Sport, currently one of the most powerful societal institutions, impacts Minnesota children, youth, families and communities.

Youth sports can provide a positive, meaningful context for youth development, family engagement, and nurturing social skills. However, the impact can often be negative and the challenges facing thousands of Minnesota children and families as a result of their involvement in youth sports are broad and complex. These include burnout, drop out, overuse injuries, cheating, violence, over-scheduling, inequalities, inadequately trained coaches, parental over/under involvement, oversight and policy issues.

The quality of youth sport experiences and outcomes are determined by adults—the coaches, administrators and parents who create, manage and influence youth sports. These adults are often searching for help in making policies and appropriate developmental choices for children and youth in sports, but fail to find accessible, centralized research-based expertise.

Youth sport is in dire need of research, resources and appropriate policies to support its rapid growth and relative place of importance in society.

Current youth sport practices and policies are formed without any contribution from the sport science community. (Hedstrom & Gould, 2004)

A strategic investment must be made to ensure adults create and nurture high quality youth sports.

The University of Minnesota is uniquely positioned to play a critical role as a change agent in youth sports for all children, families and communities. The School of Kinesiology faculty are among the best and the brightest in their fields. A sampling of the faculty’s collaborative and interdisciplinary youth sport research efforts include:

- Antecedents and determinants of parental sideline behavior
- Ethical implications of sport policy
- Influence of peers, coaches and parents on youth sportsmanship
- Bio-psycho-social predictors of athletic injury
- Minnesota PLAYSTM (Parents Learning About Youth Sports)
- The influence of adult-created background anger on youth athletes


Factors influencing bone health of youth athletes

Positive youth development is not an automatic by-product of sport participation

The purpose of the Minnesota Youth Sports Research Consortium, housed within the School of Kinesiology is threefold:

To centralize youth sport expertise across the University and build collaborative multidisciplinary partnerships within the U of M, and externally with community partners

To raise public awareness of the role of youth sport in youth development and help parents, coaches and policy makers understand their role in creating healthy, family-friendly youth sport opportunities that benefit everyone in the community

To examine youth sports across the spectrum, from policy decision-makers, to the influence of coaches and parents, to those most affected by decisions, policies and the climate created by adults – the children
The Vision: Creating a 21st Century Model of Youth Sports for Children, Youth, Families and Communities

The vision of MNYSRC is to position the University of Minnesota as the authority and national experts of youth sport research, policy, and education in the nation. This vision is consistent with the President's Initiative of Children, Youth and Families, the mission of the College of Education & Human Development and transformation efforts to become one of the top three public research institutions in the world.

Who Benefits?

It is intended the Minnesota Youth Sports Research Consortium will provide research-based products to clientele ranging from private youth sport organizations, community youth sport providers, community athletic associations, high school associations, conferences, schools and school districts, and individuals.

The University of Minnesota sport psychology students, from undergraduates to doctoral students, with the assistance of knowledgeable and experienced faculty, develop and deliver research-based programming, and conduct research, thus gaining valuable real-world experience while enhancing their education and contributing to the public good.

Sample Projects

- Evaluation of the status of the youth sport climate
- Delivery of Minnesota PLAYS™ (Parent Learning About Youth Sports) program to 1st & 2nd grade parents in the local community
- Policy recommendations to improve soccer participation in underserved youth
- Increasing the physical activity of East African girls
- Increasing the number of female coaches in youth sport

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YOUTH SPORT REPORT CARD
A panel of interdisciplinary experts gave poor grades to the status of Parental Behavior and Involvement (D), Coaching (C-) and Child-Centered Philosophy (D) in youth sports (Citizenship Through Sports Alliance, 2005).

By age 14, 70% of children drop out of competitive, organized youth sports (Ewing & Seefeldt, 1997).