

<https://scotscoop.com/pay-to-play-sports-both-help-and-harm-athletics-programs/>

Pay-to-play sports both help and harm athletics programs

[Max Lee](#), Staff Writer | February 5, 2018

The devastation of having a sport cut from an athletic program is a dilemma that many schools encounter.

Lack of funding and profit are some of the major causes that have led schools to cut certain sports.

According to [CNBC](#), from 2009 to 2011, \$3.5 billion was cut from schools' sports budgets. However, schools may have a solution: a pay-to-play system.

A pay-to-play system is essentially an arrangement in which student-athletes must pay in order to participate in a school sport.

While many high schools incorporate this into their own athletic programs, some schools, such as Carlmont, rely on booster clubs or fundraisers to provide coaching, equipment, traveling services, fields, gyms, and training facilities, due to laws prohibiting them from charging to play sports.

Pay-to-play systems can save sports programs from budget cuts, providing more opportunities for athletes to play for college scholarships. Thus, the success of a pay-to-play system may have a positive impact on many student-athletes.

However, a pay-to-play system may also create a negative impact on the athletic program as a whole.

After the West Ada School District in Idaho incorporated a pay-to-play system into their schools' athletic programs, it experienced a major decrease in athletic participation; [the district's athlete total decreased from 6,230 students to 5,451 students](#) over the course of three years.

One major consideration for schools that are thinking about implementing a pay-to-play system is the affordability of the program. Some students who might participate in a free program cannot afford to pay to participate.

According to financial advisers at The Motley Fool, the [U.S. average household](#) income in 2017 was approximately \$67,000. However, this average income can vary depending on the school district.

As the socioeconomic status of public-school households is, in many cases, considerably lower than those of private schools, many public schools choose not to integrate a pay-to-play system. In addition, some states prevent their schools from incorporating a pay-to-play system.

“First and foremost, it’s against California [education] code to require someone to pay to play sports. Everything in a public school system is supposed to be free,” said Carlmont Athletic Director Patrick Smith.

With the rejection of a pay-to-play format for sports in many states such as California, schools are forced to think outside the box and implement different forms of fundraising.

For Carlmont, fundraising for sports is done through booster clubs.

“The booster club does many different forms of fundraising; they sell memberships and hold a big fundraiser in April to raise money to pay for sports,” Smith said. “ASB does not necessarily do fundraising for sports, but they charge an entrance fee for football and basketball games. Kids can also buy what’s called a PAL sticker, which helps to pay for sports and gives the owner a discount on entrance fees for games, the yearbook, dances, and stuff like that.”

However, the reliance on fundraising can become a difficult road to cross for some schools, as the community is not always on the same page as the athletic departments.

“It’s just frustrating in general because I want all students to be able to play, but the reality is that if parents choose not to donate, then we will not have a program,” said Ralston Middle School physical education teacher Deborah Blackwell. “We get complaints about the cost of the sport, but what the community doesn’t realize is that the money is needed to run the program; we are not doing it to make a profit. We want everyone to be able to participate, but we also need the community to realize the necessity of the donations.”

Without student-athletes and their families paying for sports, fundraisers and donations become ever more crucial, as they are the backbone of public schools and their athletics. Thus, demographics and the estimated participation rate from families can lead to the determination of the need for a pay-to-play system.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/bobcook/2018/05/23/school-district-will-charge-parents-pay-to-play-fees-even-if-kids-arent-in-sports/#1128d4e9bb1d>

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School District Will Charge Parents Pay-to-Play Fees -- Even If Kids Aren't in Sports

Bob Cook, Contributor

Pay-to-play -- schools charging parents a fee for their children to participate in sports or activities -- has long become a mainstream strategy for districts that want to close budget holes or raise a little extra cash. For example, half of the school districts who responded to a Michigan State High School Athletic Association survey said they charged pay-to-play sports fees during the 2016-17 school year.

But it appears one Illinois district is breaking new ground by instituting pay-whether-or-not-you-play.

The school board for Lincoln-Way High School District 210, located in the far exurbs of south suburban Chicago, in mid-May approved a change that would replace its pay-to-play fees with a flat \$50 "participation" fee per student, which applies whether that student is in 10 activities or zero. The district reports that 80 percent of students already participate in extracurricular activities, and it figures even more students might participate now that parents are paying up front instead of worrying about the fee at the time a season begins.

But let's be realistic -- the No. 1 reason for the change is increasing something other than participation. From the Daily Southtown in south suburban Chicago:

"This past school year, students paid a \$25 fee per sport, capped at \$50 per student, and a \$10 fee per club/activity, capped at \$30, which generated \$134,000 in revenue. The flat \$50 fee is expected to bring in \$310,000, officials said.

Also, you don't have to chase down parents in the middle of football season.

I should note that Lincoln-Way has some reason to be, shall we say, innovative in this field. First, the 2007-09 recession crushed the area's growth industry -- having houses built there. What was expected to be endless enrollment growth crashed hard, with current enrollment of 7,000 expected now to be 6,000 in another five years. One of the district's four high schools was shut down in 2016, only eight years after it was built.

Of course, it appears this downturn also ended up exposing some financial shenanigans, at least according to federal prosecutors.

"[In September 2017] federal prosecutors indicted former Lincoln-Way Superintendent Lawrence Wyllie on fraud charges. Prosecutors allege Wyllie hid the "true financial health" of Lincoln-Way by misusing millions in bond money and fraudulently spent

school district funds on personal projects, including Superdog, a dog training school he ordered built. [BLOGGER'S NOTE: As one who lives near this area and has followed this story, the Superdog part is always my favorite.]

Wyllie has pleaded not guilty, and his attorney said this week the former superintendent intends to go to trial on the matter.

The bottom line, literally, in all of this that Lincoln-Way has been on the Illinois State Board of Education's financial watch list since 2015.

I can't say for sure that Lincoln-Way is the first school district to implement pay-whether-or-not-you-play. But I can't find evidence of other schools doing this, at least not explicitly to replace pay-to-play fees. What with necessity being the mother of invention and all, it's not surprising a district like Lincoln-Way would innovate in this field. With school funding as it is in many places, it wouldn't surprise me in a few years to hear of many, many more schools following its lead.