



# POLICE ATHLETIC LEAGUE OF BUFFALO

## 2024 Annual Summary Report

Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation Grant, Submitted 2025

### Introduction

The Police Athletic League of Buffalo (Buffalo PAL) has been in operation since the 1950s, providing City of Buffalo youth with enriching, recreational program activities that promote their development into successful adults. The goals of the Buffalo PAL program are:

**Youth build positive relationships with their peers and adults, especially PAL staff and Neighborhood Engagement Team (N.E.T.).**

- 1 Youth lead active, healthy lifestyles where they regularly participate in physical activity.**
- 2 Youth develop social-emotional skills, building meaningful relationships with their peers, adults, and law enforcement mentors.**
- 3 Youth are actively engaged in their Academic Achievement through building literacy skills.**
- 4 Youth begin to explore career opportunities through workforce development (e.g., job skills, build networks, and gain certifications).**

To achieve these goals, Buffalo PAL offers a variety of enrichment, physical activity, and academic programs throughout the year. Buffalo PAL partners with community centers and schools to offer programming at convenient locations for participants in the greater Buffalo area. They also host events in local neighborhoods for opportunities to provide bike helmets and play equipment to children and families in the area.

Much of years 1 and 2 (2021 and 2022) for this project have focused on continually refining legacy data systems and tracking procedures. Buffalo PAL relies on multiple funders with different and specific reporting requirements. For example, Buffalo PAL must ask all the questions on the Client Characteristics Form to receive Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG). In response, systems have been built to accommodate cumbersome (and not always the most meaningful) data reporting over the years.

With funding from the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation, Buffalo PAL has been working with Via Evaluation (VIA) since 2021 to refine data collection and review implementation data to prepare for a more robust program evaluation for 2023. VIA participated in board of directors meetings between March 2021 and March 2023 to gain insights about which data points were most valuable to board members and discuss program improvement recommendations. As Buffalo PAL began to formalize more procedures for program implementation independently, VIA was able to focus on providing more comprehensive quarterly reporting as well as Excel databases with robust quarterly data that could be parsed by Buffalo PAL staff.

Buffalo PAL has been primarily tracking and reporting “touchpoints” (i.e., how many instances of programming were accessed) for many years. VIA and Buffalo PAL have worked together to restructure and track data in a way that allows for reporting of individual-level participation as well, which is more challenging but essential to do outcome evaluation.

Data starting in 2023 was more comprehensive and accurate than in previous years (which were also deeply impacted by COVID shutdowns). PAL activities were more clearly categorized by goal in Table 1 below, continuing through the 2024 program year.

Table 1

Buffalo PAL Programming Aligned to Goals

Athletics & Active Lifestyles	Wellness & Social/Emotional Health	Academic Achievement	Workforce Development & Social Justice
Game Changers	Bike Helmets	Community Center Partnerships	Ford Critical Conversations
NFL Flag Football	City of Buffalo/PAL Mentoring Program	STAR Literacy Program	Youth Opportunity Connect
PAL PLAYSTREETS	Passport to the World of Cooking Class	Mayor Brown’s Reading Rules	MSIP Workplace Development
Sports Camps & Clinics	Summer Day Camp	School Partnerships	Lifeguard Certification
Sports Leagues		Secure Detention Facility, Erie County	
Sports Sampling Saturdays			

## Findings

The focus of this report is an annual summary of 2024 activities. Buffalo PAL formalized program operations, including data collection procedures, which allows for a more robust outcome evaluation. The following sections are separated by the 4 programming types in the table above: athletics, wellness, academic achievement, and workforce development.

Each section of findings is categorized by the program type and associated goal, including information about the topics below.

### Participant Demographics

As described earlier in this report, Buffalo PAL collects a variety of demographics from youth as part of registration to address specific funder requests. This report focuses on four demographic categories: gender, age, race, as well as residence. Some Buffalo PAL programs are only offered to one gender; thus, it is important to display the gender differences in youth served by programmatic goals. There are also some Buffalo PAL programs only offered to certain age groups or are separated by age (e.g., sports leagues). Again, as staff look at programmatic goals, it is important to understand the age of who they are reaching. Race is included because Buffalo PAL implicitly aims to offer programming to underserved youth, namely Black and Brown individuals. Lastly, residence is included because Buffalo PAL programming is primarily in the city of Buffalo, but events are open to community members in the Greater Buffalo area.

### Program Touchpoints

The Police Athletic League of Buffalo offers several programs throughout the year with different funding sources and reporting requirements. Thus, their definition of youth served by programs differs from the traditional sense. Through partnership with VIA, Buffalo PAL defined participation as “program touchpoints” where session attendance at each activity is counted separately. For example, a youth who attended each of the 3 sessions for a 6-week Golf program would have 18 program touchpoints.

To capture the total program touchpoints for each activity, VIA created an attendance tracking database for Buffalo PAL administrative staff. Staff were able to list all the participants in each activity by location, division, and other differentiating factors. There were some activities in which youth could participate with multiple teams, such as in Basketball Leagues. In those instances, the youth’s name would be entered in the database for each team.

### Program Feedback

Buffalo PAL and VIA collaborated to develop feedback surveys for youth, families, PAL staff, and the Buffalo Police Department’s Neighborhood Engagement Team (N.E.T.) to gauge their experiences in Buffalo PAL. The surveys included operations questions to determine satisfaction with programming as well as goal-related questions depending on the types of activities youth attended. Goal-related responses are included in their respective finding section and programmatic feedback is provided in the key findings section.

### Program Observation

In collaboration with Buffalo PAL staff, VIA developed a site visit rubric to assess whether Buffalo PAL programming is occurring as intended. The rubric is aligned to Buffalo PAL’s overarching goals relating to all the

programming they offer. VIA conducted a site visit on July 30, 2024. Goal-related ratings are included in their respective finding section and programmatic ratings are provided in the key findings section.

## Athletics

Buffalo PAL, at its inception, provided programming to increase the physical health of youth in the community. Buffalo PAL offered many athletic programs, including Sports Leagues like baseball and basketball, PAL PLAYSTREETS, and golf. Different programs were offered, depending on the season.

Youth lead active, healthy lifestyles where they regularly participate in physical activity.

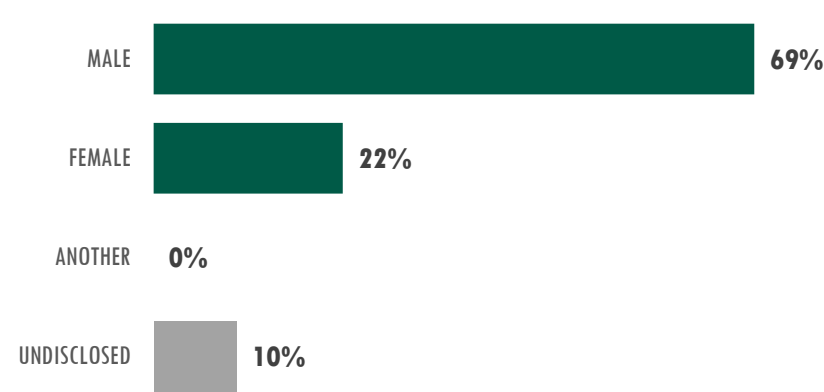
### Athletic Participant Demographics in 2024

There were 1,273 individual youth who participated in various athletic activities.

Some of the activities were only offered to boys, which explains some of the gender disparity (Figure 1).

Figure 1

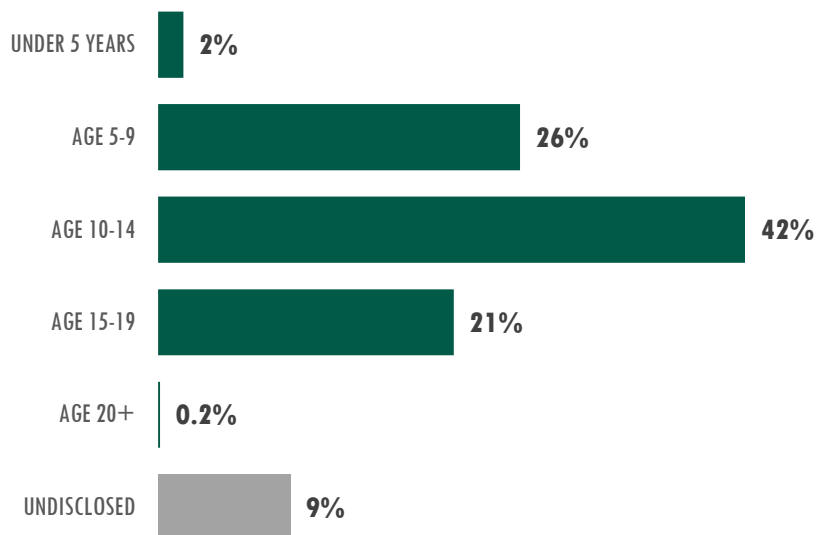
#### Gender Breakdown of Athletic Participants



There were also some activities that were only available to specific age groups, thus showing the differences in who participated (Figure 2 on the following page). Although Buffalo PAL programming primarily serves youth, there are some activities open to the entire community, which is why there are some participants over 18 in the figure.

Figure 2

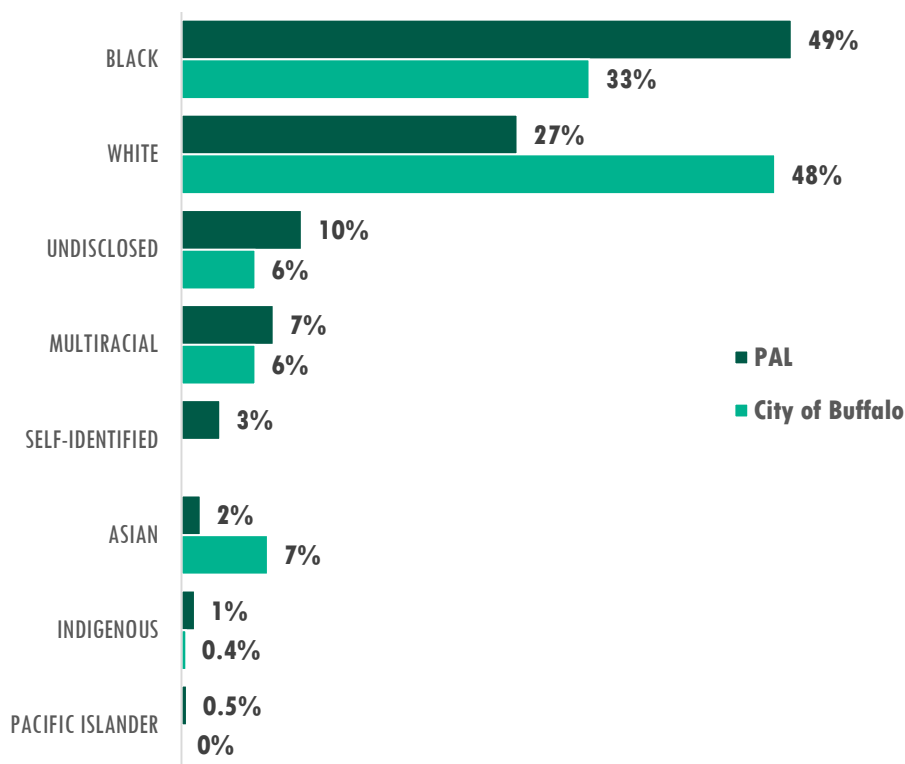
### Age Breakdown of Athletic Participants



According to most recent US Census data, the Buffalo PAL participant race breakdown is somewhat representative of the overall city (Figure 3). However, Buffalo PAL aims to primarily serve Black and Brown youth and so it represents a larger proportion of participants.

Figure 3

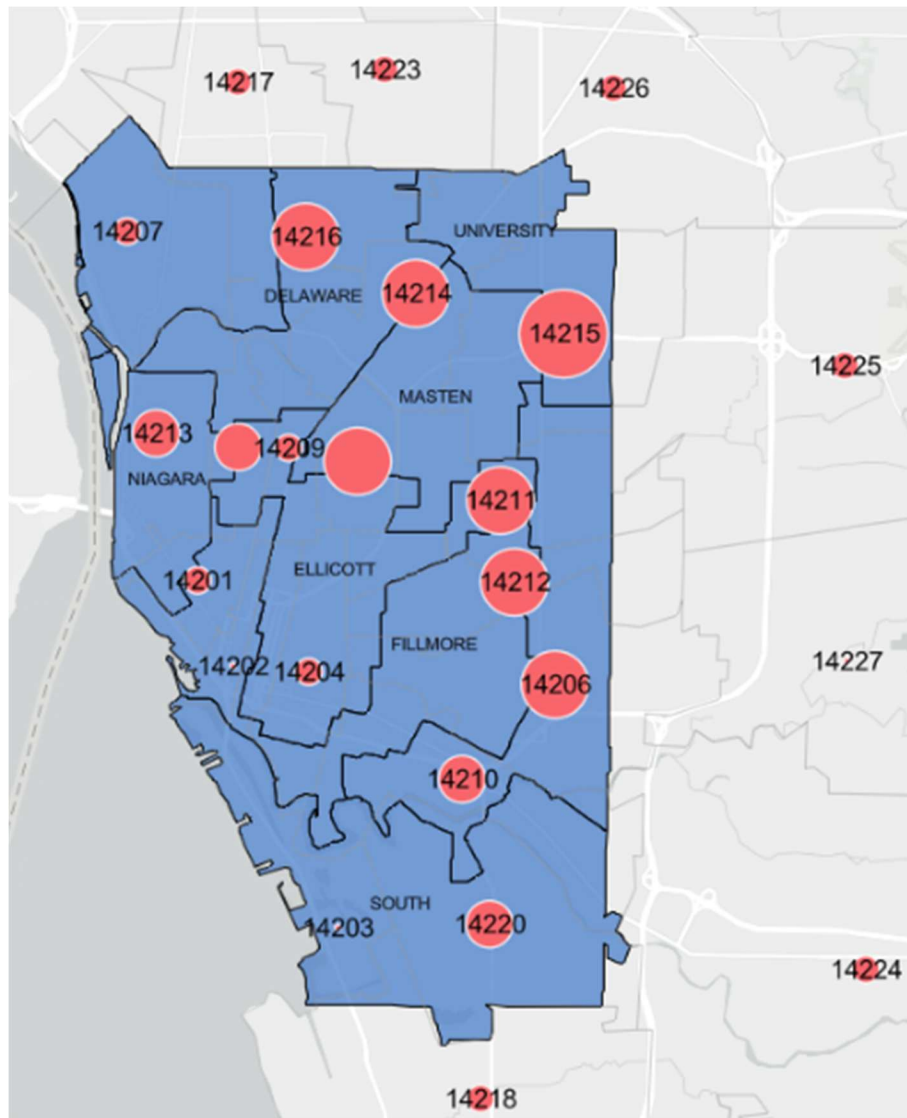
### Race Breakdown of Athletic Participants



As shown by Figure 4, athletic program participants came from zip codes all around the city of Buffalo. The most common zip code was 14215 in the University District.

Figure 4

#### Heat Map of Athletics Participant Zip Codes by Council District



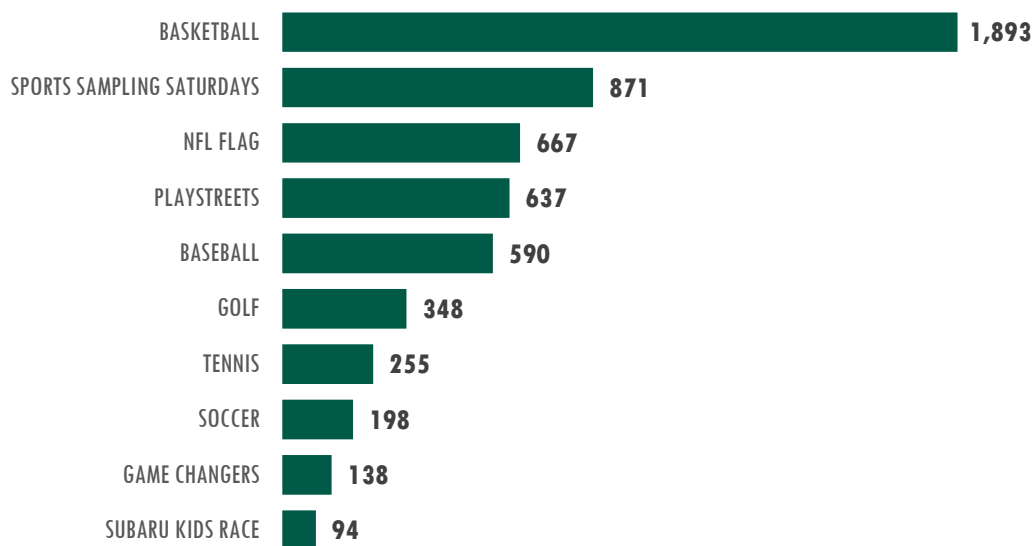
#### Athletic Program Touchpoints in 2024

Athletic Buffalo PAL programming involved multiple activities such as sports leagues and sports sampling Saturdays. For this report's purposes, some categories are further divided, such as sports leagues into baseball and basketball leagues, to capture the difference in program touchpoints based on the specific sport.

All athletic activities had a combined total of 5,691 touchpoints. Basketball had the highest number of program touchpoints because there were multiple leagues and divisions throughout the year (Figure 5 on the next page). The N.E.T. Team had 156 athletic program touchpoints throughout 2024, and N.E.T. Officers attended PLAYSTREETS, Sports Sampling Saturdays, Golf, Baseball, and NFL Flag sessions.

Figure 5

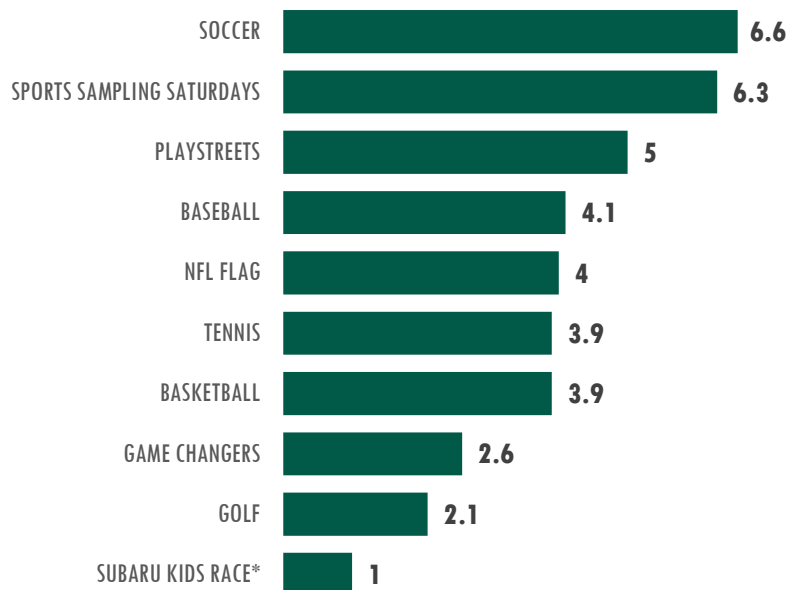
### Athletic Programming Touchpoints by Activity



Average program attendance was relatively similar across the different PAL athletic programs (Figure 6). Note that the Subaru Kids Race was a one-time event, so all participants were counted as attending once.

Figure 6

### Average Attendance by Athletic Program

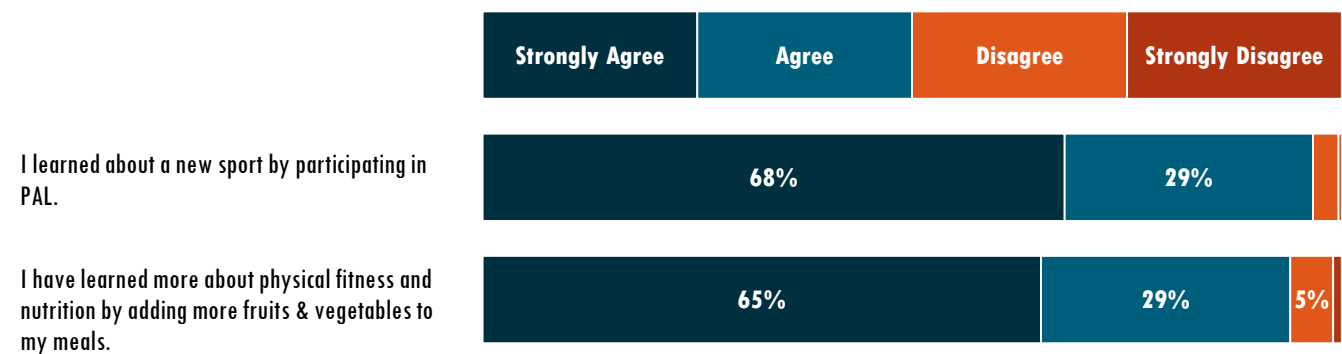


Athletic Participant & Family Feedback in 2024

Participants were surveyed at the end of each program, to gather feedback about their experience. For athletic programs, Buffalo PAL staff were interested in whether participants had changes in their habits as they relate to physical health and nutrition. In general, most survey respondents agreed that they learned about a new sport (97%) and learned about healthy living (94%; Figure 7 below). Of note, this chart only includes the 263 responses of youth that stated that they participated in athletic programming in 2024. There were another 179 respondents, not included, who said that they did not participate in athletic programming but still answered 1 or both of the questions.

Figure 7

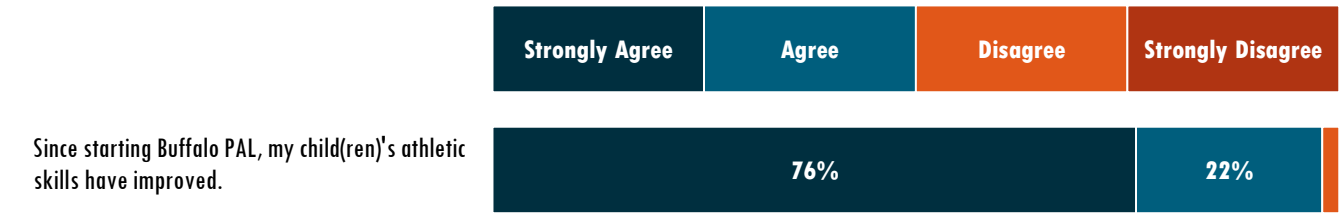
Athletic Program Participant Feedback



Family members of participants were also surveyed to gather feedback about their child’s experience. Family members were asked all survey questions, regardless of which activities their child or children attended. Nearly all (98% or 334) of the 340 family respondents agreed that their child(ren)’s athletic skills have improved since they started attending Buffalo PAL programming (Figure 8).

Figure 8

Athletic Program Participant Feedback





Athletic Programming Observation

VIA conducted a site visit of Buffalo PAL programming. The observed athletics was a mixed-age group and choice of activity at Hennepin Community Center. Youth had the option of engaging in a structured kickball game or unstructured playtime on a playground, each of which were supervised by 2 staff members.

Table 2

Completed Observation Rubric for Athletic Programming

Criteria	Site Visit 1 Rating
Modeling Pro-Social Behaviors	<b>Excellent:</b> Staff and law enforcement consistently model pro-social behaviors and restorative practices.
Positive Relationships	<b>Excellent:</b> Youth consistently interact positively with peers, staff, and law enforcement.
Adherence to Schedule	<b>Good:</b> Observation mostly matches program schedule
Youth Engagement in Activity	<b>Good:</b> Youth participate in activity for most of the observation period.
Healthy Lifestyles	<b>Good:</b> Youth are engaged in either structured/unstructured play with some physical or nutritional programming.

VIA included the following recommendations related to athletics:

- Consider offering low-intensity athletic programming. These programs can be more inclusive, allowing youth of varying fitness levels and physical abilities to participate. They can also provide significant health benefits and help reduce stress while promoting relaxation.

Wellness

As Buffalo PAL adapted its programming, the organization began to offer other types of activities for youth. With an understanding that wellness and social-emotional development is an important facet of healthy living, more intentional programming was incorporated. Some of the programs offered include Bike Helmets Giveaway, Passport to the World Cooking Class, and City of Buffalo Mentoring.

Wellness Participant Demographics in 2024

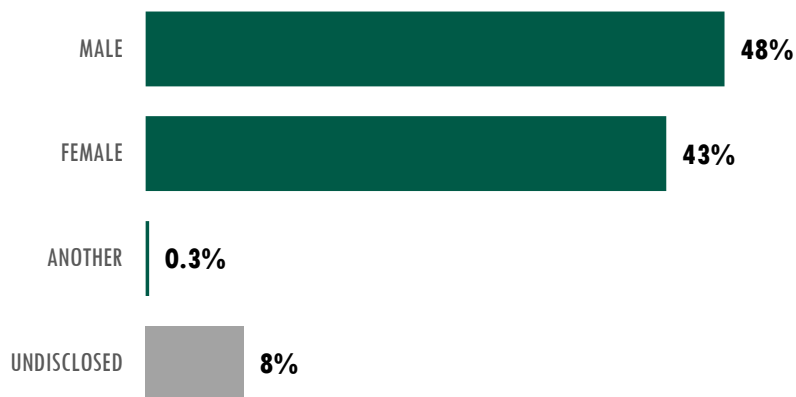
There were 660 individual youth who participated in various Wellness activities.

The gender disparity was much smaller between girls and boys for wellness programming as compared to athletics activities (Figure 9 on the next page).

Youth develop social-emotional skills, building meaningful relationships with their peers, adults, and law enforcement mentors.

Figure 9

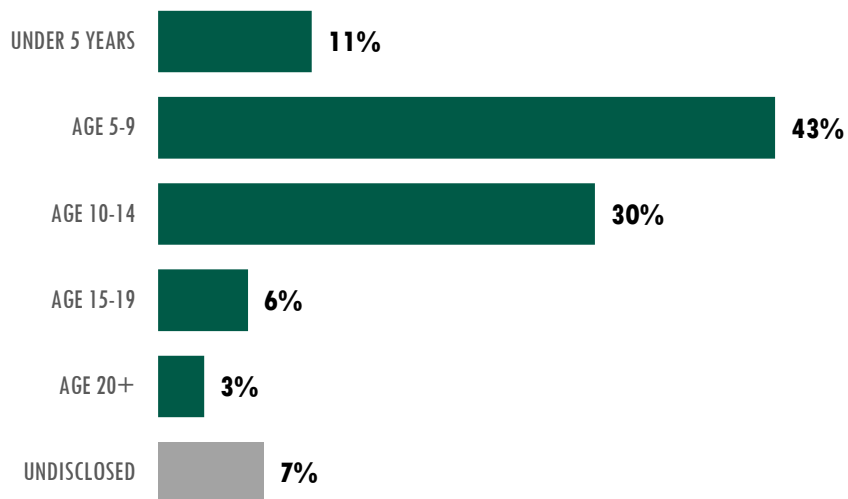
### Gender Breakdown of Wellness Participants



Due to some of the programming offered to children and youth of all ages, there was a larger portion of younger participants than in other programming types (Figure 10).

Figure 10

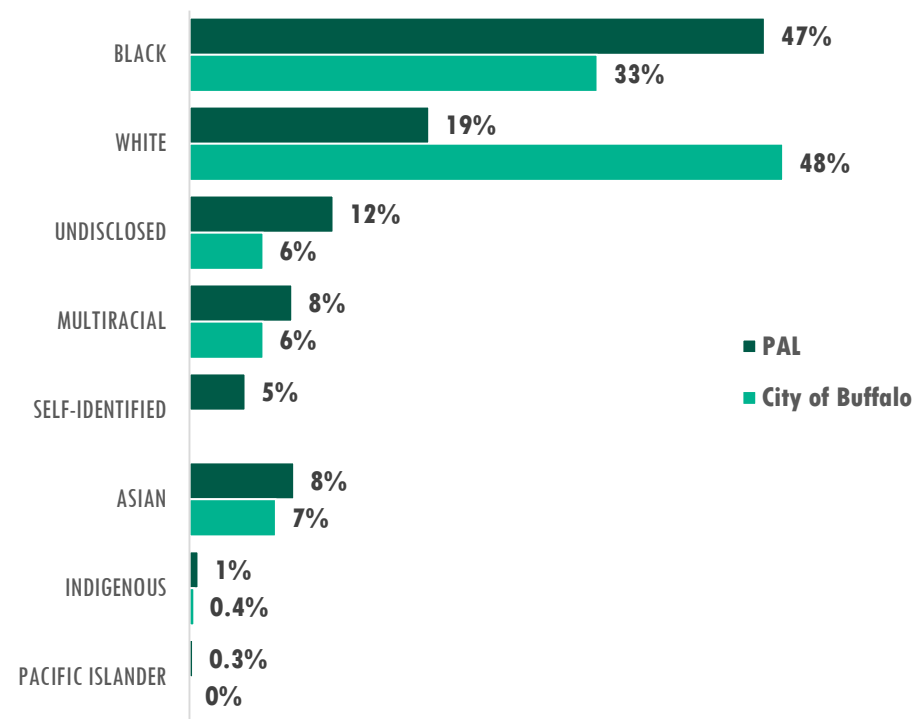
### Age Breakdown of Wellness Participants



Black youth represented the largest group of wellness participants (Figure 11 below).

Figure 11

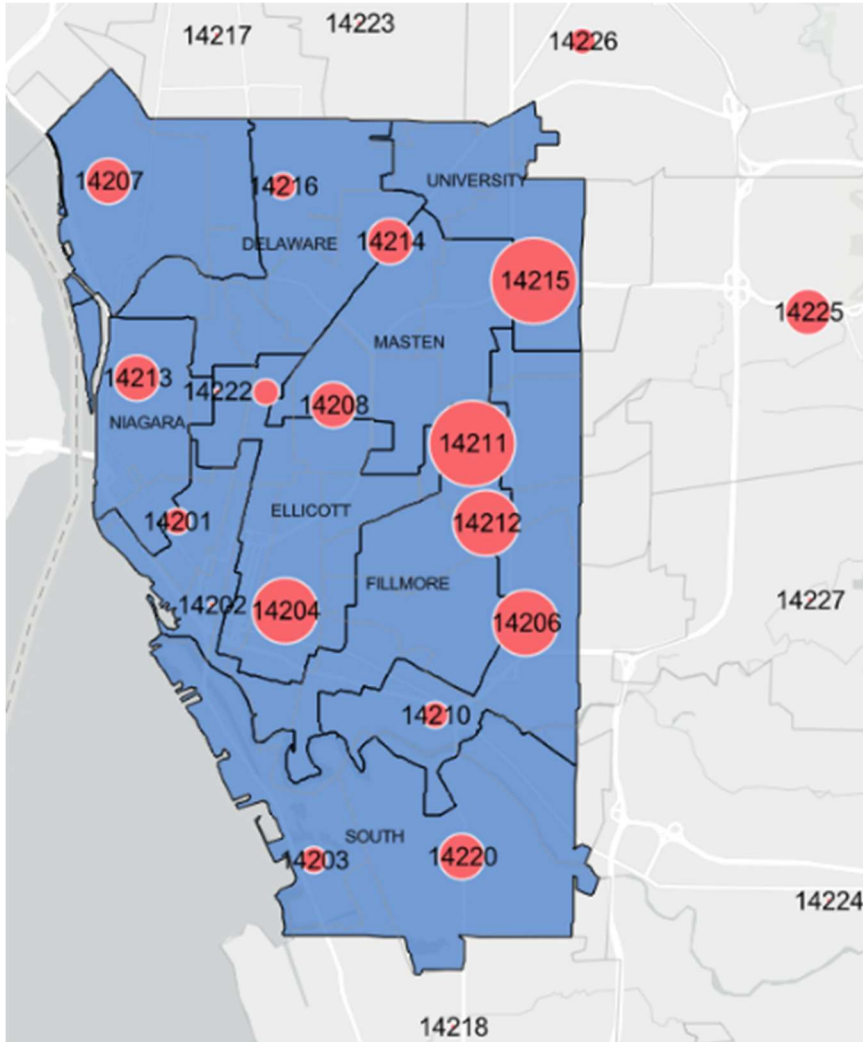
Race Breakdown of Wellness Participants



The largest number of wellness participants came from 14215 in University District and 14211 in Masten District (Figure 12 below).

Figure 12

### Heat Map of Wellness Participant Zip Codes by Council District

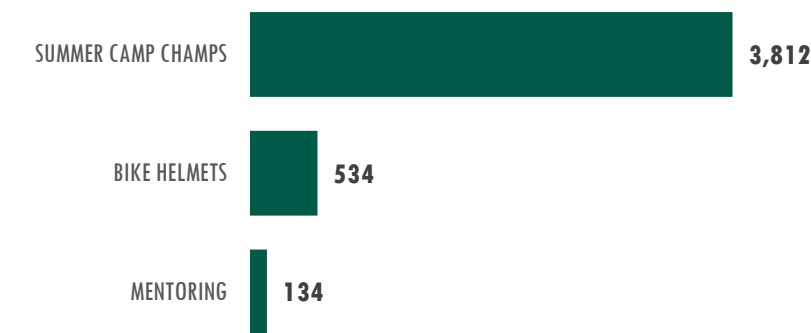


## Wellness Program Touchpoints in 2024

There were 4,480 program touchpoints for wellness activities. Say Yes Summer Camp Champs had the highest attendance because it was offered 5 days a week for 6 weeks (Figure 13).

Figure 13

### Wellness Program Touchpoints by Activity



Average attendance varied widely across wellness programs because of the distinct nature of those programs (Figure 14). The Bike Helmets Giveaway was a singular event, so each participant was counted as attending once\*, while the Summer Camp Champs program ran for 5 days per week over the course of 6 weeks, which gave youth many opportunities to attend.

Figure 14

### Average Attendance by Wellness Program



Wellness Participant & Family Feedback in 2024

Figure 15 below includes feedback from 175 respondents. There were an additional 244 respondents who said that they did not participate in any of the activities but still responded to the question who are not included in this figure. In general, respondents felt more confident in being part of a team with kids the same age (100%).

Figure 15

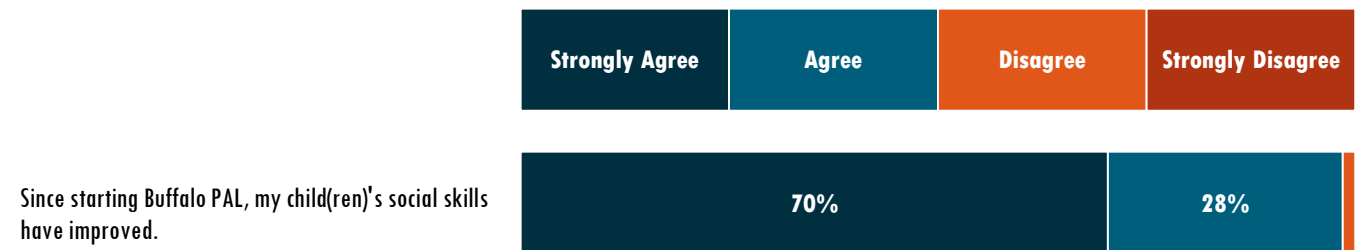
Wellness Program Participant Feedback



Figure 16 below displays feedback from 338 family member respondents. Most family members reported improvement in their child(ren)’s social skills (98%).

Figure 16

Wellness Program Family Feedback



Wellness Programming Observation

VIA conducted a site visit of Buffalo PAL programming. While VIA did not observe any wellness programs specifically, many of the criteria are relevant to all programs. The completed rubric below is based on a summary of all the programs observed during the site visit.

Table 3

Completed Observation Rubric for Wellness Programming

Criteria	Site Visit 1 Rating
Modeling Pro-Social Behaviors	Excellent: Staff and law enforcement consistently model pro-social behaviors and restorative practices.
Positive Relationships	Excellent: Youth consistently interact positively with peers, staff, and law enforcement.
Wellness	Excellent: Programming offers a structured time for social-emotional learning.

Academic Achievement

Buffalo PAL built partnerships with several schools in Buffalo to provide academic programming in their buildings for youth. Some of the partners were West Hertel Academy, Lorraine Elementary, PS 33 Bilingual Center, Highgate Heights, REACH Academy Charter School, Persistence Preparatory Academy, Marva J. Daniels Futures Preparatory Academy, and Dr. Charles R. Drew Science Magnet.

As Buffalo PAL adapted its programming, the organization began to offer other types of activities for youth. With an understanding that academic and social-emotional development is an important facet of healthy living, more intentional programming was incorporated. Some of the programs offered include School Partnerships, Community Center Partnerships, and STAR Literacy.

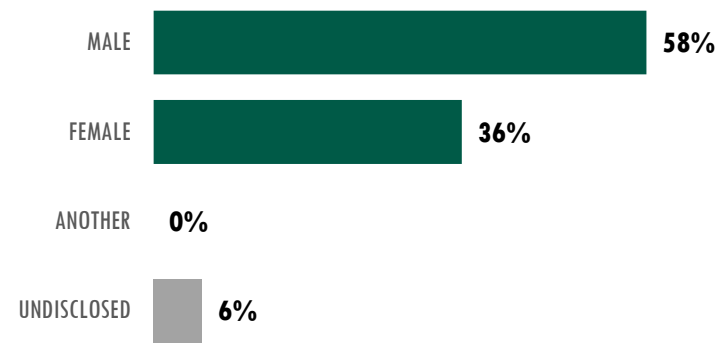
Youth are actively engaged in their Academic Achievement through building literacy skills.

Academic Participant Demographics in 2024

There were 1,552 individual youth who participated in various Academic activities. There were more boys (58%) who attended programming compared to girls (Figure 17).

Figure 17

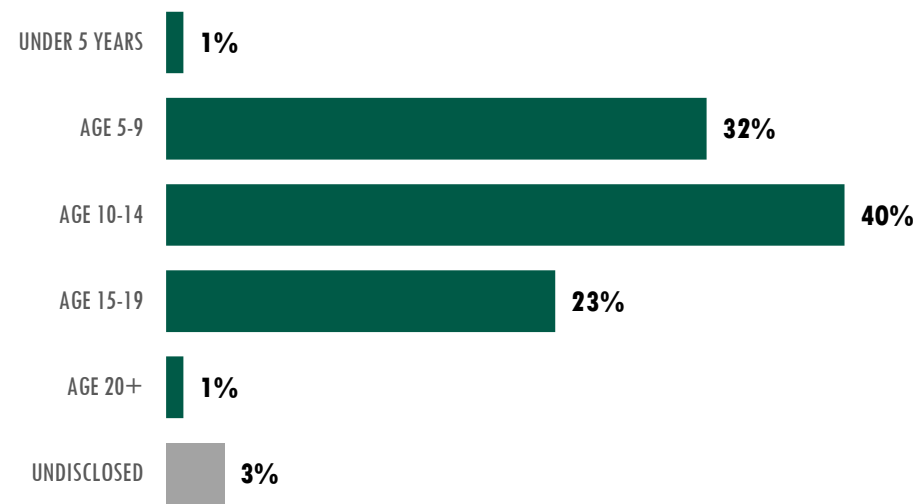
Gender Breakdown of Academic Participants



Most academic participants were between ages 5 and 14 (72%; Figure 18 ).

Figure 18

Age Breakdown of Academic Participants



The majority of academic participants identified as Black (Figure 19).

Figure 19

Race Breakdown of Academic Participants

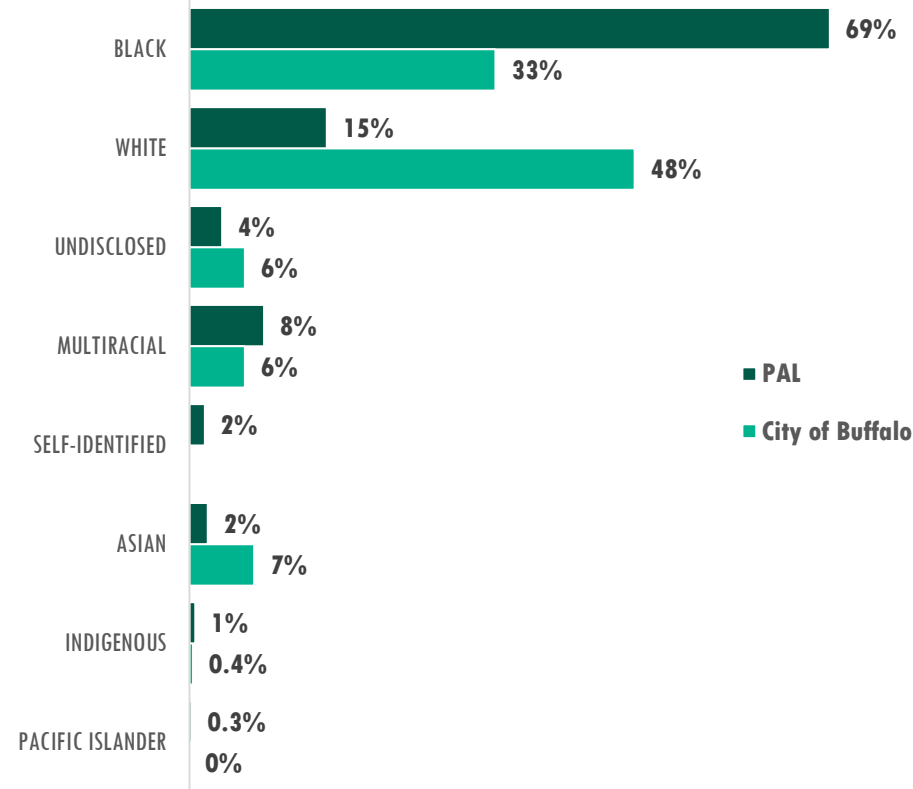
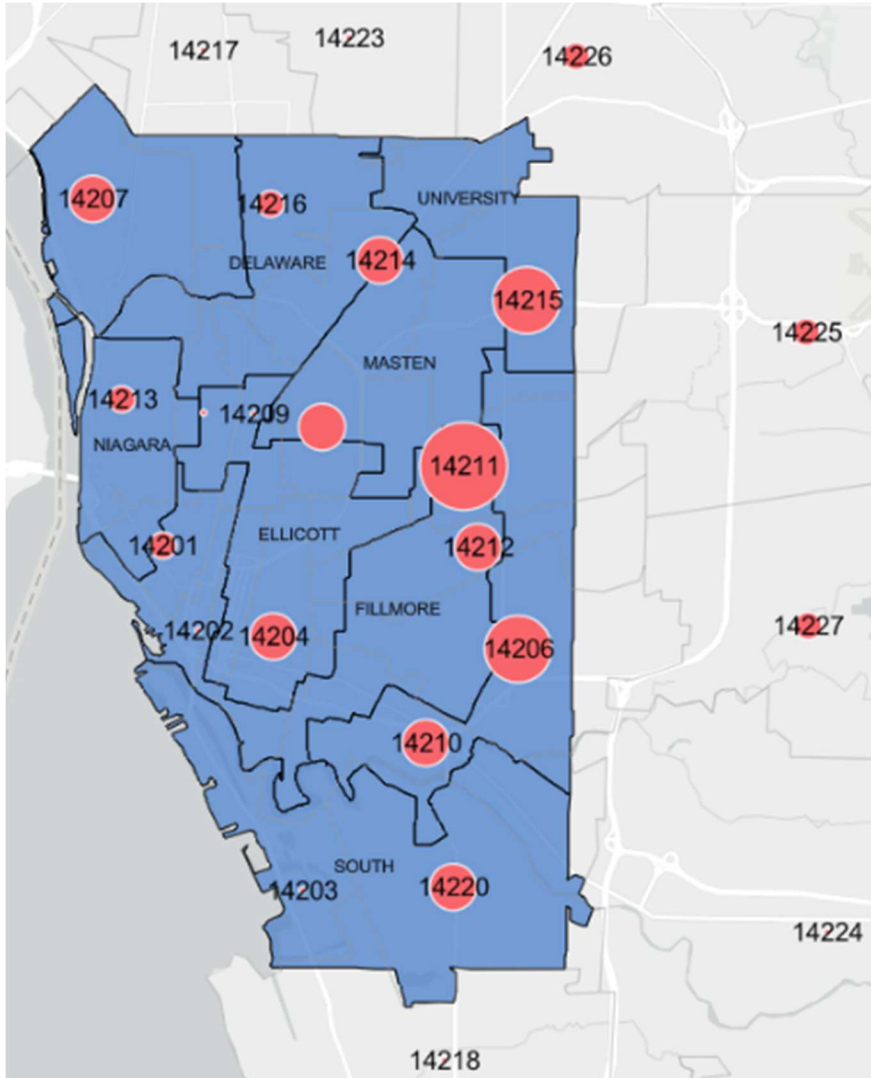




Figure 20 below shows that many Academic program participants came from council districts on the East Side of Buffalo, though the greatest number live in the 14211 zip code of Masten District.

Figure 20

### Heat Map of Academic Participant Zip Codes by Council District

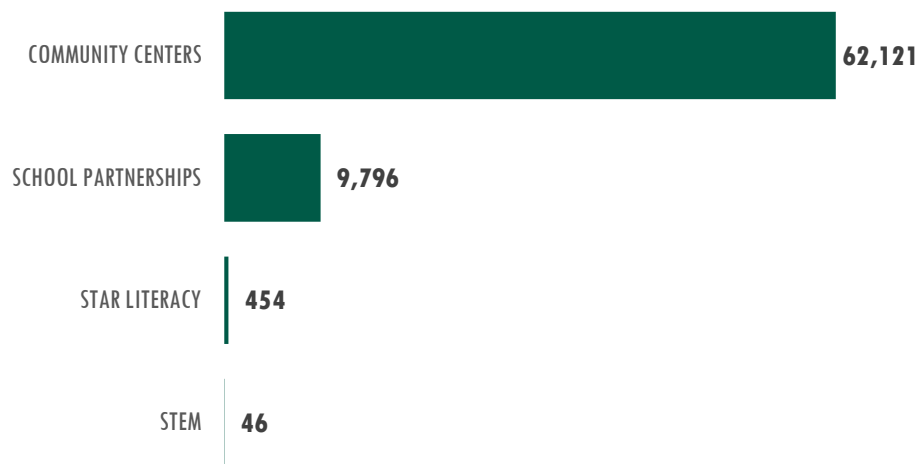


## Academic Program Touchpoints in 2024

There were a total of 72,417 academic achievement program touchpoints in 2024. As shown in Figure 21 below, the largest number of program touchpoints occurred during Community Center activities. Unlike the other Buffalo PAL activities, community centers do not collect individual-level attendance. Instead, a total number of attendees is sent to Buffalo PAL staff on a regular basis. The N.E.T. Team had 39 academic program touchpoints throughout 2024, all of which occurred at STAR Literacy sessions.

Figure 21

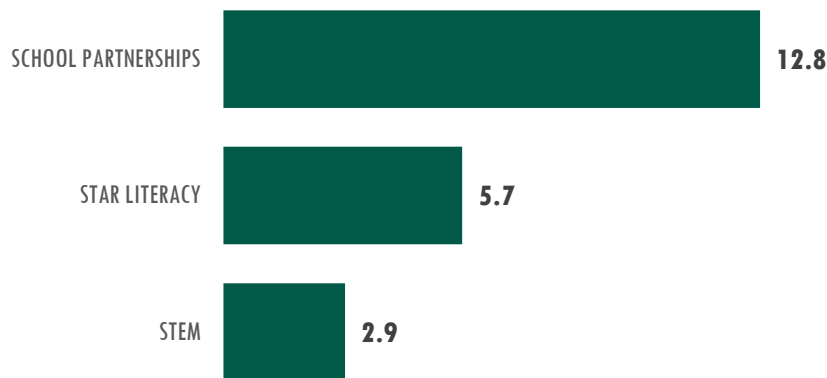
### Academic Program Touchpoints by Activity



School Partnerships had the largest average attendance since programming was offered several times a week. Community Centers also offered programming often, but that data was not collected at the individual youth level. For this reason, average attendance for Community Centers is not calculated in Figure 22.

Figure 22

### Average Attendance by Academic Program



Academic Participant & Family Feedback in 2024

Figure 23 below includes responses from 151 youth. There were an additional 277 participants who responded to 1 or more of the questions but stated that they had not participated in academic programing. Most (98%) youth had an increased interest in reading and writing after participating in Buffalo PAL, and 99% said they learned new academic skills in PAL.

Figure 23

Academic Program Participant Feedback

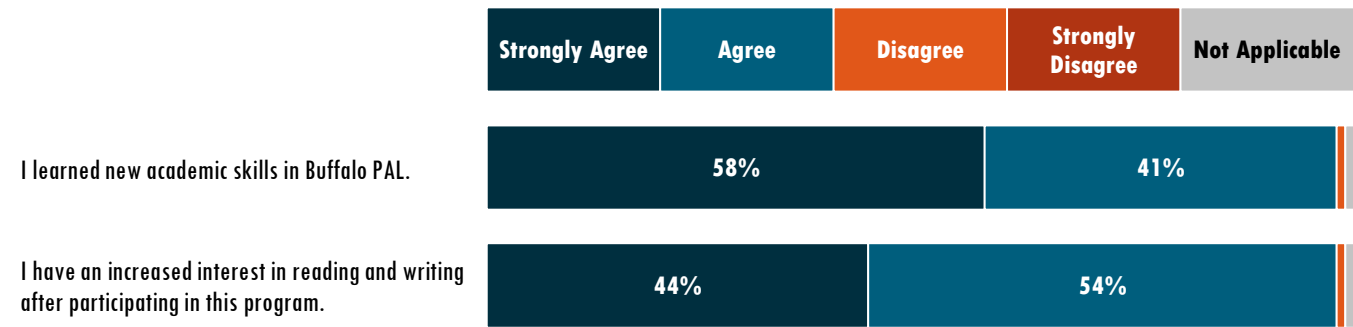
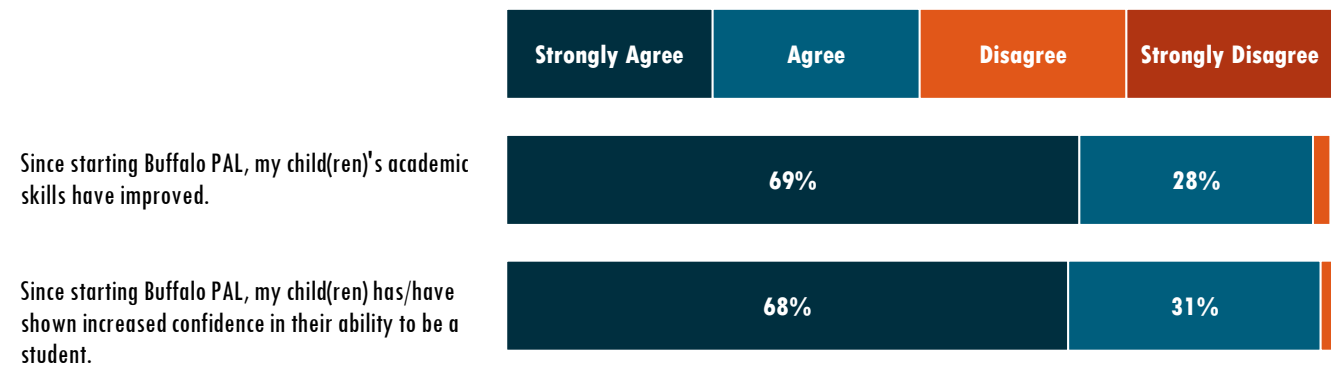


Figure 24 below includes responses from 331 family members. Nearly all family respondents noticed improvement in their child’s academic skills and confidence in those skills (98%).

Figure 24

Academic Program Family Feedback



Academic Programming Observation

VIA conducted a site visit of Buffalo PAL programming. VIA observed 2 different age groups of ELA instruction, each led by a certified teacher. In the first observation, the teacher led the activity, asking youth questions about the topics discussed. In the second observation, youth took turns reading pages of a book with breaks where the teacher would ask questions to ensure that youth understood the concepts read. The completed observation rubric on the next page is a summary of both activities, which had the same rating.

Table 4

Completed Observation Rubric for Academic Programming

Criteria	Site Visit 1 Rating
Modeling Pro-Social Behaviors	Excellent: Staff and law enforcement consistently model pro-social behaviors and restorative practices.
Positive Relationships	Excellent: Youth consistently interact positively with peers, staff, and law enforcement.
Adherence to Schedule	Good: Observation mostly matches program schedule
Youth Engagement in Activity	Excellent: Youth participate in activity throughout the entire observation period.
Academic Achievement	Excellent: Programming offers a structured time for literacy and/or academic skill-building.

Workforce Development

Buffalo PAL Workforce Development programming is one of the newest goals incorporated at the organization. Programs such as Ford Critical Conversations offered the opportunity for young adults to meet with police officers to have important conversations about the community. These programs were geared towards teens and young adults due to the mature subject matter.

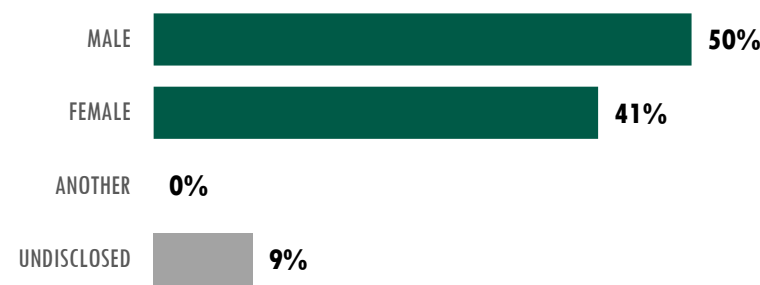
Workforce Development Participant Demographics in 2024

There were 185 individual youth who participated in various Workforce Development activities. As with other programs, males represented the largest proportion of participants, though the disparity was narrower than other program types (Figure 25).

Youth begin to explore career opportunities through workforce development (e.g., job skills, build networks, and gain certifications).

Figure 25

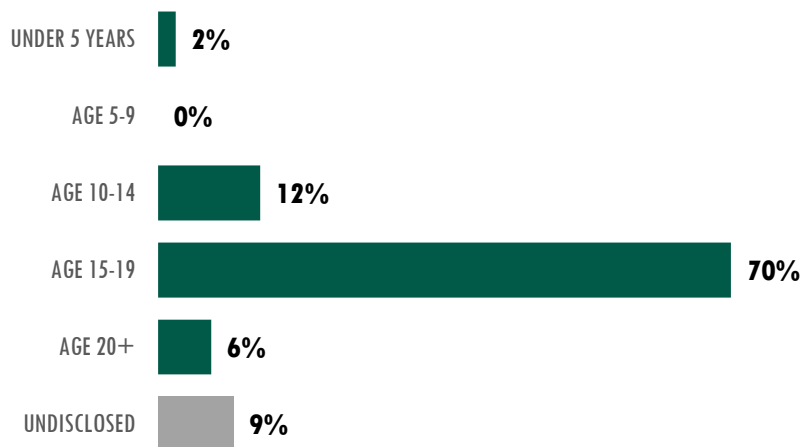
Gender Breakdown of Workforce Participants



The majority of workforce development participants were ages 15-19, as is expected based on the purpose of this programming (70%; Figure 26). Discrepancies like participants under age 5 are most likely due to errors during the registration process.

Figure 26

### Gender Breakdown of Workforce Participants



As seen in Figure 27 below, workforce development participants were more racially diverse than youth in other program types.

Figure 27

### Race Breakdown of Workforce Participants

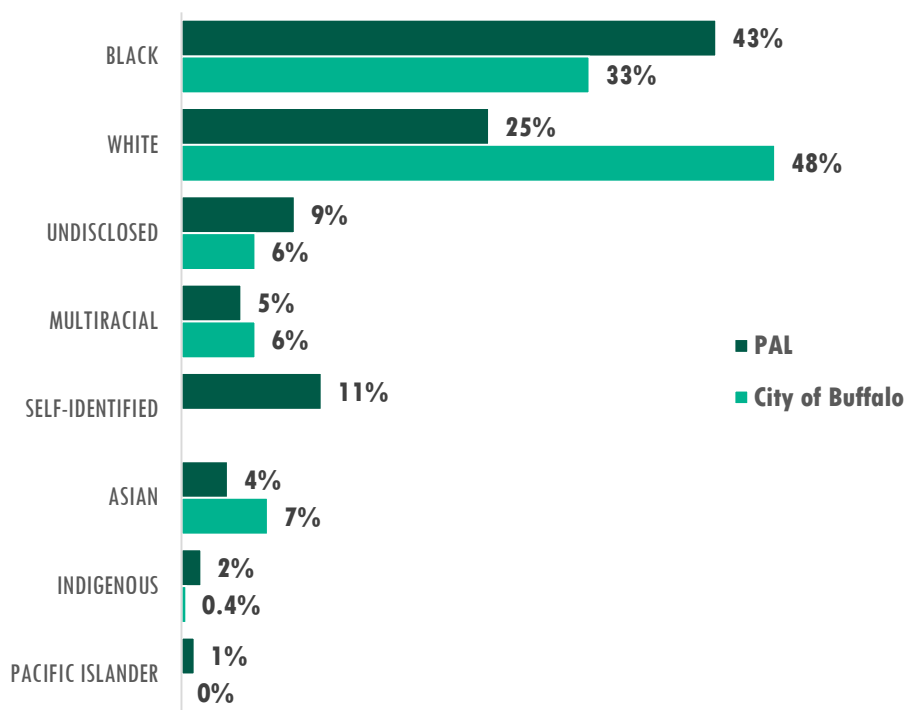
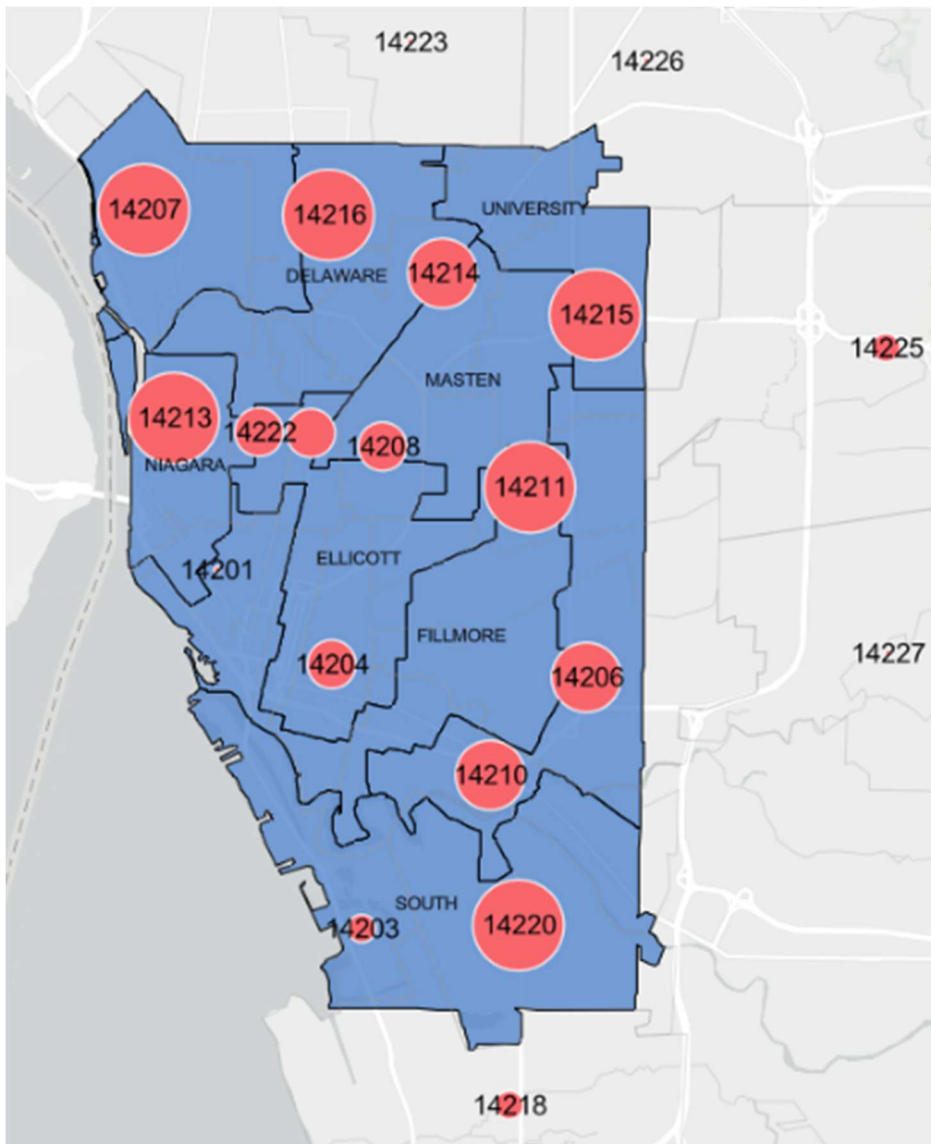


Figure 28 below shows that workforce development participants come from neighborhoods around the city, though the largest number of participants are from zip code 14213 in the Niagara District and 14215 in the University District.

Figure 28

### Heat Map of Workforce Development Participant Zip Codes by Council District

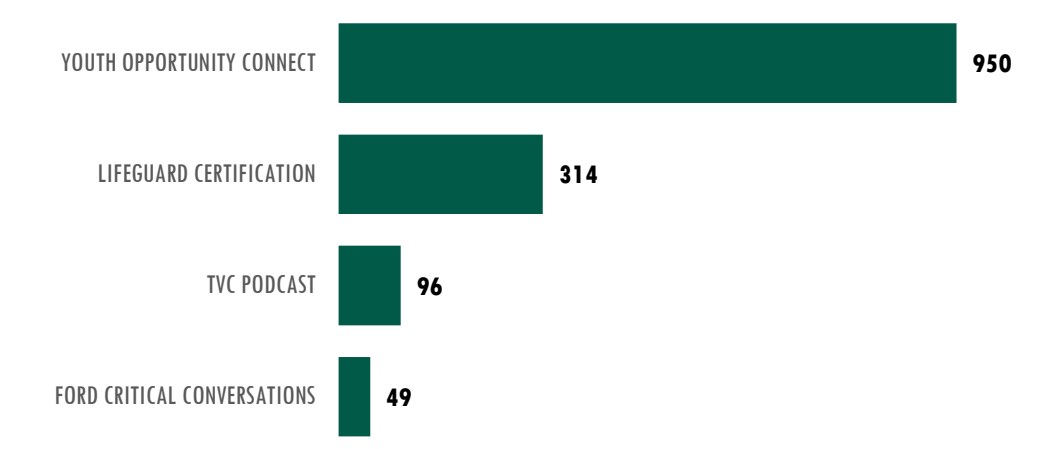


## Workforce Development Program Touchpoints in 2024

There were a total of 1,409 workforce development program touchpoints in 2024, and Youth Opportunity Connect had the highest number of touchpoints (Figure 29 on the next page). The N.E.T. Team had 21 academic program touchpoints at Ford Critical Conversations sessions in 2024.

Figure 29

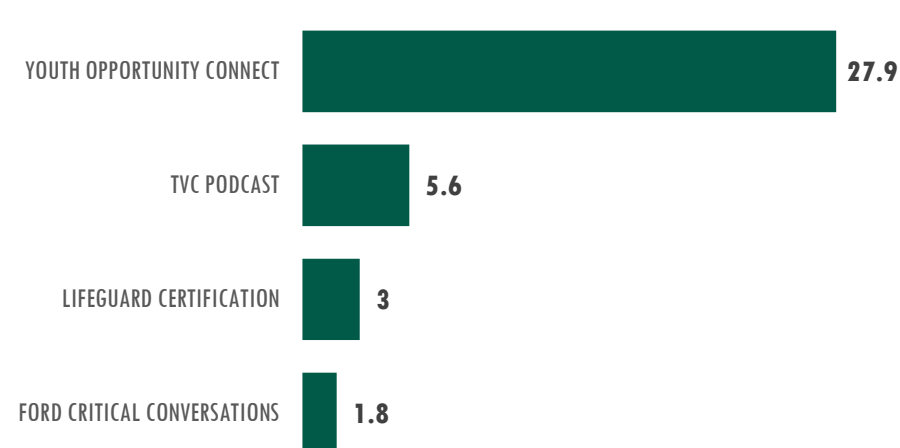
### Workforce Development Program Touchpoints by Activity



Youth Opportunity Connect had the highest average attendance since it was offered as an 8-week program (Figure 30). TVC Podcast was a subset of Youth Opportunity Connect, only available to some youth.

Figure 30

### Average Attendance by Workforce Development Program

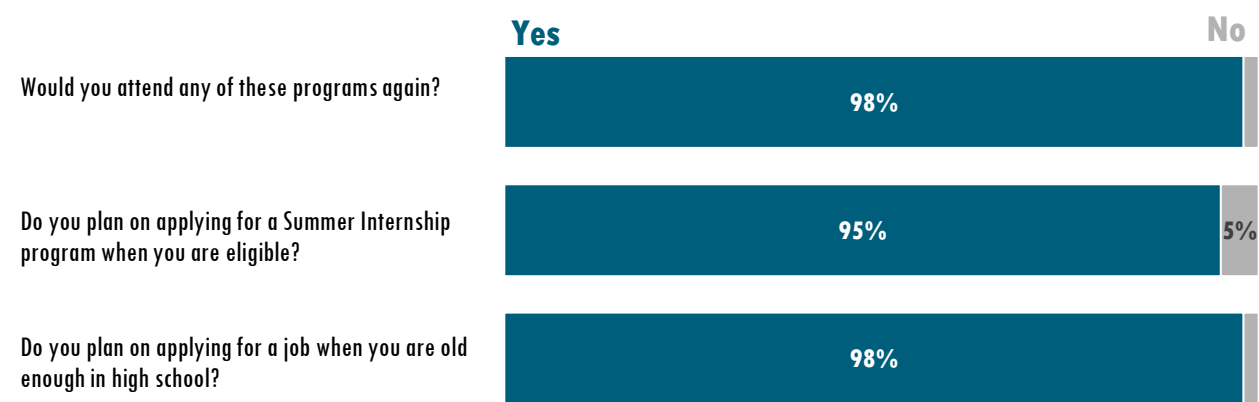


Workforce Development Participant & Family Feedback in 2024

The survey questions for workforce development varied the most on the feedback survey. This is due to different funder requirements for those specific programs. Figure 31 below includes data from 110 survey respondents. An additional 439 youth responded to at least one question although they stated that they did not participate in any workforce development programming.

Figure 31

Workforce Development Program Participant Feedback



Most (99%) of the 331 family members who responded agreed that their child’s leadership skills have improved since starting Buffalo PAL (Figure 32).

Figure 32

Workforce Development Program Family Feedback



Workforce Development Programming Observation

VIA conducted a site visit of Buffalo PAL programming. The Youth Opportunity Connect program (YOC) at Machnica Community Center hires a mix of adult and youth staff to operate programming. This gives a structured opportunity for youth staff to receive workforce development as part of their participation. Additionally, there was a sign up on the wall where youth chose their duties for the day (e.g., sweeping, cleaning bathroom, gathering supplies, etc.). The completed observation table below is for the overall YOC program, as VIA did not observe a specific workforce development activity.



Table 5

Completed Observation Rubric for Workforce Development Programming

Criteria	Site Visit 1 Rating
Workforce Development	<b>Excellent:</b> Programming offers a structured time for workforce development.

Key Findings

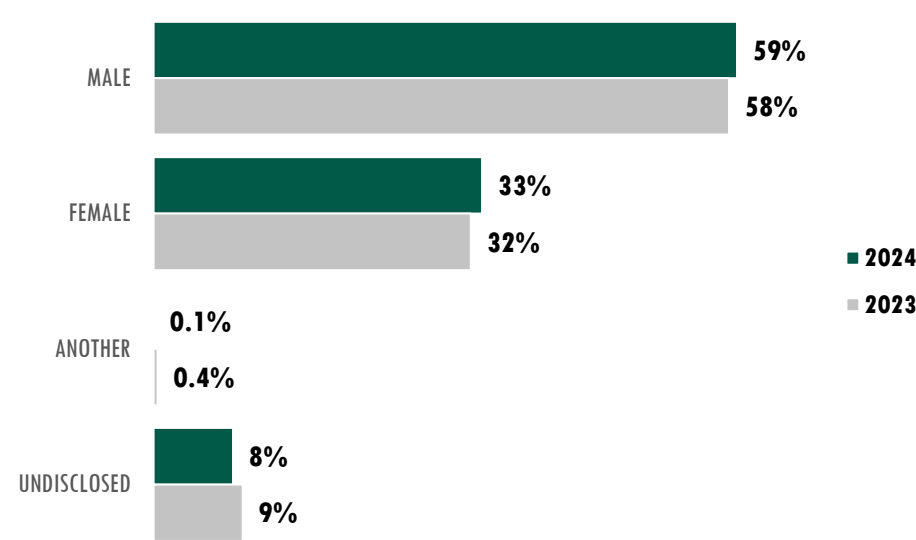
Participant Demographics in 2024

There were 3,457 individual youth who participated in Buffalo PAL Programming in 2024, notably fewer than the 5,089 youth in 2023.

As in 2023, nearly 60% of Buffalo PAL participants identified as male (Figure 33).

Figure 33

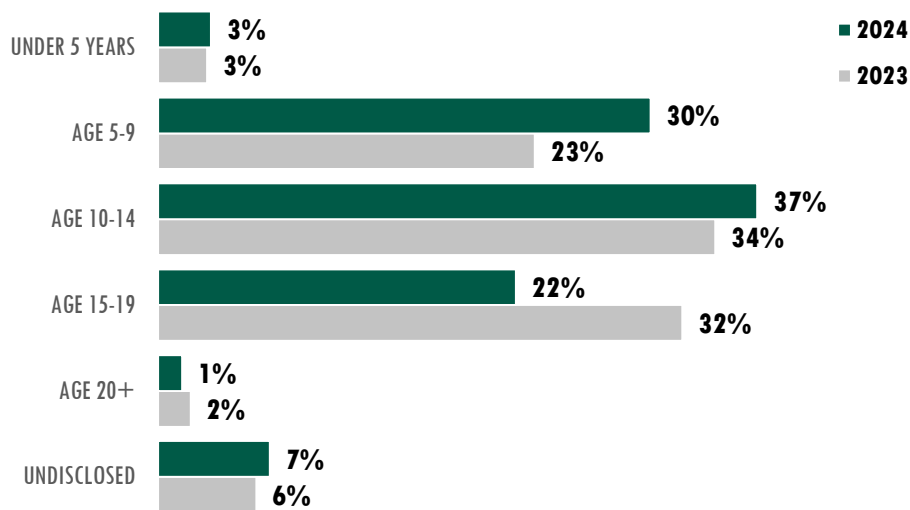
Gender Breakdown of PAL Participant, 2023 and 2024



In general, the age ranges of PAL participants were similar in 2023 and 2024, except for youth ages 5-9 and 15-19, where the percentages appear to reverse (Figure 34 on the next page). While almost a quarter of participants were age 5-9 and a third were 15-19 in 2023, 30% of participants were 5-9, while 22% were age 15-19 in 2024.

Figure 34

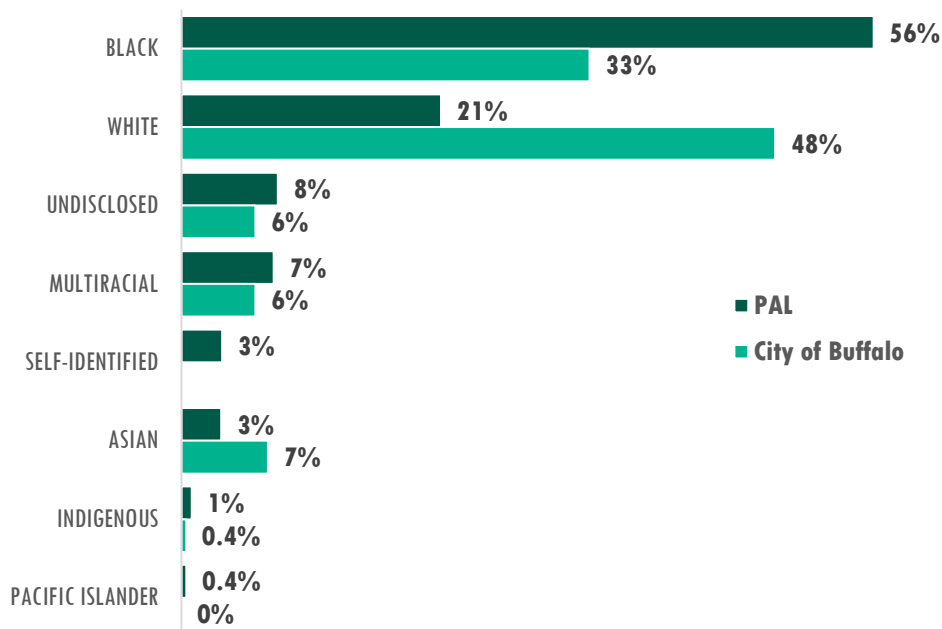
### Age Breakdown of PAL Participants, 2023 and 2024



Buffalo PAL primarily served Black youth, as aligned with their organization goal of supporting Black and Brown youth (Figure 35).

Figure 35

### Race Breakdown of PAL Participants, compared to City of Buffalo



As shown in Figure 36, the racial makeup of PAL participants was very similar between 2023 and 2024.

Figure 36

### Race Breakdown of PAL Participants, 2023 and 2024

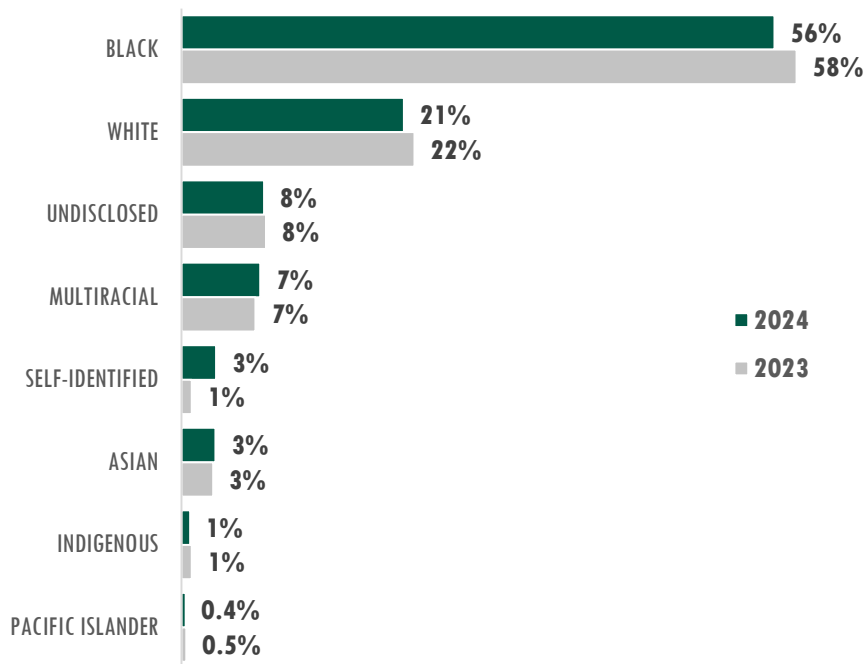
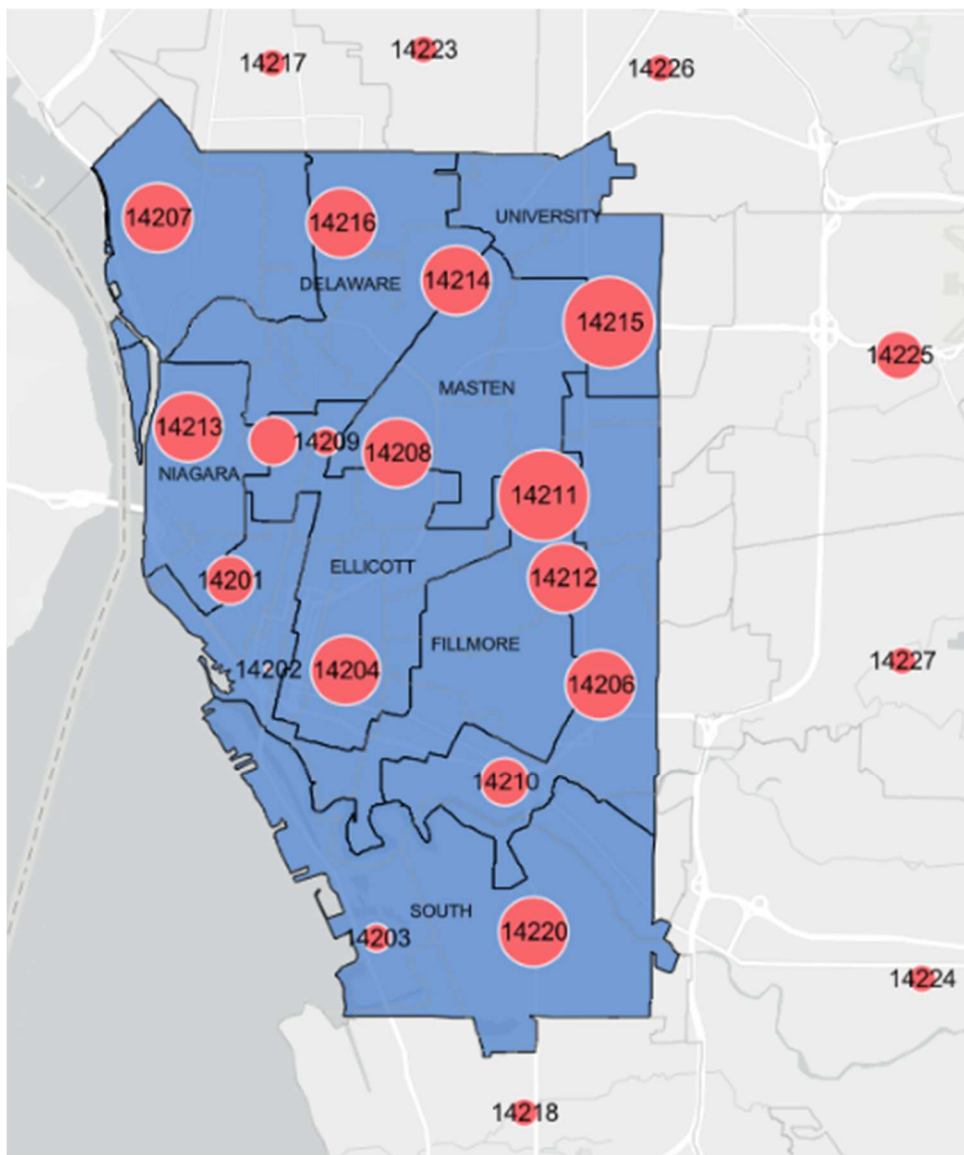


Figure 37 on the next page shows that Buffalo PAL participants represented many neighborhoods throughout the city. The greatest number of youth came from zip code 14211 in the Masten District.

Figure 37

### Heat Map of PAL Participant Zip Codes by Council District



## Program Touchpoints in 2024

There were 83,997 PAL program touchpoints in 2024, and community centers had the highest number of touchpoints (Figure 38). The N.E.T. Team had 216 program touchpoints over the course of 2024.

Figure 38

### PAL Program Touchpoints by Activity

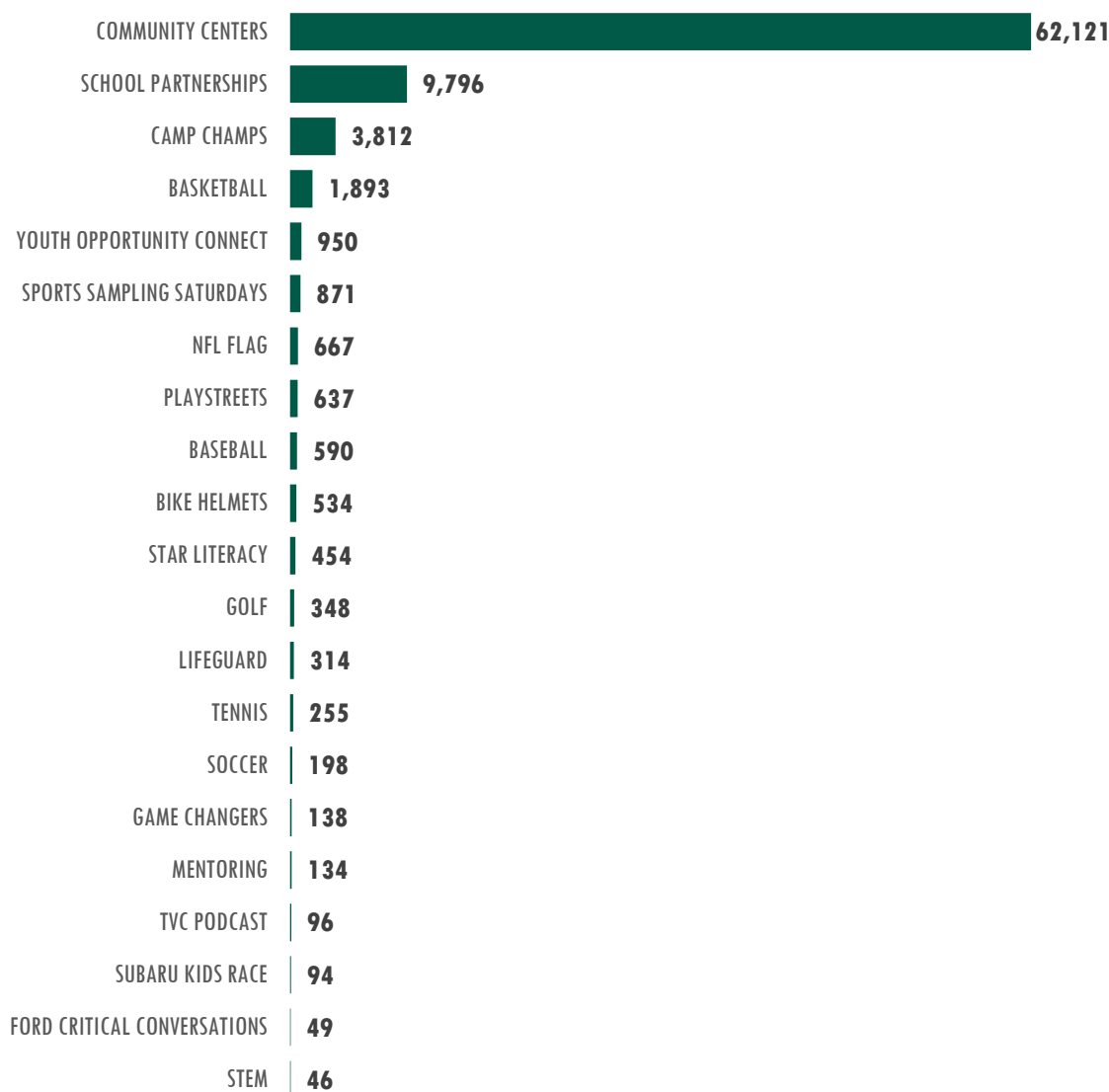
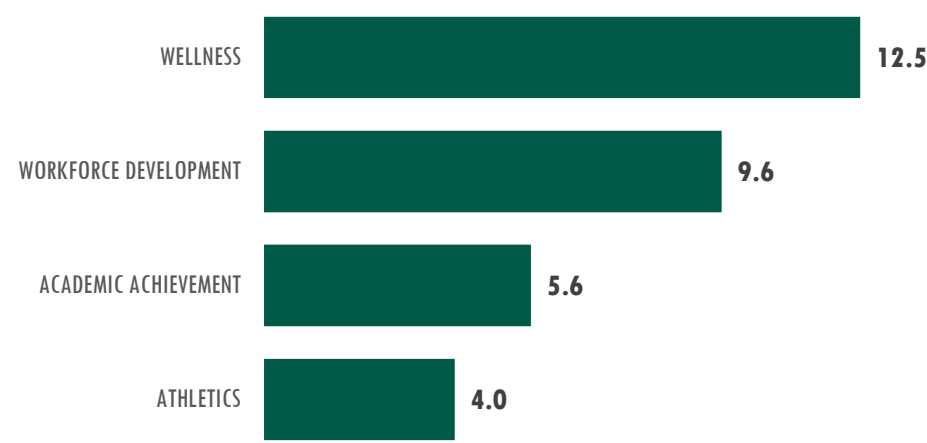


Figure 39 on the next page displays the average attendance by program type. Wellness activities have the highest average attendance, in large part because of Summer Camp Champs, which takes place 5 days a week over 6 weeks. Similarly, the high average attendance for Workforce Development is largely due to the Youth Opportunity Connects program, which occurs regularly over several weeks. Community Centers average attendance is not included in the Academic Achievement program type because individual-level attendance was not collected.

Figure 39

Average Attendance by Program Type



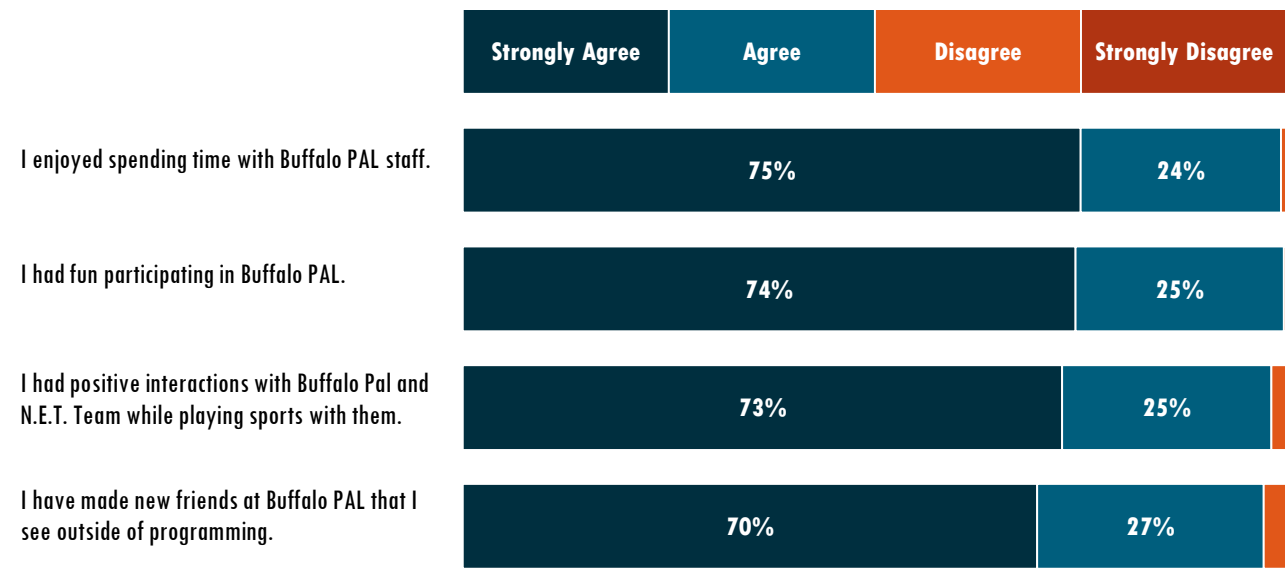
Program Feedback for 2024

Participants were surveyed at the end of each program, to gather feedback about their experience. In addition to goal-related questions, respondents were also asked about their satisfaction with Buffalo PAL.

Nearly all of the 527 youth who responded (99%) agreed that they had fun in PAL and enjoyed spending time with Buffalo PAL staff, as shown in Figure 40 below.

Figure 40

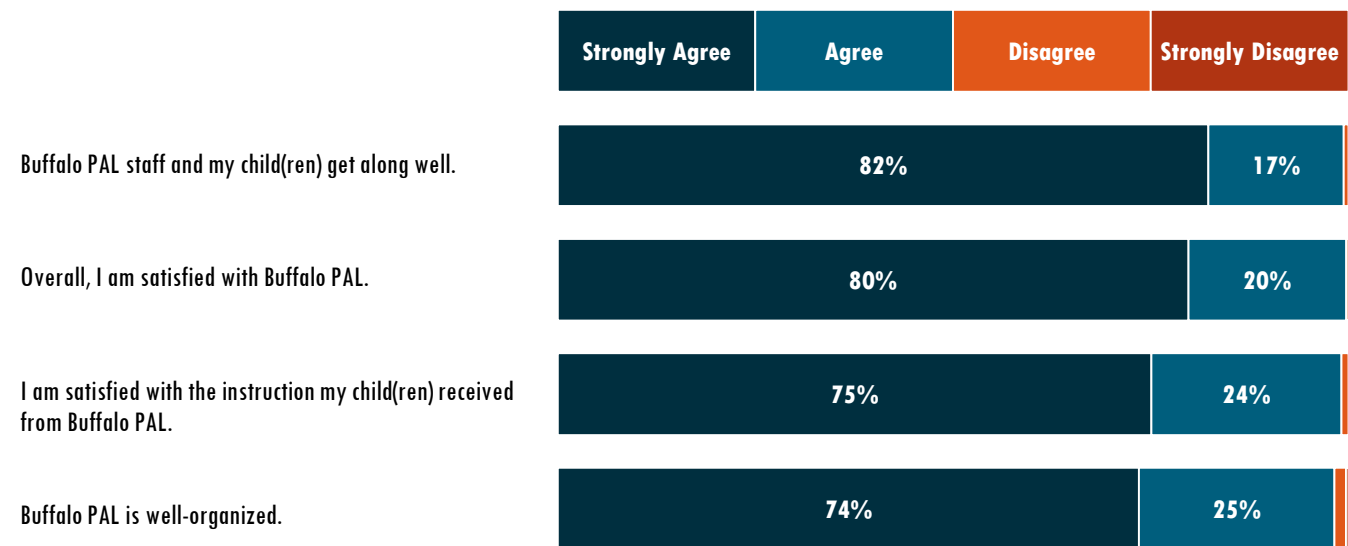
Youth Satisfaction with PAL



Families of participating youth also expressed strong overall satisfaction with Buffalo PAL, with 340 out of 341 families saying they were satisfied with the organization, and 99% saying that PAL staff get along well with their child (Figure 41).

Figure 41

Family Satisfaction with PAL



N.E.T. Team members were also asked about their satisfaction with working with Buffalo PAL. All respondents agreed that they were satisfied with their role as a N.E.T. Team Officer and with the support and resources that Buffalo PAL provides them. As seen in Figure 42 on the next page, 18 of the 20 respondents (90%) said they were satisfied with the level of communication and collaboration that they have with the PAL team.

Figure 42

N.E.T. Team Feedback on Buffalo PAL Programming, 2024

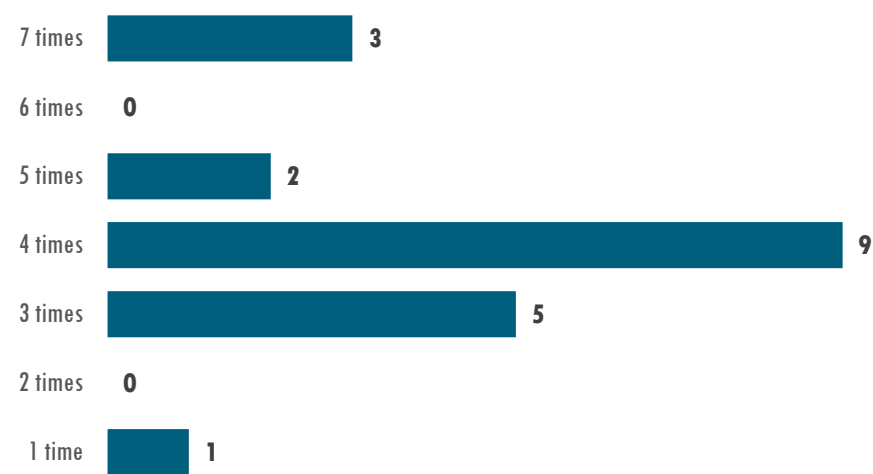


Many of the N.E.T. Team members stated that they attended Buffalo PAL programming between 3-4 times a week (Figure 43). There was only one member who stated that they attended fewer than 3 times per week.

Figure 43

N.E.T. Team Weekly Attendance at Buffalo PAL Programs, 2024

How often do you visit Buffalo PAL programs a week?



Most Buffalo N.E.T. Team members stated that they feel valued by the youth in the neighborhood (Figure 44 on the next page). Buffalo PAL’s overarching goal of “Youth build positive relationships with their peers and adults, especially PAL staff and Neighborhood Engagement Team” primarily focuses on the youth but it is important to also assess the experience of the N.E.T. Team.



Figure 44

Buffalo N.E.T. Team Feeling Valued, 2024

Do you feel that your work is recognized and valued by the youth in the neighborhood?



Buffalo PAL staff members also had an opportunity to share feedback about their satisfaction with working for the organization. Out of 10 responses, 9 (90%) said they were satisfied or very satisfied with their average workday, while one respondent was neutral.

**90%** of Buffalo PAL staff members are satisfied with their average workday

Programming Observation

VIA visited two Buffalo PAL program sites on July 30, 2024, to observe programming. Observations were conducted at Camp Champs at the Hennepin Community Center and Youth Opportunity Connect Program at Machnica Community Center.

Observed programming appears to be running as intended, with positive interactions observed among youth and among youth and staff, high levels of youth engagement in activities, and strong adherence to program schedules, with exceptions that allowed youth to participate in all planned activities throughout the day. Observed academic and wellness programming were well-structured and intentional, while observed healthy lifestyle activities could have been slightly better structured or designed.

Table 6

Completed Observation Rubric for Buffalo PAL Programming

Criteria	Site Visit 1 Rating
Adherence to Schedule	Good: Observation mostly matches program schedule
Youth Engagement in Activity	Excellent: Youth participate in activity throughout the entire observation period.

In addition the athletics specific recommendation earlier in the report, VIA also included the following program recommendation:

- Continue to remain flexible with schedule when weather and/or staffing concerns arise.

## Conclusions & Recommendations

There were 3,457 individual youth who participated in Buffalo PAL Programming and 83,997 total PAL program touchpoints in 2024. Not only does Buffalo PAL offer a robust athletics program, but they have also expanded to wellness, academic achievement, and workforce development programming.

Buffalo PAL identified 5 goals: 1 overarching and 4 goals associated with each type of programming offered. Survey feedback was used to answer whether each of the goals was met. In general, feedback was positive and amounted to progress towards Buffalo PAL goals.

**Youth build positive relationships with their peers and adults, especially PAL staff and Neighborhood Engagement Team (N.E.T.).**

- 1 Youth lead active, healthy lifestyles where they regularly participate in physical activity.**
- 2 Youth develop social-emotional skills, building meaningful relationships with their peers, adults, and law enforcement mentors.**
- 3 Youth are actively engaged in their Academic Achievement through building literacy skills.**
- 4 Youth begin to explore career opportunities through workforce development (e.g., job skills, build networks, and gain certifications).**

Buffalo PAL is meeting their goal of primarily serving Black and Brown youth in Buffalo. Although programming is available to Erie County residents, outreach efforts appear successful in enrolling youth who reside in the city of Buffalo and identify as Black.

### Recommendations

**Research alternate data systems for program registrations and/or attendance.**

Buffalo PAL transitioned from paper registrations to online registrations through evaluation capacity building with Via Evaluation, their external evaluator. The use of SurveyMonkey helped to streamline registration for families by creating separate forms for each activity registration that was then linked to the Buffalo PAL website. However, this is not the purpose of SurveyMonkey and thus leads to cumbersome registration and attendance matching procedures for Buffalo PAL staff. There are more effective registration and attendance tracking tools used by other PAL programs, such as Vision Member Tracking System. The use of such tools would also give Buffalo PAL a more independent ability to complete the various funding reports that are required across their programs.

**Expand community outreach.**

Increase efforts to engage with the community through various channels, such as social media, local events, and partnerships with other organizations. This can help raise awareness about Buffalo PAL programs and attract more participants. Additionally, leveraging community influencers and local media can amplify the reach and impact of these efforts, ensuring that more families and youth are informed about the opportunities available through Buffalo PAL.

**Implement regular staff training.**

Provide ongoing training and professional development opportunities for staff to ensure they are equipped with the latest knowledge and skills to effectively support the youth. This can also help improve staff satisfaction and retention. Regular training sessions can cover a variety of topics, including youth development, effective communication, conflict resolution, and cultural competency. Additionally, offering opportunities for staff to attend external workshops and conferences can help them stay updated on the latest trends and best practices in youth programming. By investing in staff development, Buffalo PAL can create a more knowledgeable and motivated team, ultimately leading to better outcomes for the youth they serve.