



THE PLAY STANDARD

Cross-Curricular Integration

Health Literacy, Applied Academics, Community, and Cultural Literacy

Four strands that run through the thirty-six lessons

Document 10 of 12 | Version 1.0

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About This Document

A neighborhood sport session is one of the few places a child is physically present, engaged, and repeatedly available across a whole year. That access is the Foundation's real asset, and it can carry more than sport.

This document describes four strands that run through the existing thirty-six lessons. None of them adds a lesson, a segment, or a minute to the session. Each attaches to lessons that already exist and gives the coach a slightly wider frame for what they are already doing.

The Rule That Governs All Four

A coach is not a teacher, a dietitian, a therapist, or a cultural authority. These strands make a coach a better noticer, not a second curriculum.

Every strand below is written to be delivered in seconds, inside play, by a coach with no additional qualification. Anything requiring more than that is outside the standard, and a coach who finds themselves delivering a lesson rather than naming a moment has left the frame.

Where the Strands Attach

Strand	Primary lessons	Also appears in
Health literacy	Y3 Fuel, Y4 Rest, Y5 Body	P9 Consistency, Y7 Self-Awareness, Y9 Balance
Applied academics	Y6 Goals, P8 Focus	P6 Patience, Y2 Confidence, Y8 Honesty
Community awareness	L7 Service, L9 Influence	A4 Gratitude, A7 Inclusion, A1 Respect
Cultural literacy	A7 Inclusion, A3 Manners	A1 Respect, A8 Listening, Y1 Identity

Strand One: Health Literacy

Three lessons in the YOU pillar carry health content: Fuel, Rest, and Body. This section gives the coach the facts behind them so that what they say to a child is accurate, and gives the Foundation the sources so that what it says to a funder is defensible.

Read the binding rule first. No coach comments on any child's weight, body size, shape, or appearance, in any direction, in any age band. No weigh-ins. No dietary or medical advice, regardless of the coach's own qualifications. This is not a tone preference. It rests on the National Athletic Trainers' Association position statement on disordered eating in athletes and two American Academy of Pediatrics clinical reports, and the evidence linking coach comments about shape and weight to disordered eating in young athletes is consistent. A coach who breaches it has left the curriculum, not bent it.

Sleep

The recommended durations below come from the American Academy of Sleep Medicine consensus statement, endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics. One citation carries both.

Age	Recommended sleep per 24 hours
3 to 5 years	10 to 13 hours, including naps
6 to 12 years	9 to 12 hours
13 to 18 years	8 to 10 hours

- The consensus statement's own language on consequences is worth knowing: regularly sleeping fewer than the recommended hours is associated with attention, behavior, and learning problems, and increases the risk of accidents and injuries.
- Adolescent athletes sleeping under eight hours a night were 1.7 times more likely to have been injured in a study of 112 athletes. A later meta-analysis of seven studies found a pooled odds ratio of 1.58 for injury with chronic poor sleep.
- That injury association is the strongest, cleanest thing a coach can tell a Summit athlete about sleep, and it is more persuasive at that age than anything about growth or mood.

What a coach actually says. Sleep is when the training you did today turns into ability. Athletes who sleep under eight hours get hurt more often. That is the whole lesson, and it takes fifteen seconds at the end of a session.

One claim to avoid. There is a genuine research literature on sleep-dependent consolidation of motor learning in children, but the Foundation has not verified a synthesis of it. Do not build the central claim on motor consolidation. Build it on the duration consensus and the injury evidence, both of which are solid.

Fuel

Current federal guidance is the Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2025 to 2030, published January 2026. It changed materially from the previous edition and coaches should know what changed.

- Added sugars: no amount is recommended for children aged five to ten, and the same statement applies to adolescents eleven to eighteen, with specific guidance to limit sugary drinks and energy drinks. This is a substantial tightening — the previous edition advised avoiding added sugars only under age two.
- The guidelines direct avoiding highly processed foods, and advise that children in middle childhood avoid caffeinated beverages.
- Ultra-processed food supplies 61.9 percent of calories for American youth aged one to eighteen, against 53.0 percent for adults. By age band: 56.1 percent at one to five, 64.8 percent at six to eleven, 63.0 percent at twelve to eighteen. Youth consumption peaked at 65.6 percent in 2017 to 2018 and has declined modestly since.
- Top sources in youth diets are sandwiches and burgers, sweet bakery products, savory snacks, pizza, and sweetened beverages.

What a coach actually says. Food is the material your body builds itself out of. Sugary drinks and energy drinks are the two easiest things to change. That is the extent of it. A coach describes what food does, never what a child should look like, and refers every specific question to the family’s physician.

An honest tension worth acknowledging. The 2025 to 2030 guidelines encourage full-fat dairy while retaining a cap of ten percent of calories from saturated fat, which is difficult to satisfy at the same time. Pediatric commentary has also raised that families living in poverty may have less access to the recommended foods. For a program serving mixed-income neighborhoods, acknowledging both is a strength. It shows the Foundation has read the guidance rather than reprinted it.

Hydration, Heat, and the Body

This is the most operationally useful health content in the curriculum, because it translates directly into session rules rather than advice.

Group	Fluid guidance
Ages 9 to 12	Roughly 3 to 8 ounces every 20 minutes
Adolescents	Up to 1.0 to 1.5 litres per hour depending on conditions and sweat rate
All ages	Free access to fluids at all times, not only at designated breaks

The reversal every coach should know. The American Academy of Pediatrics stated in 2011 that youth do not have less effective thermoregulatory ability, insufficient cardiovascular capacity, or lower exertion tolerance compared with adults when adequate hydration is maintained. The older claim that children are inherently poor thermoregulators is obsolete, and it is still repeated in a great deal of coaching material. The modifiable risks are inadequate hydration, excessive exertion, insufficient recovery between activities, and heat-trapping clothing. Exertional heat illness is usually preventable.

- Drinking only to thirst may not be sufficient to prevent meaningful dehydration, particularly across multiple same-day sessions.
- Swimmers do not feel themselves sweat and routinely under-drink. Being in water is not being hydrated, and coaches should say that out loud.
- The full heat protocol, including wet bulb globe temperature thresholds and cold water immersion, is in Document 8 and governs every outdoor session in every sport.

National Health Policy Alignment

Play Academy Foundation’s health content is deliberately aligned with the Make America Healthy Again agenda. That alignment is real rather than rhetorical: the Foundation operates almost entirely inside the space where MAHA, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the federal Dietary Guidelines all agree.

The Policy Instruments

Instrument	What it establishes
Executive Order 14212, signed February 13, 2025	Establishes the President’s Make America Healthy Again Commission, chaired by the Secretary of Health and Human Services, to address the childhood chronic disease crisis across diet, medications, lifestyle, environmental factors, and food production.
Make Our Children Healthy Again Assessment and Strategy	The Commission’s two published reports, setting federal health policy priorities for children.
Executive Order 14327, signed July 31, 2025	Reestablishes the Presidential Fitness Test and revitalizes the President’s Council on Sports, Fitness, and Nutrition. Directs Council recommendations on expanding youth sports participation and school-based fitness programs, and treats childhood obesity as a national security concern.
Get Kids Active, launched June 29, 2026	The operational launch of the restored Presidential Fitness Test. Schools begin administering it nationwide in fall 2026. Protocol and certificates are free and public at GetActive.gov.

The sentence that names this program’s exact category. The MAHA Strategy commits that the Administration for Children and Families, in partnership with the President’s Council on Sports, Fitness, and Nutrition, will promote greater physical activity in afterschool and out-of-school-time programs. Play Academy Foundation is an out-of-school-time physical activity provider operating in the neighborhoods where children live. That is the category, named in federal strategy.

The Anchor Statistic

One figure carries the Foundation’s case and is simultaneously MAHA-aligned, CDC-aligned, AAP-aligned, and drawn from the federal Physical Activity Guidelines: roughly seventy percent of children and eighty-five percent of teenagers do not meet the guideline of sixty minutes of physical activity per day.

It is stated in MAHA documents and it restates federal surveillance data. It requires no hedging, survives any reviewer, and points directly at what this organization does.

The Presidential Fitness Test

Foundation programs adopt the restored Presidential Fitness Test as their standard fitness measure for Climbers and Summit. It is free, federally canonical as of fall 2026, and solves a problem the curriculum already had.

Category	Options
Core strength	Curl-ups for one minute, or a plank held for time
Cardiovascular	One-mile run for time, or the twenty-metre shuttle run for laps
Upper body	Right-angle push-ups for repetitions, or pull-ups for repetitions

- Award tiers are Presidential, National, and a Certificate of Participation, with age and sex specific standards. Certificates are downloadable at no cost.
- It attaches to Y6 Goals as a measurable target a child controls, and to Y2 Confidence as countable evidence a child collects about themselves.
- It gives the Foundation a standardized, externally defined pre and post measure across every community and every sport, which is exactly what an evaluation needs and what a funder asks for.
- The named community partners at launch were Boys and Girls Clubs of America and other community organizations. There is no published application process or funding attached, and the partnership route appears to be relationship-based rather than competitive.

One caution on the fitness test. A fitness score is a number attached to a child's body, which is the one category of number this curriculum treats with care. Results are self-referenced, shared with the child and their family, never posted, never compared between children, and never discussed in terms of size, shape, or appearance. The binding rule at the top of this strand governs the fitness test exactly as it governs everything else.

Citation Discipline

The Foundation cites MAHA documents for policy alignment and cites the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Physical Activity Guidelines, and the Dietary Guidelines for scientific authority. That division is deliberate and it is what makes the alignment durable.

The MAHA Assessment report has documented citation defects, including references to studies that do not exist, and independent methodological analysis found that fewer than seven percent of its citations presented primary data. Any reviewer who checks will discount an application that leans on it as a scientific source. Cited for what it is — a statement of federal policy priorities — it is an asset. Cited as evidence, it is a liability.

Cite freely, from CDC, AAP, PAG and DGA	State carefully	Take no position
Seventy percent of children and eighty-five percent of teens miss the sixty minutes per day guideline	Diets high in ultra-processed foods are associated with excess energy intake and weight gain in children — association, not causation, and there is still no federal definition of ultra-processed food	Vaccines
Drowning is the leading cause of death for children aged one to four	Screen time is associated with adolescent anxiety and depression — direction and effect size remain debated	Pesticides and agricultural chemicals
No amount of added sugars is recommended for children aged five to eighteen		Full-fat dairy promotion and elevated protein targets, which are the contested elements of the 2025 to 2030 guidelines
Recommended sleep durations by age, and the association between short sleep and injury in adolescent athletes		Any claim about overmedicalization

The American Academy of Pediatrics has published a formal response to MAHA identifying areas of disagreement alongside opportunities to collaborate. The collaborative space it names is physical activity, reducing ultra-processed food, screen time, and sleep. Play Academy Foundation operates entirely inside that space, which means the Foundation can be authentically aligned with federal health policy without adopting a single contested claim.

What This Means in Practice

- Foundation health content leads with added sugars, ultra-processed food, sleep, hydration, screen displacement, and daily movement. That set is endorsed by MAHA, CDC, AAP, and the Dietary Guidelines simultaneously.
- Water safety leads with the CDC finding on drowning, not with MAHA. It is stronger on its own and carries no political weight either way.
- Coaches do not discuss federal policy, politics, or any contested health claim with children or families. The alignment is an organizational and funding position, not session content. A coach's job is unchanged.
- Grant narratives cite the policy instruments above for alignment and the scientific bodies for evidence, and never the reverse.

Strand Two: Applied Academics

Children who dislike arithmetic will happily calculate a serve percentage. That is not a trick, and it is not a reason to teach mathematics on a court. It is a reason for a coach to use real numbers out loud instead of vague ones.

What This Strand Is

The coach does not run a maths activity. The coach counts, measures, and names numbers as a normal part of coaching, and lets the child do the arithmetic that they were going to want to do anyway.

Concept	Where it already exists in a session	What the coach does
Counting and one-to-one correspondence	Repetitions, laps, lengths, turns	Count out loud with Sprouts. Let them count for you.
Fractions and percentages	Serves in, shots made, passes completed	Ask a Climber for their number out of ten rather than telling them.
Averages and variability	Splits, times, stroke counts across a set	Ask a Summit athlete which repetition was their fastest and which their most consistent, and why those are different questions.
Geometry and angle	Court lines, service boxes, shooting angles, passing lanes	Name the angle rather than pointing. Closer to the net means a wider angle available to you.
Area and space	Small-sided game dimensions, zones, spacing	Ask why a smaller pitch produces more touches. The answer is area per player.
Symbolic representation	Play diagrams, set notation, lane assignments	Draw it once. A diagram is a symbol system and reading one is a transferable skill.
Time and rate	Intervals, pacing, work-to-rest ratios	Give the interval in seconds and let them hold it themselves.
Measurement	Distance, height, net height, throw length	Measure it in front of them rather than estimating.

Where It Attaches

Y6 Goals. This is the primary attachment. A process goal a child controls is almost always a number — twenty dinks in a row, ten first serves in, five successful presses, an even split. Applied academics is how a goal becomes measurable, and measurability is what makes Y6 work at all.

Y2 Confidence. Confidence in this curriculum is evidence a child has collected about themselves. Counted evidence is the most durable kind, because it cannot be argued away on a bad day.

Y8 Honesty. A child who reports their own count accurately when nobody checked has practised honesty in a form that is unusually clean. The number makes the honesty visible.

What Not to Do

- Do not stop play to teach. If a coach is explaining a concept rather than using it, the strand has become a lesson and the session has stopped.
- Do not turn counting into assessment. A child who is bad at arithmetic must not discover that here.
- Do not use numbers to rank children against each other. Every number in this strand is self-referenced.
- Do not claim academic outcomes the program has not measured. The Foundation can honestly say children practise counting, measurement, and self-tracking in a context they enjoy. It cannot claim an effect on school mathematics without evidence it does not have.

Strand Three: Community Awareness

The Foundation's programming happens inside the neighborhoods where children live, not at a facility they are driven to. That is a structural advantage over almost every other youth sport model, and this strand is how it is used.

Cross-Age Mentorship

The single highest-value activity in this strand. A competent twelve-year-old is genuinely useful to a nervous six-year-old, and both children gain more from the arrangement than from an adult delivering the same help.

- Summit athletes assist with Sprouts sessions in a defined role: setting up, demonstrating, encouraging, helping a nervous child enter an activity.
- The mentor is delivering L7 Service and L9 Influence. The younger child is receiving P7 Courage and A7 Inclusion. Both should be told which value they are practising.
- This is also the strongest retention mechanism available to the program. A thirteen-year-old with a role stays. A thirteen-year-old who has aged out of being coached and has not been given anything else leaves.

Safeguarding constraint, non-negotiable. Cross-age mentorship operates under the same conduct rules as everything else. A young mentor is never alone with a younger child, never out of sight of an adult, never responsible for supervision or discipline, and never used to fill a staffing gap. The mentor is an assistant to a supervising adult, never a substitute for one. Ratios in Document 9 count adults, not mentors.

Service Projects

One or two per program year, tied to L7 Service, and chosen so that the work is real rather than symbolic.

- Court, field, or pool-deck stewardship — cleaning, repainting lines, repairing nets, clearing debris. The children maintain the facility they use, which connects directly to A1 Respect and A4 Gratitude.
- Equipment drives for a community with less than this one has. Handled carefully so that receiving communities are participants rather than an audience for someone else's generosity.
- Running a session for younger children in the neighborhood, planned and delivered by Summit athletes with adult supervision.

The standard for a good project. The work would still need doing if nobody was watching, and the children can see the result. A project that produces a photograph and nothing else teaches the opposite of L7.

Community Stewardship

The everyday version, available in every session, and more valuable than the projects because it repeats. Somebody unlocked the gate, swept the court, paid for the equipment, and lined the field before the children arrived. Point at it. A child who has been shown the invisible labor once will notice it for years.

Strand Four: Cultural Literacy

This strand is the one most easily done badly, so its constraints are stated before its content.

What It Is Not

- It is not a culture day, a heritage month segment, or a themed session. Those position culture as an occasional topic rather than an ordinary condition.
- It is not teaching children about groups they do not belong to. A coach is not qualified for that and does not need to be.
- It is not asking a child to represent, explain, or perform their background to the group. That is a burden, not an inclusion.
- It is not stereotype, however positive. A generalization about any group, including a favorable one, is outside the standard.

What It Is

Four practices, all of them ordinary, all of them delivered inside the session.

Names. A coach learns to pronounce every child's name correctly, asks when unsure, and keeps asking until it is right. This is the most concrete respect behavior in the entire curriculum and the one children notice most. It attaches to A3 Manners and A1 Respect. A coach who shortens or anglicizes a name because it is easier has taught the whole group something.

The game is bigger than here. Soccer has the highest participation of any sport on earth. Basketball is played in nearly every country. Swimming and running are universal and require almost nothing. Saying this occasionally, accurately, without ceremony, tells a child that what they are doing connects them to a very large number of people. It attaches to Y1 Identity.

Different ways of playing are legitimate. Rules, scoring conventions, and styles differ across countries and communities, and difference is not error. A coach who says that a variation is how it is played somewhere else, rather than that it is wrong, models the disposition this strand exists to build.

The group as it actually is. A neighborhood program serves whoever lives there. That is the Foundation's model and it produces mixed groups by default rather than by design. A7 Inclusion is the operative lesson, and the coach's job is structural: rotate partners so that pairing never becomes a choosing ritual, and make sure every child receives the ball.

The test for this strand. If a child would feel singled out by something a coach is about to say, it is outside the standard. Cultural literacy here is delivered by how the session is run, not by what is said about anybody.

Using This Document

For Coaches

Read the strand that matches the pillar you are teaching. The health strand matters most during the YOU pillar, the community strand during Leadership, the cultural strand during Attitude, and applied academics whenever a child sets a goal. None of it changes the session plan.

For Grant Applications

This document is the answer to the question of what else a sports program does. Each strand is defensible, sourced, and modest in its claims, and the modesty is the point.

Claim the Foundation can make	Claim it cannot
Children receive accurate, sourced health information on sleep, fuel, hydration, and heat, delivered by trained coaches inside sessions they attend voluntarily	That the program measurably improves diet, sleep, or body composition
Children practise counting, measurement, and self-tracking in a context they enjoy	That the program improves school mathematics attainment
Older participants mentor younger ones in a supervised, structured role, and the program retains adolescents as a result	That mentorship produces measured outcomes for either party
Programming reaches whoever lives in the community rather than whoever can travel or pay	That the program has closed any measured equity gap

Every claim in the left column is true today and verifiable by observation. Every claim in the right column would require evaluation the Foundation has not yet done. Building that evaluation is a legitimate future funding request, and asking for it honestly is stronger than asserting the outcome now.

Play Academy Foundation, Inc. is a national nonprofit that brings professional sports, wellness, and recreation programming directly into the neighborhoods where children live.

Roughly half of American high school students attend no physical education in a given week, and fewer than three in ten attend daily, against a national recommendation of daily physical education. That deficit has held for thirty years. The Foundation exists because it is not going to close on its own.