



**Soccer
at Schools**

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How to Bring Soccer To Your School

**A Step-By-Step Guide to Advocating
and Making the Case**

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

WHAT'S INCLUDED

This guide provides practical guidance to help you advocate for soccer in schools. We share a seven-step process that will help you set a vision, make the case for the sport, gather support, and raise funds needed to make soccer happen.



WHO IS IT FOR

You don't need to be an expert to bring soccer to your school - just motivated and determined to advocate for soccer's inclusion. You likely already have the connections, influence and skills to help make soccer happen.

HOW TO USE IT

All communities and schools have different needs and opportunities. If you're starting from scratch, work through each of the seven steps in sequence. If you know you need to focus in a particular area, start there. And always adapt the approach to work best in your specific context.



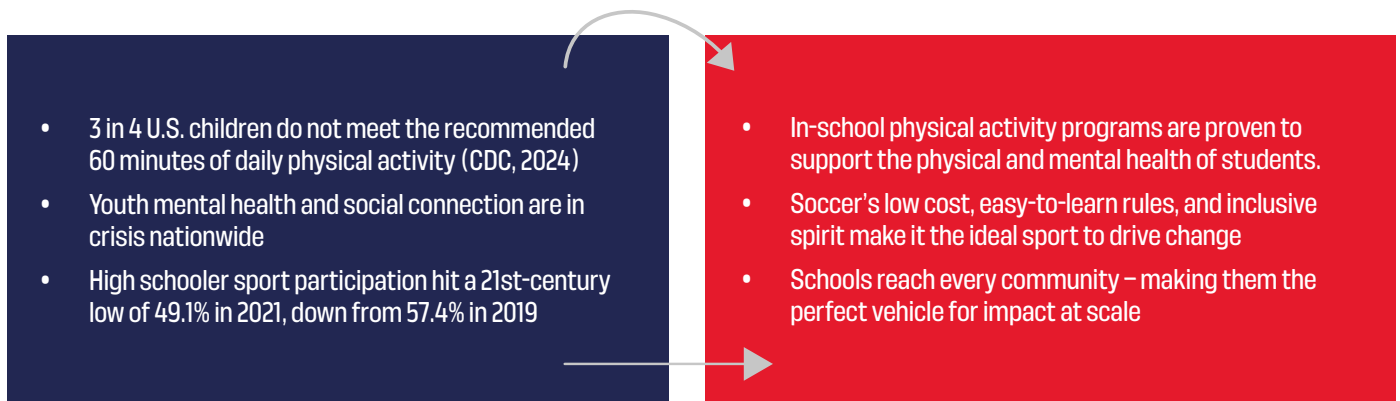
WHAT IS SOCCER AT SCHOOLS?

Soccer at Schools is a national effort led by the Soccer Forward Foundation, the legacy and social impact arm of the U.S. Soccer Federation, in partnership with Bank of America.

Our mission is to **make soccer possible in every school in the United States** - supporting movement, connection, and confidence for all young people.

Why Soccer at Schools

At a time when students are facing unprecedented challenges to their wellbeing and mental health, and rates of anxiety, depression, and disconnection continue to rise, soccer can play a meaningful role.



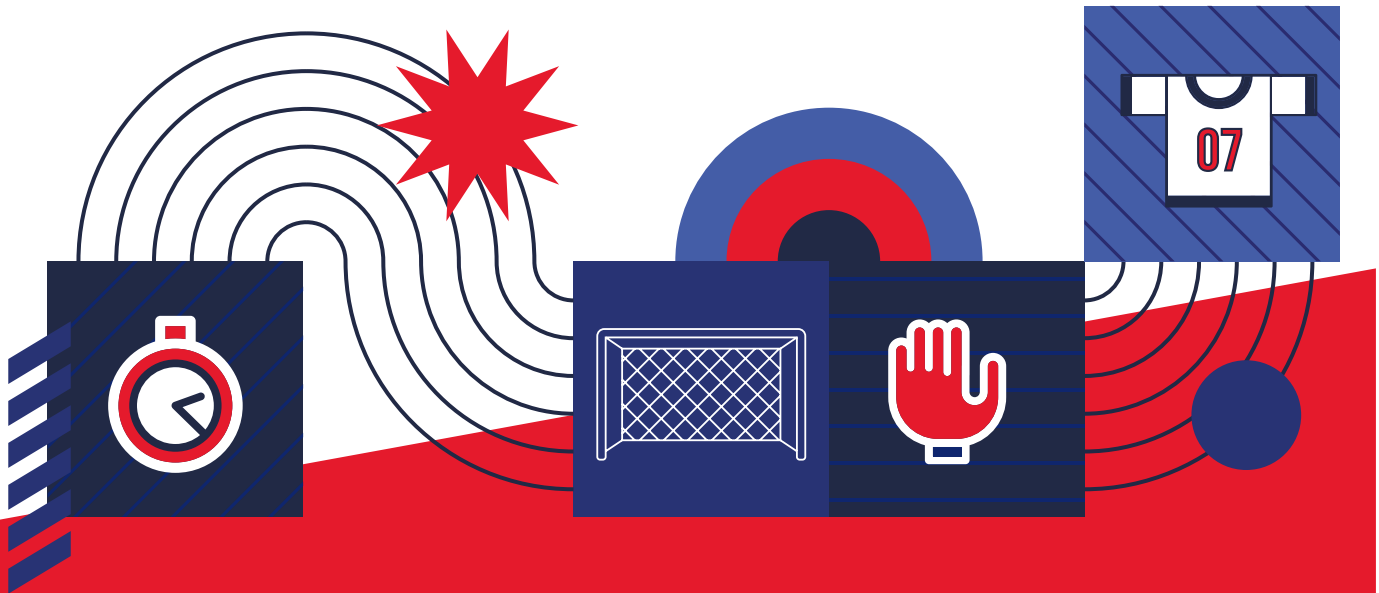
Our Approach

As the game's National Governing Body, U.S. Soccer is uniquely positioned to transform access to soccer at schools across this country. We are supporting and equipping educators and coaches with trusted curriculum, training, and resources, and by connecting schools to a national network of community partners, so that consistent, high-quality soccer experiences can be delivered at scale. Soccer at Schools will focus on supporting the integration of soccer during the school day for K-8th grade.

The Support Available

ACTIVITY & SKILL VIDEOS	Bank of soccer activity and skill development videos.
SHAPE-ALIGNED PE LESSON PLANS	Lesson plans to support the delivery of soccer in PE classes for elementary and middle school students.
TEACHER TRAINING	Digital and in-person training options for teachers and coaches.
TOOLKIT	Tried and tested guides, models, and tools to support soccer at schools, gathered from across the soccer community.
EQUIPMENT KITS	For Title I elementary schools, access to the equipment needed to make soccer happen.

STEPS YOU CAN TAKE TO BRING **SOCCER AT SCHOOLS** TO YOUR SCHOOL



01

UNDERSTAND THE CURRENT STATE OF SOCCER AT YOUR SCHOOL

02

SET A GOAL TO WORK TOWARDS

03

BUILD A TEAM OF SUPPORTERS

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MAKE YOUR CASE

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DISPEL ANY MYTHS

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PRESENT THE SUPPORT AVAILABLE FROM U.S. SOCCER

07

IF REQUIRED, CREATE A FUNDRAISING PLAN

01

UNDERSTAND THE CURRENT STATE OF SOCCER AT YOUR SCHOOL

Determine if and how soccer is offered at your school. If it isn't offered, find out why.

Talk to students, parents, caregivers, and teachers to see if there's interest in soccer. Research any school district rules and processes about starting new sports.

This table outlines four ways soccer can show up in the school day and enrich your school. For each of these options, explore the current offering, interest, and any barrier.

HOW SOCCER CAN SHOW UP - EXAMPLES TO EXPLORE

RECESS

- **How it can work:** Soccer games for all students, opportunities for youth to organize and lead.
- **The benefits it can bring:** Increases physical activity and promotes teamwork.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION (PE)

- **How it can work:** Delivery by PE Teacher or co-teaching by local soccer clubs and organizations.
- **The benefits it can bring:** Meets SHAPE standards, supports physical activity, skill development, and is adaptable for all ages.

FIELD DAY EVENTS

- **How it can work:** Mini World Cup, Soccer obstacle courses and relays.
- **The benefits it can bring:** Adds energy and variety to your celebration, everyone can play...

CLASSROOM LEARNING

- **How it can work:** Integrated into subjects.
- **The benefits it can bring:** Reinforces classroom learning through engaging, real-world applications that connect to students' interests.

02


SET A GOAL TO WORK TOWARDS

Set a clear and specific goal that your school community can rally behind.

Soccer can be delivered at schools in a number of different ways, at different times, for different groups, and for different purposes - there is no one right way. Consider how soccer currently shows up in your community, and think about where there are gaps in access or opportunities for students in your school or district. Depending on your school's context, you may want to start small (e.g., recess, field day station) to track student engagement and show impact, before taking on a more ambitious goal.

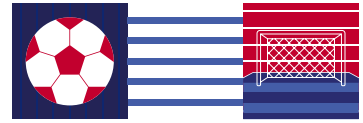
Below we share some ideas for goals you could work towards to help get you started. Consider framing your goal using the SMART method (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-based).

GOAL THOUGHT-STARTERS:

- 
- ⚽ Create a soccer unit within your PE curriculum.
 - ⚽ Partner with a local soccer club for a PE takeover.
 - ⚽ Establish soccer recess clubs.
 - ⚽ Create new soccer activities designed specifically for girls.
 - ⚽ Strengthen the existing soccer provision to be more inclusive.
 - ⚽ Hold a soccer field day for students and their families.
 - ⚽ Integrate civics and soccer to increase the energy and fun.
 - ⚽ Develop the technical soccer skills of PE teachers to increase the quality of their classes.
 - ⚽ Connect with the local soccer clubs to help kids move between school soccer and community soccer.
 - ⚽ Establish soccer within your school's official sports program.



03



BUILD A TEAM OF SUPPORTERS

The more voices you have, the stronger your case.

Getting soccer started or strengthened in your school isn't something you have to do alone. Success often comes from building a team of champions who each bring different skills, influence, and resources.

This table outlines the key people and groups who can play a role in your advocacy journey - why they matter, how they can help you achieve your goal, and practical ways to connect with them in your community. Even if you don't know all of them yet, you can start with the people you do know and build your network step by step.

PEOPLE TO CONSIDER	WHY THEY'RE RELEVANT	HOW THEY CAN SUPPORT YOUR GOAL	HOW TO CONTACT THEM
School & District Leadership (Principal, PE / Health District Coordinator, etc.)	They have authority to approve programs, allocate resources, and set priorities for school sports.	Approve soccer as a school sport, allocate budget, provide facilities, schedule games, connect you with district decision-makers.	Email via school or district website, attend open houses or meetings, schedule an appointment .
Teachers & Coaches	They know student interests, have direct influence on student participation, and may coach or supervise the program.	Advocate internally for soccer, help recruit students, potentially volunteer to coach, share equipment needs.	Approach in person before/after-school, email via staff directory, connect during parent-teacher nights or sports events.
Students, Youth Leaders	They are at the center of the effort and can demonstrate demand for soccer.	Share personal stories, recruit fellow participants and generate excitement.	Class group chats, focus groups, leadership groups (e.g., student council, class president).
Parents & Caregivers, Parent-Teacher Association	They can advocate to the school board and help with fundraising.	Sign petitions, attend meetings, participate in fundraising, volunteer for events.	Parent-teacher association meetings, school newsletters, group chat.
Local Soccer Community & Businesses (soccer clubs, rec leagues, soccer nonprofits)	They can provide expertise, coaching, equipment, fields, and funding and amplify your message.	Partner on coaching, donate or loan gear, host joint events, write letters of support, assist with grant applications.	Reach out via websites, social media, community centers, local Parks & Rec departments.
Elected Officials	They can influence district budgets, policy changes, and public awareness, their support can legitimize the cause.	Advocate to the school board, help secure funding, attend launch events, speak publicly in favor of your program.	Email or call via official government website, attend town halls, connect through local events.

04

MAKE YOUR CASE

Help others see why soccer matters at your school. Prepare a short pitch that summarizes your case.

Prepare a simple, compelling case about how soccer can support your school to respond to issues being faced by students and the wider community.

Think about the things your community and school already care about. Connecting soccer to those priorities can help persuade others.

The table below sets out an initial list of issues and how soccer can help. Not all will be relevant to your school or community, but it can be used as a starting point to help to make your case.

ISSUES FACED BY SCHOOLS

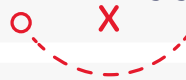
HOW SOCCER CAN HELP

Young people are facing unprecedented risks to their physical and mental health.



Soccer increases physical activity, combats chronic disease, and supports kids to develop resilience for their mental well-being.

Students struggle with engagement, focus and motivation - especially after COVID learning disruptions.



Soccer is a practical tool schools can use to improve attendance, engagement and achievement at school.

Too many young people feel disconnected and lack a sense of belonging, impacting their wellbeing and engagement.



Soccer is played in almost every part of the world, and can be a powerful connection between schools and communities, including newcomer populations.

Girls face unique challenges with confidence, belonging and staying engaged in sports as they grow older.



School-based soccer creates more accessible opportunities for girls to keep playing sports and experience the benefits.

Cost and transportation are common barriers, keeping many kids from playing soccer outside of school.



Schools are uniquely positioned to make soccer and its benefits accessible to all, regardless of background.

A sequence of global soccer events hosted in the U.S. is expected to drive interest like never before.



Now is the time for schools to bring this moment into students' daily lives and connect them to soccer and all its benefits.

05

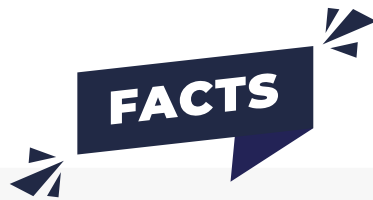
DISPEL ANY MYTHS

Be ready for questions. Being prepared can help you address concerns before they become roadblocks.

Questions and concerns are a normal part of bringing any new idea into a school setting. Being prepared with thoughtful responses can help build confidence and keep conversations moving forward.

Consider the misconceptions or challenges that may come up when trying to get soccer started such as finding coaches, field space, buying equipment, and funding a program, and think about practical ways these barriers can be addressed.

This table outlines common myths that may be raised around soccer, along with facts you can use to respond with confidence.



“Soccer is too expensive to start.”

Soccer is one of the most affordable sports to launch. All you need is a ball, open space, and a few cones or markers.

“You need a real soccer field.”

Soccer can be played anywhere! Outdoors and indoors. Gyms and blacktops are perfect for futsal, the fast-paced indoor version of the game that develops ball control and decision-making.

“Only kids already in clubs will enjoy it.”

Soccer is naturally inclusive. It’s easy to learn, encourages teamwork, and allows all skill levels to participate and shine. Kids don’t need prior experience to enjoy it.

“It’s too competitive for recess or PE.”

Soccer activities can be non-competitive, playful, and social. Games like “Sharks and Minnows” or “Freeze Tag” with soccer balls build coordination and fun without needing goals or keeping score.

“You need a soccer coach or expert.”

Any school staff member can lead basic soccer activities using simple guides and games. Check out our [Soccer at Schools platform](#) and [Soccer Forward Resource Hub](#) for more content.

“It’s not culturally relevant here.”

Soccer is the most played and watched sport in the world, and its popularity is rising fast in the U.S. Chances are, many of your students already love it or will once they try it.

06

PRESENT THE SUPPORT AVAILABLE TO YOUR SCHOOL

You are not alone! Your school can access a comprehensive range of support from Soccer Forward and U.S. Soccer.

Through the Soccer at Schools platform, your school has access to a wide range of support to help them set up and sustain soccer programming. And support is also available through other Soccer Forward and U.S. Soccer programs, to help with related efforts such as the development of coaches and facilities.

Below we detail the support available to help turn your idea into action. Use this to develop your plan and strengthen your case.

SUPPORT AVAILABLE TO SCHOOLS

[Soccer at Schools platform](#)

- **Activity & Skill Videos:** Bank of soccer activity and skill development videos.
- **SHAPE-Aligned PE Lesson Plans:** Lesson plans to support the delivery of soccer in PE classes for elementary and middle school students.
- **Teacher Training:** Digital and in-person training options for teachers and coaches.
- **Equipment Kits:** For Title 1 elementary schools, access to the equipment needed to make soccer happen.

[Request a letter of support](#)

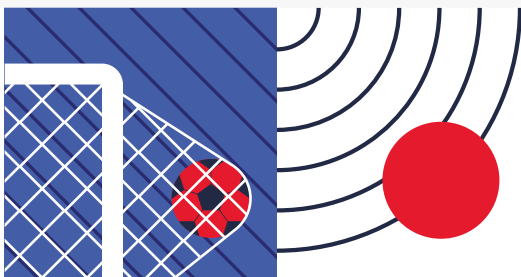
- Request a letter from U.S. Soccer that supports your work to start or strengthen soccer at schools, and shows how it aligns with our national initiative.

[Soccer Forward Resource Hub](#)

- Comprehensive bank of tried and tested approaches, shared from across the soccer community, helping anyone to grow the game and use it as a force for good.

[Places to Play Toolkit](#)

- Practical tools to help you maximize access, inclusion, safety, and belonging in your spaces, and resources to support funding or advocacy efforts for a new place to play.



07

IF REQUIRED, CREATE A FUNDRAISING PLAN

Funding concerns shouldn't stop a great idea. Build a plan that works for your context.

If you need money to get soccer started in your school, you will need a basic fundraising plan. To help you get started, follow the three initial steps below:

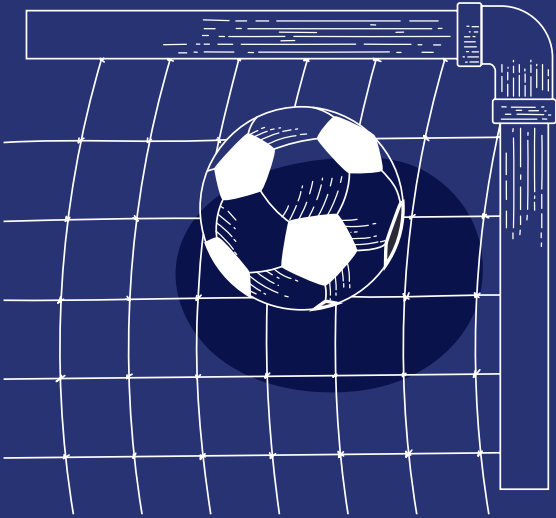
Understanding what you're funding: Before you ask for funding, know exactly what you're asking for. Soccer at your school can take many formats which impact your space and equipment needs, and ultimately the costs involved.

Estimating Costs: To understand how much your vision will cost consider asking experts and learning from others (e.g., schools with similar programs, facilities department, local soccer organizers). Make a simple budget estimating the cost of equipment, facilities, staffing, and operations.

Find the right funding sources: You don't have to choose just one funding source. The most successful efforts combine funding from a range of the sources listed below:

FUNDING SOURCE	HOW IT WORKS	TIPS
School Budget	Money allocated by the school or district for sports programs.	Present your case during budget planning season. Show how many students will benefit.
Parent-Teacher Association (PTA/PTO)	Parent/caregiver-run groups that raise money for school needs.	Attend meetings and submit a funding request. Tie soccer to academic and social benefits.
Community Fundraisers	Events, raffles, bake sales, soccer tournaments.	Pick fun, low-cost events that involve students and families. Promote on social media.
Local Business Partnerships	Local restaurants, shops or companies sponsor the program.	Offer to feature their name on team jerseys, banners, or event flyers.
Sports Clubs & Nonprofits	Local soccer clubs, YMCA, Boys & Girls Club may share resources.	Ask for equipment donations, coaching help, or shared facility use.
Grants	Foundations or government programs that fund youth sports.	Search "youth sports grants" or check with your state's parks & recreation department.
Crowdfunding	Online fundraising campaigns.	Share your story, photos, and specific funding goal. Encourage community sharing.

For more comprehensive support on fundraising, check out [COGEO's guide](#) on the Soccer Forward Resource Hub for more tips on fundraising for soccer at your school.



Appendix

**Data and evidence to
support the case for
soccer at schools.**

INTRODUCTION

DATA AND EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THE CASE FOR SOCCER AT SCHOOLS.

Schools are being asked to improve student wellbeing, engagement and attendance, often with limited time and resources. Soccer programming offers a low-cost, easy to implement way to support these priorities.



This section of the guide shares some of the key benefits of soccer – including physical and mental health, attendance, engagement, achievement, inclusion, and sense of belonging – organized into a simple narrative with proof points. Additional talking points about the importance of schools to drive these benefits, and why now is the time to act, are also included.

HOW TO USE THIS DATA AND EVIDENCE

When making the case for Soccer at Schools – whether you’re speaking to teachers and administrators, parents and caregivers, or local coaches and organizations – there are a range of issues and proof points that can be referenced. Soccer at Schools is needed for a number of reasons, and delivers a variety of benefits, so it’s possible to make a broad and compelling case.

Conversations with different stakeholders will require a tailored emphasis, and specific communities will of course have unique needs and opportunities for impact, and more specific data available. So, we advise you take this as a starting point and build a case for soccer at your school that is specific to your context.

MAKING THE CASE FOR SOCCER

HEALTH

ISSUE



Young people are facing unprecedented risks to their physical and mental health.

- Only 20-28% of 6-17 year olds meet the 60 minutes of daily physical activity guideline. ([Physical Activity Alliance, 2024](#)).
- Approximately 1 in 5 U.S. children and adolescents have obesity. ([CDC, 2024](#)).
- Nearly 20% of 3-17 year olds have a mental, emotional, developmental, or behavioral disorder. ([National Healthcare Quality & Disparities Report, 2022](#)).
- The number of adolescents reporting poor mental health has increased - 4 in 10 high school students experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness. ([CDC, 2024](#)).

Explore the issue in your community: Where are students in your school currently missing opportunities to move, play, or de-stress during the day?

HOW SOCCER CAN HELP



Soccer increases physical activity, combats chronic disease, and supports kids to develop resilience for their mental well-being.

- Recreational soccer improves cardiorespiratory fitness, blood pressure, body composition, and metabolic health - more effective than running or gym exercise for many groups. ([Sports Medicine, 2015](#)).
- Playing soccer can improve body composition to lower blood pressure and cholesterol - building a healthy lifestyle from a young age. ([The American Heart Association, 2018](#)).
- Soccer can help combat chronic disease by reducing blood pressure, cholesterol, and body fat. ([BMJ Open Sport & Exercise Medicine, 2018](#)).
- Soccer participation is linked to lower depression and anxiety rates among students. ([Frontier Public Health, 2024](#)).
- Middle and high school students who participate in sports are significantly less likely to report mental health issues. ([Annals of Epidemiology, 2025](#)).

MAKING THE CASE FOR SOCCER

EDUCATION

ISSUE



Students struggle with engagement, focus and motivation - especially after COVID learning disruptions.

- ~28% of students are chronically absent from school, which can have severe long-term impacts on learning and social-emotional development. ([U.S. Department of Education, 2025](#)).
- Chronic absence rates have nearly doubled since before the COVID-19 pandemic. ([NCES, 2022](#)).
- Reading and math scores are at historic lows - 45% of twelfth-graders are below the basic proficiency level in math, and 32% are below the basic proficiency level in reading. ([NCES, 2024](#)).

Explore the issue in your community: What specific challenges around issues such as absence, behavior, engagement, or achievement are particularly relevant in your school?

HOW SOCCER CAN HELP



Soccer is a practical tool schools can use to improve attendance, engagement and achievement at school.

- Soccer's team environment is linked with higher classroom engagement, concentration, and academic performance in children. ([CDC and Shape America, 2017](#)).
- Athletes have higher graduation rates, higher GPAs, less missed school days. ([National Federation of State High School Associations, 2025](#)).
- Youth who participate in sport have improved concentration, memory, school attendance, academic performance and life skills such as goal setting, time management and work ethic. ([U.S. Department of Health and Human Services](#)).
- High school athletes are more likely to attend and graduate college. ([National Library of Medicine, 2016](#)).
- Schools with a higher proportion of sports participants have significantly fewer serious crimes and suspensions occurring on school grounds. ([National Federation of High School Associations, 2025](#)).

MAKING THE CASE FOR SOCCER

CONNECTION

ISSUE



Too many young people feel disconnected and lack a sense of belonging – impacting their wellbeing and engagement.

- Nearly 40% of U.S. high school students do not feel connected to school. ([Aspen Institute, 2024](#)).
- Students facing racism, LGBTQ+ students, and students with disabilities are more likely to not feel connected to school. ([Aspen Institute, 2024](#)).
- 61% of young adults reported serious loneliness. ([Harvard, 2021](#)).
- 28% of 6th graders reported being bullied at school during the school year. ([NCES, 2019](#)).

Explore the issue in your community: Which groups of students in your school may feel less connected or included in school life?

HOW SOCCER CAN HELP



Soccer is played in almost every part of the world, and can be a powerful connection between schools and communities, including newcomer populations.

- Soccer is an accessible sport, that everyone can play – you can play just about anywhere in a variety of formats, all you need is a ball.
- Adaptive soccer programs (like Power Soccer) improve social integration, physical fitness, and mental health for people with disabilities.
- Community-based soccer reduces social isolation, builds connection, and strengthens belonging for migrant communities. ([Karen Football Association](#)).
- In U.S. immigrant communities, youth soccer programs can increase sense of belonging for refugee kids. ([Soccer Without Borders](#)).

MAKING THE CASE FOR SOCCER

GENDER EQUITY

ISSUE



Girls face unique challenges with confidence, belonging and staying engaged in sports as they grow older.

- Over 50% of girls will quit sport by age 17. ([Girls in Sport 2017, Gatorade](#)).
- By the age of 14, girls drop out of sports at twice the rate of boys. ([United Nations, 2024](#)).
- The drop in confidence girls experience from 6th to 11th grade is 6x greater than the decline for boys. ([Harvard, 2019](#)).
- Girls are more likely than boys to struggle with their mental health. ([CDC, 2021](#)).

Explore the issue in your community: How do participation in sports or physical activity differ between girls and boys at your school?

HOW SOCCER CAN HELP



School-based soccer creates more accessible opportunities for girls to keep playing sports and experience the benefits.

- Girls who play sport report 1.5x higher levels of meaning and purpose compared to non-athletes. ([Women's Sports Foundation, 2024](#)).
- High school girls who play sports are less likely to be involved in an unintended pregnancy, more likely to get better grades, and more likely to graduate. ([Women's Sports Foundation, 2016](#)).
- Girls who play sports have a more positive body image and experience higher states of psychological well-being. ([Women's Sports Foundation, 2016](#)).
- Girls active in sports during adolescence and young adulthood are 20% less likely to get breast cancer later in life. ([Women's Sports Foundation, 2009](#)).
- 80% female Fortune 500 CEOs played sports in their formative years. ([United Nations, 2024](#)).
- The U.S. Women's National Team is a unique driver of inspiration to keep girls engaged in soccer and continue to experience the benefits of sport.

MAKING THE CASE FOR SOCCER

ACCESS

ISSUE



We can't rely on students having access to soccer and its benefits outside of schools.

- Only 55% of kids play organized sports. ([Project Play, 2025](#)).
- Income limits access - children from the lowest-income homes play sports at half the rate of those from the highest-income group. ([Project Play, 2023](#)).
- The average family spends \$910 per year on soccer. ([Project Play, 2025](#)).

Explore the issue in your community: What barriers do students in your community face when trying to access soccer?

HOW SOCCER CAN HELP



Every student deserves access to the benefits of soccer - schools are uniquely positioned to make this a reality.

- Schools provide access to all children - regardless of background.
- By meeting kids where they are, schools remove the most common barriers to accessing club or community soccer - cost and transportation.

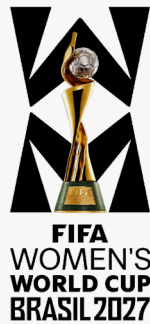
WHY NOW?

SOCCER IN THE UNITED STATES IS EXPERIENCING A ONCE-IN-A-GENERATION MOMENT

With the **unprecedented sequence** of the 2026 FIFA Men's World Cup, the LA28 Olympics, and the 2031 FIFA Women's World Cup, all on U.S. soil, soccer is poised to become one of the **most played and watched sports** in the United States.

When the United States hosted the Men's and Women's World Cups for the first time in 1994 and 1999, there was a **surge in youth participation and interest**. The number of youth soccer players in the U.S. has doubled since the 1994 FIFA Men's World Cup.

With so many communities engaged, schools have an opportunity to **bring this moment into students lives** and connect them to the game and all its benefits.



HOSTING

HOSTING

HOSTING

2026

2027

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