The Problem

- The number of participants in high school sports has increased since 1989 (National Federation of State HS Association).
- From 2000-2010, 7% of public schools cut athletic programs while less than 1% added them (Sharp Center Univ. Michigan).
- Some estimates predict 27% of public high schools will not offer varsity athletics by 2020 (Sharp Center Univ. Michigan).
- Schools are dropping athletic programs (as well as music and theater programs) due to budget cuts.
- Alternative approaches schools are taking include “pay to play” which increases the financial burden on students and families.
- In 2011, 3 out of 4 school districts in PA planned to decrease the number of extracurricular activities to deal with increasing budget cuts (Hardy).
- Despite increased participation, high school sports programs are threatened by budget cuts.

Benefits of Sports

- Physical
  - 17% of people under 18 fall short of the 60 minutes of recommended physical activity (CDC).
  - High school athletes are 3x more likely to participate in physical fitness activities than non-athletes (Dept. of Ed).
  - Athletes are even more likely to remain physically active after graduation (Dept. of Ed).
- Educational
  - High school athletes are more likely to achieve post-secondary education, attain a bachelors degree, and be employed 8 years after graduation than non-athletes (Dept. of Ed).
  - Employment status and educational level are social determinants of health recognized by the CDC.
- Social
  - Children who play sports have higher levels of self-esteem and increased connectedness to the community (Trudeau).
  - Initiative, identity exploration, emotional learning, teamwork skills, and forming ties with community members are all benefits of athletic participation (Hansen).

Socioeconomic Barriers to Participation

- Figures show socioeconomic status and financial concerns limit athletic participation.

Inequity of Athletic Participation

- Socioeconomic Status (SES)
  - 25% of boys in low SES school districts participate in athletics compared to 31% and 36% of boys in middle and high SES school districts respectively (Bridging the Gap).
  - 20% of girls in low SES districts participate in sports compared to 28% and 34% respectively (Bridging the Gap).
  - The trend is similar for intramural sport participation.
  - Putnam reports participation in extracurricular activities is increasing among upper/middle class adolescents while it is steady or declining among lower class adolescents.
- Race
  - Athletic participation rates in predominantly white schools are higher than those in predominantly black or Latino schools for both boys and girls (Bridging the Gap).
- Sex
  - 53 athletic opportunities for every 100 boys vs. 41 for every 100 girls (Sharp Center).

Addressing the Problem

- Increased time and resources spent on physical education programs by 10% increases the average student’s time spent doing moderate to vigorous physical activity by 50% (CDC).
- However, this approach does not address the “intangible” benefits of athletics like self-esteem, goal-setting, and leadership.
- High school athletic programs need funding to be advocated on a local, state, and federal level.
- Aspen Institute suggests community sports programs should partner with businesses and other organizations in the community.
- Aspen Institute “8 Plays” include asking kids what they want, outfitting the spaces available in communities to maximize productive usage, and revitalizing youth programs.