



CAMDEN ATHLETICS & HEALTH PROGRAM

An Initiative to Facilitate and Support Youth Sports



Camden City is unveiling a new initiative designed to fund, facilitate, and support youth sports programs and health. In his First 100 Day & Beyond Plan, Mayor Vic Carstarphen highlighted that fact that Camden is one of the youngest cities on a per capita basis and the importance of ensuring the city's youth have access to athletic activities that positively shape their futures.

Youth sports are foundational to building a vibrant, healthy, and sustainable community. During these challenging times, the importance of engaging and keeping Camden's youth on the sports field has proven to be an irreplaceable vehicle to ensure their safety and health.

The non-profit Camden Health and Athletic Association (CHAA) took the first steps for the past few years in coordinating various existing sports programs in the city for the city's youth, working with individual and community organizations throughout the City, but it is clear that as a city, Camden is now more than ever in a unique place to support and grow and nurture organized youth programs. For the first time, Camden is seeing significant investment in its parks and youth facilities, something that has not happened in decades. The City has played a pivotal role in coordinating capital improvements at various parks and sports facilities. Similarly, the City can and should play a leadership role as it pertains to organized youth sports, working with existing individual volunteers, coaches and organizations who are currently running community sports organizations.

The City is committed to allocating public resources, leveraging philanthropic support, and providing specific coordinating and operational support to ensure the continued and growing success of youth sports. Critical to the successful design and implementation of this initiative is a community driven approach, where community members are represented, organizers of existing and new sports programs that cater to boys and girls have a say in programmatic and investment decisions. Therefore, it is envisioned that the initiative will be led by the City, but driven with input from residents and the youth sports community writ large. To that end, an advisory board will be created to provide advice to the City on investment, coordination, and programmatic matters. However, this initiative cannot be just about sports. It must also be about ensuring the safety and health of our youth.

Using this initiative as a vehicle, the City will ensure that the 18,000 plus school aged children in the city are healthy – mentally and physically. Camden will work with the organizers, teams, coaches, after school programs and community groups to provide education regarding proper nutrition and the importance of leading active and healthy lives. In addition, the City will work with health care institutions like Cooper University Health Care, Virtua, CAMcare and others to provide sports physicals for youth athletes and other health education for the athletes and families.

The COVID-19 pandemic has deeply and disproportionately impacted communities of color. The impact on Camden residents is a stark reminder of at least five decades of inequities and social disparities that created the environment to let the virus spread. However, the progress the city has seen in the last decade is beginning to turn decades of disinvestment; new parks, schools, and businesses all are indicators of a positive change in the direction of the city. Camden has a rich and storied history with sports; in many ways youth sports has been an insurance policy – a layer of protection – against challenging times. The city has an opportunity to invest in and contribute to a critical area of youth development. The Camden Athletic & Health Program is a pathway to make that commitment in a tangible manner.

The City, under the auspices of the Mayor and the Department of Human Services, will develop an infrastructure plan and work to constitute an advisory board to provide visioning and programmatic advice for this initiative.

Camden Strong: People Empowered | First 100 Days