The cost to play school sports is rising and fewer students can afford it

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A study shows that low-income students who can’t afford pay-to-play sports suffer health consequences with obesity and other problems. Photo: Julian H. Gonzalez/Detroit Free Press/TNS

A new survey shows that children from low-income families may have more long-term health problems if their families can’t afford to pay for them to play school sports. The survey, known as the National Poll on Children’s Health, was conducted in June of last year by the University of Michigan’s C.S. Mott Children’s Hospital.

The survey may reinforce the idea that there is a link between income and health. It found that while 51 percent of families earning more than $60,000 per year reported having a child in sports, only 30 percent of low-income families had a child playing school sports.
Fewer Opportunities

Those income-based differences are worrisome for several reasons, said Sarah Clark, a research scientist specializing in children's health.

“Sports is one way that kids can be physically active in an enjoyable way. They’re with their buddies. They’re learning teamwork,” Clark said.

Clark said school-based activities such as sports or music programs also help kids stay in school.

“So if we’re decreasing opportunities for lower-income kids to participate in sports,” she said, “we’re taking away one of our weapons in the fight against high dropout rates and the severe weight problems so many children face. Being very overweight, or obese, can cause serious health problems. It can lead to heart problems, diabetes and even shorter life expectancy.

Priced Out Of The Game

The survey found that 1 in 7 parents whose children were not in sports mentioned cost as a reason. In addition, money might be becoming increasingly important.

Sports participation among lower-income students decreased by 10 percent compared to a May 2012 poll. Even among students from higher-income households, participation has dropped. Nearly 1 in 10 parents said their child had decreased sports participation because of cost — twice as many as had reported that in 2012.

Other factors may also play a role in a family's decision on whether or not to participate in school sports, Clark said. For example, some families choose to have kids play in community leagues rather than school teams.

Expensive Travel, Equipment

Overall, however, the results are troubling. Schools and parent groups do try to help reduce costs for low-income students who demonstrate a desire to play sports, she said. Yet they may fail to consider students who never bother to try out for a team because they know cost will be an obstacle.

The poll found the average school sports participation fee was $126 per child. However, some parents — especially when costs for equipment and travel were included — paid more than $400 for their children’s participation.

Clark, a mother of two boys who played multiple high school sports, knows about the cost first-hand, she said.

One year, she said, “I remember I hit $1,000 in fees before Christmas.”
Quiz

1 Which sentence from the article suggests that pay-to-play sports has more than one effect on student health?

(A) So if we’re decreasing opportunities for lower-income kids to participate in sports," she said, "we’re taking away one of our weapons in the fight against high dropout rates and the severe weight problems so many children face.

(B) "Sports is one way that kids can be physically active in an enjoyable way."

(C) Schools and parent groups do try to help reduce costs for low-income students who demonstrate a desire to play sports, she said.

(D) Even among students from higher-income households, participation has dropped.

2 Select the paragraph from the section "Priced Out Of The Game" that shows pay-to-play sports decreased participation among students.

3 Which of the following sentences from the article is LEAST important to include in a summary?

(A) The survey found that 1 in 7 parents whose children were not in sports mentioned cost as a reason.

(B) "Sports is one way that kids can be physically active in an enjoyable way."

(C) The survey may reinforce the idea that there is a link between income and health.

(D) The poll found the average school sports participation fee was $126 per child.
Which paragraph BEST summarizes the article as a whole?

(A) The survey may reinforce the idea that there is a link between income and health. It found that while 51 percent of families earning more than $60,000 per year reported having a child in sports, only 30 percent of low-income families had a child playing school sports.

(B) Those income-based differences are worrisome for several reasons, said Sarah Clark, a research scientist specializing in children’s health.

(C) Clark said school-based activities such as sports or music programs also help kids stay in school.

(D) Other factors may also play a role in a family’s decision on whether or not to participate in school sports, Clark said. For example, some families choose to have kids play in community leagues rather than school teams.