

*Background & Context:*

Invented in England, the sport of squash first came to the United States in the 1880s at St. Paul's School in New Hampshire. Squash is now played in over 185 countries, with the top players hailing from Egypt, England, France, Malaysia, Pakistan, Australia, and New Zealand. Traditionally, in the United States, the sport of squash has been played at private high schools, elite colleges and universities, and private membership clubs. In the 1990s, the face of the sport began to change. Greg Zaff, a former professional squash player and graduate student at Harvard Business School wrote a term paper entitled "Bringing Squash Down from the Ivory Tower" that spurred the creation of the "urban squash" movement. With 28 middle school students from Boston Public Schools, Zaff created SquashBusters, the first after-school program to combine the sport of squash with academic tutoring, mentorship, and community service.

In 1999, a similar program opened in Harlem, followed by other urban squash programs in Philadelphia, the Bronx, and Chicago. In 2005, NUSEA (National Urban Squash + Education Association) was formed to act as the governing body of urban squash. Currently, there are over 2,000 urban squash student-athletes in the United States from 23 different programs. Over 25 million dollars in college scholarships has been earned by urban squash students and 96 percent of urban squash students who stay in their programs graduate from high school and enroll in post-secondary education. Furthermore, 65 percent of urban squash students earn a bachelor's degree within 6 years, compared to the national average of 24 percent for low-income students.

Inspired by the urban squash movement and similar programs, Portland Community Squash has created a facility and a community of adult and junior squash players representing diverse backgrounds in Portland, Maine. Our mission is to sustain this diverse community and to provide squash, wellness, and academic instruction to support and empower Portland area youth to achieve academic success, physical wellness, constructive citizenship, and a path to higher education.

In July 2012, a group of people came together to discuss expanding squash in Maine. They decided to focus on serving local youth and start running programs at the local YMCA, using two converted racquetball courts. In 2013, there were over 130 people playing squash at the YMCA in Portland, outgrowing the space and creating a huge demand for more squash courts for both adult and youth players. Soon after, the concept of Portland Community Squash, or PCS, was born. In 2013, PCS staff went around to local schools for gym class visits to introduce students to the sport of squash, and around 60 youth then came to the Y for squash practice. After outgrowing the courts at the YMCA with 270 adult and youth players, and after raising 1.5 million dollars, Portland Community Squash found a new home at 66 Noyes Street in a former synagogue in October 2016.

A year ago, on January 10th, 2017, Portland Community Squash opened its new home to the community and became the first "community squash" program. To date, all squash programs in the country are either private membership clubs, high school teams, or urban squash programs. Portland Community Squash combines all three of these using the "community squash" model. With 4 squash courts, a yoga studio, a cardio and weight gym, locker rooms, and 3 classrooms, PCS has over 200 adult members, 80 middle school and high school youth, 12 Rally Portland student-athlete leaders, and 20 elementary school youth every week. Across all of our youth programs, we have 17 different languages spoken and 27 countries represented. This is how we use walls - the walls of a squash court - to break down the walls between different groups of people and break down the barriers that prevent local youth from being successful student-athletes and leaders.

### *Junior Squash & Program Offerings:*

Every Wednesday afternoon, 4th and 5th grade students from LearningWorks come to Portland Community Squash for an enrichment field trip. They are introduced to the sport of squash and are coached by our top middle school and high school players. On Mondays, our middle school students go to different LearningWorks sites to engage with these same youth, help them with their homework, and talk to them about the various squash opportunities during summer and middle school, such as the Junior Squash League.

The goal of the Junior Squash League is to introduce middle school and high school youth in the greater Portland area to the sport of squash. The program emphasizes squash instruction (group instruction, technique, competitive match play), wellness (yoga, fitness, mindfulness and meditation, nutrition) and character development (leadership development, team-building, critical conversations). High school juniors and seniors receive personal fitness plans, weightlifting training, and college preparation support. All high school youth benefit from optional homework help and tutoring after practice. Generous financial aid is available to both middle school and high school youth participating in the Junior Squash League. Transportation to and from practice is provided for middle school youth.

Middle school and high school youth who reach a highly advanced level of play are eligible to attend twice-monthly advanced skills clinics. In addition, youth participants also have the opportunity to obtain junior memberships and private and semi-private lessons taught by coaching staff.

Rally Portland is the rigorous college pathway and leadership development program at Portland Community Squash, combining squash instruction with intensive academic enrichment and tutoring, community service opportunities, college and career readiness, and travel opportunities. Students in the Rally Portland program receive support from middle school to college graduation, and beyond. After completing one season the Junior Squash League, sixth grade students from Portland Public Schools are eligible to go through an intensive application and tryout process. If accepted, students in the Rally Portland program make a commitment to participate in two of the three Junior Squash League seasons per year, additional weekly squash practices and academic support sessions, weekend activities and trips, and summer programming - up until they graduate from high school. The support continues throughout a student's post-secondary education and early career. Significant financial aid is available and Rally Portland has an emphasis on supporting students who do not have access to other afterschool programs and educational resources.

## *Student Information & Data*

In order provide afterschool programming with comprehensive academic tutoring, social-emotional support, and college preparation, we believe it is necessary to establish clear communication - including the sharing of student information - with families, Portland Public Schools, and our community partners. In speaking with other urban squash programs, they all emphasized the necessity of establishing a formal partnership with the local school system in order to recruit potential students, share critical information regarding students-athletes, and ensure the academic success and social-emotional wellbeing of participants.

In order ensure we are delivering this comprehensive model of afterschool programming, we request to the following student information from Portland Public Schools to be shared with Portland Community Squash:

### 1. School Attendance

We would like to be able to regularly view and track individual school attendance for each of our Rally Portland participants. The rationale behind us accessing this data is that we believe it is critical that our youth participants are present in school every single day and are getting to school on time. Furthermore, we plan to track the average school attendance rate among the Rally Portland students and compare this to city, state, and national averages - a metric we plan to use in our annual report and grant writing efforts. We hope to access this data from a student's Infinite Campus account, as long as we have student, school, and parent permission to do so.

In addition, we pick up our middle school students at dismissal and drive them over to practice. There have been several times in which a student has been absent, but I or other PCS staff members have not been able to reach a parent, so we end up waiting around at dismissal and rely on other kids to search around the school to find them. Sometimes, school staff are hesitant and not sure if they can let us know if the student was present or not at school that day. Sharing attendance information would help streamline the school pick up process, allowing us to accurately plan transportation logistics, vehicle capacity, and arrive back at Portland Community Squash on time.

### 2. Report Cards/Progress Reports/Grades/Transcripts/Academic Performance

In addition to attendance data, we would also like to be able to regularly view, track, and keep tabs on the individual academic performance of each participant. Monitoring grades and academic progress is critical in order to ensure we are providing the appropriate academic interventions and support. We want to work with students and families to identify areas of improvement and deliver tutoring and support in these specific areas.

Furthermore, we are curious to measure any growth and improvement among our youth participants' academic performance as a whole over the course of their participation in Rally Portland - this is also a metric we could potentially use for our annual report and fundraising purposes. Again, we hope to access most of this information from a student's Infinite Campus portal, as long as we have student, school, and parent permission to do so.

SquashBusters in Lawrence, MA said that some of their partner schools directly give copies of printed report cards and progress reports to the organization, while for other schools, SquashBusters staff members have to call or email school staff every quarter and the paper copies are mailed out or picked up. They receive paper copies because the PowerSchool student/parent accounts do not provide everything that is shown on the report cards and progress reports, and long-term data is not stored year after year. If everything shown on the Portland Public Schools progress reports and report cards are available on Infinite Campus, we would probably not need paper copies of these records. If not, then we are planning to view the day-to-day grades on Infinite Campus, but having

copies of printed report cards and progress reports would be useful for data collection efforts and maintaining files for each Rally Portland participant.

As for transcripts, the ability to request an unofficial or official transcript will be helpful for high school students applying to institutions of higher education, scholarships, and pre-college summer programs. In the future, we also plan to collect data regarding the average overall GPA of our youth participants, rigor of coursework, and average grade by subject area. Having final transcripts of our high school graduates - our youth are in 6th and 7th grade right now, so this will be further down the road - would assist us in the collection of this data.

In addition, we would love to be able to be in touch with teachers and staff on a regular basis about students' academic engagement and progress in the school setting. There have been many times in which I am helping a student with homework or a project at PCS, but would love to reach out to the teacher for clarification, especially when both the student and I are confused. In addition, we would love to be able to reach out to teachers when we are concerned about a particular student or just to have a general check in about how our Rally Portland participants are doing in school. There have been times when I and other PCS staff members chat with teachers at dismissal and we ask how a certain student is doing, but teachers are often hesitant to relay too much information.

Many other urban squash programs have students and parents sign the release of information form before the student goes through the tryout process, allowing the squash coaches and academic staff to discuss the student's school performance and academic engagement with teachers and school staff and use that information as a factor in the final decision process. SquashBusters staff states that they sit down with all of the sixth grade teachers to openly discuss the applicants, and it is helpful to have their feedback when deciding who earns a spot on the final roster. As of right now, we have our Rally Portland applicants ask a teacher or school staff member to fill out a short recommendation form. In addition to this, we would ideally like to be able to follow up with that teacher - and other teachers and staff - to discuss any concerns and talk about whether or not the student would be a good fit for Rally Portland, which is such a long-term investment and commitment from both parties - the student and PCS staff.

### 3. Social-Emotional, and Psychological Wellbeing

As for the sharing of social-emotional and psychological wellbeing, we envision this line of communication to be mostly Portland Community Squash staff sharing information with school personnel and helping students get connected with resources and support staff available in school. As we are in close communication with families and conduct home visits about every week, we find out a lot of information that I feel would be helpful to share with school staff. We do not anticipate calling or emailing school staff every single time an issue or crisis arises, but we do want to establish an open line of communication regarding these matters, especially if doing so would benefit the student.

There have been multiple situations over the past few months in which students have confided in our staff about very personal things and I always suggest that they speak to a trusting adult at their school, such as a school counselor or social worker. As our program grows and as our 6th and 7th graders enter high school, I anticipate this referral process needing to happen more often. I would love to be able to refer students to specific school staff and then follow up with said staff member to check in if the student showed up to the meeting, how they are doing, if the situation requires more resources and personnel, etc.

In addition, we have our Rally Portland participants take the HSA (Holistic Student Assessment) survey, developed by the PEAR Institute at Harvard University. The HSA is a strengths-based self-report assessment that provides a

social-emotional “portrait” of the unique strengths and challenges of each youth participant. It provides data about student resiliences, learning and school engagement, peer and adult relationships, and strengths and difficulties. We believe that this data would be incredibly helpful for school staff, as it has been very insightful and beneficial for Portland Community Squash staff.

#### 4. Health & Medical Information

As for the sharing of health and medical information, this release of information would most likely concern copies of physicals and immunization records. SquashBusters staff members said it is helpful when a student gives them an updated physical but the school did not receive a copy, so SquashBusters staff is able to give a new copy to the school, and vice versa.

There have been several instances when the sharing of health and medical information between the schools and Portland Community Squash could have been useful. For example, all of our Rally Portland students are going off to various residential summer camps and programs this upcoming summer, and the registration forms requires intensive paperwork, especially health and medical forms. I asked students and parents for copies of their most recent physical and immunizations, but most said they gave it to the school for athletics. Many of the immigrant and non-native English speaking families struggle in contacting their healthcare providers, so I envision it would be helpful if I could receive a copy from the schools to use for summer camp purposes.

#### 5. IEP Meetings, Behavior Plans/Contracts, and Parent-Teacher Conferences

As for sharing of IEP and behavior information, SquashBusters staff in Boston state that school staff and parents frequently invite academic staff to sit in on students’ IEP meetings and parent-teacher conferences. As to my knowledge, we do not have any Rally Portland students with IEPs, but we may in the future, so attending any IEP meetings could be helpful, but only if parents, students, and school staff believe it would be beneficial to have us present.

#### 6. Test Scores and Reports

As for the sharing of test scores and reports, we would like to be able to have access to test scores and reports, such as any ACCESS scores, NWEA/MEA scores, and other relevant test scores, including psychological and special education testing. If these scores are available on Infinite Campus, we would plan to view and track the data. Many other urban squash programs use this data as a fundraising metric to track students’ academic progress over time.

#### 7. Google Drive & Email

I am not sure this fits in with the rest of the information release requests, but when working with Portland Public Schools students on essays and coursework, it appears that they are prohibited from emailing and sharing documents on Google Drive with PCS staff members’ email accounts, such as mine for example (katrina@pcsquash.com). If there is any possible way to allow Portland Public Schools students to send emails to PCS staff and share Google Drive documents with us, it would greatly assist our academic staff with tutoring, editing, and academic support.

\*The next page is a sample form we plan to use



Portland Community Squash  
+  
Portland Public Schools  
RELEASE OF INFORMATION



Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Infinite Campus Username: \_\_\_\_\_

Infinite Campus Password: \_\_\_\_\_

I, \_\_\_\_\_ [PARENT/GUARDIAN NAME], hereby authorize Portland Public Schools and Portland Community Squash to release information to respective staff members pertaining to the educational and enrollment status of \_\_\_\_\_ [STUDENT NAME].

I authorize Portland Public Schools and Portland Community Squash to release the following information about my child [please initial each category you authorize]:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> School & Program Attendance                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Health & Medical Information                                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Report Cards/Progress Reports/<br>Grades/Academic Performance | <input type="checkbox"/> IEPs, Behavior Plans/Contracts,<br>Parent-Teacher Conferences |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Social-Emotional & Psychological<br>Wellbeing                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Test Scores and Test Reports                                  |

- ▶ I understand the purpose of this communication is to enable Portland Community Squash to offer comprehensive academic and social-emotional support to its participants in collaboration with Portland Public Schools
- ▶ I understand authorization is voluntary and may be revoked by written communication to Portland Community Squash
- ▶ I understand this authorization is valid for one year from the date of signing unless it has been revoked according to the aforementioned procedure
- ▶ I certify this form has been fully explain to me and that I fully understand its contents and implications

\_\_\_\_\_  
[PARENT/GUARDIAN SIGNATURE]

\_\_\_\_\_  
[DATE OF AUTHORIZATION]