

# 2021 Geneva Youth Sport’s Survey Report

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## Executive Summary

A survey of Geneva parents was distributed throughout the month of April (and early May) relating to obstacles preventing youth participation in sports activities. Scheduling difficulties, cost of participation, and inaccessibility or confusion finding registration and team information were highlighted as the three most significant challenges among parents. These three factors were reported as even greater challenges for those who were below the state poverty level.

Overwhelmingly, parents reported having a desire for their child(ren) to participate in sports activities, and children wanting to participate as well. The main deterrent for children who were not enthusiastic to play were connected to social desires to have friends on a team, and to feel welcomed treated well by coaches and teammates.

Suggestions for community small- and large-scale efforts that can be made to address these challenges in the community are included below (See Suggested Future Action / Recommendations). Increased communication between parents and teams or organizations may allow coaches to better communicate with parents about carpooling opportunities or find times when practices best meet the needs to team members and coaches. Evaluating the current distribution and accessibility of scholarship funds for sports’ programs may help parents be better aware of opportunities to reduce cost when that is a limiting factor for participation. And the creation of a virtual centralized hub where information on various community sports programs are compiled and accessible to parents. Communicating registration times, as well as which children are eligible, and the cost and time commitment required would enable parents to have more complete knowledge on available opportunities for their child(ren).

## Purpose of Research

This internship role was initially conceived in response to the decrease in enrollment in Geneva’s youth sports programs over the past several years, even before the start of the coronavirus pandemic. The

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widespread benefits of youth participation in sports are well known to former athletes and in published research, and this research was intended to identify the most significant obstacles to Geneva youth's full participation in this activity.

### Benefits of Sports Participation

The widespread benefits of youth participation in sports are well documented. In 2019, the ASPEN institute conducted a nationwide investigation call Project Play, investigating youth physical activity. See, <https://www.aspenprojectplay.org/youth-sports-facts>. Benefits of sports participation were found to impact areas of physical and mental health, as well as correlating with educational and career successes. Obesity and weight-related illnesses, muscle, joint, and bone health conditions, chronic diseases and even cancer risk were all significantly reduced by increased physical exercise during childhood. Children who report not exercising were also twice as likely to report mental health struggles than their peers, with depression and anxiety rates being lower for those who were physically active. Interpersonal and intrapersonal skills were also bolstered with team participation, showing increased self-esteem, goal setting skills, social skills and leadership along with decreased loneliness among athletes. Outside of the sports arena, participating in sports in early elementary school has been shown to be associated with skills which benefit academics including: enhanced concentration, attention, classroom behavior, and attendance. This young exposure to sports is correlated with generally higher grades and standardized test scores in school as well as higher high school graduation rates, college attendance, and college graduation rates than non-athletic peers.

These benefits have been found to exist across gender, race, and socioeconomic status of the child. In a diverse population such as Geneva (<http://math.hws.edu/~mitchell/SuccessForGenevasChildren2020.pdf>), sports and athletic participation is one of many ways to provide children with as much support for future success as possible. Identifying possible barriers to individuals in the community not being able to participate in organized youth sports can help identify possible changes that could be made to make athletics more accessible generally. Also gathered by the ASPEN institute were the most common reported challenges regarding children's participation in sports. These included costs of participation in sports, inequity in access (sports offered for different genders, ages, ability), lack of facilities, injury or disability, busy schedules or lack of time, untrained coaches, and the prevalence of technology - with children opting for indoor activities such as video gaming as a replacement to physically active hobbies. These nationwide challenges became the starting point for our own research in identifying obstacles specific to Geneva with the **goal to understand both the primary obstacles to sports participation, and parent perception of the importance and benefit of sports participation for their children.**

### Method

A survey was created using Google Forms and distributed to Geneva parents through multiple distribution networks.

### Distribution

Flyers and posters were hung in local businesses and restaurants in downtown Geneva as well as outside community sports centers such as the YMCA. Parents accessed the survey through the use of a scannable QR code which enabled the survey to be taken on smart phones. The survey was also distributed electronically via social media and email. Copies of the flyer with a link to the survey were posted to community Facebook groups and youth sports pages. The flyer was also distributed to community members and asked to be forwarded to their own networks through social media, email, or newsletters.

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Community stakeholders included members of organizations such as the Geneva Rec, the YMCA, Boys and Girls Club, youth sport coaches and administrators of local public and private schools. All posters, flyers and other promotions of the survey were written in both Spanish and English for increased accessibility.

Noting that all families receive information from various sources, we worked hard to leverage multiple outlets of hard copy, social media, newsletters, and word of mouth to reach and receive feedback from individuals in all sections of the community.

### Survey Design

The survey consisted of three sections: perceived obstacles to sport participation, perceived value of sports, and demographic information of each respondent.

Regarding obstacles to sport, this section was intended to identify the key challenges that impacted community members regarding their child(ren)'s participation in sports. Parents were presented with eight possible obstacles that restricted sport's participation: cost of enrollment, cost of equipment, work schedule conflict, lack of transportation, confusing registration process, child's availability/free time, injury or physical disability of the child, child's not wanting to participate. In addition, parents were given the option to list other challenges that limited their ability to have their child participate in sports. Parents were also asked to select reasons they believed their child did not want to participate in sports, if relevant, and to list any sports that were not currently offered that their child may be interested in.

Parents were next asked their opinion on the overall importance of sports and what benefits in what ways they believed sports to be beneficial. This section was intended to identify the enthusiasm and motivation of parents to have their child participate in sports, and possible areas to educate parents. While improved physical health and improved social skills are well known benefits of sports, should lesser known benefits (such as the mental health or academic benefits) not be appreciated, it could be a target to inform and educate parents to promote more encouragement among parents for their child to participate in sports. Parents were asked to rate how beneficial they believed sports to be in eight areas: physical health, mental health, discipline, cooperation, social skills, academic skills, college scholarship, and skills for future careers.

The demographic section asked questions on the gender and age of children, race, income, employment status of the parents, and how long the family had lived in Geneva. The two primary goals of this section were to evaluate if respondents were representative of the Geneva population to ensure all kinds of voices were heard and represented. Additionally, these questions allowed for the previous survey responses to be sorted to identify any common trends that were specific to certain kinds of families.

### Results of Data Collection

The survey is still currently live and collecting data as we are waiting for the information to be published in particular upcoming newsletters. To date there are 104 different respondents.

### Demographics

A vast majority of respondents use the English version of the survey, with only one response in Spanish. (Though bi-lingual Spanish and English speakers may have opted to answer using the English version). Over 80% of respondents identified as White (non-Hispanic). (See Chart 1.1) This is disproportionate compared to Geneva's overall population and indicated a possible misrepresentation of the general

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population in the sample of the study. There was much greater diversity in reported income brackets (See Chart 1.2) with relatively even distribution among number of respondents. Seven respondents were identified as being near or below the poverty guidelines for New York State (calculated using the total number of adults and children in the home and reported income bracket compared to 2021 poverty guidelines).

### Obstacles to Sports Participation (See Chart 2.1)

On average the **most significant obstacle to sports was due to scheduling conflicts**, with parents unable to get children to practice or games based on other conflicts. More than 65% of respondents believed it to be at least a bit of an obstacle, with nearly 20% saying it made it “a lot” harder for their child to participate. Many parents also expressed specifically the conflicts that arose having multiple children with practices at different times or different locations. Since many sports are coached by volunteers who are busy until 5pm, sports aren't offered after school which would be ideal timing for kids since transportation wouldn't be needed.

The **next most significant obstacles were cost**, both of enrollment (such as registration fees, game fees, and travel expenses) and of equipment (uniforms, pads, cleats, etc.). A majority of parents reported the cost as making it some degree harder for their child to participate. **For families at or below the poverty guideline, the costs associated with participating in sports was reported as the largest obstacle to participation.** The survey did not inquire about parent's knowledge of existing scholarship opportunities for several of the community sport's programs, but this is a point of interest in how the current scholarship opportunities are contributing to addressing this challenge.

While less consistently a challenge for the majority of responding families, the **confusing registration process for many sports was also a commonly reported challenge**, including multiple families who indicated that it made it “impossible” to their child to participate. Parent feedback in later parts of the survey and conversation added to this conclusion, with many parents describing difficulties finding various registrations for different sports or determining when/where sports were offered. This was also evident by parents suggesting sports that already exist in the community as ideas for “sports that are not currently offered that would be of interest for their child.”

Lack of transportation, children being too busy with other activities, physical disability/injury of the child, and the child not wanting to participate, were not reported to be significant challenges for most respondents. These results are promising and may help the community better focus on challenges that the survey highlighted as being significant. It is particularly **encouraging that a majority of respondents (62%) said their child's desire (or lack thereof) to participate was not an obstacle.** However, some families did indicate that their child not wanting to participate was so significant it made it impossible to have them participate in sports.

For those who indicated their child had any reluctance to participate, most reasons provided were social in nature. The two most commonly named reasons were not having other friends participating with them (45%), with additional parents citing shyness or social anxiety limiting their child from joining a new group, and not being treated nicely by teammates and coaches (35%). Other reasons included not being interested or wanting to spend the time playing sports, or the sport children were interested in not being offered. (See Chart 2.2)

### Value of Sport Participation (See Chart 3.1 and 3.2)

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There were very promising results from parents' reported positive perception about the value of sports. When asked, **no parent responded that it was not important for their child to participate in sports.** 95% believed it to be "somewhat" or "very important" with a majority identifying it as being "very important." Even parents who expressed that there were current obstacles making it impossible from having their child participate acknowledged the importance of sports participation for their child(ren). This isn't necessarily surprising, given selection bias, it's likely that people feel that sports aren't important or valuable wouldn't have responded to the survey.

When asked about specific areas that parents believed sports to benefit there was relatively equal responses in importance across most of the examples including physical health, mental health, discipline, cooperation, social skills, and academic skills. This is encouraging as it recognizes parents as seeing the benefits that their child can gain from sports' participation beyond physical fitness. The greatest room for possible growth and education of the public was in their understanding of sports helping produce positive outcomes in school as well as their future careers as more parents indicated these as being a small benefit to children compared to the considerable to large benefit most frequently noted for other questions. The most significant outlier of the question was parents' responses to the importance of participation based on the possibility to receive scholarships, with most responses saying it was "not a reason" they saw sports as being beneficial.

### Conclusion

The responses of the survey are beneficial in guiding potential suggestions for future action plans aimed to specifically help address the needs of those in the community. Understanding foundationally that parents want their child(ren) to be involved in sports and, in large part, children want to participate as well, much of what can be done is about increasing access to sports for all families. This survey was largely intended to gather information from the community and share that information with community partners to use as they see fit. There are many new sports requested and other suggestions made by parents that can help to understand local interest and desires of the community.

### Suggested Future Action / Recommendations

There are many possible interpretations of the results of the survey or possible responses or action plans that could be taken. Below are some suggested ideas based on general themes and desires from parent responses.

Regarding cost:

- Many programs in Geneva offer some kind of scholarship or payment reduction in the case of hardship; these policies are not always widely known or available to all families. Consider how to better communicate these options to families who need it.
- Explore ways to decrease costs of sports with particularly expensive gear or equipment costs with trade-in or donation initiative. As Hobart and William Smith Colleges (HWS) has a variety of athletic programs and former high school athletes, there may be an opportunity to partner Geneva community teams with HWS students to fundraise or donate outgrown and older equipment to younger athletes in the community.

Regarding clarity/accessibility to information:

- Currently, different teams and organizations disseminate their information in different ways (Facebook, websites, twitter, etc.). A document has been created condensing the core information (sport, age, season, website/social media, contact information) of different

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community sports offered. The plan to disseminate this document to the community is still undetermined, and the document is only partially completed as the coronavirus pandemic has halted programming through the Geneva Rec which typically hosts numerous sports. This is a short-term solution as a document such as this would need to be updated regularly.

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1YyIQwp3nNtcqaoltDbmW-gxa8OAt6leJPcFLH6QvCAC/edit?usp=sharing>

- Creation of a centralized website for youth sports updates, one site could be updated by various stakeholders so parents weren't left scrambling "which sport is offered by which organization" as frequently noted in the Geneva Parents FB page and a centralized effort to distribute scholarships, funding, advertise for a sports equipment swap etc.  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/260699210693447>
- Suggestion of a "Geneva Sport Fair" or "Sport's night," in person or on Zoom, where parents and children would be able to see a variety of sports offered and engage with potential coaches or teammates.
- Geneva Boosters Club will recruit and hire an intern to assist with social media outreach and activating some of the suggestions offered in partnership with HWS and the Geneva Boosters Club

Regarding coaches' training:

- There are several websites which offer free trainings for coaches or adults involved in youth sports. The National Alliance for Youth Sports, offers free training for non-members, including a bullying prevention training specifically for coaches (available at <https://www.nays.org/additional-training/>). Training sessions or online opportunities could increase coaches' knowledgeability in youth development, building an inclusive team environment, anti-bullying, and communication.

Regarding scheduling:

- Recruit an HWS student to offer an "after school sports club" to expose kids to soccer, lacrosse, etc. (weekend field trip to meet up at ice rink for hockey and ice skating) helps parents who want an after school option – internship opportunity, perhaps funded by stipend from Boosters Club? Etc. this could help address some of the challenges identified that kids didn't know anyone who was playing, they hope would be to have students connect with each other earlier

Any future action plan will be dependent on a community member (or possibly hired intern) to take initiative to address the areas of concern voiced by parents and highlighted in this report. I am happy to clarify any information in this report or from the original survey or answer any questions there may be. I can be contacted at [sarah.laferrera@hws.edu](mailto:sarah.laferrera@hws.edu)

### Summary of Community Feedback

Included in the survey were a selection of open-ended questions that allowed for parents to respond with their own perspectives and ideas. Though the information has been primarily synthesized above, because parents took the time to share their thoughts it was important that that information was included and accessible so all voices who shared could be heard.

[Challenges that make it hard for children to participate in sports \(not included in the pre-given answers\)](#)

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### Coaching ability/training and team culture

- "Lack of coaching knowledge dealing with a diverse population"
- "Don't care for youth football coaches or the way they interact with kids"
- "My son is ADHD and has always had miserable experiences in team sports due to ADHD related issues"
- "Lack of ability of staff to work with students with disabilities appropriately"
- "Lack of volunteer coaches"
- "Team culture"
- "Communication between coaches and families"
- "Coaches have 'favorites' and don't offer the same attention/skill sharing depending on who your child is"
- "Racismo en el equipo de deportes" (translation: "Racism in sports teams")

### Lack of acceptance on teams/programs

- "There isn't the same attention given to girls sports as boys. In a family with both boys and girls the differences are obvious and causes a lot of hard feelings and resentment"
- "My children were interested in differs sports at different times. Because they were never super stars they were never encourages enough to feel good about trying out for a team. The ONE time my son tried out for baseball his freshman year at GHS, he and one other boy were the ONLY 2 who tried out and didn't get a spot on the team. Never again did he show any interest in ANY sport. During little league he always did well. He wasn't the worst player on the team by far. But the fact is, he didn't attend city schools until high school. It's hard not to assume he was being "punished" for attending catholic school. Sad really. He loved baseball and was a great teammate"
- "Not all schools are accepted"
- "Age cutoffs, my kids are 22 months apart but sometimes, age restrictions put them in 2 different age groups. As a single mother it makes things impossible"
- "For those kids 5/6<sup>th</sup> grades the challenging sport teams are not available unless you travel. They are not old enough for modified sports that take place after school without a cost, but they are too motivated/talented/want the challenge for a YMCA team but travel teams cost money and time demand is high and not conducive to a parent full time job. Those age groups seem to fall between the cracks a little"

### Time or scheduling constraints

- "Homework and getting to bed at a reasonable time"
- "Custody visitation schedule"
- "Too much homework assigned during COVID"
- "Co parenting schedules. Making the child feel like they missed because of exchange mishaps that disrupted their ability to attend. Participation while they are there is what should matter, commenting on whether they missed can be discouraging because it's not within their control"
- "A lot of sports end up having the same days of practice and games when they are in the same season. So if my child would actually like to play more than one sport, which he does, he can't"
- "My child loves basketball but there is no help in the off season for better skills work"
- "multiple children needing to be at sperate practices at the same time in different locations"

### Inaccessible information on registration

- "Schedule of sport not being available"
- "Knowing season schedules ahead of time to plan"

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- "Hard to find out when/where sign-ups are. We get NOTHING in take home folders from school"
- "Very hard to find streamline information on registration dates according to age/grade. It's spread across different organizations and depends on word of mouth. Makes it tricky for new coming families to navigate Geneva hasn't been the child's forever home. Once a season or two passes, child may feel too far behind in terms of skill to have courage to join"
- "Not knowing schedules in advance and how they might conflict with other things"

### Sports children may play if available

It should be noted that many of the sports listed *are* offered in some capacity. All responses were included, however, as responses of a desire to have sports that already exists highlights a different concern of the lack of knowledge of all available sports.

Basketball	Paintball/nerf/laser gun
Basketball (girls)	Pickleball
Crew	Roller skating derby/speedskating
Fencing*	Running/Track* (Available for younger ages)
Field hockey**	Skateboarding
Frisbee golf	Soccer****
Fishing*	Soccer (that is not on weekends)
Football (youth)	Swimming (available for younger ages)
Golf***	Swimming (team)
Gymnastics	Tennis League***
JROTC	Volleyball***
Lacrosse	Wrestling
Martial arts	Xgames

\*Each asterisk indicates an additional response suggesting the same sport

### Suggestions for changes that could make it easier to participate in sports

#### Suggestions regarding cost

- "Lower cost"
- "Create a scholarship fund for those who can't afford to pay"
- "Price"
- "Not for mine but I do believe and have seen that many don't play bc their family can not afford it or lack transportation to take them to practice and or games"

#### Suggestions regarding coaching

- "Screen coaches better"
- "Get training for coaches on handling ADHD"
- "Provide incentives for coaches"
- "Do some focused work for coaches in how to build an empowering sports team and hold players accountable for inclusion"
- "I think good coaching is huge!"

#### Suggestions regarding scheduling

- "Not all games Saturday AM"
- "I think rather than a whole season of sport some short clinics for k-3 would be beneficial. School and then multiple, after school practices during the week are a bit much for this age"



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group I think. As a teacher and a mom of a 5 and 8 year old I see meltdowns in the classroom of children that are participating in after school sports. It's too much for them. I feel most children are over scheduled in this age range. A three week clinic on the weekends would give this age range exposure to a sport without exhausting them with games and after school practice schedule"

### Suggestions regarding increased options

- "Early exposure to skilled play – spectator, clinic, etc."
- "Longer seasons"
- "Clinics for those who want to play but might need more skills training"
- "Having camps during the summer"
- "More teen boy options"
- "Find a way to offer modified, junior varsity along with varsity teams"
- "Team basketball"
- "I would love to see a tennis clinic"
- "I would also love to see a box lacrosse program in the summer, like Penn Yan (I know this is in the works)"
- "As far as pre-K youth sports or events it seems like if we aren't mem here or the YMCA its impossible to be involved in them"

### Suggestions regarding communication

- "I am not from Geneva so it was very confusing to know where to go to sign my child up for sports. It was word of mouth to find about basketball offered at the Boys and Girls Club, swimming at the Y, and ice hockey at the Rec."
- "Currently only the YMCA offers soccer that I'm aware of and it was very "low key" my son loves soccer and I would like him to participate in a local or traveling soccer club. If one is available, I don't know about it. I find most of my information via social media"
- "more publicity on the availability of sports in the area. Besides Facebook I do t see much advertisement"
- "Sports fair – families get to learn in one event all the sports offerings and what it entails across the years in terms of financial and time commitment. And chat with some of the athletes and coaches who've been through it"
- "Newsletter/brochure overseen/managed by one organization sending an annual snapshot of offerings by season, by age, and general cost, time commitment, season length"
- "Better distribution of information regarding what sports are available"
- "Baseball lacrosse and soccer schedules available before registering so we know if it will conflict"
- "Drop in options to help with scheduling"
- "Advertise sports in the hallways at school not just online signups"
- "Over communicate!"
- "Information is hard to find!! I want to know if teams welcome newbies rather than kids that are already seasoned players"
- "Post when and where sign ups are"

### Other

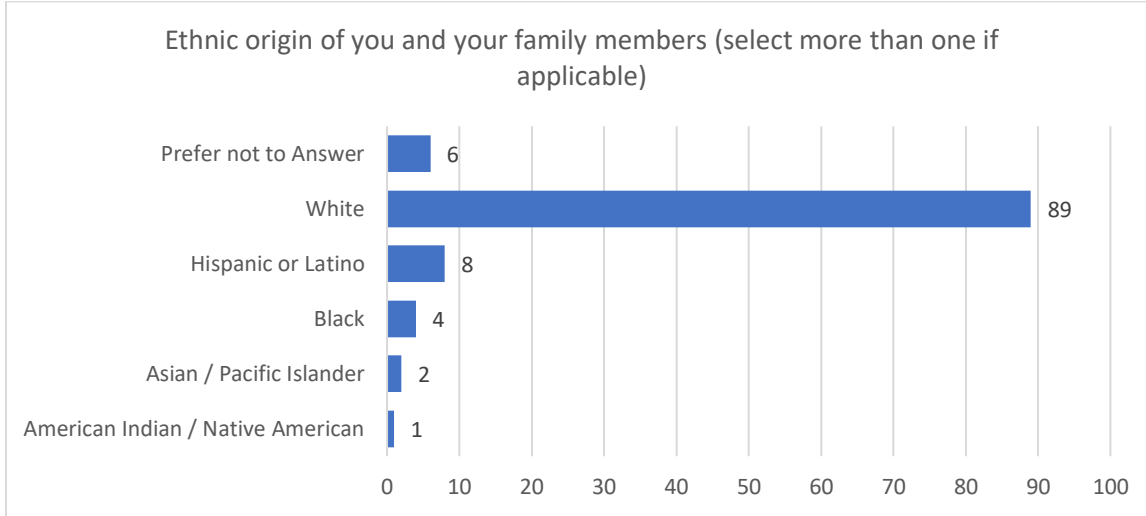
- "Incentivar las relaciones interpersonales entre los miembros del equipo" (Translation: "Encourage interpersonal relationships between team members")
- "Keep parents under control"

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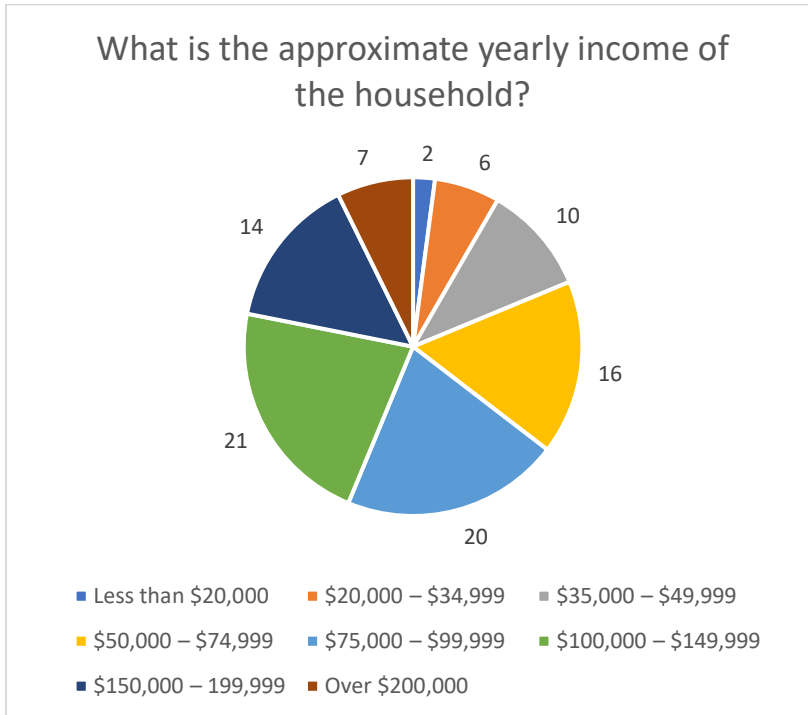
## Appendix

Included are the charts and graphs of the original data collected from the survey.

### Chart 1.1 Racial/ethnic distribution



### Chart 1.2 Income distribution



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Chart 2.1 Severity of obstacles to participate

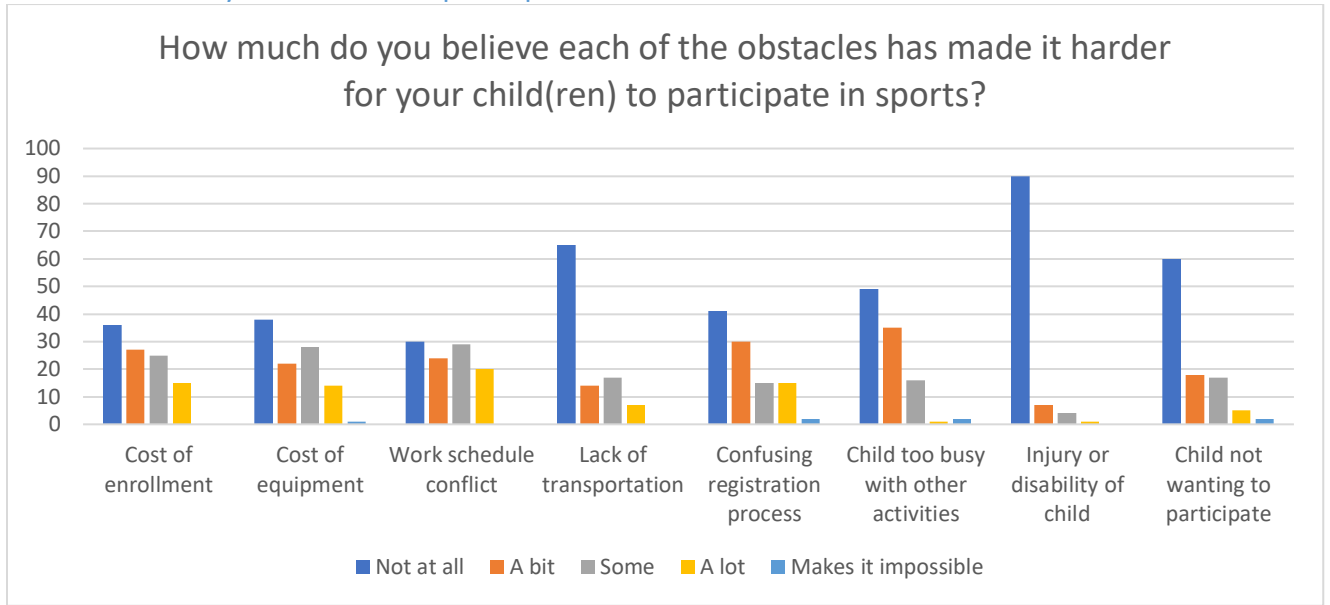
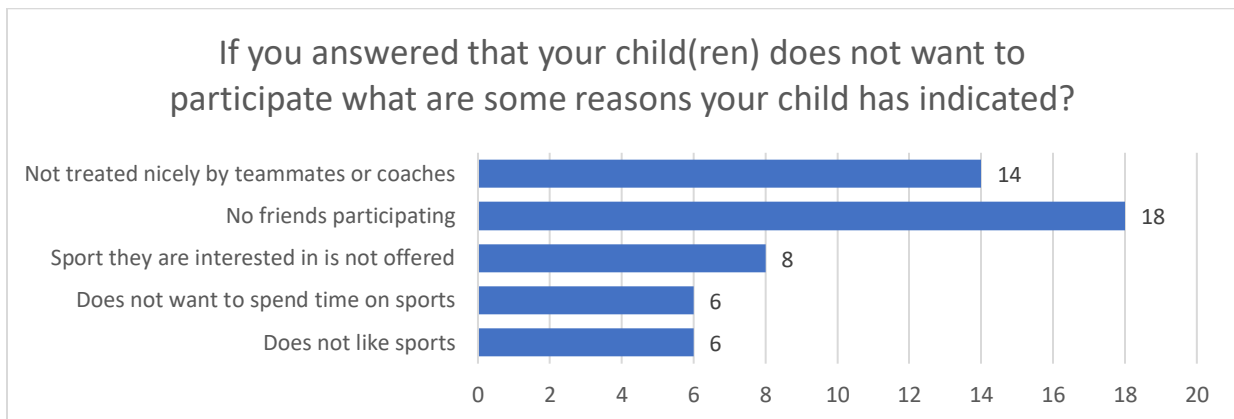


Chart 2.2 Reluctance from children to participate



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Chart 3.1 Perceived value of sports participation

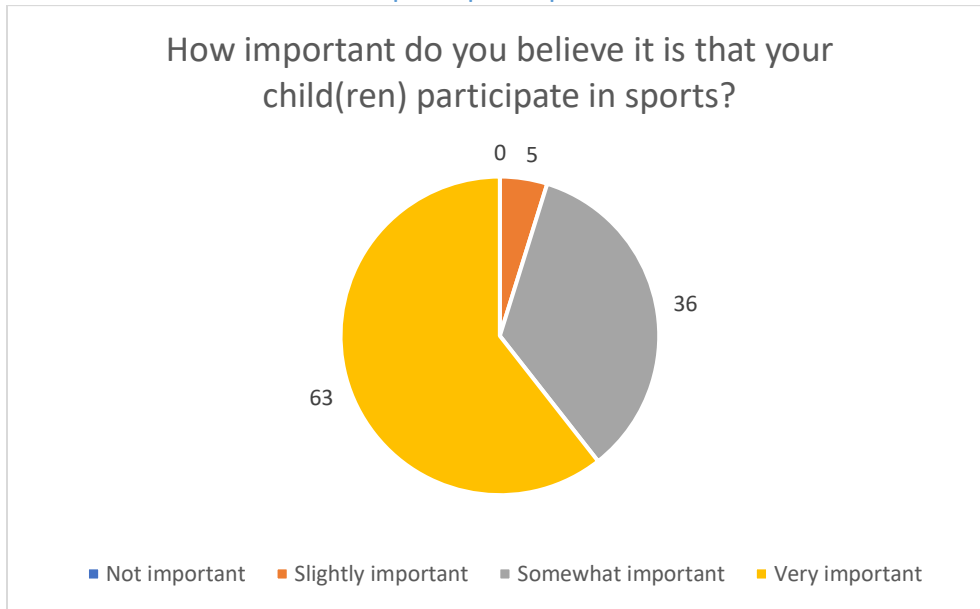


Chart 3.2 Importance of specific sports' benefits

