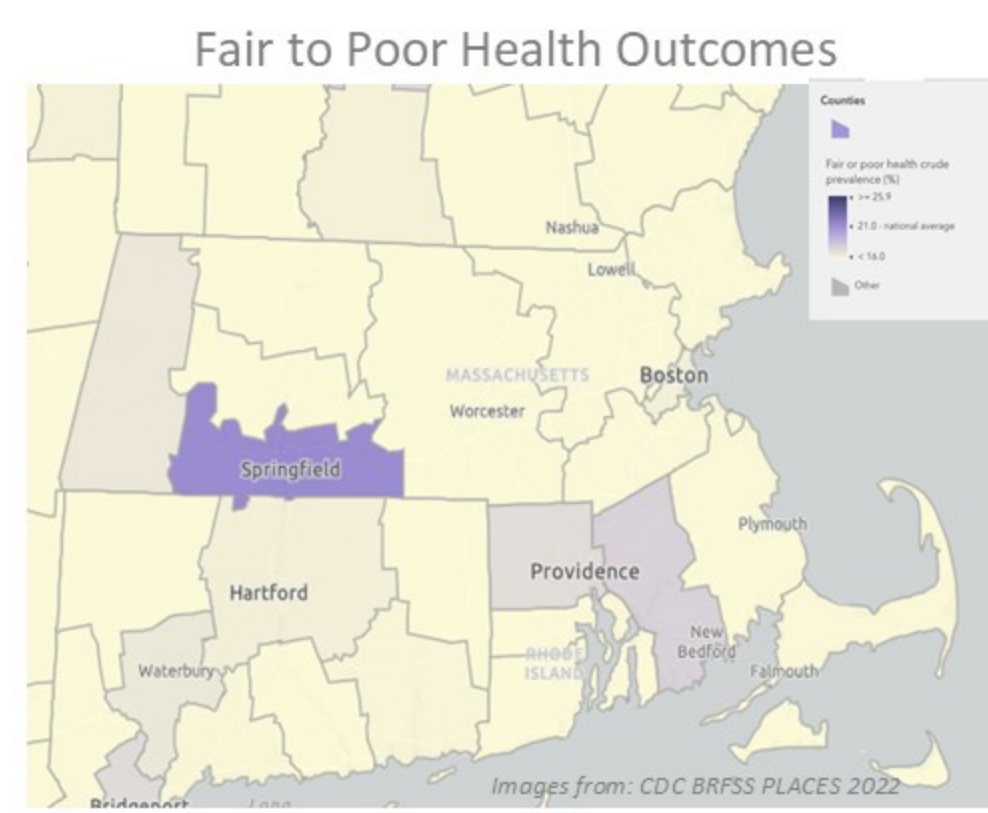
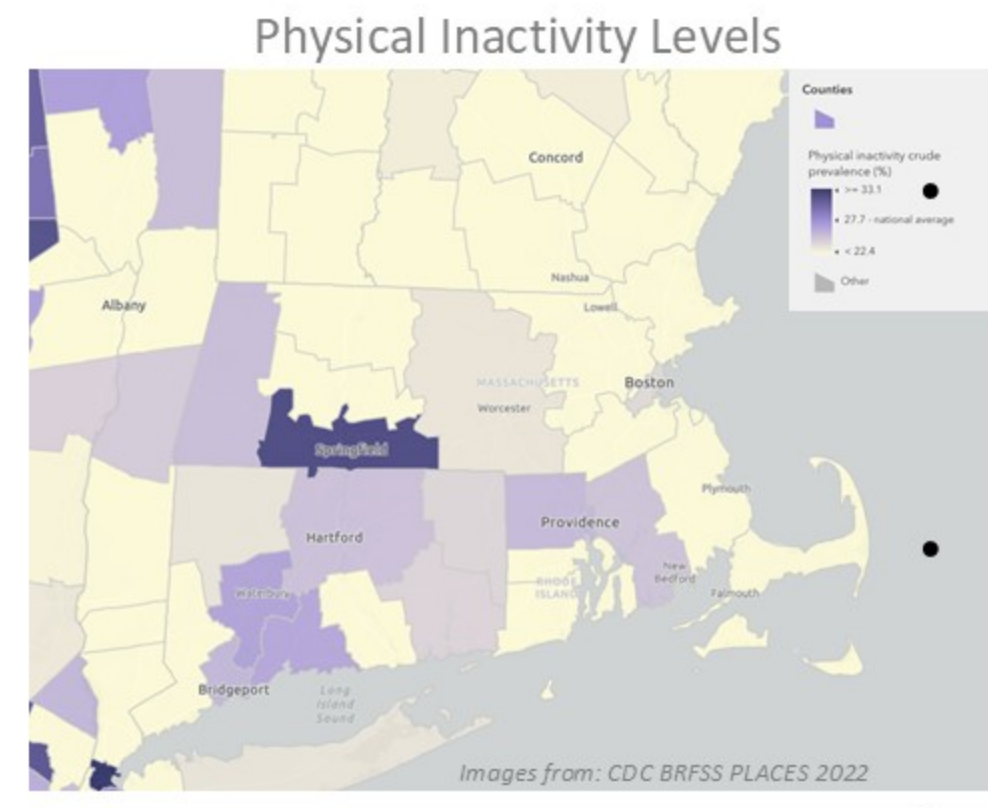
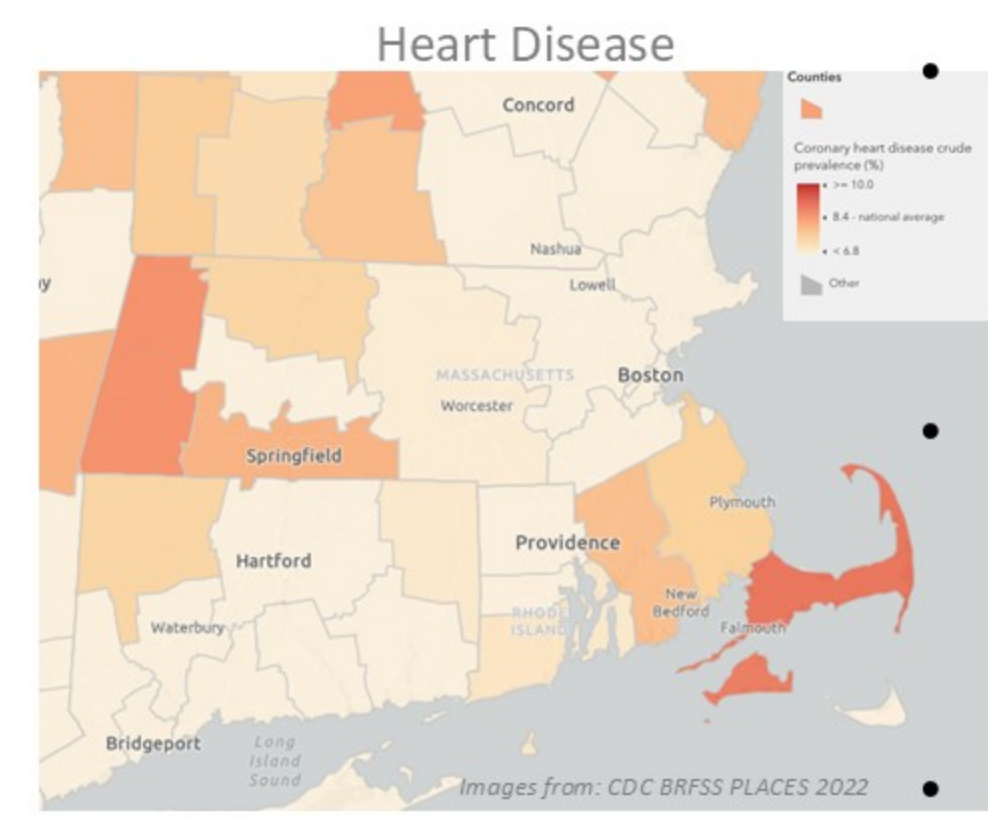


## Background



Hampden County has the lowest life expectancy in Massachusetts, with heart disease as the leading cause of death, correlating with the highest rates of physical inactivity in the state.<sup>2,3</sup> In Hampden County, local high school students may face increased risks due to low physical activity (PA) engagement, as identified by our community partners, the local PE Teachers. This trend reflects the broader global decline in PA, especially among adolescents, which has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>4,5,6</sup> The 2018 Physical Activity Guidelines Advisory Committee recommends that children and adolescents (ages 6–17) engage in at least 60 minutes of PA daily. PE class plays a crucial role in promoting PA and physical literacy, helping students develop lifelong healthy habits.<sup>7,8</sup> Regular PA supports cardiovascular health, reduces smoking rates, and alleviates symptoms of depression.<sup>9,10</sup> Thus, establishing active habits early can lead to long-term health benefits.

## Purpose

- My Education, Action, and Lifestyle (M.E.A.L.) Inc. is a student-led nonprofit dedicated to improving health outcomes in Massachusetts, by enhancing access to health education and promoting PA through health education workshops at a high school in Hampden County.
- This community project aims to increase PA engagement in high school students through providing new equipment, incentives, and workshops, aimed to improve health literacy and long-term health outcomes in the community

## Methods

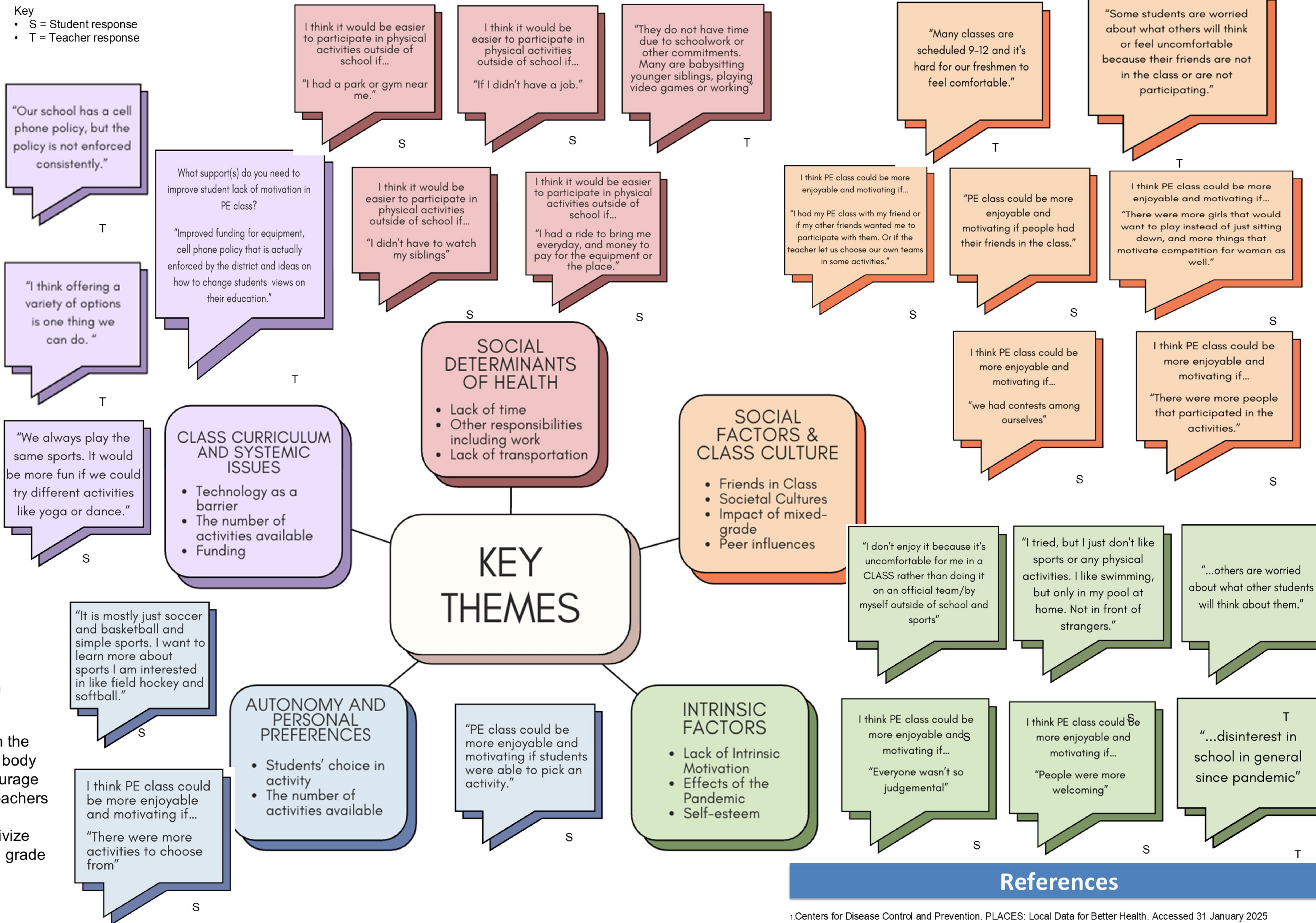
- Target population: 9th–12th grade students enrolled in PE class at our partner high school during the spring semester of 2024
- A multicomponent intervention was implemented:
- New PE equipment (pedometers, yoga mats, pickleball gear) was provided through the Remillard Family with the same students, covering nutrition, exercise benefits, and body image. Community Service Fund grant, chosen based on PE teacher input to encourage goal-setting, accessibility, and engagement in lifelong physical activities. The PE teachers integrated new equipment into their curriculum.
- Introduced an End-of-Semester raffle for Dick's Sporting Goods gift cards to incentivize class attendance and active participation in PE; students with  $\geq 70\%$  in participation grade were eligible
- M.E.A.L. Inc. continued to conduct their biannual health education workshops
- Anonymous pre- and post-intervention surveys were conducted in January & May 2024 for students and teachers
- The survey responses were reviewed, coded based on recurring ideas and key concepts related to motivation and attitudes towards PA (during class and outside of class). Related codes were grouped into overarching themes.

## Discussion and Takeaways

- Students are more likely to participate when they have autonomy to choose which activities they engage in, with expanded PA options (e.g. new sports like pickleball, yoga, dance) boosting interest.
- New equipment and incentives may be useful in motivating students to engage in PA, providing engaging activities and promoting a positive, inclusive environment is also crucial.
- Improving PE participation also requires addressing larger systemic challenges like curriculum design, resource allocation, and enforcing school-wide policies to address class distractions.
- The raffle incentive had limited influence, with only 29 out of 140 students entered.
- Student feedback suggests the health education workshops were engaging and informative.

## Key Themes

Key  
• S = Student response  
• T = Teacher response



## Limitations

- The sample size was small given the qualitative nature of this project.
- Surveys were conducted on a subset of students enrolled in PE class during one semester at one public high school in Hampden County, MA. Findings may not be generalizable to other populations.
- As this was IRB-exempt and planned to be analyzed as an aggregate set, demographic and identifying data were excluded

## Future Work

- Explore accessibility to PA outside of school
- Investigate Post-Pandemic motivational declines in PA
- Determine strategies to help students rebuild intrinsic motivation for PA
- Further assess the impact of the new equipment on student attitudes and participation in PE

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