The Youth Athletic Participation Gap



Barrier Snapshot: Interest Is Not Always Enough

55.4%

Youth sports are widely popular, with 55.4% of youth playing organized sports.[1]

But access is uneven, with a **20.2-point income gap in regular sports participation.[2]**

Cost adds pressure, with family spending on a child's main sport up **46% from 2019 to 2024** and **58% of sports parents** reporting equipment-cost stress.[3] [4]

COMMON ENTRY BARRIERS :

- Transportation gaps
- Equipment, uniform, or fee costs
- Family schedule conflicts
- Limited sign-up awareness
- Low confidence or fear of not belonging

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SCHOOL-BASED SPORTS

Access strength: Campus-based and easier to find

Access challenge: Tryouts can limit available spots

CLUB SPORTS

Access strength: Clearer paths to advanced competition

Access challenge: Higher fees and travel costs

RECREATIONAL TEAMS

Access strength: Beginner-friendly entry point

Access challenge: Limited equipment and resources

How Support Keeps Athletes Involved

Fair access improves when communities lower cost barriers, with **85% citing financial support** and **75% citing equipment** as key access tools.[5]

MOST HELPFUL SUPPORT FACTORS

- Timely updates on schedules and needs
- Shared transportation planning
- Low-cost or shared equipment options
- Simple ways to request support
- Easy ways for families and supporters to contribute
- Clear visibility into team needs
- Community support beyond the same few parents

GoPledge

Sources:

1. https://projectplay.org/youth-sports/facts/participation-rates
2. https://projectplay.org/state-of-play-2025/participation-trends
3. https://projectplay.org/news/2025/2/24/project-play-survey-family-spending-on-youth-sports-rises-46-over-five-years
4. https://www.goodsports.org/the-price-of-play/
5. https://www.nrpa.org/contentassets/e8964d7375e94c0fa3f19123e5745194/2025nrpayouthsportsreport_final.pdf