

Pay up or sit out

[Business](#)



School Supplies: \$75; School Clothes: \$100; Participating in school activities: \$25-450.

Before July of 2011, participating in extracurricular activities at this school came at no cost. Now, the school ask parents to pay \$25-\$450 in order for their children to have the opportunity to participate in school activities.

Although participation fees help offset economic costs for the school district, parents already pay taxes for their children to go to school, and these fees place an additional hardship on lower income families, discouraging students from trying new activities. Charging a fee to participate in extracurricular activities is a locked fence around the playing field or a locked door to a gym. Students should not have to pay a participation fee.

Participation fees may represent a hardship for lower income families. For many of these families, the school team is the only way their children can participate in sports and school-run organizations. According to a July 2004 USA Today article titled “ Michigan primer offers pros and cons of fees,” “ Participation has long been a privilege available to all students meeting academic and other eligibility criteria. Fees threaten to create teams that will be made up of only those families within a school district with the ability to pay — not much different than some of the elite travel teams that exist in non-school sports.” Every high school student wants to avoid embarrassment in front of his or her peers, particularly in a situation caused simply by a family’s inability to afford participation fees, just like the improvised student who qualifies for reduced lunches. Subsequently, many students simply put participating in activities out of their mind.

In a February 2013 article, titled “ Pay to Play,” published in Junior Scholastic, Brooke Ross discusses a University of Michigan poll that states, “ Nearly one in five parents in lower-income households say their children participate in fewer school sports because they cannot afford the fees.” Additionally, every child deserves equal opportunity to succeed in school athletically, as well as academically. Many professional athletes today came from poorer families, and they understand the barrier poverty erects. For example, LaMarr Woodley of the Pittsburgh Steelers donated \$60, 000 to his alma mater, Saginaw Public Schools, to cover all participation fees in that district, enabling every student an equal opportunity in joining activities. Woodley indicated that if the district had charged fees when he was in school, he would not have been able to play sports.

By abolishing the participation fee requirement, every student receives the opportunity to take part in school activities and sports. Furthermore, parents and guardians already pay district taxes in order for their children to attend school and gain an outstanding education. The school’s fiscal budget for the 2013-2014 school year totals over \$131 million. The activities budget totals fewer than \$2. 7 million, or 2%, which is low, compared to the other departmental budgets for the district, yet the parents pay extra amounts for their children to participate. In addition, parents and guardians must also pay for the individual equipment that each athlete needs.

My parents had to pay over \$500 in order for me to cheer this year, on top of the required “ donation.” Lastly, activities offered by the school should come at no additional cost, as activities for many students are a valuable part of the educational process. My school wants recognition as a premier high

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school that gets student prepared not only for college, but also for life.

Student involvement in extracurricular activities helps build strong character and a well-rounded student, essential qualities that universities look for. The school knows they can charge fees for participation because parents would rather pay it then lose the opportunity for their child. Participation fees need eliminated from the school district.

In addition, participation fees can discourage kids from trying new activities and staying active for fear that they will not enjoy the activity, but cannot quit because of the money it cost to sign up. To avoid the possibility of finding themselves in this situation, many students choose not to pursue their interests. The Physical Education Department promotes staying active and making healthy choices. The practice of charging a participation fee is giving students the wrong idea, making it appear that athletic endeavors and physical fitness are luxuries. Participation fees not only discourage kids from participating but also from attending the school events and athletic games.

According to the same USA Today article cited earlier, “ Imposing fees reduces student involvement and paid attendance at athletic events, further negating much of the new revenue anticipated.” The number of who participate will directly affect the number of fans who will show up and buy tickets to watch. The silence you hear someday may be the sound of few students participating in school activities. Finally, school involvement is crucial for creating a well-rounded student. Colleges look not for academic success but also athletic and activity involvement.

Schools should leave participation fees out of the equation in order to promote school involvement for every student. On the other hand, the School Board states that they implemented the participation fee “ as a result of the significant and increasing financial challenges that are facing not just the School District, but most public school districts in this region and across the country.” Although this is true, athletics make up roughly 2% of the total budget. This small percentage for athletics is nowhere near enough to make up for the economic problems faced by the school. Is the school on the road to becoming a private institution, where attendees will pay tuition? Everyone wants students to be active and involved in school sports and activities. A participation fee inhibits the numbers of student who participate because of the hardship it places on lower income families, and discourages students from trying new activities.

These families are already paying for these activities through their school taxes. The taxpayers should overturn this well-intentioned, but faulty board policy. Create a petition and speak your opinion at the next School Board meeting to show your opposition to this policy. A more involved student body creates an exciting educational environment, which is ultimately what we all want.