



May 17, 2017

Hon. Sandy Evans, Chair (ssevan@fcps.edu)
Hon. Jane Strauss (jane.Strauss@fcps.edu)
Hon. Jeanette Hough (jhough1@fcps.edu)
Hon. Ryan McElveen (ryan.McElveen@fcps.edu)
Hon. Ilryong Moon (ilryong.moon@fcps.edu)
Hon. Megan McLaughlin (megan.McLaughlin@fcps.edu)
Hon. Pat Hynes (pat.Hynes@fcps.edu)
Hon. Tamara Derek Kaufax (tdkaufax@fcps.edu)
Hon. Karen Corbett Sanders (kcorbettsan@fcps.edu)
Hon. Dalia Palchik (dapalchik@fcps.edu)
Hon. Elizabeth Schultz, (elizabeth.Schultz@fcps.edu)
Hon. Thomas Wilson (tawilson@fcps.edu)
School Board
Fairfax County Public Schools

Your Honors:

We are the co-presidents of the Wolverine Athletic Booster Club (WABC), which spends 100% of the money it raises at West Potomac High School. The imposition of a fee to play sports will at least reduce on a dollar-for-dollar basis our ability to support sports at West Potomac. Indeed, it is reasonable to conclude that a fee will affirmatively hurt kids at West Potomac.

In terms of dollars, WABC and the sports we represent will spend about \$375,000 in the 2016-17 school year (on, among other things, direct payment to FCPS and West Potomac, spending on everything from uniforms to training equipment to landscaping, and 100% of the funding for a complete renovation of the training facility (which will be used by non-athletes and athletes alike)). By contrast, FCPS will spend approximately \$163,000 on West Potomac activities in FY 2017, exclusive of things like salaries for Directors of Student Activities, which at each school do many things, including supervising the sports programs. However, it took in \$63,000 of gate revenue, as to which FCPS itself had a relatively-minor role (gathering the money that West Potomac parents collect through ticket sales). So, on a net basis, FCPS provided no more than about \$101,000, or less than 19% of the amount spent on sports at West Potomac.

Put another way, parents and students — not the public generally or FCPS — provided 81% of the sports budget.¹

If a fee is imposed for participation in sports, we know that the ability of WABC to contribute to West Potomac will be reduced by an amount exceeding fee revenue. Simply, if a parent is forced to pay money to FCPS so her or his child can play a sport, that parent will reduce their support for WABC. Thus, even if the administrative costs associated with a fee were small, the revenue increase would be offset entirely by the diminution in the amount we could provide. Of course, the institution of a fee likely would result in some kids not playing sports at all or playing fewer sports, so revenue from the fees will be smaller than hoped. We also expect that a fee will independently hurt our ability to raise money as the family who pays the fee will have less money **and** inclination to buy a WABC membership, let alone the Christmas trees, mulch, restaurant discount cards or many other things that we sell in order to support West Potomac sports.

A fee for sports participation would have especially grave implications for schools like West Potomac, for two reasons: 1) Obviously, gate revenue is less at West Potomac than at many other schools, which means that West Potomac is even more dependent on the money raised by the athletic booster club; and 2) A fee likely will dissuade a higher percentage of West Potomac students from participating in sports, since it also stands to reason that schools like ours have a greater percentage of kids who are just-above the fee-waiver line and may have a financial barrier to playing sports if a fee is imposed.

A participation fee would not only affect WABC and West Potomac negatively, it would also be unreasonable and unfair. The FCPS Office of Student Activities & Athletics has estimated the costs of individual sport participation. However, the revenue for many of the higher cost sports is not counted, so the net cost for participation in those sports is not used and that earns an “F” in Budgeting. Also, it should be noted that FCPS actually spends less than \$100 per participant for some sports like Cross-Country.

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There are many positive aspects of high school sports that a fee would discourage. As comprehensively noted by the Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association when summarizing studies:

¹ FCPS not only provides a limited percentage of financial support to sports but the actual dollars are very small in terms of the over-all FCPS budget. It must be remembered that total activities funding represents less than .8% of the FCPS budget, *not counting the significant offset provided by game ticket revenue* (FCPS does not track costs separately for athletics and non-athletic activities). Yet, some wrongly view athletics as some sort of great driver of FCPS costs.

In addition, while booster clubs provide a significant amount of financial support for sports and much in-kind contributions to high schools and their sports programs, the extent of what is almost volunteer hours put in by coaches should be recognized. While comprehensive information is not available, we have found out that the average baseball coach at West Potomac makes \$2.34 per hour while the average girls basketball coach WP is paid \$2.38 per hour. Thus, FCPS already is getting a gigantic return windfall when it compares the rate for coaches to what every single FCPS employee makes.

Students who participate and are engaged in school programs, whether it's athletics or any other extracurricular activity, have less truancy, lower drop-out rates, fewer disciplinary issues and better grade point averages on average than their peers that have no involvement. [S]tudents who took part in more vigorous sports like soccer or football performed nearly 10 percent better in math, science, English and social studies classes.

It may also be undeniable that involvement in high school activities bodes well for participants after high school as well. [P]articipation in extracurricular activities gives all students--including those from disadvantaged backgrounds and those without stellar academic accomplishments in high school--measurable improvements on college admission exam scores. Furthermore, students who compete in sports in high school were more likely than those not participating to be active in volunteering, voting, speaking publicly and being aware of current events.

<https://www.wiaawi.org/aboutwiaa.aspx>

Increase in academic performance by students who play sports also is demonstrated elsewhere. For example, following an exhaustive national survey, it was concluded, "The results of every academic success category demonstrated student-athletes achieving greater than non-athletes." Anthony Price, *Slashing Sports: A National Study Examining the Correlation Between Athletic Involvement and Academic Success* (http://www.iahsaa.org/resource_center/Academic_Assistance/2013_Slashing_Sports_DrTuPrice_Results.pdf).

Further, obesity is a leading health issue amongst students, yet exercise counters that. This could not be more clear than comparing students generally to those who play sports. Simply, while an ever increasing percentage of non-athletes are growing flabbier, student-athletes buck this trend. And, those who play sports in high school are more likely to remain active and healthy in college and adulthood, lessening their own health problems and the resulting cost to society.

Given the positive effect of participation in high school sports, the evidence seems to strongly support the notion that FCPS should be supporting athletics to a greater extent than it is now. There is certainly *no* evidentiary support for imposing a fee for athletic participation. We appreciate that there are many misperceptions as to the funding and cost of FCPS athletics. We also hope that you make decisions based on facts.

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We are happy to provide the support that we do. We appreciate that participation in high school athletics increases academic performance and leads to greater long-term physical and mental health, as well as less anti-social activity. We recognize the great value that participation in athletics brings in terms of making a more constructive citizenry. We know that athletics are an essential part of high school and that they are a crucial part of learning. We take pride in knowing that our efforts may allow some student to fully participate even though money might otherwise sideline them. However, it is just a matter of simple math: A fee means less revenue for WABC and that means less money for our student-athletes.

Thank you.

Very truly yours,

Jonathan Willmott & Mike Monson
Co-Presidents, Wolverine Athletic Booster Club