity or session should be chosen carefully to: > allow a deliverer to build rapport > assess the existing skill level of students.
Skill development	To ensure students' confidence in their skills, games should initially be based around foundation skills, and then extend into the full versions.
Games vs drills	Students and teachers prefer program activities that are delivered in a fun, game-based format, rather than focussing primarily on drills for skill development.
Game sense approach	The game sense approach is the most effective in engaging secondary students, and particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.
Modified sports	More enjoyment is gained by basing the program on a modified version of the sport, enabling students of all skills and abilities to start on a more even playing field. In delivering a modified sport program, the key considerations are: > the skill level of the student cohort > explanation of the rules > the team selection process > necessary adjacent activities > the use of modified equipment
Rules and strategy	Learning the rules to the game is important to students as they are conscious of being prepared if and when a situation arises during a game. For example, if a ball goes out of play, students prefer to be prepared for what happens next, which in turn maintains their confidence while playing.
Physical exertion	The least enjoyable activities are those that require physical exertion beyond a student's capabilities. By giving students the option to walk/jog, those who are unable to run will avoid embarrassment.
Efficient activity transitions	Minimise set-up time and time transitioning between activities to reduce the opportunity for students to disengage.
Student empowerment	Empower students to make decisions about the sports they participate in. This can increase their confidence.
Flexibility and adaptability	Program design should have a level of flexibility to adapt to different student cohorts (including CALD students and groups of mixed gender, sport experience and ability).
Team activities	Team activities are an effective method to include all participants in the session. Students who can choose their own teams are more likely to support them.
Activity length	For circuit drills of basic skills, shorter activities are more effective at maintaining student engagement. In game-based activities, such as a full game of football, longer activities are more effective at allowing students to have a free-flowing experience.
Competition	Students generally respond positively to competition, if it does not lead to: > the same individuals coming last, and > the students with less ability being left out.
Gender-specific programming	The majority of students prefer program design and delivery in single-gender groups.
Dividing cohorts by skill level	Most students prefer being grouped by skill level in order to participate in activities. This is true across: > all age groups > both male and female students > large and small groups > sports where activities are based on team work or competition.
Sport culture	Building sport culture in the school greatly affects: > student sport engagement > the ability for a sport to develop a relationship with a school > the sport's ability to deliver a sport program.





Program feature tips

Gym-based programs	Small group gym-based sessions can build student connection to their body and confidence for sport. 
Bridging and wellness programs	Holistic programs based on building strength and body confidence (i.e. in a gym or functional fitness sessions including strength and conditioning) build confidence and prepare students for a sporting experience.
Fitness and stress relief programs	Secondary school students often need a space to release stress and mentally relax. Fitness and stress relief-based sport programs can improve student physical and mental wellbeing, and in turn positively impact their academic or other pursuits. 
Injecting novelty	Injecting novelty excites and motivates students. Try introducing new and different experiences, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > offering free equipment and merchandise > going to an off-site facility > having a new instructor > doing a new activity > participating in a gala day against other schools.
Music	Allow students to play and select the music as it gives them a sense of ownership and a reward for increasing their engagement. 
Contact in sport	Don't be afraid to include contact in sport - students prefer it.
Weather contingencies	Overcome weather barriers by developing a program that can be modified to a classroom environment.
Technology	Create innovative ways to include phones or technology into a program, i.e. pedometers are used successfully in tennis.

Specific recommendations for sporting organisations

10 Development areas for existing sport programs

Upskill and support the workforce

- 1 Develop your deliverer workforce to better identify and engage disengaged secondary students, focussing on managing group dynamics to promote positive student interaction within their participant group.
- 2 Provide deliverers with the tools and resources to more effectively communicate with teachers, to define shared objectives and improve sport program administration issues.

Try alternative program strategies

- 3 Enhance existing sport programs with a 'fitness-based' program, targeting disengaged secondary school students to build their confidence, and provide the knowledge and skills they are seeking to support their shift to a healthier lifestyle.
- 4 Enhance existing sport programs with a 'stress relief' program for those students who can no longer commit to traditional sport activities. This could include a social competition for a traditional sport (suited to more-confident students) or a series of alternative sport or physical activities that focus on learning and developing new skills (suited to less-confident students).
- 5 Develop tools and resources to support deliverers and teachers to promote and build a positive sport culture within the school community. Include strategies to reach families to encourage them to support their child's sport participation.

Focus on the student experience

- 6 Develop and provide deliverers with guidelines for building more positive student group dynamics. Include considerations for dividing program cohorts by skill and gender to increase engagement.

Take a partnership approach

- 7 Consider ways your sporting organisation can achieve a balance between a prescribed program and allowing deliverers the flexibility to build a relationship with a school through tailored programs. Base this balance on the objectives and desired outcomes for the sport in the secondary school market.
- 8 Understand how sport can meet the needs and motivations of the various student cohorts, and develop programs based on this understanding. Establish relevant value propositions to target the identified market/s.
- 9 Provide deliverers with an open communication channel to better monitor and control program delivery, seek support, and provide feedback. Genuinely consider this programmatic feedback.
- 10 Consider the *14 Program design and delivery principles* when designing a new program or reviewing an existing program for secondary schools.

14 Program design and delivery principles for new sporting programs

- 1 **Objectives of the program** are negotiated, agreed to, shared and communicated between the funding body, school and sport
- 2 **Program administration** is clear, comprehensive and consistent, and utilises open and effective communication channels. Use the 14 Pre-Program Questions to support this communication (see full report)
- 3 **Program delivery is flexible** and adaptable to each secondary school context
- 4 **School sport culture** and perceptions of sport are considered in the design and delivery of the program
- 5 **Program design and delivery is innovative** to overcome entrenched barriers experienced by the student, teacher, school or community
- 6 **Student-centric program design** is applied and incorporates empathetic delivery based on an understanding of student motivations and influences
- 7 **Skill building** and **developing mental resilience** are dually incorporated in the program design
- 8 **Empower students** with the opportunity to choose their activities
- 9 **The program's value** to the student, school and greater school community is clearly demonstrated
- 10 **Opportunities to connect** with the local community and sport clubs are provided to encourage transition from school-based to community-based sport participation
- 11 **Three program elements** are offered (either within a single program or as three separate offerings) and include:
 - a) activities based on building fitness and confidence
 - b) a modified social competition
 - c) a traditional sport program based on building and refining skills and game play
- 12 **Program cohort is divided by gender** (for specific activities, sessions or days)
- 13 **Program cohort is divided by skill level** for sports with an emphasis on competition, either in their traditional or programmatic format (for specific activities, sessions or days)
- 14 **A skilled deliverer** conducts the program and receives support from their sporting organisation to modify activities and program delivery based on the needs of the school and student cohort.



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