



Note to Reader:

Each park inventoried in this study can be located on the *Long Island Index* maps available on our website, www.longislandindex.org

AVAILABILITY OF OUTDOOR SPACE FOR LONG ISLAND'S CHILDREN

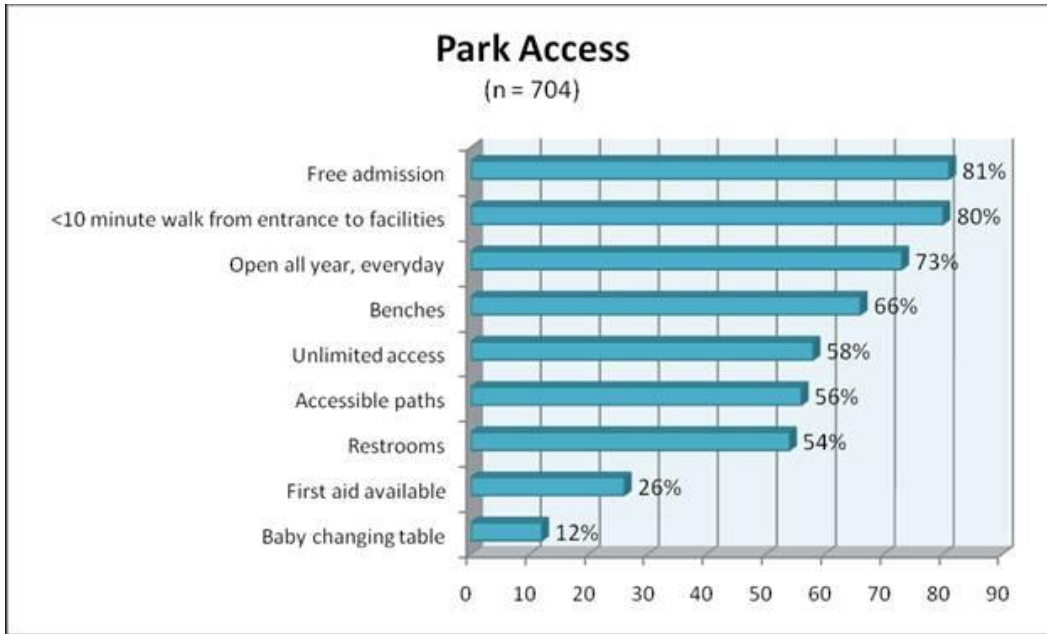
Prepared by The Early Years Institute
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Years ago, children spent most of their time playing outdoors, engaged in stimulating physical exercise using backyards, sidewalks, playgrounds and parks. Parks can offer children a safe place for physical activity, and an environment that promotes a positive self identify, and sense of belonging. All children need hands-on learning environments that respond to and support their varied learning styles, as well as physical activity and opportunities to connect with the natural environment. Parks can offer opportunities for both physical activity and multiple kinds of learning. The richer the park environment, the richer the learning will be.

Outdoor activities can also address the growing epidemic of obesity among children. More than 15% of children ages 6-19 are considered overweight, as are 10% of children ages 2-5. According to the National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity, obesity rates have doubled in children and tripled in adolescents in the past 20 years. Experts predict that if these trends continue, today's youth will be the first generation in this nation's history to have a shorter life expectancy than their parents. The epidemic of obesity, inactivity and related diseases, such as diabetes, is shortening children's lives and destroying the quality of their lives.

As an island of 1,400 square miles, with 340 miles of coastline, and 52,000 acres of parkland, there is vast potential for Long Island's open space to provide healthy learning environments for young children and their families. Over 800 parks have been identified in the two counties, including passive parks, with limited facilities, and active parks, that typically have playgrounds, ball fields and family events. Over 740 of these parks were visited and inventoried in 2008.

Most Long Island parks offer free admission (81%), but only 58% are open to everyone. Many town and village parks require proof of residency before someone is allowed on the property. The overwhelming majority of parks have their parking lots close to the place where children might play (80%). Three-quarters are open all year, everyday. Parents will find benches to rest on in two-thirds of Long Island parks, but only 56% are in very good, or somewhat good condition. More than half of the parks have paths where strollers or wheelchairs can be easily traveled. Slightly more than half of the parks have restrooms, however, only a third are clean and in good condition and only 28% are close to the play area. Over a quarter of parks have first aid available, while only 12% have a changing table, although make-shift alternatives are likely to be available.



Given that 54% of these parks are passive, it is not surprising to see that only about half have various play activities. A passive park, however, can provide endless hours of exploration and child-directed learning. For parents looking for specific physical activities their children, fewer than 15% offer swimming, boating, bike paths or other climbing and playground equipment, while 22% offer walking and jogging trails.

