



# **The Chicago Plays! Initiative: Evaluation of a Natural Experiment to Increase Park Use**

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# Research Team and Partners

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- **Tracy Lin, JD**
- **Chicago Park District**
- **Friends of the Parks**

# Background

- **A needs assessment of all Chicago parks, conducted in 2009 through 2011, identified 300 playgrounds in need of repair.**
- **The Chicago Plays! Initiative was created to renovate these 300 playgrounds over the next five years and enhance safety and accessibility for all Chicago residents. (Project is funded with existing capital improvement funds)**
- **The Chicago Park District and Friends of the Parks developed a competitive application process where community *groups* (e.g., park advisory councils, block and church groups): 1) nominated playgrounds to be renovated in Year 1 of the program and 2) proposed plans for ongoing playground maintenance.**
- **The process was meant to empower residents living in intervention areas (i.e., those receiving *first stage* renovated playgrounds) to improve their neighborhoods and health by increasing park utilization and PA for children and their families.**

# Study Purpose

- **Primary Objective: To examine the impact of community engagement + park renovation compared to a matched control group of not yet renovated playgrounds on park-based utilization and physical activity.**
- **Define community engagement as community coalition involvement to:**
  - 1. Identify how playground renovations benefit their community; and,**
  - 2. Collaborate with FOTP to implement ongoing care and maintenance of playgrounds.**

# Study Hypotheses

- **H1a: Park-based playground renovations will result in increased overall park-based utilization and PA at 12 months and increases will be sustained at 24 months compared to baseline, at the aggregate level as measured by direct observation.**
- **H1b. More park programming, ongoing maintenance, the combination of installed playground features and reduced crime will moderate the relationship between playground renovations and park-based utilization and PA at 12 and 24 months compared to baseline.**

# Submitted Applications

## Coalitions:

- **Park Advisory Council (17)**
- **Block Club (1)**
- **Local School (1)**
- **Nonprofit Neighborhood Group (19)**
- **Museum Program (2)**
- **Conservation Association (1)**
- **Parents Association (2)**
- **Chamber of Commerce (1)**

# Statement of Impact (Safety)

- **Neighborhood safety**
- **Playground equipment safety**
- **Minimize crossing unsafe intersections**
- **Drug-free (problems with drug/alcohol use)**
- **Clean (problems with graffiti, dilapidated equipment)**
- **decrease violence/crime /gang presence**
- **Creating safe playground space for kids**

# Statement of Impact (For the Community)

- **Unity among community members**
- **Quality of family life**
- **Healthy social interactions with neighbors**
- **Community revitalization**
- **Attract new families**
- **Neighborhood pride**
- **Community engagement**
- **Cultural diversity**
- **Benefit local businesses**



# Statement of Impact (Health and Education)

- **Learning/education for children**
- **Child development social and cognitive benefit**
- **Youth after school activities**
- **Physical fitness/obesity**
- **Peer interaction**
- **Increase park use**
- **Offer activities, i.e., summer camp, outdoor activities , other structured youth programs**

# Methods

- **Used SOPARC to assess parks pre- and post-playground renovations.**
- **Conducted park and street audits (EAPRS, BTG-COMP).**
- **Observations were conducted July through September at each time point.**
- **Obtained Chicago Park District programming data.**
- **Obtained Chicago Police Department crime data.**

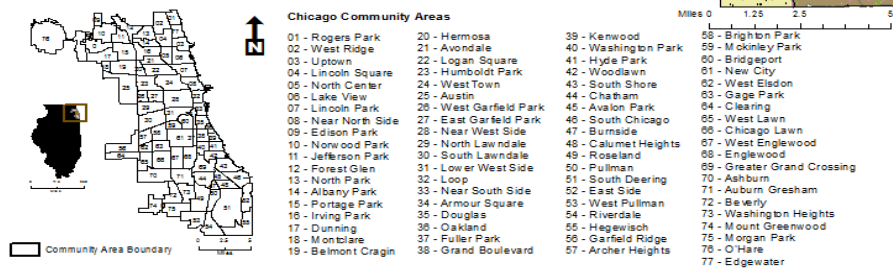
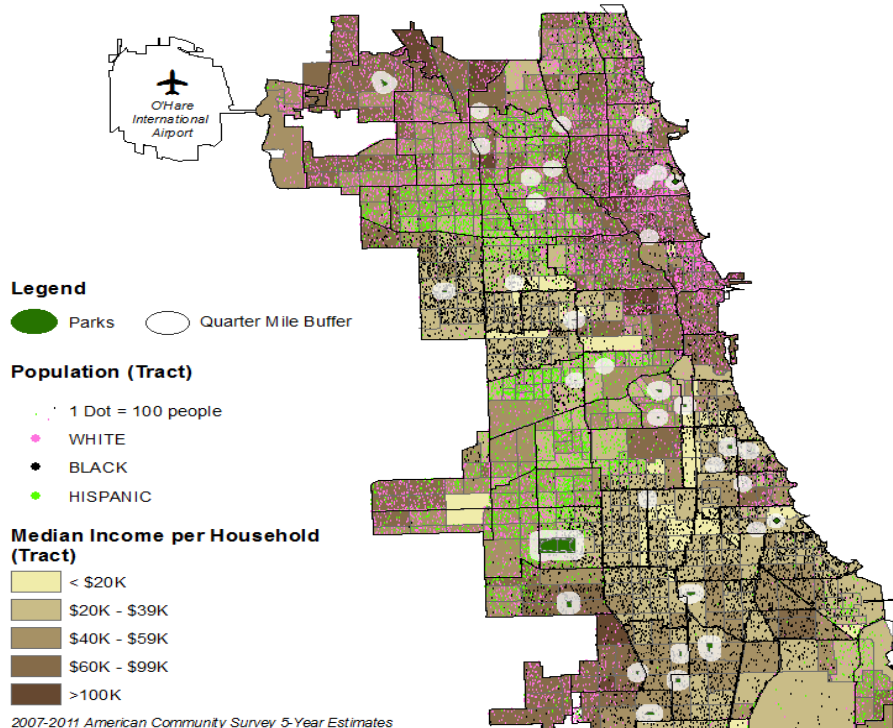
# Methods

- **Parks were matched by: in size and park features, median household income, race/ethnicity, and located in close proximity to intervention sites to ensure that intervention and control communities had similar underlying neighborhood characteristics to test the added effect of community engagement.**
- **Analyses were conducted using a mixed effects model that accounted for matched parks and examined significant changes between intervention and control parks between baseline and 12-month follow-up.**

# Preliminary Results

- **Most study parks (n=68) had posted signage regarding park rules and hours of operations.**
- **Only half (n=39) of the playgrounds observed had lighting present.**
- **In 2013 a total of 304,276 reported crimes occurred in Chicago with 45,642 occurring in parks.**
- **Around 15 percent of all park-based crimes occurred in our sample (13 percent of all CPD parks).**
- **The most commonly reported park-based crimes were drug, assault, battery, and theft-related crimes.**
- **In 2013 a total of 2,586 programs (e.g., team-based sports) or events (e.g., movie night) were offered in our park sample with approximately 45,000 community participants across all ages (children, adolescents, adults and seniors).**

# Park Sample Distribution



# Playground Renovations

- **Before**



- **After**



# Playground Renovations

- **Before**



- **After**

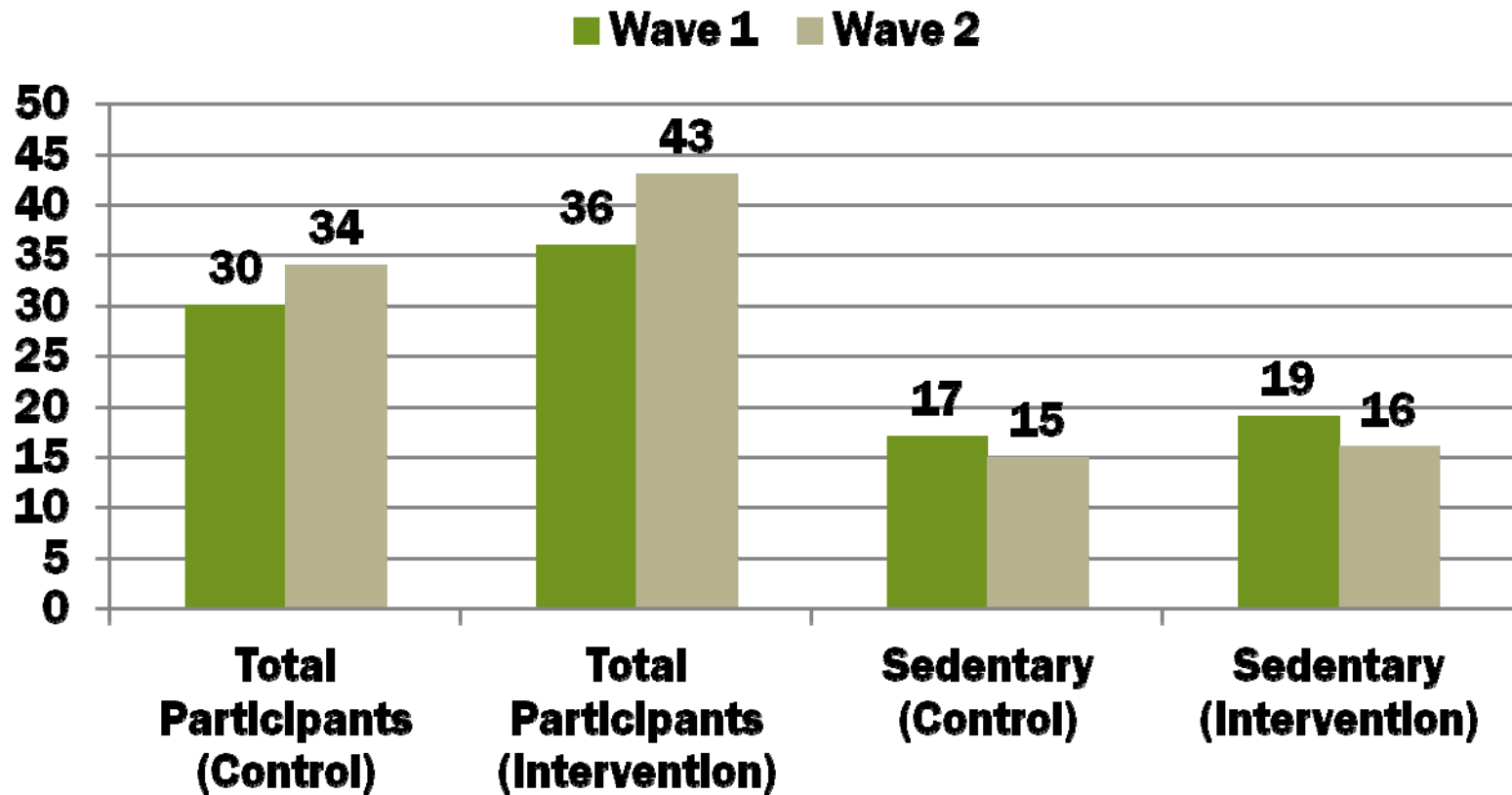


# Park Observations: Preliminary Results

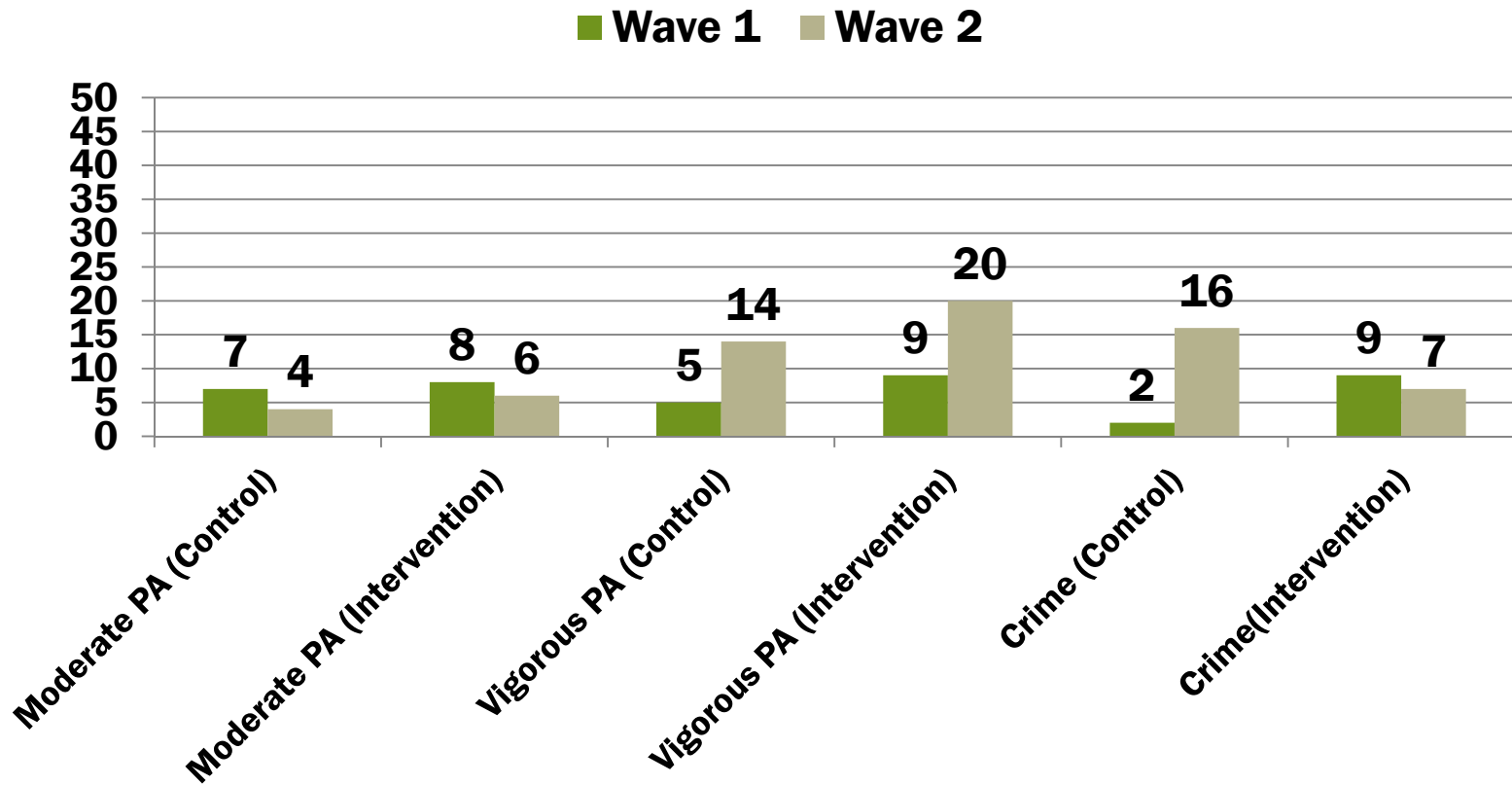
- **A total of 14,586 people were observed across 78 parks (39 matched pairs)**
  - **Baseline: 5,612 observations over 2 days (1 weekday, 1 weekend)**
  - **12-month follow up: 8,974 observations over 3 days (2 weekdays, 1 weekend)**



# Park Observations: Preliminary Results (Mean # Observations)



# Park Observations: Preliminary Results (Mean # Observations)





# Upcoming Analyses

- **Examine changes in:**
  - **Park Programming**
  - **Park Maintenance**
  - **Park-based and surrounding neighborhood crime**

# Interviews with Park Coalition Leaders

- **Process of Applying for Chicago Plays!**
  - **Working with the Chicago Park District**
- **Outcomes of Chicago Plays**
  - **Community Engagement**
  - **Sustainability**
  - **Park Safety**
- **Park Coalition Characteristics**

# Focus Groups with Parents and Children

- **The focus groups will seek to gather information specifically related to:**
  - **Increased/lack of park programming, perceived park-based disorder, perceived safety (presence of gang members, knowledge of recent park-based crimes), and other issues that may impact park visitation.**
  - **A total of 12 focus groups with up to 10 parents or children will be conducted.**
  - **Focus groups will be organized by race/ethnicity and age: 1) parent/Latino; 2) child aged 9-11/Latino; 3) parent/African American; 4) child aged 9-11/African American; 5) parent/White; and, 6) child 9-11/White.**

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- **The content of this presentation is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the CDC or the University of Illinois.**

# Thank You!

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