

School sports costs leave some students on sidelines

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Photo: Robin Foster

Only one-third of kids from families making less than \$60,000 play on teams.

(HealthDay)—Many American children can't afford to participate in school sports, a new survey finds.

Only 30 percent of students in families with annual household incomes of less than \$60,000 played school sports, compared with 51 percent of students in families that earned \$60,000 or more a year.

The difference may stem from a common practice—charging middle and high schools students a "pay-to-play" fee to take part in sports, according to the researchers.

The survey, from the University of Michigan Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, found that the average school sports

participation fee was \$126 per child. While 38 percent of students did not pay sports participation fees—some received waivers for those fees—18 percent paid \$200 or more.

In addition to pay-to-play fees, parents in the survey said they also paid an average of \$275 in other sports-related costs such as equipment and travel.

"So, the average cost for [sports participation](#) was \$400 per child. For many families, that cost is out of reach," Sarah Clark, associate research scientist at the university's Child Health Evaluation and Research Unit, said in a university news release. She is also associate director of the [national poll](#).

The researchers surveyed parents of [children](#) aged 12 to 17 and found that 42 percent said at least one of their children took part in school sports during the 2013-14 school year. However, there were significant differences based on household income.

Of the 58 percent of parents who said their children did not play school sports, 14 percent said cost was the reason, according to the poll.

"Participation in school sports offers so many benefits to children and teens, from lower dropout rates to improved health and reduced obesity. It is significant to have one in seven parents of non-sports participants indicate that cost is keeping their kid out of the game," Clark said.

"School administrators struggle to balance the budget for school sports without creating obstacles to participation. This poll shows the need for schools to continue to work on options for both low-income families, and families that don't qualify for waivers but still may need financial help, because the risk of kids dropping out of sports is very real," she concluded.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more about [children and physical activity](#).

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