WHITE PAPER | OCTOBER 2025

THE COST OF PLAY

Insights on Access, Affordability, and Equity in Youth Sports

GOOD SPORTS®

Good Sports is a national youth sports charity that drives equitable access in youth sports and physical activity by supporting children in high-need communities to achieve their greatest potential, on the field and in life. Founded in Boston in 2003, Good Sports has supported over 7,000 youth organizations by donating over $125M in brand-new sports equipment to positively impact over 10M children from high-need communities.

THE VALUE OF YOUTH SPORTS

For more than two decades, Good Sports has been on the frontlines of youth sports, seeing firsthand how access to play shapes healthier, more confident kids. But today, a growing crisis is unfolding: **while parents overwhelmingly believe in the benefits of sports, rising costs are pushing too many children to the sidelines.**

A 2024 Harris Poll commissioned by Good Sports reveals near-universal agreement on the value of youth sports:

OF PARENTS SURVEYED

95% believe children benefit from playing sports

89% say sports provide positive physical and emotional impacts

84% have children currently participating in sports

Yet despite these convictions, families across the country are struggling to afford registration fees, uniforms, and equipment, turning what should be a right of childhood into a luxury.

This white paper explores the growing affordability gap in youth sports, confirming what parents, coaches, and educators have long voiced: the cost of participation is threatening access to play. Good Sports aims to spotlight these realities, drive conversation, and help leaders across sectors create solutions that keep every kid in the game.

COMPLEMENTARY DATA

- Nearly 9 in 10 parents (89%) believe that it is important for their child to enjoy playing sports. (USA Today, 2025)
- 82% of parents said it's important for their child to be regularly involved in sports. (Siena College Research Institute)
- 81% of children say their biggest motivation to play sports is to have fun. (Project Play's Reimagining School Sports Initiative)
- 73% of parents believe that sports benefits their child's mental health, and 88% believe that sports benefits their child's physical health. (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, 2015)

RISING COSTS DECREASE ACCESS TO PLAY

Parents overwhelmingly see the benefits of youth sports. Despite the proven advantages, the rising costs of participation are closing doors for too many families today. **Research confirms that youth sports are becoming increasingly expensive, and our study shows the direct toll: parents are feeling a sharper strain, greater hesitation, and growing concern about whether their child can continue playing.**

THE FINANCIAL STRAIN OF PLAY

OF PARENTS SURVEYED

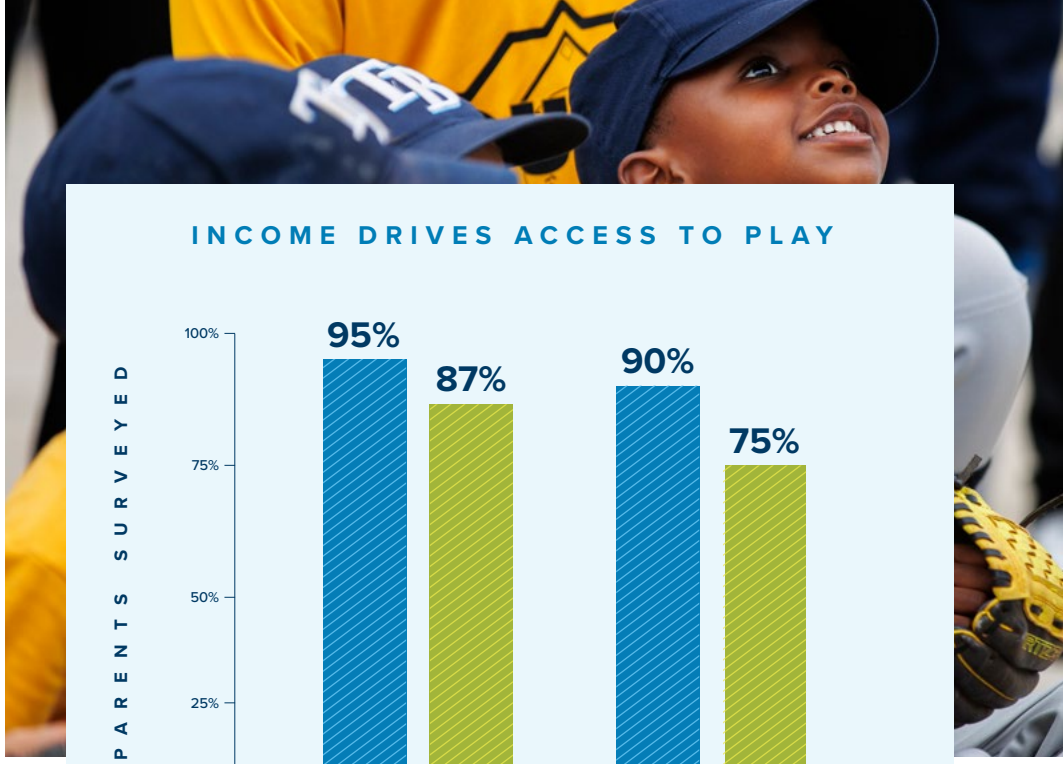
58% of parents with children currently playing sports say paying for sports equipment has become a financial stress

24% report experiencing financial strain from sports participation

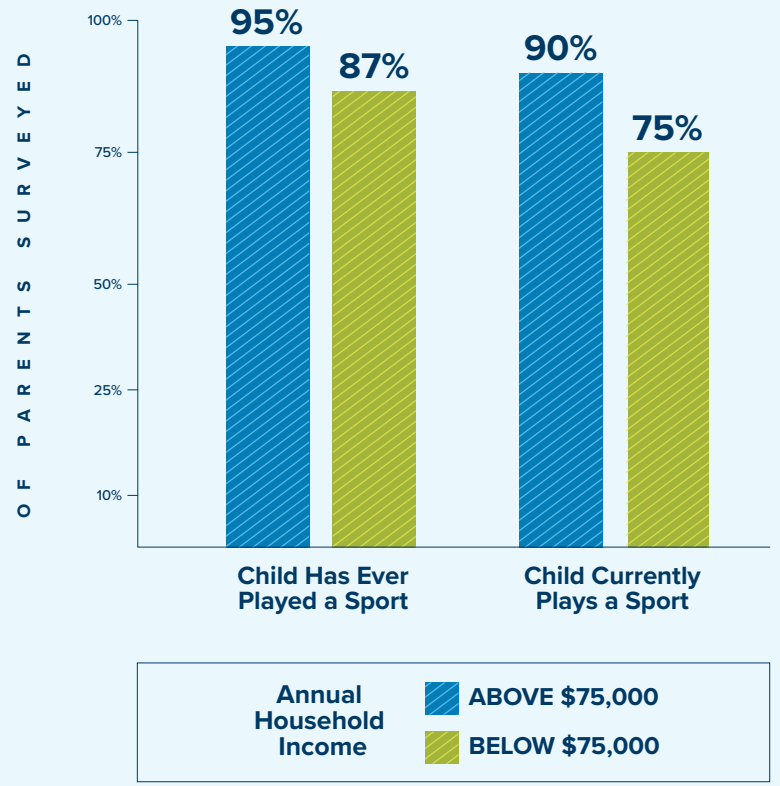
23% say they have taken on additional work to afford it

18% have taken on debt to cover the costs

These pressures are not evenly shared, but instead deepen the divide between higher- and lower-income households, putting kids from less-resourced families at an even greater disadvantage.



INCOME DRIVES ACCESS TO PLAY



This gap in sports access has become a pressing equity issue. Children from lower-income families are increasingly shut out of opportunities their peers enjoy, and rising expenses have made participation a barrier that continues to grow. More than half of parents are worried about affording sports next year, and 46% of non-participating families say they would reconsider if sports were more affordable. **The urgency is clear: without action, too many children will be left on the sidelines.**

COMPLEMENTARY DATA

- Family spending on youth sports has risen over 40% in the last five years. (Aspen Institute, Project Play 2025)
- 73% of parents say youth sports have lost sight of their original purpose: fostering fun and teaching teamwork. (USA Today, 2025)
- High-income families ($100,000+) spend nearly 3x more on youth sports ($1,590/year) than low-income families ($604/year). (Aspen Institute Project Play, 2024)

EVERY KID DESERVES SPORTS

Affordability must be at the center of any effort to grow youth sports participation. Our findings show that parents believe in the power of sports, yet rising costs are forcing too many families to choose between financial stability and their child's participation. This is more than a budget challenge: it's an equity issue with lasting consequences for kids' physical, mental, and social well-being.

At Good Sports, we believe play is a right, not a privilege.

Since 2003, Good Sports has focused on equipment as a solution for youth organizations and schools, and has helped millions of children play sports confidently, comfortably, and cost-free.

OUR IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

$125M+
in equipment donated

10.6M
kids impacted

20,100
donations

30+
sports and fitness activities supported

NOW IS THE TIME TO ACT.

THERE ARE STILL MILLIONS OF KIDS ON THE SIDELINES WAITING FOR THEIR CHANCE TO PLAY

Join our roster of 40+ brand partners and thousands of individual donors and volunteers to help get kids off the sidelines and onto the field. Let's commit to making youth sports affordable and accessible, because every kid deserves a chance to experience the life-changing power of play.

For media inquiries or partnership opportunities,
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