

More PA school districts charging student participation fees

PSBA first partnered with Pennsylvania State Athletic Directors Association (PSADA) to look at participation fees for sports and other extracurricular activities in the spring of 2010. Athletic directors from Pennsylvania schools attending PSADA's 2010 Annual Conference were surveyed to determine the scope of pay-to-play in the commonwealth. At that time, a relatively small number of respondents indicated charging fees for student participation in athletics and other extracurricular activities. A continuing economic downturn since that time has coupled with substantial cuts to public education funding, prompting a re-examination of if and how districts are finding ways to pay for athletics in schools.

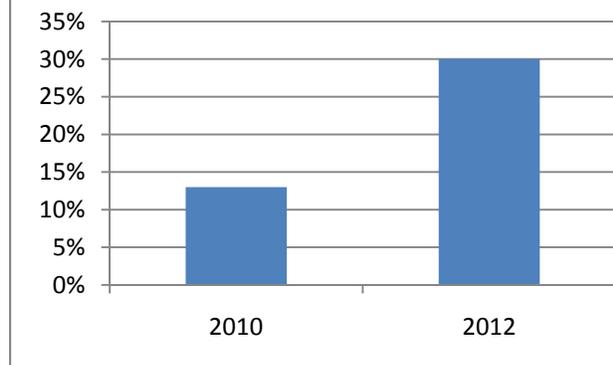
When the organization first looked at participation fees in 2010, 13% of Pennsylvania's public school districts surveyed indicated charging students fees ranging from between \$5 and \$50 for the opportunity to participate in interscholastic athletics. These fees, especially when compared nationally and to private school fees often charged specifically to offset cost, seemed at the time to largely have an insignificant impact on district expenditures for extracurricular activities. Since 2010, nearly \$1 billion in cuts to Pennsylvania public school funding has led school districts to question how to continue to sustain interscholastic and other extracurricular programs.

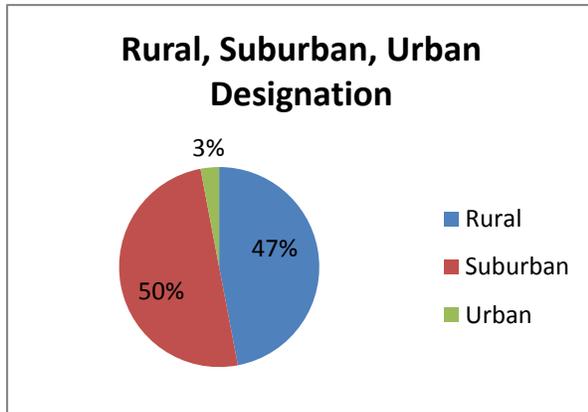
When comparing data gathered in 2010 and spring 2012, it is immediately evident that cuts are forcing districts to make difficult and unpopular funding decisions. Two years after an initial look at participation fees, a joint PSBA/PSADA survey recently found nearly one third (30%) of public school respondents indicated charging individual students \$10 to \$250, with a statewide average of \$65 per-sport. More than half (55%) of the districts that reported charging students fees for participation indicate fees are assessed on a

per-sport basis. A family with two student athletes each participating in three sports, paying the statewide average of \$65, would be expected to pay nearly \$400 over the course of an individual school year, and more than \$1,500 for four years of high school. The same family paying the maximum amount, as indicated via the PSBA/PSADA survey, on a per-sport basis would be charged \$1,500 per year, and \$6,000 over the course of a four-year high school career.

Thirty-one percent of districts that indicated charging participation fees for athletics charge students an annual fee for participation. Ten percent cap fees once they reach a certain amount to help families with multiple student-athletes or multiple-sport athletes. Twenty-one percent of public school districts also reported charging student fees for participation in other extracurricular activities including band and chorus. As a last resort, a notable number (13%) also reported being forced to eliminate or cut athletics programs for financial reasons in the past year.

Change in Districts Charging Fees for Athletic Participation, 2010-2012





School districts reporting charging student participation fees seem fairly evenly spread over Pennsylvania, representing 16 of 29 Intermediate Units and 20 of 67 counties. Only one school district that reported charging student participation fees is designated as urban. All remaining districts reporting student participation fees are split evenly between rural and suburban locations. PSBA also looked at alternative methods to funding interscholastic athletics, surveying school districts about fundraising, corporate sponsorship partnerships

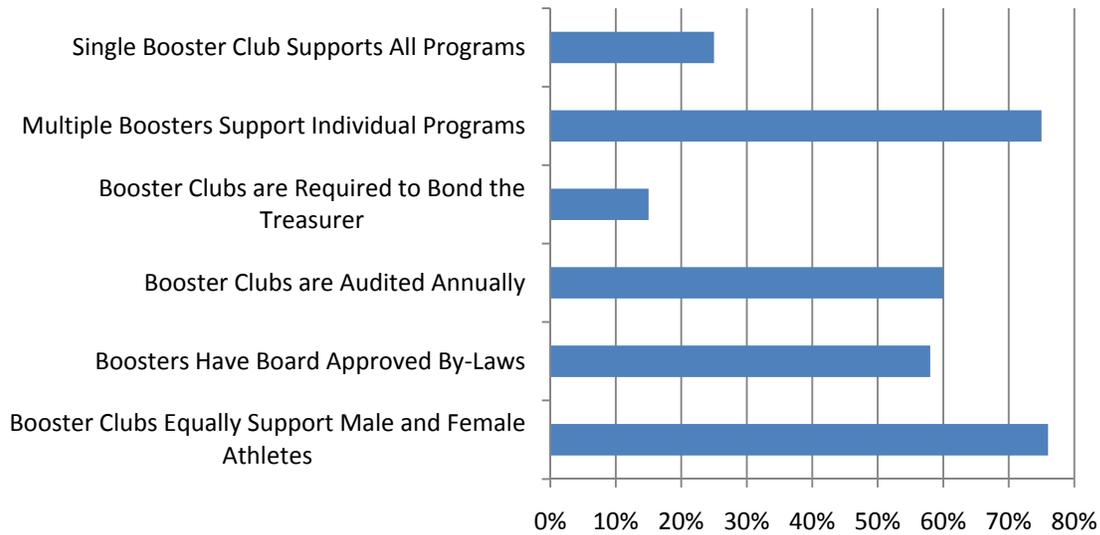
and booster clubs. Most of the school districts surveyed indicated that while fundraising for extracurricular activities is common, it is most often not mandatory. Athletic directors from 13% of the public schools surveyed indicated fundraising activities are a mandatory component of the revenue stream for interscholastic athletics programs. Most often, mandatory and other fundraising efforts support individual programs rather than being used generally in support of all programs within the district.

Of the surveyed districts, 30% reported participating in corporate sponsorship partnerships. The amount of money benefiting the school district varied greatly, from as little as \$500 to as much as \$2 million. Several districts also indicated ongoing partnerships generating \$2,000-\$5,000 per year.

Most districts rely on booster clubs to help pay for athletics programs. Of collected surveys, 92% indicated one or more booster clubs support athletics and other extracurricular activities within the district. Three quarters of that number reported multiple booster clubs that support individual programs, with an average of nine per district. Twenty-five percent rely on a single booster club that supports all programs within the district.

The significant increase in the percentage of districts charging (and often increasing) participation fees illustrates another challenge facing public schools: how to sustain critical programs that have traditionally contributed to a well-rounded education. As school districts grapple with many difficult budgetary and programmatic decisions, the extracurricular offerings in many school districts face an uncertain future.

Booster Clubs



The PSBA Education Research & Policy Center is an affiliate of the Pennsylvania School Boards Association. The PSBA Education Research & Policy Center is dedicated to the purpose of in-depth research and analysis of issues affecting public education in Pennsylvania.

Questions about pay-to-play may be directed to: PSBA Education Research & Policy Center, (800) 932-0588, ext. 3363.