

2022 Des Plaines Park District Community Survey: Final report



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March 13, 2023



COLLEGE *of* APPLIED HEALTH SCIENCES
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION AND METHODS

The purpose of this community study was to obtain input from Des Plaines Park District (DPPD) residents on: 1) use of DPPD parks, facilities, and programs; 2) opinions regarding DPPD operations (e.g., staffing, facilities/parks condition/upkeep, programs); 3) understanding reasons for not using DPPD parks, facilities, and programs/events; 4) assess resident opinions of priorities for capital improvement projects; and 5) evaluate programs (e.g., dance, fitness, sport, youth, camps, active adults, and special events). Insights from community input will inform the DPPD strategic plan.

The University of Illinois Office of Recreation and Park Resources (ORPR) and the DPPD Board and Staff developed the survey collaboratively. Valid and reliable survey questions that used in other community surveys were tailored to the DPPD resident survey and questions were created to achieve the aims of the study. A stratified sample of 6,000 households within the DPPD was generated using a survey sampling company (Dynata). People who are members of racially/ethnically diverse groups were over sampled since they are less likely to complete surveys. A postcard explaining the survey initiative was mailed first class to each sample household. The survey link was also e-mailed to a database of 8,336 customers and interested residents. Analytics indicated 45% (N=3,753) opened the email and 2% (N=85) clicked on the link. Moreover, the survey was promoted via signage at DPPD facilities, a printed newspaper ad, and on various social media pages, and the DPPD website.

A total of 627 surveys were completed for a 12% response rate. Seventy percent of respondents accessed the survey from the direct mailing or a direct email. The remaining 30% of respondents accessed the survey through DPPD social media or onsite QR codes. Analysis of the two groups based on age, gender and length of residency indicated the groups were not significantly different, which justified combining the two samples into one sample for further analysis. Thus, we can be 90% confident that we only have 10% error in the results, which is consistent with industry standards for research methods.



FINDINGS

Sample Description: The mean age of the sample was 48 years with an age range from 18 to 88 years old. The majority of respondents were female (70%) and the race/ethnicity of the sample closely resembled that of Des Plaines Park District residents in which 74% of respondents were White, 10% were Hispanic/Latino, 6% were Asian and 1% were Black. The average household size was 3.1 people and respondents have lived in the park district for an average of 22 years. Sixty-four percent have one or more child living in the household, and 80% are married/living with a partner.

Use and Opinions of Parks, Facilities and Programs: Overall, the facilities utilized most frequently are parks (94%), Prairie Lakes Community Center (79%), and playgrounds (75%). The least used facilities/programs are the outdoor pools (54%), Mountain View Adventure Center (51%) and golf facilities (42%). Reasons for not using park district programs, facilities and parks included lack of interest, being too busy, time conflicts, and not aware of program offerings. Many park district facilities were highly rated based on their condition, upkeep and cleanliness. Specifically, the Prairie Lakes Aquatics Center (63%), Prairies Lakes Community Center (58%), Chippewa (51%), Lake Park (70%), and West Park (55%) were rated as “good or excellent” by respondents. However, the Administrative and Leisure Center (17%), Mountain View Adventure Center (12%), Arndt Park (18%) and Mystic Waters (11%) were rated lower.

Respondents overwhelmingly agreed or strongly agreed (93%) that recreation services, parks and facilities are important to their quality of life and 89% agreed that the park district is responsive to resident needs. Most respondents agree that DPPD programs are a good value for the money and the majority agree they are satisfied with the recreation opportunities provided by DPPD. They also agree that registration is convenient and front desk staff is knowledgeable, and 70% agree that the park district’s marketing is effective.

Importance of Proposed Capital Projects: Respondents rated “add a nature center” as the most important potential park district project to fund and implement followed by “outdoor lighting at Prairie Lakes”, “increase the number of open park spaces”, and “add a dog park”. When asked to rank their top projects that the park district should prioritize, “add a nature center” had an average rank of 2.04 followed by “increase the number of open park spaces” (4.25) and “outdoor lighting at Prairie Lakes” (5.5).

Further analysis of importance ratings for these potential projects by age and years lived in the park district indicated that both living in the district longer and being older was significantly associated with rating parking at Golf Center Des Plaines as “very important.” Moreover, as age and years lived in the DPPD increase, so does importance for adding pickleball courts. However, findings revealed that younger residents who

have not lived in the district as long as older long-time residents, were more likely to rate “add a nature center” more important.

Participation and Evaluation of Special Events and Programs: The majority (51%) of respondents attended a park district special event in the last 12 months. Fall Fest and Live at the Lake Concert Series were the most well attended events, whereas the Chili Open had the lowest attendance. Lack of awareness and interest in the event were primary reasons why respondents did not attend special events. Other reasons included avoiding crowds, COVID-19 concerns, and health issues.

About half of respondents utilized DPPD childcare/camp programs with 80-85% rating them as “excellent or good”. Dance and youth programs were also popular with 29% of respondents who had a household member participate in these programs. While all dance programs were rated favorably, the School of Dance programs was highly rated (90% good or excellent). Athletic programs sponsored by DPPD were highly rated as most respondents rated them “excellent or good”. Forty percent of respondents participated in fitness and aquatics programming with all programs having a favorable rating.

Senior Program Participation, Evaluation and Interests: Among the 65+ age group, about 12% reported they participated in DPPD senior programs and 80% rated them as “excellent or good”. Respondents are most interested in outdoor recreation, lifelong learning/enrichment programs, and themed events.

Other Agencies Used for Recreation and Preferred Modes of Receiving Information: The most utilized recreation agencies outside of the DPPD were: 1) Des Plaines Library, 2) other local park districts, and 3) public school based sports/activities. The most preferred ways of staying informed about park district news and information were: 1) email, 2) seasonal brochure, 3) DPPD website, and 4) Facebook. The least preferred modes included: 1) Twitter, 2) park district staff, and 3) newspapers.

STRENGTHS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengths of the Park District:

The Des Plaines Park District (DPPD) has many strengths and areas in which they excel. Most respondents agree that park district programs and services are a good value for the money and 80% believe the park district is responsive to their needs. Ninety-five percent believe the staff is helpful and friendly and 88% think the park district is important to their quality of life.

Areas to Focus On

Active Adult/Senior Programming/Events

The park district has expertise and a reputation of delivering high quality programming and events. We recommend DPPD collaborate with the local senior center on programs and events. While the park district provides some funding to the senior center, there is an opportunity for DPPD to capitalize on their programming and events expertise and utilize the senior center facility and staff to offer collaborative or joint programs. This type of collaboration is prevalent, and if implemented, could substantially increase interest and participation in active adult/senior programs.

Parks and Mystic Waters Cleanliness and Upkeep

Findings from the survey (both closed and open-ended questions) suggests there is a need to improve the cleanliness and upkeep of several parks and Mystic Waters. There are many comments about the need to keep parks cleaner and concerns were raised about the water quality and trash in the lake at Lake Park.

Recommendations: The findings point to several recommendations for fine-tuning operations and prioritizing future capital projects.

- **Capital Projects:** Respondents rated adding a nature center as the most important capital project to implement. It was also ranked as the top project to prioritize in a follow-up question. In addition to the nature center, residents wanted to see additional outdoor lighting at Prairie Lakes, increased open space and walking paths and adding A/C to the Administration and Leisure Center.
- **Maintenance and Upkeep:** Upgrade playground equipment (where needed) and expanding the ADA accessible options. As mentioned above, assess park and Mystic waters cleaning/upkeep practices, and strive to improve cleanliness and upkeep.

- Keep Mystic Waters: While there was resident support for an indoor sports complex, residents are not supportive of sacrificing Mystic Water to get one.
- Des Plaines Manor Park: Respondents suggested that seating areas, pollinator gardens, ADA playground features, a picnic pavilion, and climbing features be added to Des Plaines Manor Park in the future.
- Outreach to Latino/Hispanic and Eastern European Residents: Residents, particularly those who are Latino/Hispanic and Eastern European, should be involved in future outreach to ensure their needs and preferences are incorporated into park district plans for future programming, events, facilities, and services. It may be necessary to identify some key informants and ask for their help in reaching members of these communities.



INTRODUCTION AND METHODS

The Des Plaines Park District (DPPD) has developed a strategic plan for 2019-2024. As part of their ongoing progress monitoring and to maintain their accredited agency status, park district obtained input from residents to better understand their needs, preferences and opinions regarding DPPD programs, events, facilities, and parks. Thus, the DPPD worked with the Office of Recreation and Park Resources (ORPR) at the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign to develop and implement a community needs and evaluation study. The proposed community survey gives residents a voice in planning and ensures residents' needs and preferences are met by the park district. Specifically, the following aspects of the park district were assessed:

- Frequency of use of DPPD parks, facilities, programs and services;
- Opinions regarding the condition of park district facilities and parks;
- Satisfaction with parks, facilities, programs, and services;
- Constraints that prevent residents from using parks, programs, facilities and services;
- Areas that need improvement within the park district (i.e., facilities, parks, programs, services, customer service/personnel);
- Feedback on special events;
- Interest and prioritization of capital projects;
- Input on new programs and services needed in the future;
- Feedback on marketing strategies;
- Examination of other organizations used for recreation; and
- Assessment of resident demographics.

The community survey was developed in collaboration with the DPPD staff and questions were asked on the aforementioned topics (see Appendix B for the survey). ORPR conducted a pretest of the survey with DPPD staff to evaluate the face validity of the questions and assess the length, readability and understandability of the survey. The survey consisted of mostly closed-ended questions, with some open-ended questions designed to gain more insight into areas of improvement needed for programs, facilities and park areas. A broad-based open-ended question was asked at the end of the survey inviting respondents to give input on any aspects of the park district including programs, services, facilities, parks, and staff (see Appendix A for the open-ended responses). The survey was created in Microsoft Word and then developed as an online survey using Qualtrics.

Several strategies were used to collect data. Dynata, a research firm, provided ORPR with database of 19,000 contacts (i.e., name, address, rent/own housing, race and ethnicity) from which a stratified random sample was generated. Based on the demographic profile of Des Plaines Park District residents, households from diverse

ethnic and racial groups were over sampled because they are less likely to respond to surveys. A total of 6,000 households were selected to receive a postcard invitation via mail to complete the survey. The postcard included an explanation of the survey aims, a URL link and Q/R code to access the survey, and instructions on how to use a Q/R code (for those new to this technology). Of the 6,000 households, 257 postcards were undeliverable, for total list of 5,743 valid household addresses. A reminder postcard was distributed to non-respondents 10 days after the initial postcard was mailed. The link to the survey was also sent to the park district's database of 8,336 valid email addresses, which included past and current customers, and interested individuals. Out of the 8,336 emails, 82 clicked on the survey link. Finally, the survey was shared through the park district's website and social media pages where a link was given to the park district home page where the survey could be accessed online.

A total of 627 surveys were completed, which yielded a 12% response rate. Thirty-five percent of responses were from individuals who accessed the survey from the direct email and 35% of responses came from individuals who received the postcard in the mail. The final 30% of respondents accessed the survey through DPPD social media and onsite QR codes. We compared the random sample (i.e., those invited to participate via the postcard) with the convenience sample (i.e., those who received an email, social media posts or signs at facilities) on key demographics to determine if the samples were similar or different based on age, race, and gender. The samples were not significantly different on those demographics. Thus, the two samples were combined into one group for the purpose of the analysis and reporting the findings. Respondents from the random sample more likely to be non-users of DPPD.

Based on having at least 35% of responses come from the random sample, we are at least 90% confident that there is only a maximum of 10% error in the results, which is consistent with industry expectations for confidence levels and error rates. The data was checked for outliers and data entry errors and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27. Frequencies and distributions were calculated for all of survey questions and the results are presented in the next section of this report.

DESCRIPTION OF THE SAMPLE

AGE

The Des Plaines Park District (DPPD) serves the City of Des Plaines and a small portion of Mt. Prospect, Park Ridge, and Rosemont, Illinois. According to the 2020 Census, there are 60,681 residents in the City of Des Plaines. The median age of the sample was 48 years old, slightly older than the median age of 43 reported by the US Census Bureau. Respondents ranged from 18 to 88 years old, with 17% of respondents over 65. This aligns with the general demographics of Des Plaines, where 19% of the population is over 65 years of age (US Census).

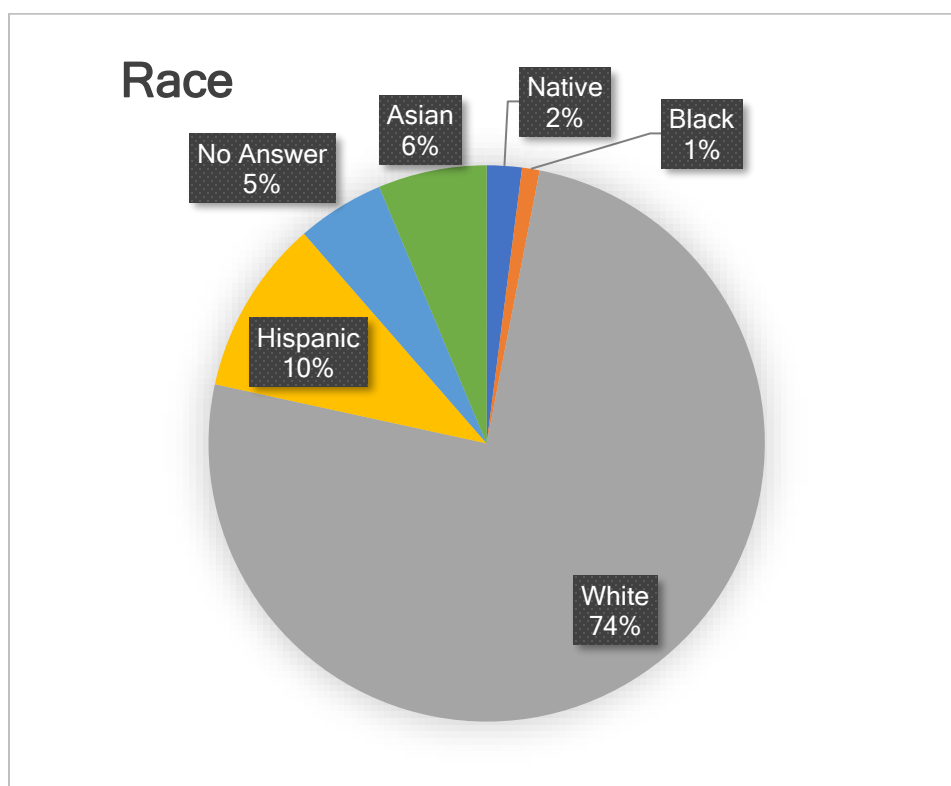
GENDER

Seventy percent of survey respondents were female, which is higher than the gender distribution of Des Plaines residents (51% female, Census, 2020). However, females are more likely than males to complete household surveys. Thus, the gender distribution is similar to other surveys conducted by ORPR.

RACE

Seventy-four percent of respondents of the survey were White, which aligns well with the Census data (74.5%). The sample was 10% Hispanic (7.9% Census), and 6% Asian/Pacific Islander (5.2% Census). Black/African Americans comprised 1% of the sample, which aligns with the Census data (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Racial Breakdown of Sample



ETHNICITY

When asked about their ethnicity (Table 1), 58% of respondents reported being from North America (e.g., United States and Canada). Eastern and Southern Europeans (e.g., Ukraine, Hungary, Greece, Italy, etc.) comprised 8% of the sample and Northern and Western Europeans (e.g., Germany, France, England, Ireland, Sweden, Finland, etc.) were 8%.

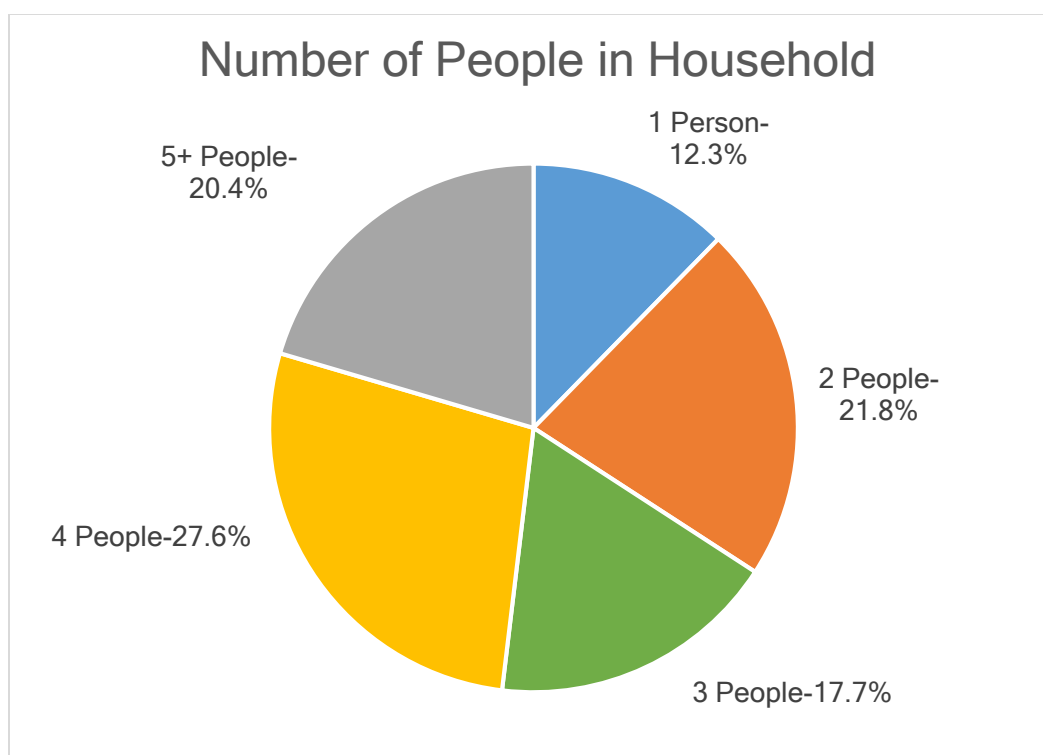
Table 1. Sample Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Percent
North American	58%
Eastern/Southern European	8%
Northern/Western European	8%
South American/Caribbean	1%
Asian	4%

HOUSEHOLD

When asked how long respondents have resided within Des Plaines Park District, the average length of residency was 22 years. The average household size of the sample was 3.1 people, which was slightly larger than the household size of 2.5 people reported by the 2020 Census (Figure 2).

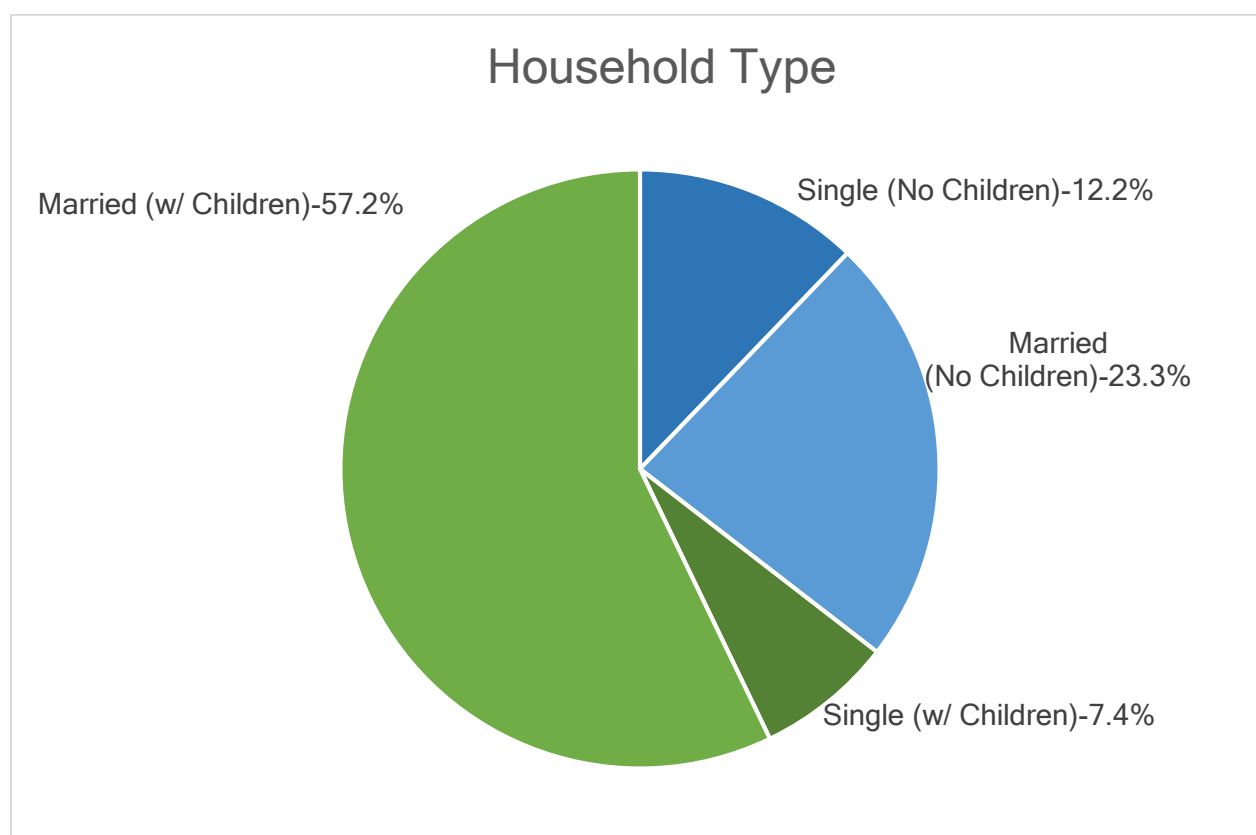
Figure 2. Number of People in Household



HOUSEHOLD RELATIONSHIP STATUS

Over 80% of survey respondents were married. Sixty-four percent of the sample indicated they have at least one child, with 57% of those with a child were married households. Twenty percent of the sample were single households with 7% having at least one child in the home (Figure 3).

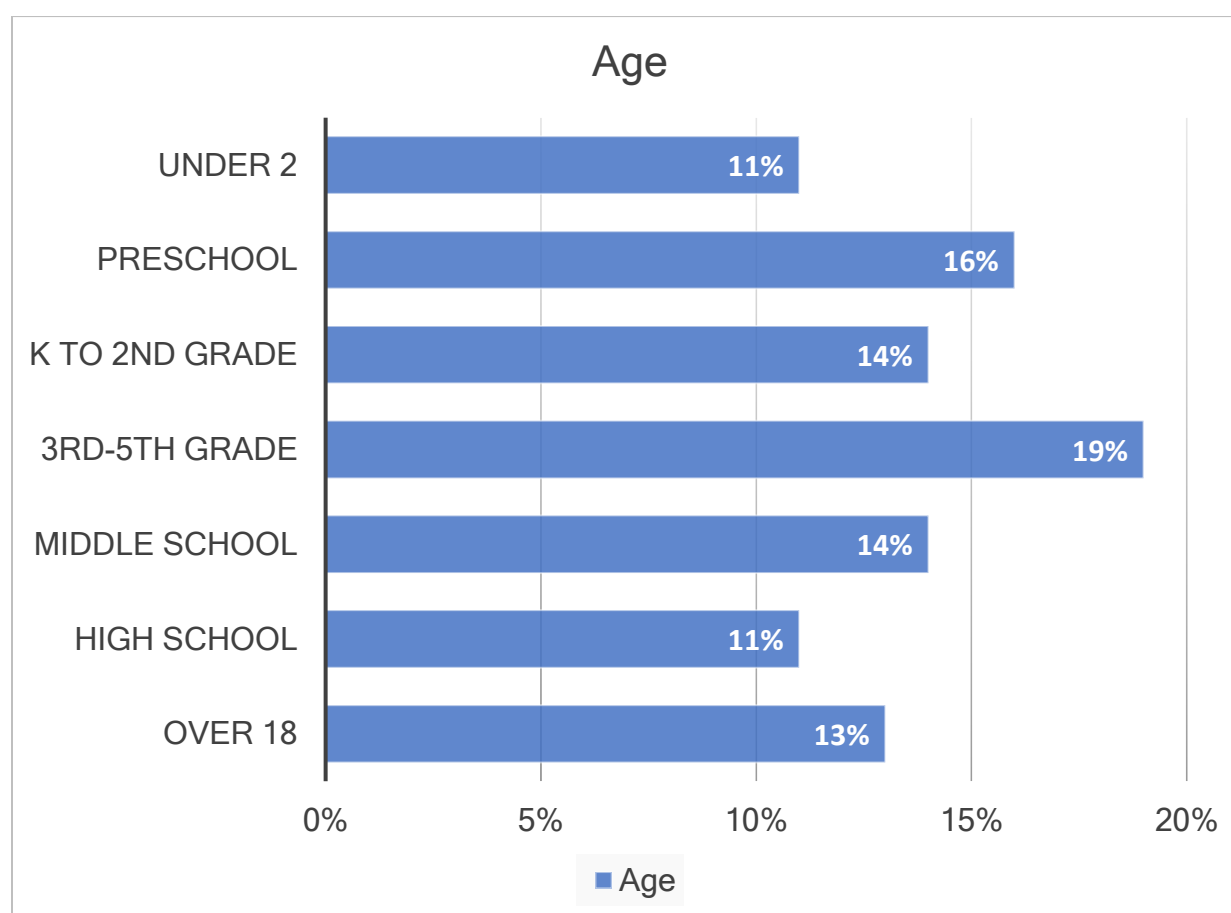
Figure 3. Relationship Status of Household



CHILDREN IN HOUSEHOLD

Nineteen percent of respondents indicated they have one or more children who are in third to fifth grade and 16% have children in preschool. Fourteen percent of respondents indicated they had children in kindergarten to second grade or middle school. Eleven percent of respondents indicated they had children under the age of two or in high school. Thirteen percent of respondents indicated that they had an adult child living in the household (Figure 4).

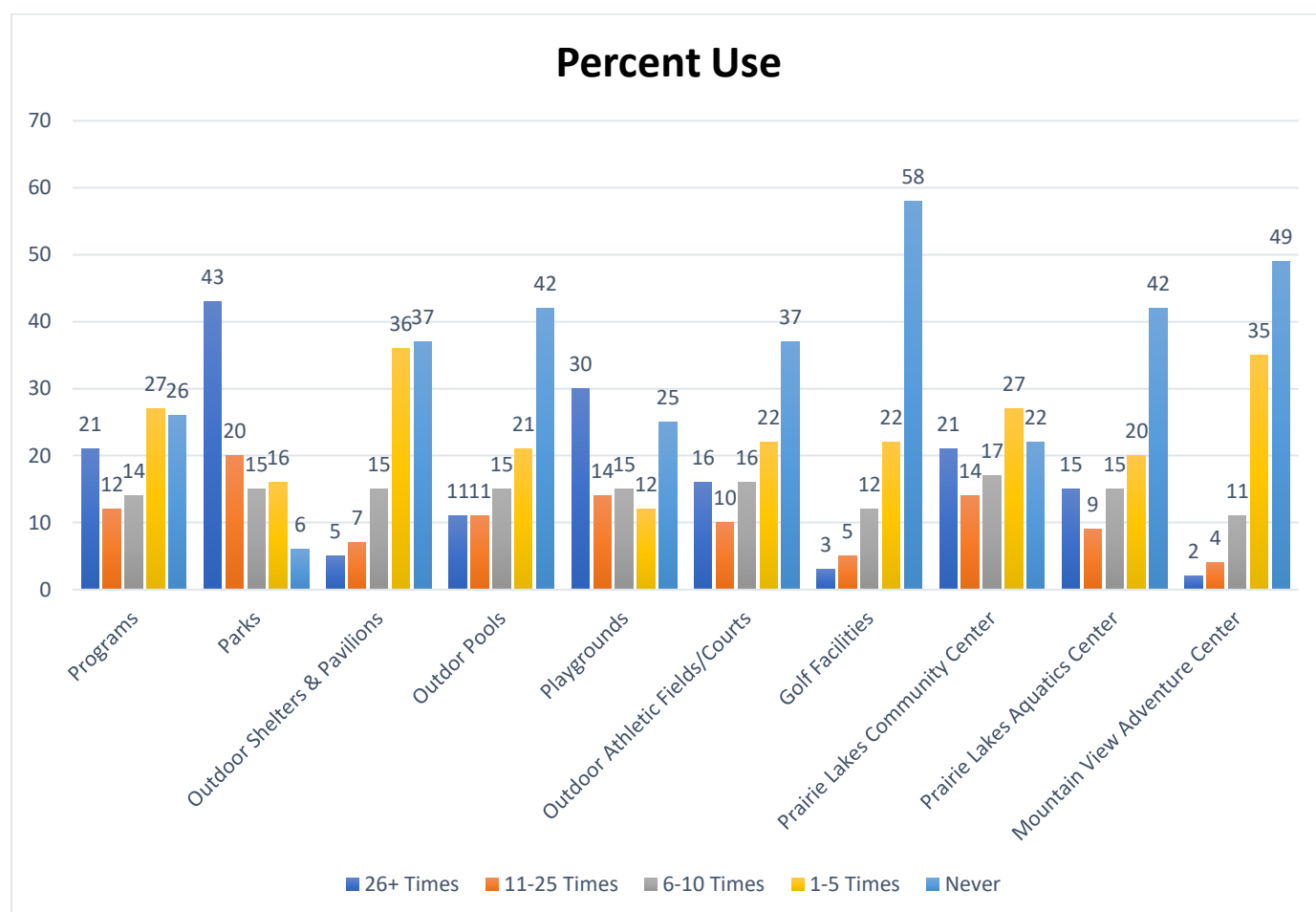
Figure 4. Children's Ages



RESIDENT USE OF PARKS, FACILITIES AND PROGRAMS

Respondents were asked how often they used eight different types of facilities (Figure 5). Answer categories ranged from over 26 times, 11-25 times, 6-10 times, 1-5 times or never. While all DPPD facilities were used by the community, the top three most used facilities were: Parks (94%), Prairie Lakes Community Center (79%), and Playgrounds (75%). The least used facilities were Golf (42%), Mountain View Adventure Center (51%) and the Outdoor Pools (58%).

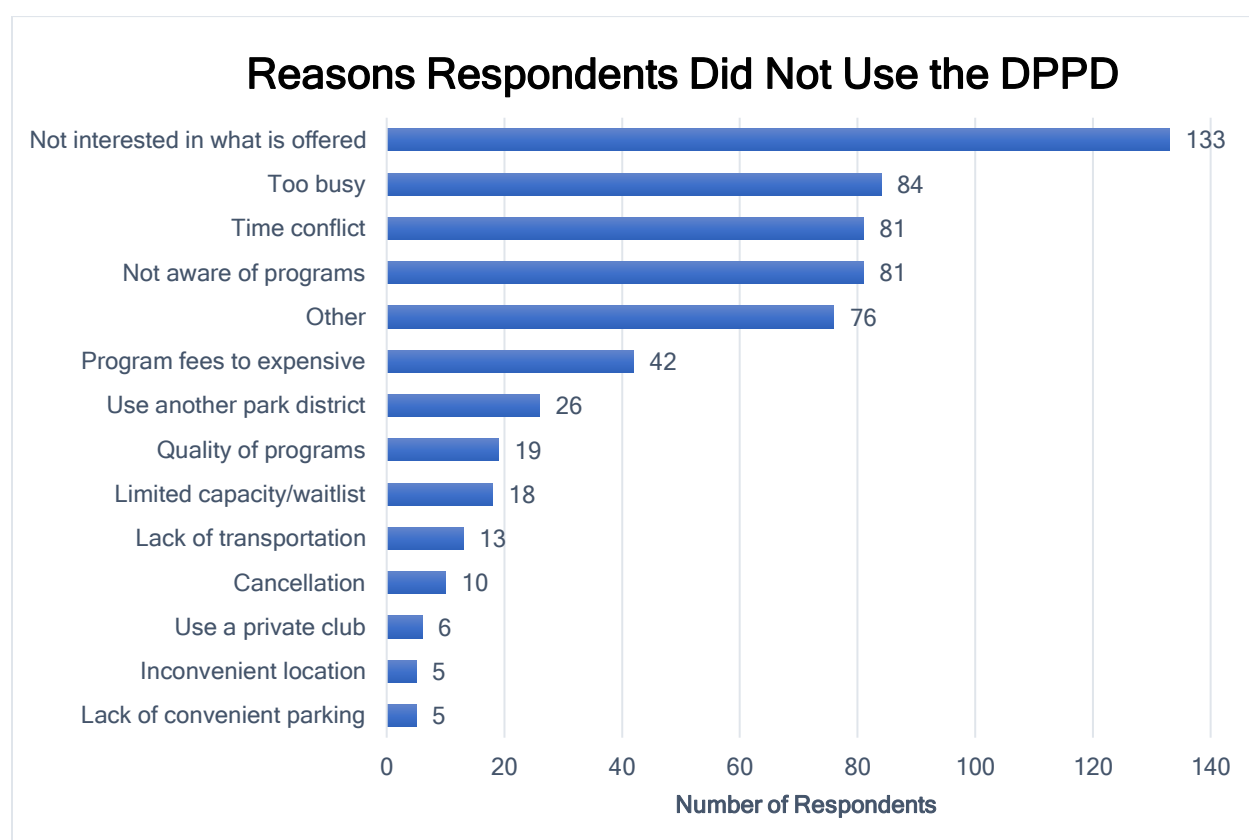
Figure 5. Program and Facility Use



REASONS RESIDENTS DO NOT UTILIZE THE DES PLAINES PARK DISTRICT

Respondents were asked the reasons why they do not utilize Des Plaines Park District parks, facilities, programs, services, and events (Figure 6). Among those who did not utilize DPPD facilities and programs, top reasons included: lack of interest, too busy, and time conflicts. Inconvenient location and lack of parking were uncommon reasons for lack of participation/usage of DPPD facilities and programs. Other reasons listed for nonparticipation included: not enough programs for young kids, kids have aged out, and health problems.

Figure 6. Reasons Respondents Did Not Use DPPD Facilities and Programs



CONDITION, UPKEEP AND CLEANLINESS OF FACILITIES

Residents rated the condition, upkeep, and cleanliness of 28 parks and facilities managed by the DPPD on a five-point scale (i.e., excellent, good, fair, poor) that was reduced to three categories (excellent/good, fair/poor, and have not used; Figures 7 - 10). While all the parks and facilities managed by DPPD generally had a favorable rating, a few facilities stood out. The top facilities perceived as favorable were: Prairie Lakes Aquatics Center (63%), Prairie Lakes Community Center (58%), Chippewa Pool (51%), Lake Park (70%), and West Park (55%). The facilities with negative (rated as 'fair' or 'poor') ratings over 10% were the Administrative and Leisure Center (17%), Mountain View Adventure Center (12%), Arndt Park (18%), and Mystic Waters (11%).

Figure 7. Quality of DPPD Pools and Golf Facilities

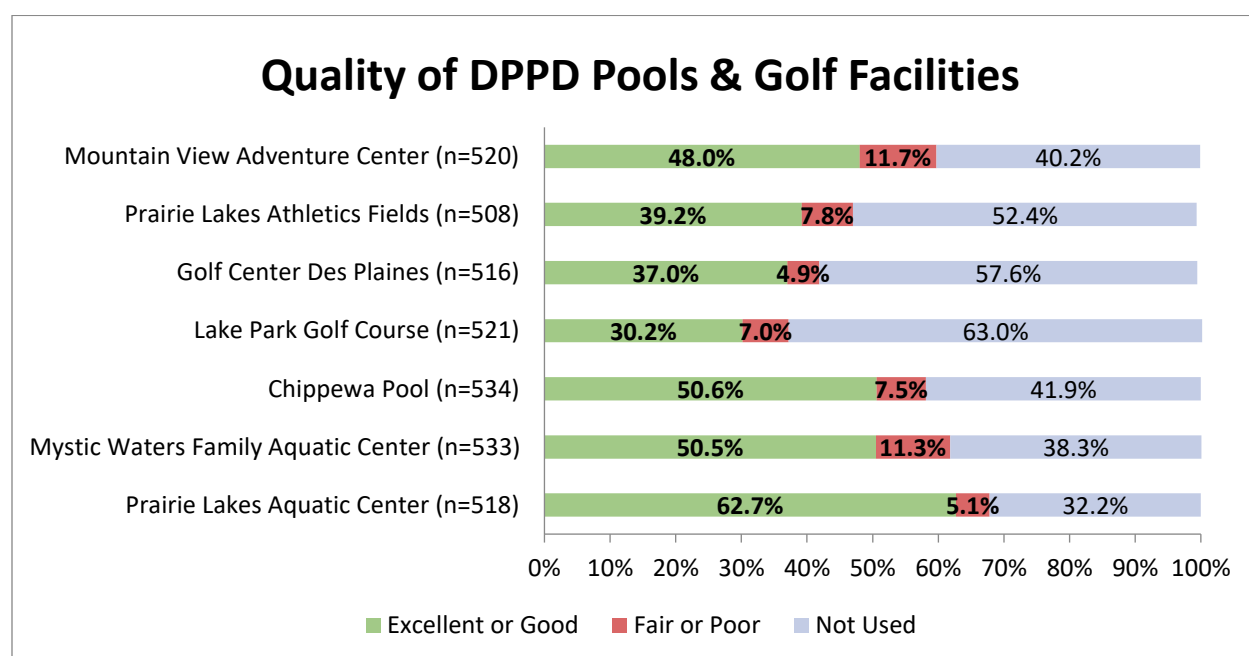


Figure 8. Quality of DPPD Facilities

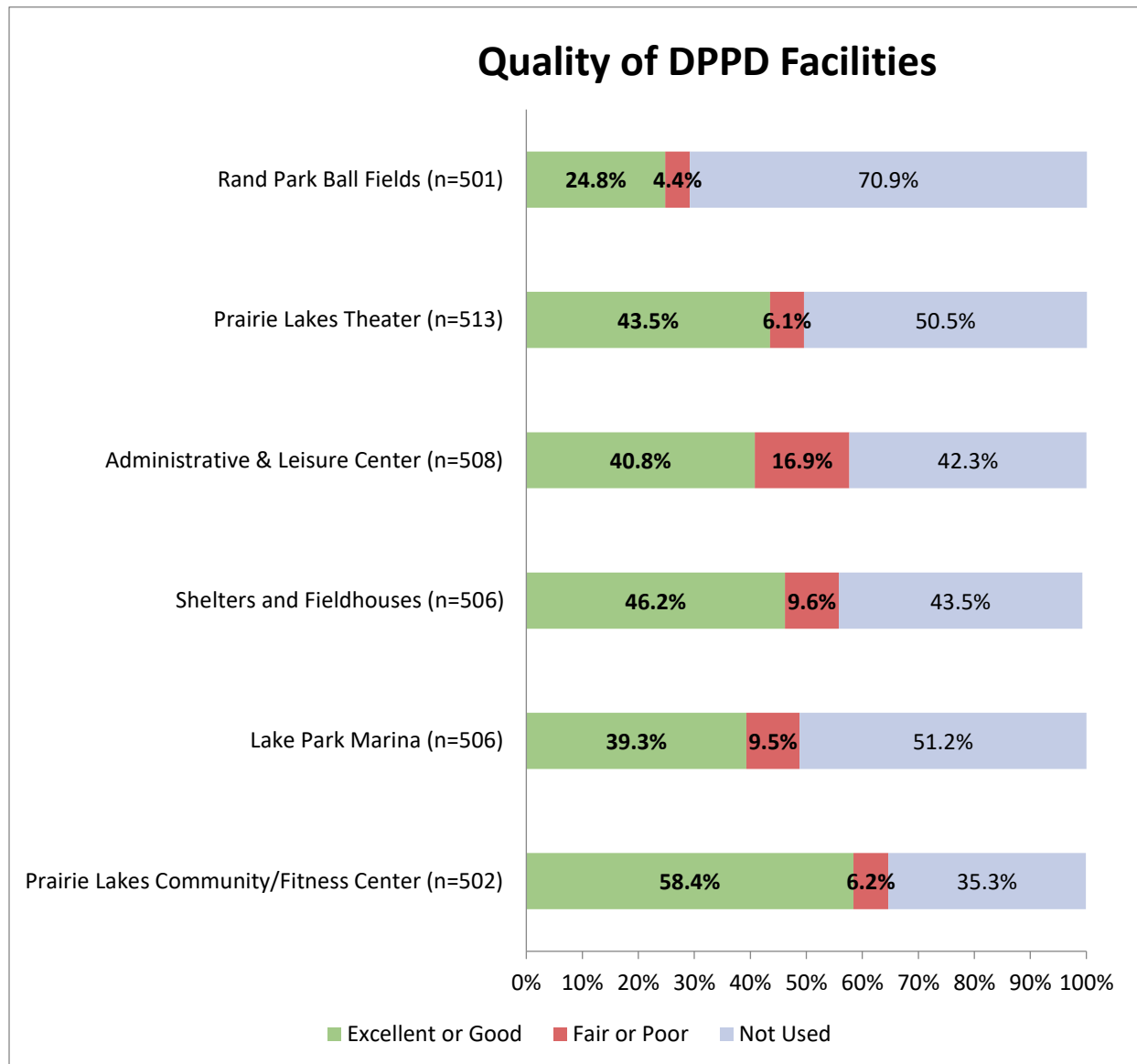


Figure 9. Quality of DPPD Parks

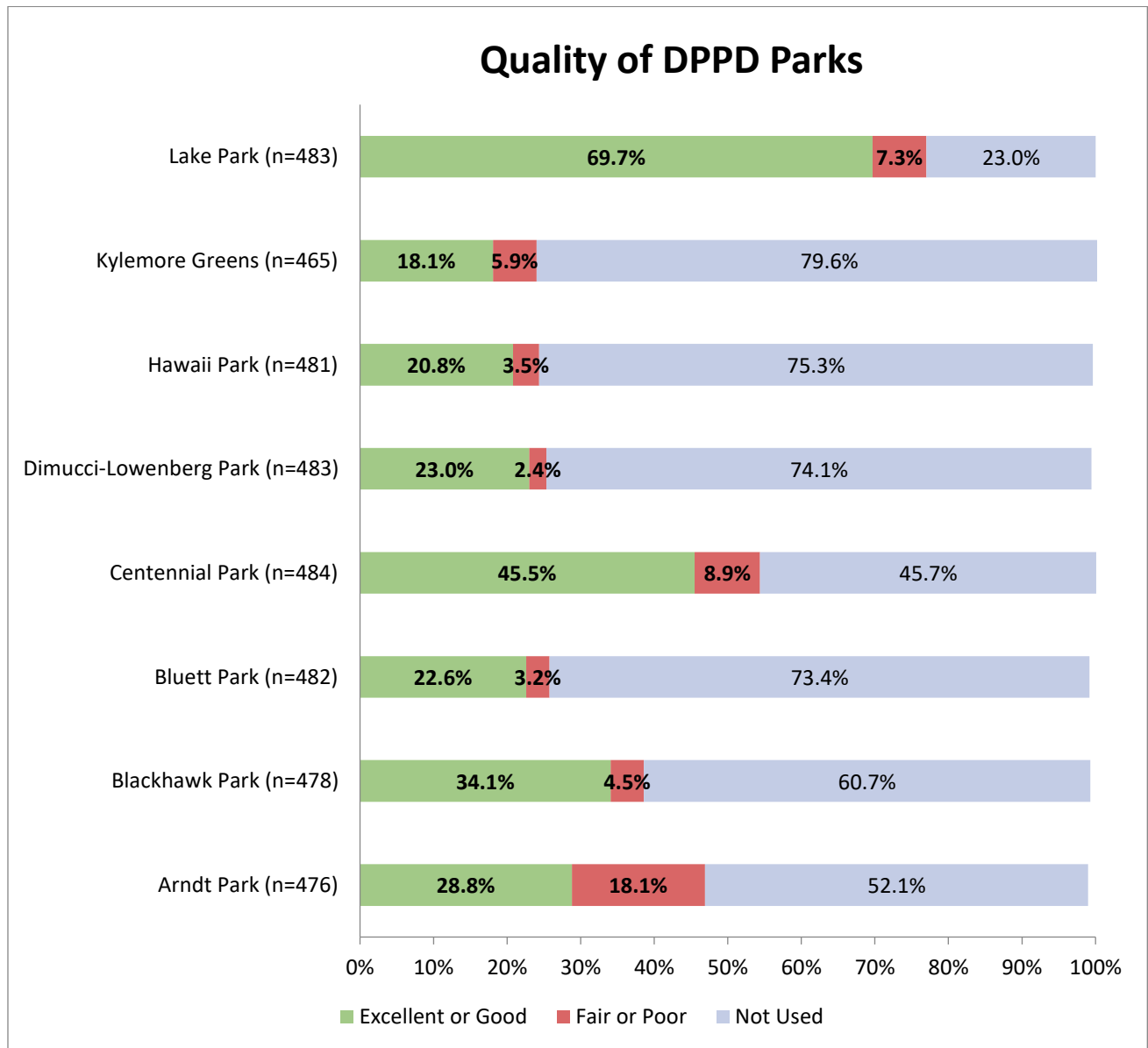
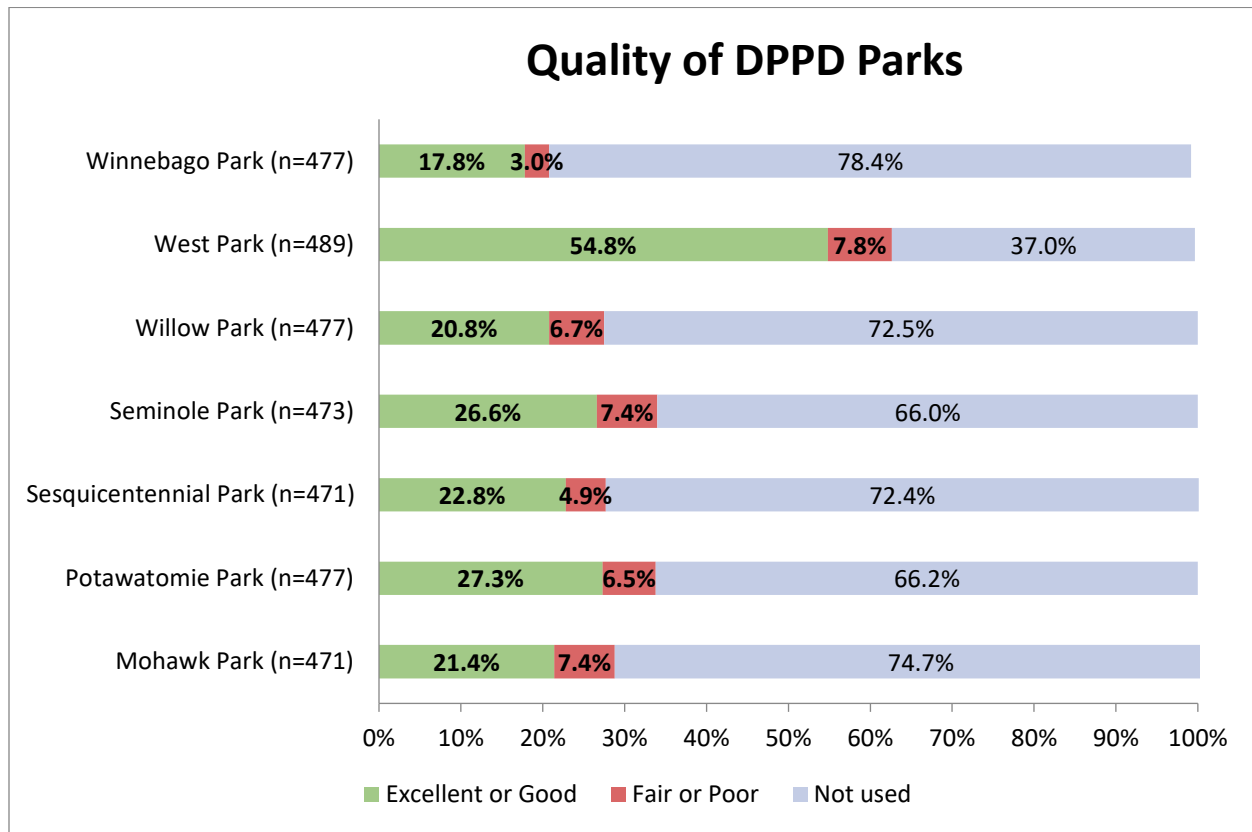


Figure 10. Quality of DPPD Parks





INSIGHTS ABOUT PARKS AND FACILITY CONDITIONS

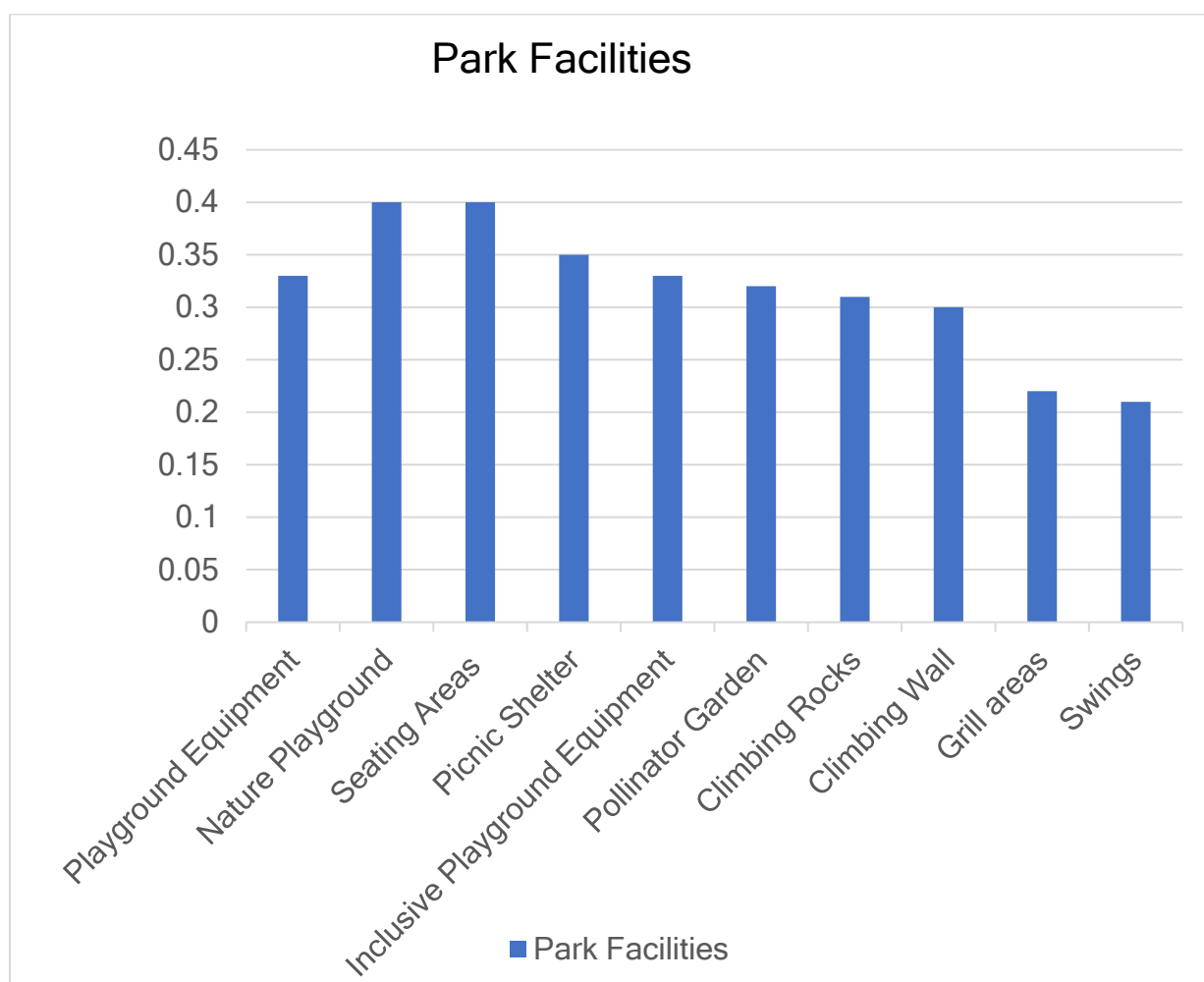
Nearly 280 residents offered open-ended feedback about the park and facility conditions. Their comments comprised of three major themes: updated facilities, cleanliness, and playgrounds. Many residents commented on the condition of the Administration and Leisure Center, stating that more dance space is needed along with air conditioning. Others shared generally how Mystic Waters is dirty and needs more amenities. One resident reported there was food on the floor and chairs. Another respondent suggested adding hooks in the locker rooms for swim bags and towels.

Several respondents suggested attending to the trash present at the parks, especially at Lake Opeka, Arndt Park, and the Chippewa Pool locker rooms, which were named. One resident shared there is too much trash in Lake Opeka, that they saw ducks swim through litter. Other respondents mentioned garbage overflowing, finding needles, and dirty park restrooms. Several residents suggested improvements to some of the playgrounds such as adding more restrooms that are accessible, replacing faded equipment, and attending to uncut grass. Lastly, two residents specifically identified that Winnebago Park is in poor condition. They shared there was broken beer bottles at the park and the equipment is outdated. For more details, please reference Appendix B: Open-Ended Responses.

DES PLAINES MANOR PARK FACILITIES

Respondents provided input about the types of features and facilities they would like to see at Manor Park (Figure 11). More seating areas and nature playgrounds were rated the highest. Picnic shelters were the next highest, followed by inclusive playgrounds, playground equipment, pollinator gardens, and climbing rocks. The lowest rated features by respondents were swings, grill areas, and a climbing wall.

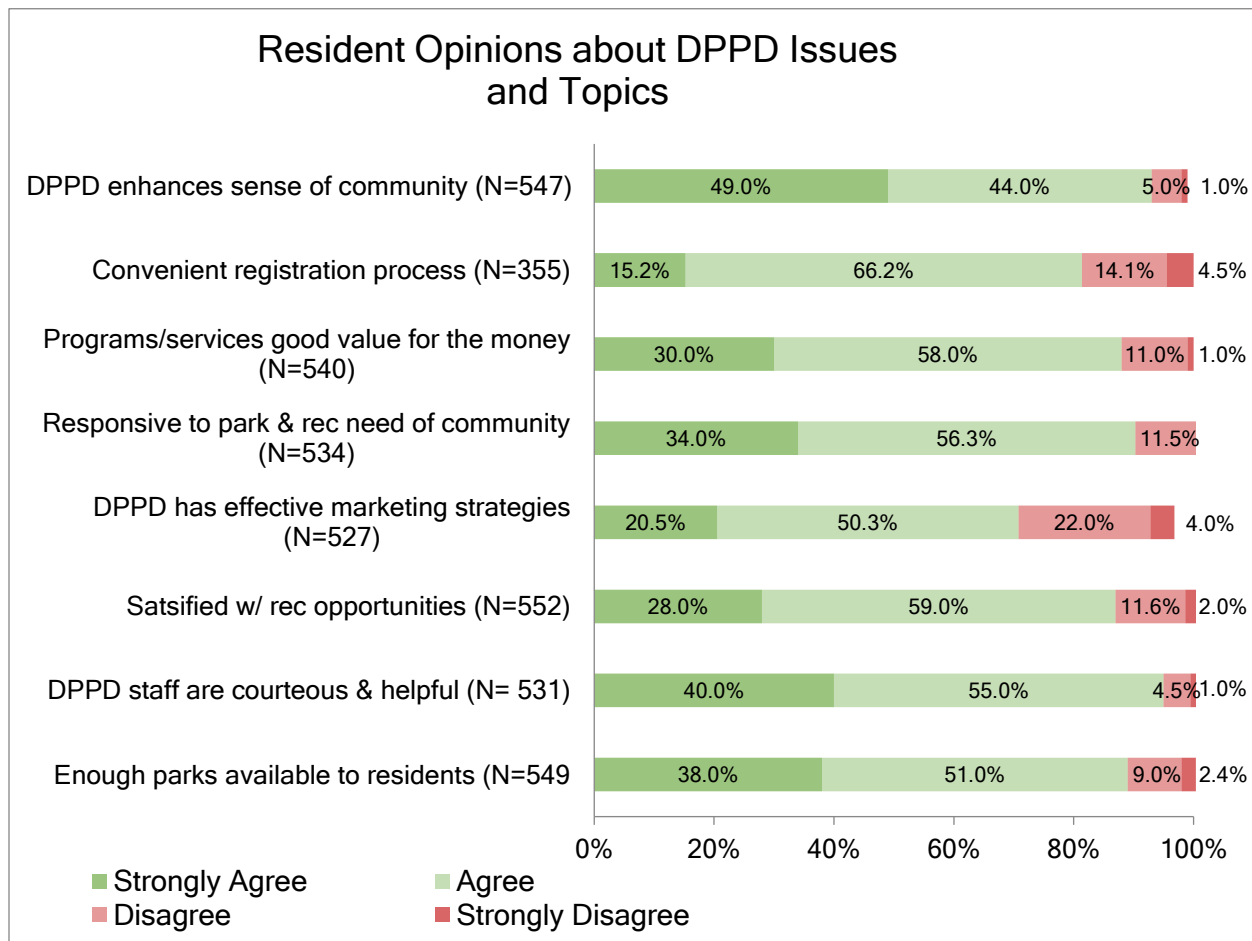
Figure 11. Facilities for Des Plaines Manor Park



OPINIONS ABOUT PARKS AND RECREATION ISSUES AND TOPICS

Over 87% of Des Plaines residents agreed that recreation services, parks and facilities are important to their quality of life (Figure 12). Almost 90% agreed that Des Plaines Park District (DPPD) enhances their sense of community. Nearly 90% agreed that DPPD programs & services are a good value for their money. Over 80% of respondents agree that the park district is responsive to residents' needs. Close to 90% of respondents are satisfied with recreation opportunities provided by DPPD. Over 95% agree the front desk staff is courteous and helpful. Lastly, 88% believe there are enough parks available to Des Plaines residents.

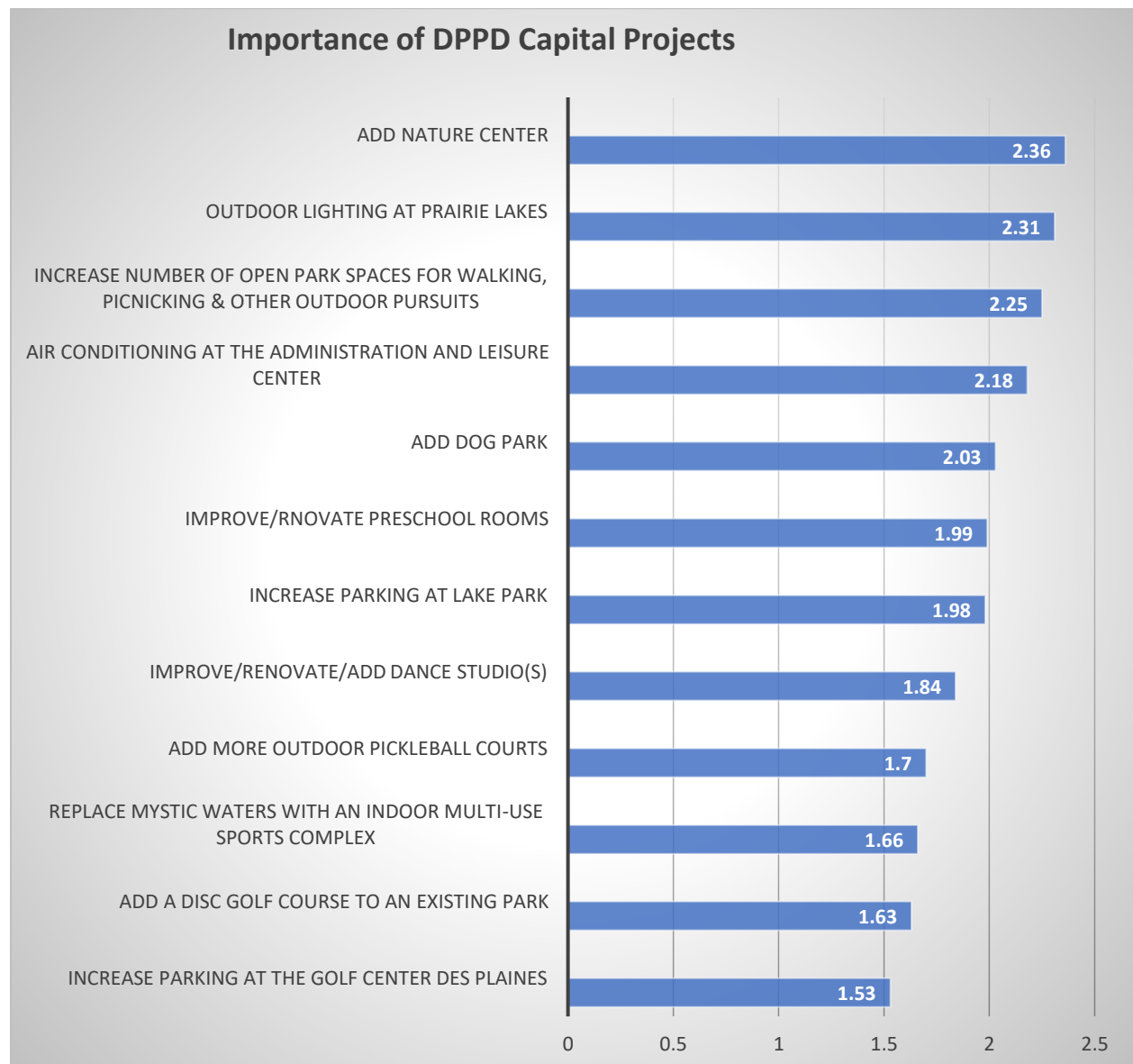
Figure 12. Resident Opinions about the DPPD



IMPORTANCE OF DPPD CAPITAL PROJECTS

When DPPD residents were asked about the importance of capital projects, the number one response was to add a nature center (Figure 13). The other projects rounding out the top four included outdoor lighting at Prairie Lakes, increase the number of open parking spaces for walking etc., and air conditioning at the Administration and Leisure Center.

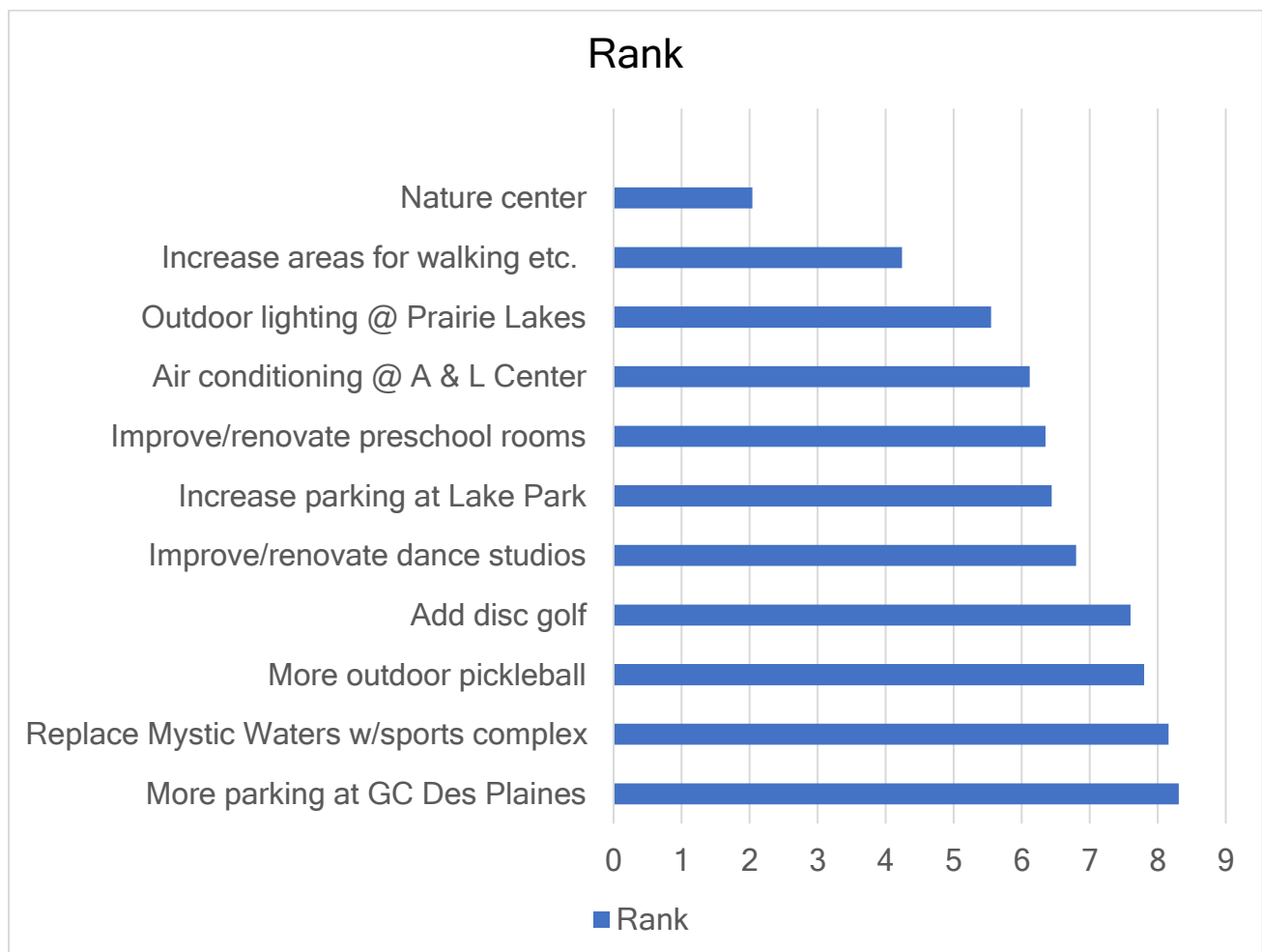
Figure 13. Importance of DPPD Capital Projects



RANKED PRIORITY FOR CAPITAL PROJECTS

The projects were ranked from highest to lowest priority based on initiatives ranked in the top three by respondents (Figure 14). The highest ranked project by respondents is to “add nature center.” The second highest project is “increased parking for Lake Park.” The third ranked project by DPPD residents is “outdoor lighting at Prairie Lakes.” The fourth ranked project was to “add dog park.” The fifth ranked project by residents was to “add air conditioning at the Administration and Leisure Center.” The lowest ranked initiative by respondents was to add “more parking at Golf Center Des Plaines.”

Figure 14. Ranked Priority for Capital Projects



Importance of Capital Projects by Age and Number of Years Lived in the District

Further analysis of importance ratings for these potential projects by age and years lived in the park district indicated that both living in the district longer and being older was significantly associated with rating parking at Golf Center Des Plaines as “very important.” Moreover, as age and years lived in the DPPD increase, so does importance for adding pickleball courts. However, findings revealed that younger residents who have not lived in the district as long as older long-time residents, were more likely to rate “add a nature center” more important.

SPECIAL EVENTS

In evaluating the participation at DPPD special events 51% of respondents attended a special event in the last 12 months (Figure 15). Fall Fest and Live at the Lake Concert were the most attended special events and about half attended the Fall Fest. Winter Wonderland was the third most attended special event. The Chili Open (i.e., the Winter Golf Tournament) had the lowest participation among respondents. However, the Chili open attracts a specialized group of people who enjoy the challenge of golfing in the winter. It was noted by DPPD staff that, as of December 2022, registration for the Chili Open has reached capacity (i.e., sold out).

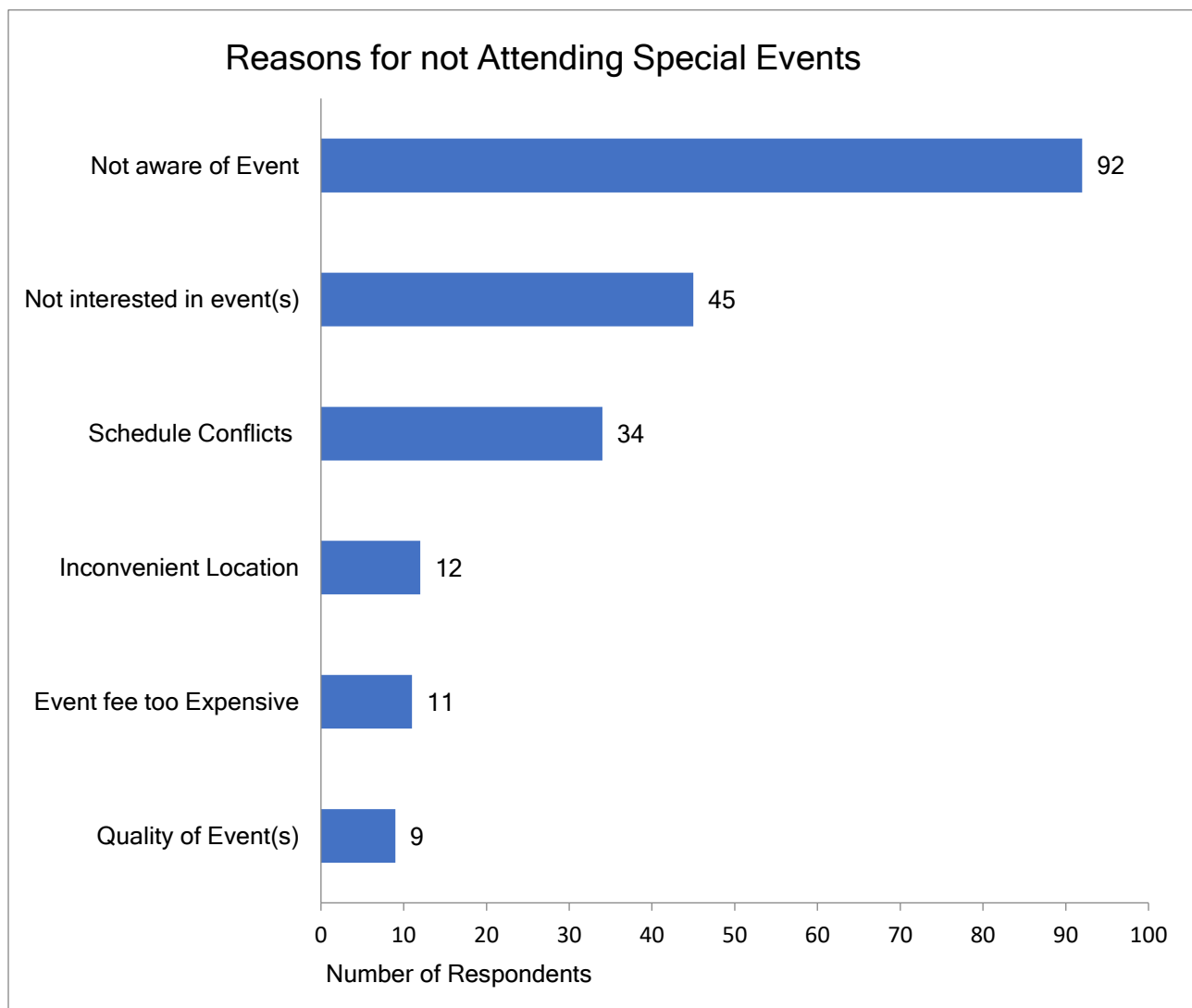
Figure 15. Special Event Participation



WHAT PREVENTS RESIDENTS FROM ATTENDING SPECIAL EVENTS?

In examining the respondents' reasons for not attending special events, the lack of awareness and not interested were the primary reasons for residents not attending a special event (Figure 16). The quality of the event was the least cited reason that prevented residents in attending special events. Other reasons for not attending included: avoid crowds, concerns with COVID-19, and health issues.

Figure 16. Reasons for Not Attending Special Events



CHILDCARE AND AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Forty-seven percent of respondents used park district childcare and camp programs. Of the programs, summer camps were the most widely attended with 148 participants. Youth programs followed with 112 participants, early childhood with 71 participants, and teen programs with 54 participants (Figure 17). Across all youth and childcare programs, 80-85% of respondents rated the programs as “excellent” or “good” and only a small proportion of participants (< 15%) rated these programs as “fair” or “poor” (Figure 18).

Figure 17. Number of Participants in Childcare Programs

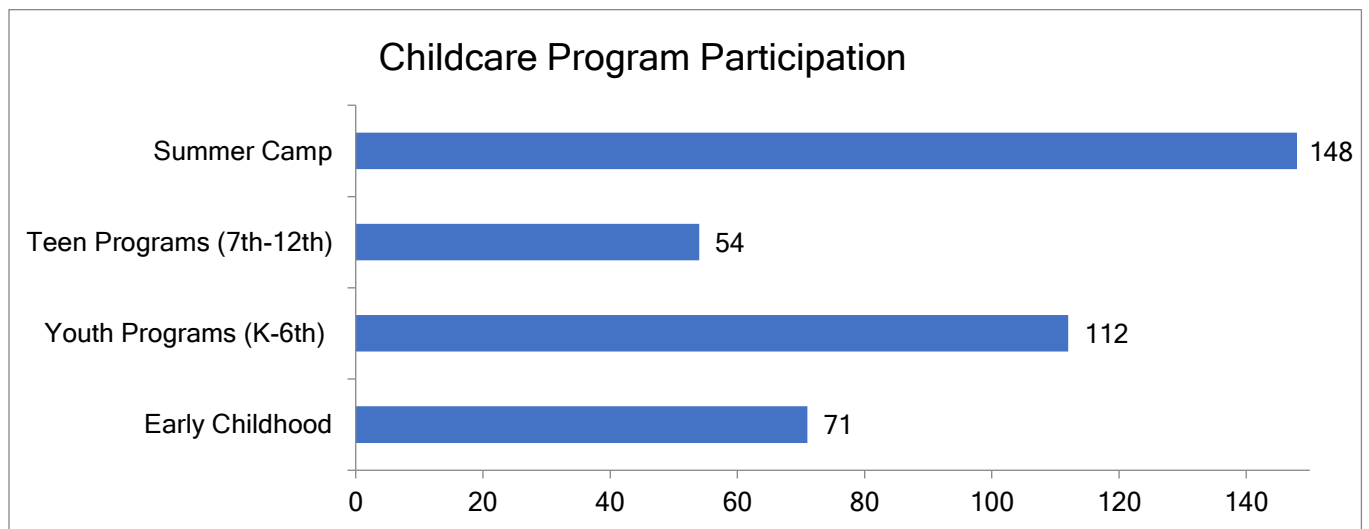
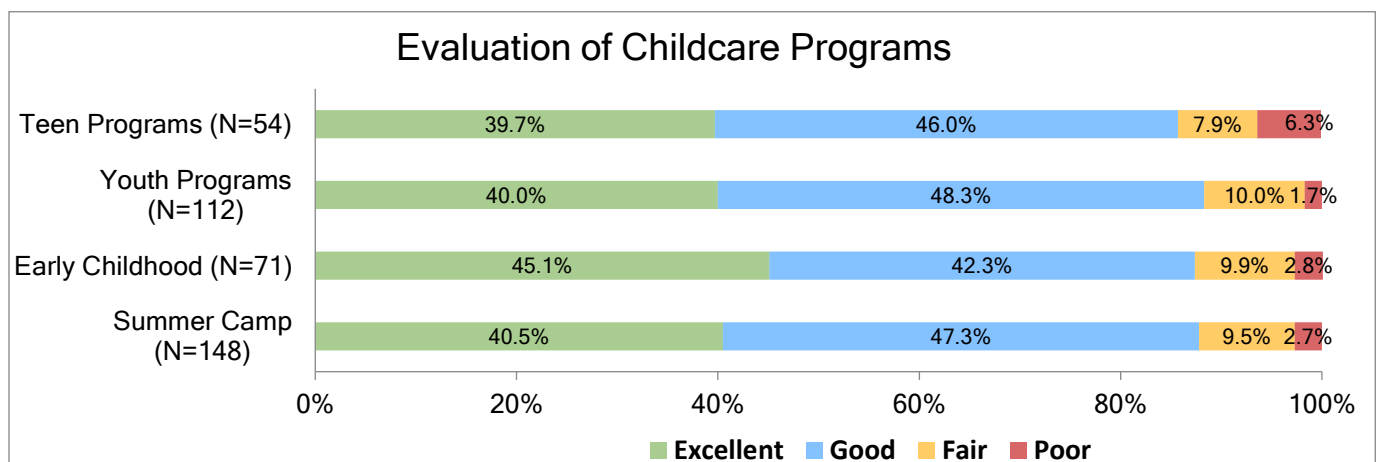


Figure 18. Evaluation of Childcare Programs



DANCE AND YOUTH PROGRAMS

Twenty-nine percent of respondents had someone in their family participate in park district dance programs (Figure 19). The school of dance recital program had the most participants, at 96. School of dance was also rated “excellent” or “good” by 90.3% of respondents. Though all programs were viewed favorably, artistry in motion had the lowest percentage of “excellent” or “good” evaluations at 75%, which is still quite high (Figure 20).

Figure 19. Number of Participants for Dance & Youth Programs

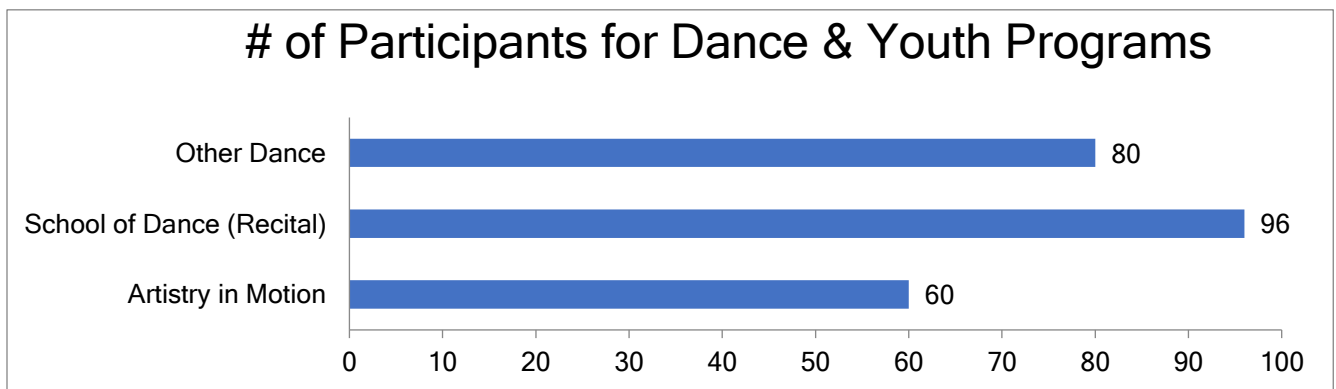
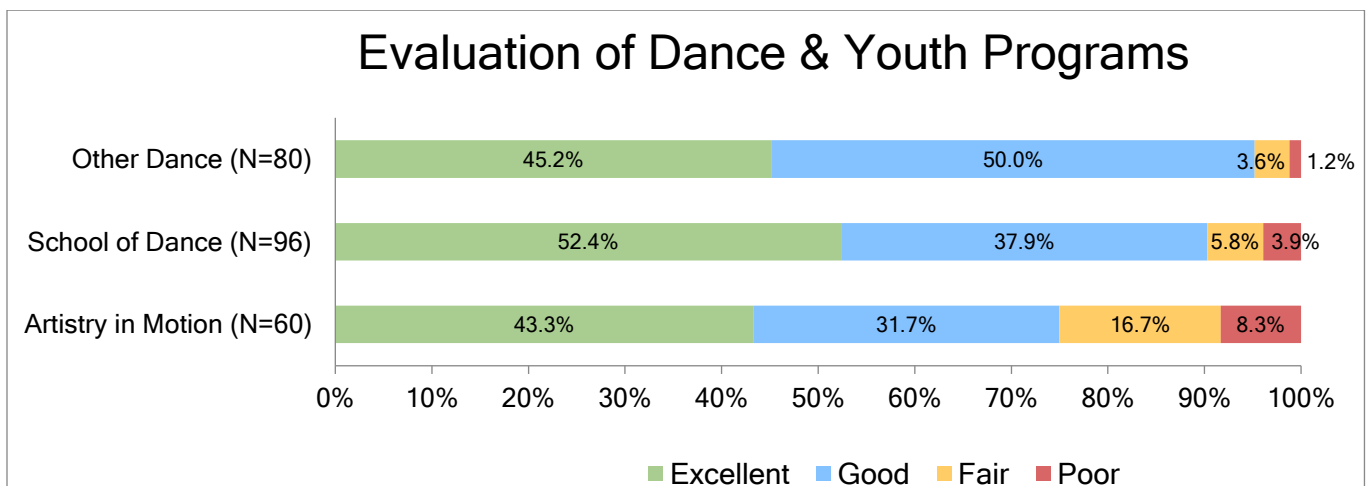


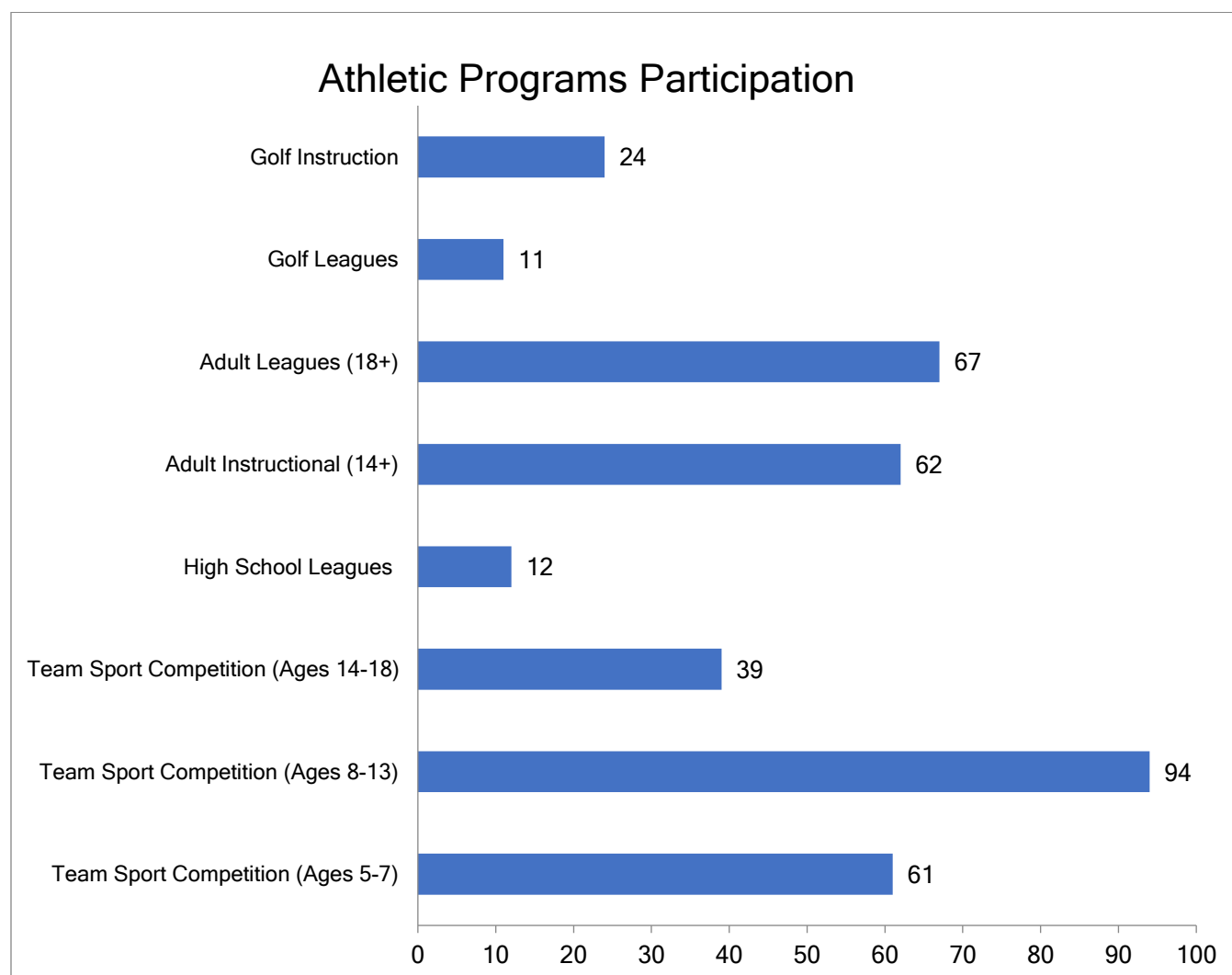
Figure 20. Evaluation of Dance & Youth Programs



PARTICIPATION IN ATHLETIC PROGRAMS

Competitive team sports had high rates of participation. Youth ages 8-13 (n=94) participated most frequently in team sports, followed by youth ages 5-7 (n=61), and youth ages 14-18 (n=39). Adult leagues had high participation (n=67) along with adult instructional programs (n=62). Golf instruction had 24 participants, followed by high school leagues (n=12) and golf leagues (n=11) (Figure 21).

Figure 21. Number of Participants in Athletic Programs

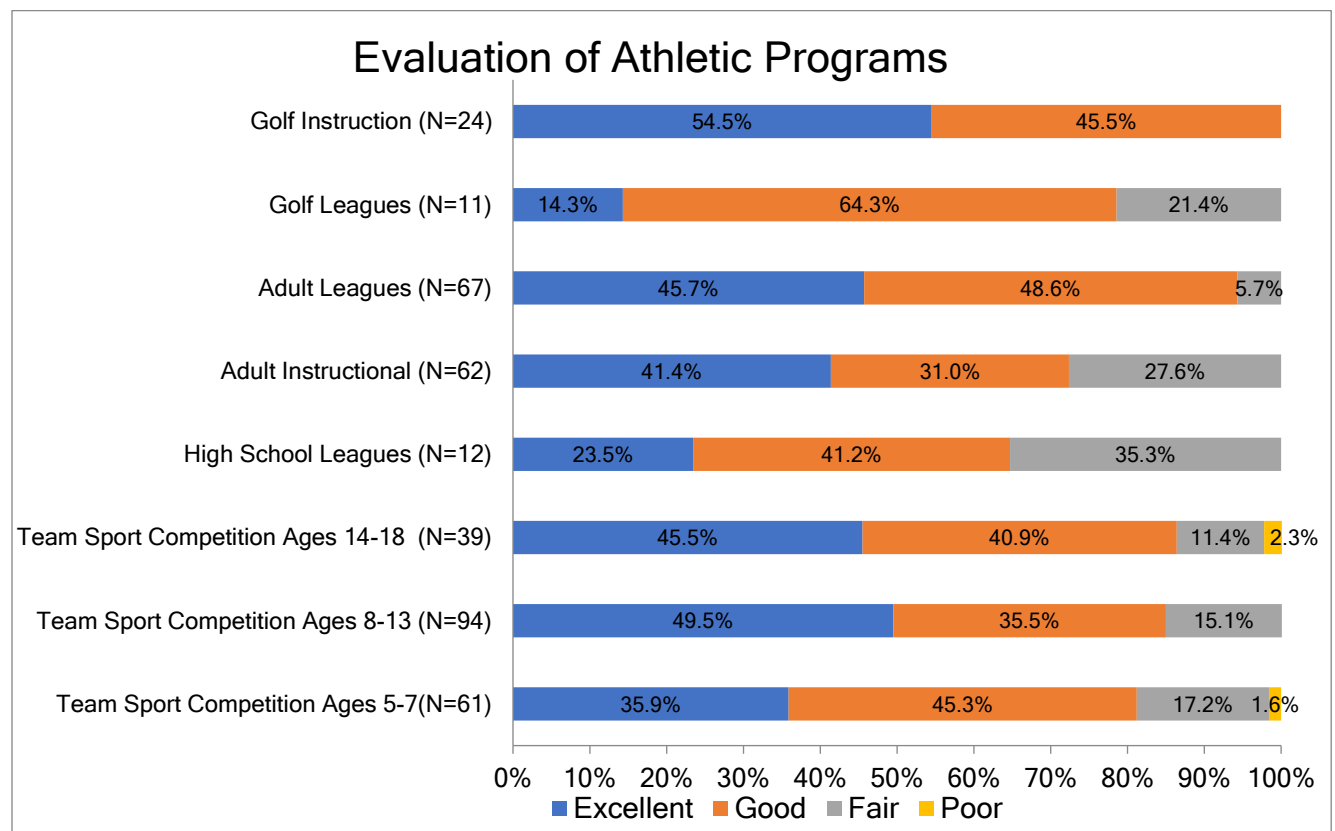


EVALUATION OF ATHLETIC PROGRAMS

Many of the athletic programs facilitated by the DPPD were rated favorably (75% “excellent” or “good”). Golf instruction (n=24) and adult leagues (n=67) were favored, as over 94% of respondents rated them as “excellent” or “good.” All competitive youth sports were rated favorably as 80 - 85% of respondents rate youth sports as “excellent” or “good.” Golf leagues (n=11) had fewer “excellent” ratings at 14%, with 64% rating them as “good” and 21% rating golf leagues as “fair.”

Competitive golf leagues were rated fairly well, although 21% of respondents rated golf leagues as “fair”, which indicates room for improvement. Age group team sports were rated favorably overall, however a few respondents rated high school (HS) leagues as fair (n=12). Since there were relatively few respondents who rated HS leagues, we caution against generalizing from this result. Overall, adult instructional programs were favorably rated with 72% of respondents who rated these programs as “excellent: or “good,” with 27% rating them as “fair” (Figure 22). Open-ended feedback provides insights useful for fine-tuning these programs.

Figure 22. Evaluation of Athletic Programs



FITNESS AND AQUATIC PROGRAMS

Forty-four percent of respondents participated in fitness and aquatics programs (Figure 23). Outdoor swim lessons were evaluated favorably, with over 90% (N=169) of respondents rating them as “excellent” or “good.” The swim team (91% favorable), all swim lessons (75-90% favorable), aqua fitness (90% favorable), group fitness (90% favorable), and cycling (100% favorable) all yielded satisfied participants (Figure 24).

Figure 23. Number of Participants in Fitness and Aquatics Programs

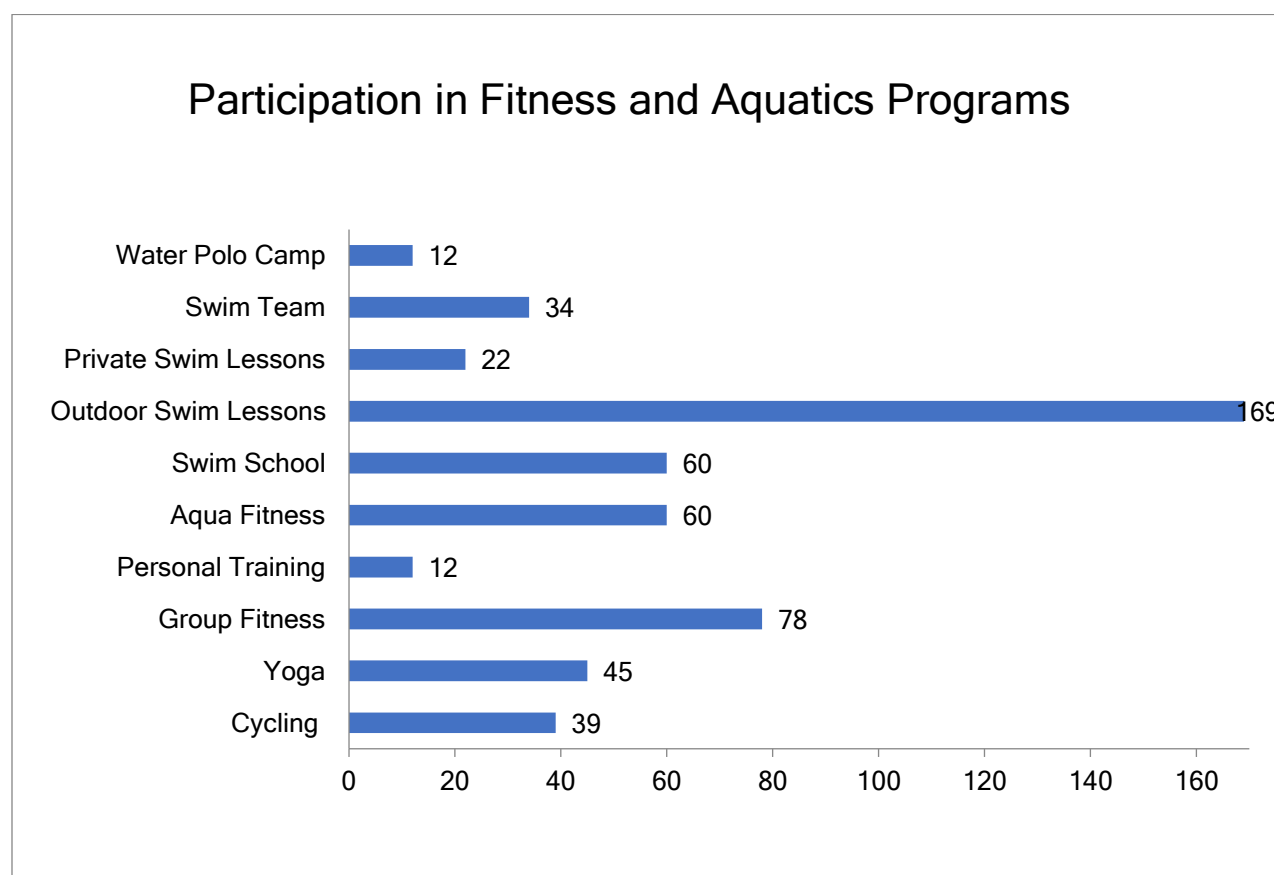
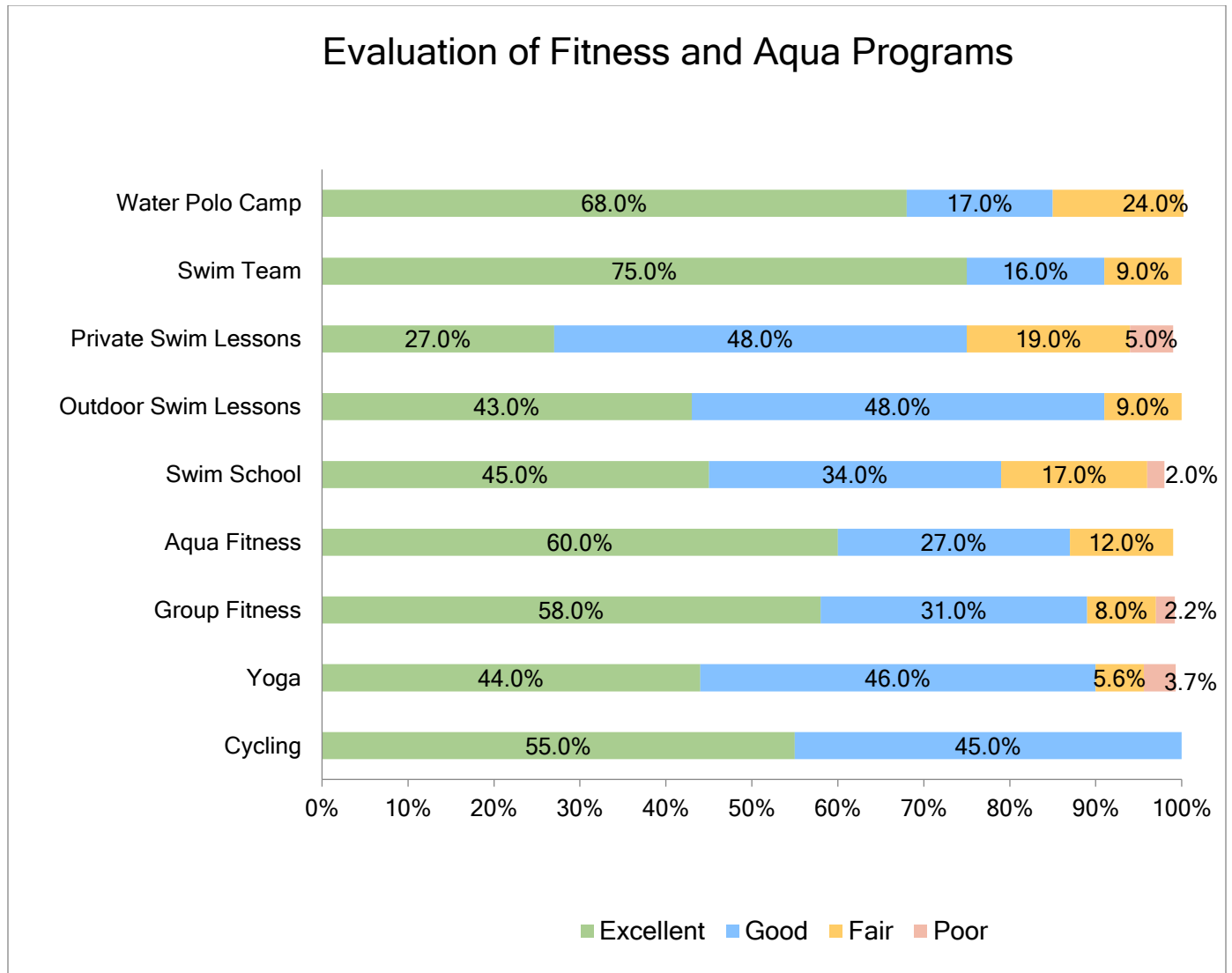


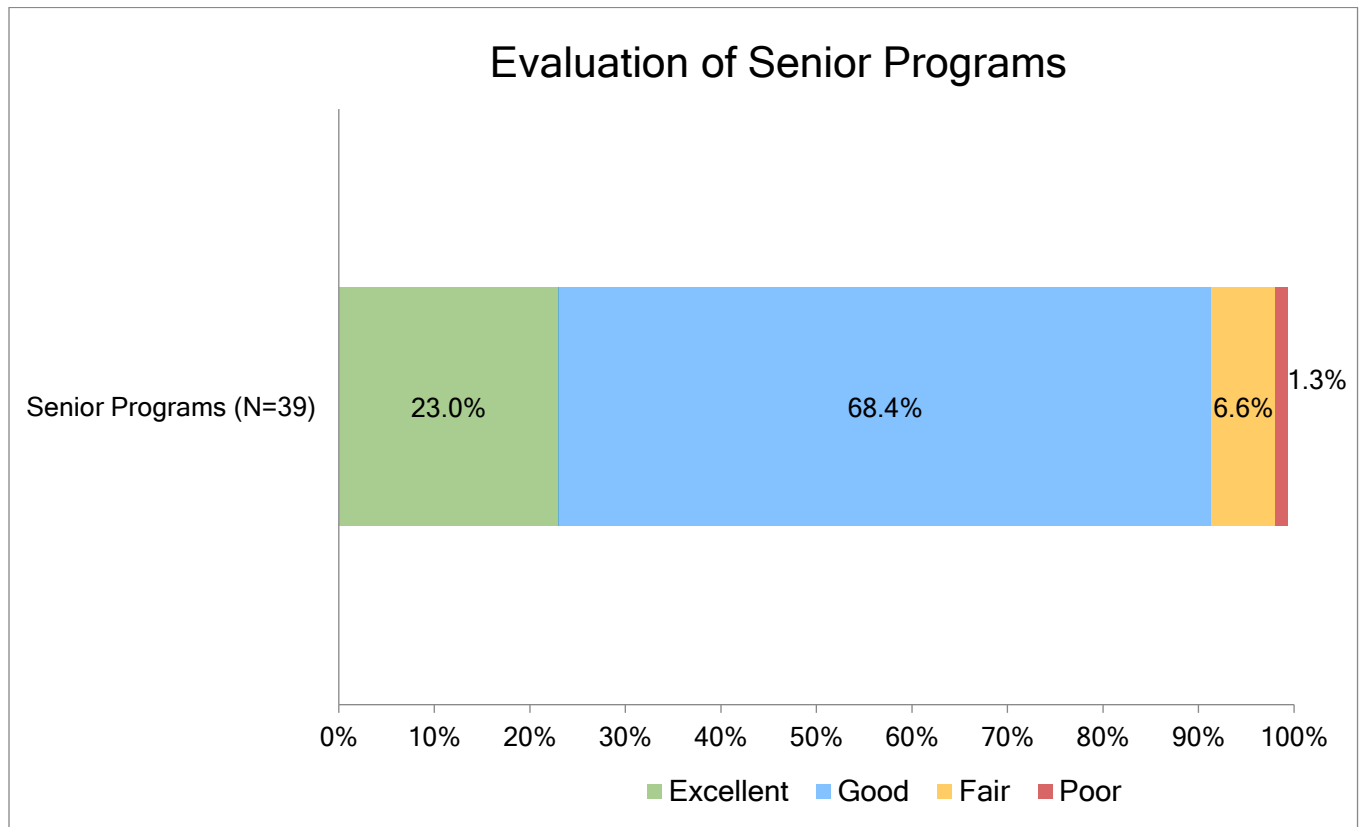
Figure 24. Evaluation of Fitness and Aquatic Programs



ACTIVE ADULT/SENIOR PROGRAM PARTICIPATION

Only 12% of respondents reported they participated in active adult/senior programming and 6.4% were unsure if they had participated in active adult/senior programs. Of those who participated, more than 80% rated active adult/senior programs as “excellent or “good” (Figure 25).

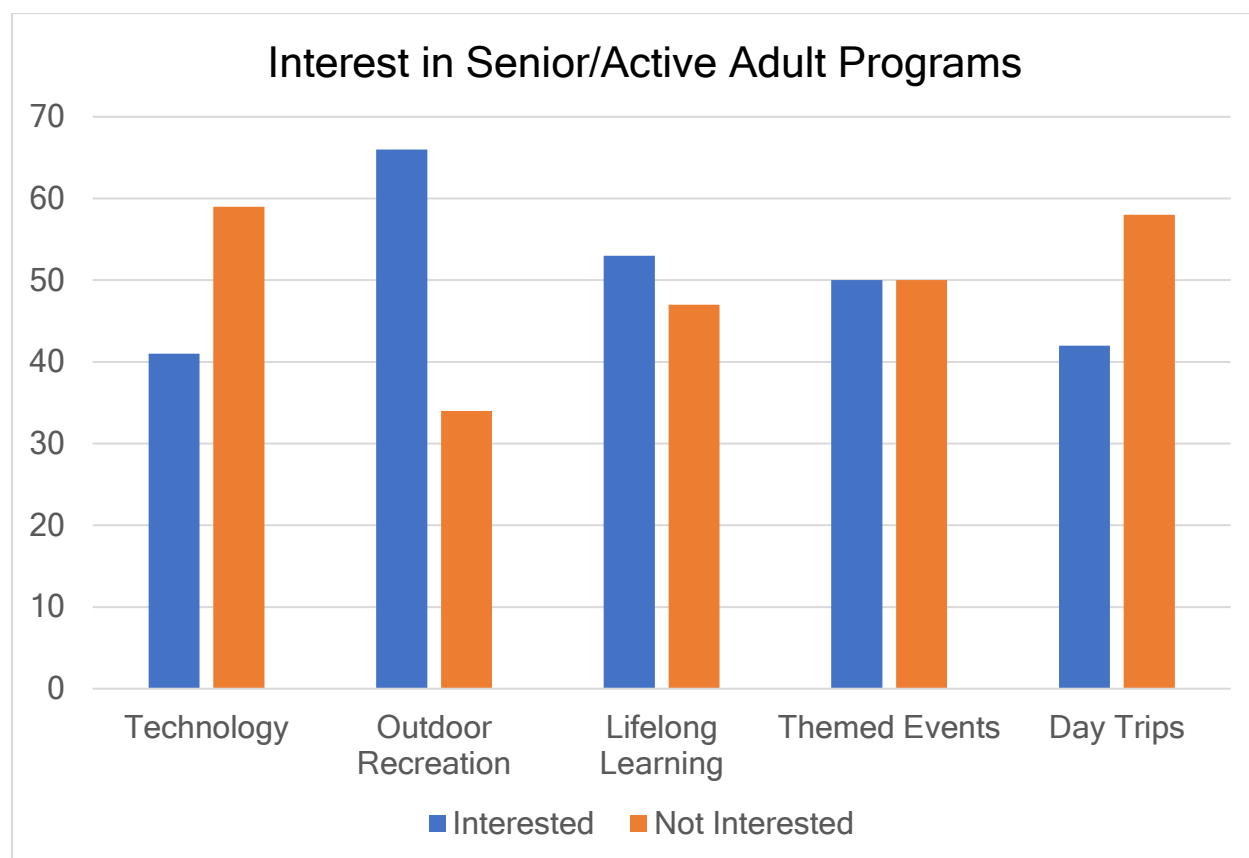
Figure 25. Evaluation of Senior Programs



SENIOR/ACTIVE ADULT PROGRAM INTEREST LEVELS

The programs respondents are most interested in seeing developed included outdoor recreation with 66% interested, lifelong learning/enrichment programs with 53% interested, and themed events, with 50% interested. There is less interest in day trips with only 42% responding favorably, while 58% were not interested (Figure 26).

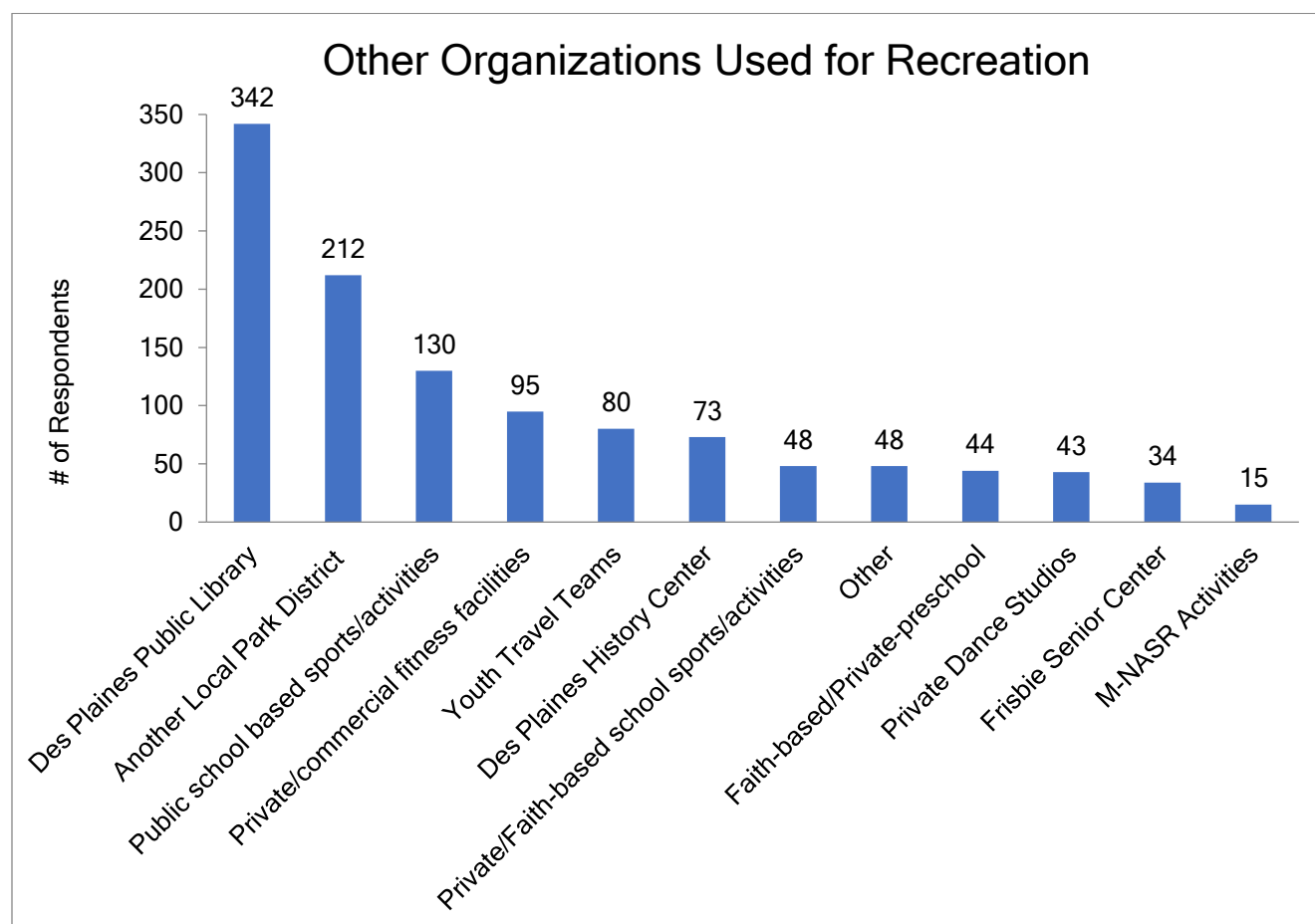
Figure 26. Interest in Senior/Active Adult Programs



OTHER RECREATION AGENCIES UTILIZED

Outside of the park district, participants were active in Des Plaines Public Library programming (n=342). Other respondents utilize other park districts nearby (n=212), followed by Des Plaines public school-based sports and activities (n=130). Agencies represented outside of local schools, nearby park districts, and local public services were the Park Ridge Park District, Niles Ice Arena, and the Maine Steamers (Figure 27).

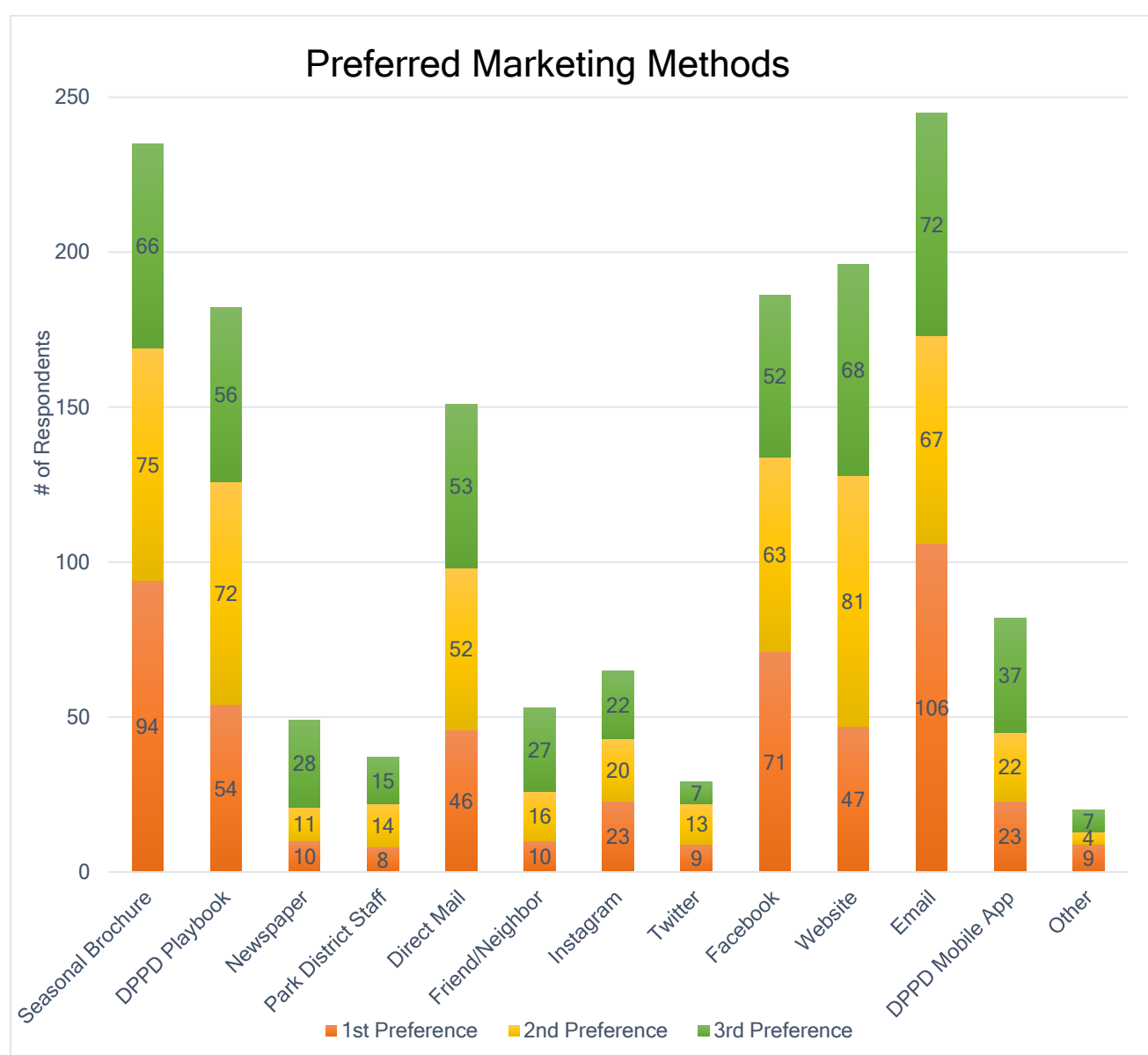
Figure 27. Other Organizations Used for Recreation



PREFERRED METHODS OF STAYING INFORMED

The most preferred ways of staying informed about the park district included email (n=106), with 106 respondents favoring it as their first choice, followed by the park district seasonal brochure, website, and Facebook. Respondents found less preference in being informed through channels such as Twitter, park district staff, and newspapers (Figure 28).

Figure 28. Preferred Marketing Methods



ADDITIONAL FEEDBACK: DPPD PROGRAMS, SERVICES, FACILITIES, PARKS AND STAFF

Many respondents commented on how important the park district is to their family and how much they value the park district for the parks, facilities, programs, and events they offer that contribute to individual and community health and well-being. They expressed a desire for continued access to parks and affordable recreation programs. Several respondents mentioned they appreciate how the park district contributes to the sense of community in Des Plaines. These open-ended responses content analyzed and grouped into four themes: aquatic facilities, programs, parks and facilities, and accessibility.

Aquatic Facilities

Residents in the DPPD were very adamant about the value and desire to keep their aquatic facilities open. However, there were common sub-themes of extending pool hours throughout the week, especially on the weekends. A few respondents advocated extending lap swim hours.

Programs

Some (a small but vocal set) of residents advocated for lower prices facility use fees and program fees, especially for the indoor track. A few respondents expressed a desire more programming for younger children and one respondent suggested a cooking class for younger children. Additionally, a few respondents suggested adding more family centered activities.

Parks and Facilities

Several DPPD residents shared how much they enjoyed the staff and how friendly the service is and they appreciate the staff's hard work and dedication. However, a few residents shared there could be more staff present at facilities and programs. Residents also expressed the need to update some facilities (e.g., Mystic Waters, some parks).

Accessibility

Several residents expressed a need for some facilities and equipment to be more ADA accessible. Specifically, one respondent shared, “please make all parks and playgrounds handicap accessible. It is impossible to push a wheelchair or stroller through woodchips. We cannot visit most DP parks because they are not accessible.”



STRENGTHS OF THE DES PLAINES PARK DISTRICT

The survey findings revealed that the Des Plaines Park District has many strengths. These strengths include high performing parks, facilities, and programs, positive perceptions of staff being courteous and helpful, and very good evaluations of several aspects of the park district's operations. Survey findings also revealed areas where the organization can concentrate its efforts for continuous improvement and future planning.

Continue Investing in Parks and Facilities

Overall, most parks and facilities were rated favorably by respondents. Respondents visited Lake Park, West Park and Centennial Park most often and users perceived these parks favorably. Respondents rated several facilities highly, especially Prairie Lakes Community Center, Prairie Lakes Aquatic Center, Prairie Lakes Fitness Center, Prairie Lakes Theater, and Chippewa Pool. These are areas of excellence for the park district. While only a sampling of parks were rated in the survey, respondents rated several Parks favorably, especially Lake Park and West Park. Although visited less often, respondents rated Rand Park Ball Fields, Dimucci-Lowenberg Park, Bluett Park, Blackhawk Park, and Hawaii Park very favorably.

Residents Value the Park District

It was evident from survey results that respondents perceive staff as effective since over 95% of respondents reported that staff are courteous and helpful. Overall, the park district staff is well regarded by respondents and this finding was supported by numerous open-ended comments provided at the end of the survey where people remarked "the staff is friendly" and several respondents remarked they are grateful for the staff. Most residents also agreed that park district programs are a good value for the money and the majority of respondents agreed that the park district is responsive to resident needs. Moreover, 88% of respondents are satisfied with recreation opportunities provided by the Des Plaines Park District.

Events and Programs

Events and programming are a strength of the park district. Residents love Fall Fest and Live at the Lake, as both were the highest attended and favorably rated special events. Moreover, most respondents rated DPPD programs as "excellent" and "good." Among youth programs offered, camps and dance programming were rated "excellent" or "good" by over 75% of respondents. Nearly half of respondents had participated in a fitness or aquatics program. The highest rated of these programs were the swim team

and swim lessons. Finally, nearly half of respondents had a household member engaged in athletics programs, with at least 75% who rated these programs as “excellent” or “good.”



RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the survey findings, several next steps are recommended for the park district to continue on their trajectory of excellence in programming, events, and facilities to enhance residents’ well-being and quality of life.

Areas to Focus On

Active Adult/Senior Programming/Events

The park district has expertise and a reputation of delivering high quality programming and events. We recommend DPPD collaborate with the local senior center on programs and events. While the park district provides some funding to the senior center, there is an opportunity for DPPD to capitalize on their programming and events expertise and utilize the senior center facility and staff to offer collaborative or joint programs. This type of collaboration is prevalent, and if implemented, could substantially increase interest and participation in active adult/senior programs.

Active/senior adults are most interested in themed events and outdoor recreation. We recommend utilizing the new Lake Park facility in conjunction with the marina and other larger parks as potential sites for nature-based recreation activities and events. Larger parks near facilities and amenities (e.g., parks with bathrooms, water fountains, seating

areas) are prime locations for nature-based events and activities. We recommend allocating resources (i.e., staff, funding) to further develop the park district's active adult/senior programming. Notably, there is strong interest in adding a nature center, which aligns with active/senior adults' interests in outdoor/nature-based recreation opportunities.

Parks and Mystic Waters Cleanliness and Upkeep

Findings suggest adding central air conditioning to the Administrative and Leisure Center is a high priority project. While there was interest in adding a dog park, it was not prioritized in the top three or four as a community need and preference. However, respondents prioritized adding more parking at Lake Park. Although adding more parking at Golf Center Des Plaines did not rise to the top as a priority, it is a popular destination for golfers and there is a visible need for more parking, especially since Golf Center Des Plaines is a multi-use facility.

Findings from the survey (both closed and open-ended questions) suggests there is a need to improve the cleanliness and upkeep of several parks and Mystic Waters. There are many comments about the need to keep parks cleaner and concerns were raised about the water quality and trash in the lake at Lake Park.

Capital Projects

Consider Adding a Nature Center

For capital projects, residents rated the nature center as the highest priority capital project to fund. Other highly rated options included adding outdoor lighting for the walking paths at Prairie Lakes, increased space for walking, and air conditioning in the Administrative and Leisure Center.

While a dog park was rated in the top half of the capital projects, it was a lower priority for many residents. Additionally, adding more parking at Golf Center Des Plaines was prioritized lower than several other proposed capital projects. This may be due to the golf center attracting a more specialized recreation user group.

Keep Mystic Waters

While there was some resident support for an indoor sports complex in the community, many residents expressed a strong desire to keep Mystic Waters rather than replace the water park with an indoor sports complex. For example, one resident stated, "Our family is big fans of Mystic Waters and would hate to see it go, but also super interested in a multi-sports complex to offer more opportunities for basketball/volleyball since space is always so limited at Prairie Lakes!"

While results indicated a desire to keep Mystic Waters, findings also suggest the aquatic facility should be prioritized for cleanliness, upkeep, and maintenance. Some respondents indicated that Mystic Waters facilities are not kept clean, particularly when camp groups were visiting.

Des Plaines Manor Park

Residents' were asked for input on the re-design of Des Plaines Manor Park. Respondents indicated a strong interest in having additional seating areas added to this park, followed by a nature playground, picnic areas, inclusive playground (equipment), and pollinator gardens. Residents were less interested in swings, grilling spaces, and a climbing wall. A few residents suggested adding bathrooms to Des Plaines Manor Park in the open-ended section of this question.

Outreach to Diverse Populations

Residents, particularly those who are Latino/Hispanic and Eastern European, should be involved in future outreach to ensure their needs and preferences are incorporated into park district plans for future programming, events, facilities, and services. It may be necessary to identify some key informants and ask for their help in reaching members of these communities.



CONCLUSION

Findings from the input of a sample of over 600 Des Plaines residents provides key insights into residents' perceptions of the Des Plaines Park District, engagement in and evaluation of programmatic areas, and opinions about future potential capital projects and programming residents would like to see developed.

Most respondents indicated that parks and recreation is important to their overall quality of life and that the park district contributes to their sense of community in Des Plaines. Key themes identified in this study included residents' interest in seeing a nature center added, improved and accessible playground equipment, adding lighting to Prairie Lakes outdoor trails, and maintain excellence in programming.

The findings from this study will be a useful tool for the park district's strategic planning process. The findings and recommendations of this study help to ensure that strategic decisions enacted by the park district are guided by the public input process and meet residents' recreation and park needs and preferences.