SPARK Parks: Monitoring the Implementation and Impact of Schoolyards-turned-Public Parks

ACTIVE LIVING RESEARCH CONFERENCE 2015
Today's talk

- Introductions:
  - Study Area: Houston, Texas
  - The SPARK School Park Program
  - The Trust for Public Land
  - SPARK Park Assessment

- Preliminary Findings

- Next steps

- Q&A
Today’s talk

- Introductions

- Preliminary Findings:
  - Park Access Mapping and Analysis
  - JUA Monitoring
  - Park Use
  - Park User Input
  - Case Study: Lyons Elementary
  - SPARK Park Factors

- Next steps

- Q&A
Study Focus: Houston, Texas
Wilson Montessori Elementary/Middle
Houston ISD; Re-SPARKed in 2012
Travis Elementary
Houston ISD; Re-SPARKed in 2011
Travis Elementary
Houston ISD; Re-SPARKed in 2011
SPARK Park Assessment: Objectives

1) Evaluate the SPARK School Parks role and impact within Houston’s parks and open space system

2) Collect information that could inform future actions (park conditions, park use, park user input)

3) Study SPARK service areas

Funded by the Houston Endowment
SPARK Park Assessment: Methods

1) GIS Analysis
   • Park access
   • Identify high priority areas

2) Assessment and Inventory

3) Observations

4) Park User Survey
SPARK Park Assessment: Methods

1) GIS Analysis

2) Assessment and Inventory
   • Physical Accessibility
   • Features & Amenities
   • Maintenance
   • Aesthetics

3) Observations

4) Park User Survey
SPARK Park Assessment: Methods

1) GIS Analysis

2) Assessment and Inventory

3) Observations
   • SOPARC
   • Included in this presentation is information from over 3,100 observations

4) Park User Survey
1) GIS Analysis

2) Assessment and Inventory

3) Observations

4) Park User Survey
   - Frequency of use
   - Access to open space
   - Travel mode to parks
   - Concerns and perceptions
Park Access Mapping
## Park Access Analysis

Percent of Houston Residents that are served by the existing Park and Open Space Systems*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Park/System</th>
<th>Total Houston Population</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Low Income Households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Public Parks and Open Space</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPARK Parks</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPARK Parks, and Not Served by Other Parks</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*defined as those that live within a ½ mile of parks or open space
Park Access Analysis

- A 10-minute walk is used by The Trust for Public Land to determine access to parks and open space

*Next step: map where people live and assess the distances that people are walking to the parks from.

How do you usually travel to this park?

- Drive
- Walk
- Bike
Access and Park Use

How safe do you feel this park is?

- Very safe
- Safe
- Not very safe
- Not safe at all
Access and Park Use

James Berry Elementary and Croyden Park example
How accessible and open to the public are these parks currently?

90% of parks have gates
JUA Monitoring

• How accessible and open to the public are these parks currently?

Is at Least One Entrance Unlocked?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of SPARK Parks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70%
Park Use

• Are they being used?

Percentage of Parks Observed as Empty/Not Empty

- Empty
- Not empty
Park Use

- 3,300 people observed in the parks total
Average Weekly Park Use, by target area type (DRAFT)
System-wide Average Physical Activity Levels, by target area type (DRAFT)
Park Use

Female Activity Levels - Observed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity Level</th>
<th>Percentage of Park Users Observed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sedentary</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vigorous</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Male Activity Levels - Observed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity Level</th>
<th>Percentage of Park Users Observed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sedentary</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vigorous</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Park User Survey Respondents

- Over 200 people were surveyed (25% of “eligible” respondents)

Characteristics of Survey Respondents (how would you describe your race/ethnicity?)

- Latino/a
- White
- Black/African American
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
Park User Survey Respondents

- Over 200 people were surveyed (25% of “eligible” respondents)

Characteristics of Survey Respondents (how long have you lived in this community?)

- Less than 1 year
- 1 to 5 years
- 5 to 10 years
- More than 10 years
Most frequent responses for why people like the SPARK parks:

- Provide close-to-home park space
- Provide playgrounds, open space, and places to walk (trails/walking paths)
- They’re clean and aesthetically pleasing
  - *Assessments: park rank as well-maintained and contain elements that enhance aesthetics*
Park User Input

• On average, SPARK parks users feel:
  • they have sufficient access to park space
  • that being at parks or in natural settings increases their wellbeing

• 86% reported that SPARK Parks are the primary park they visit

• 58% of respondents do not visit other parks
• Maintenance and safety elements didn't seem to be a major concern in most of the parks

• Most frequent responses about concerns:
  • Lighting (or lack of)
  • Access (gates are inconsistently unlocked at some parks)
  • Access (distance from their homes is the primary reason they don't visit the parks or visit them often)
A survey response from Lyons Elementary:

“Yes, this [SPARK Park] is the park I visit the most – it’s quiet and close to my house (I don’t have a car), and it’s really the only place I have to escape, relax, de-stress.”
Overall Park Use by Target Area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target Area</th>
<th>Percentage of Park Users Observed</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Playground</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pavilion</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seating</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trail/walking path</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseball</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Commited Leadership
  • SPARK Program
  • Schools and principals

Continued Communication
  • Community engagement
  • Signage
  • Ensuring new principals are aware of SPARK contracts

Explore:
  • Programming options
  • Friends of groups
Next Steps

• Next steps?
  • Mapping where people live and which parks they go to
  • Analysis of specific parks (like Lyons example)
  • Mapping efforts to identify high need areas

• Where to invest/reinvest?
  • Low assessment results
  • Low or no use (observations)
  • Mapping analysis and decision making tools
  • Explore programming, outreach, continued community involvement
Questions?
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