

Participation Fee FAQ

When did the participation fee begin?

The School Board passed the Participation Fee Board Policy #3301 at the voting meeting on July 13, 2011. Beginning in the fall of 2011, the fee was introduced to students and families.

Why was a participation fee structure adopted by the Board?

Similar to other areas of business and society, public school districts in this region and the country are faced with increasing financial challenges. The North Allegheny School District believes that a broad range of curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular programs help contribute to the development of children. However, the implementation of new strategies - such as a participation fee for extra-curricular activities - is necessary to offset costs and help continue the depth and breadth of programs. The logic underlying a participation fee is that the costs for these programs are partially absorbed by the students and families receiving those direct services.

What activities are impacted by this policy?

Participation fees were instituted for certain extra-curricular activities, such as interscholastic athletics (grades 7 – 12), Marching Band (grades 9 – 12), intramurals (grades K – 12), and various select ensembles or clubs (primarily grades 6 – 12).

What is the actual participation fee structure? Why were those specific amounts selected?

The following fee structure was approved by the School Board at the July 2011 meeting:

- **Interscholastic Athletics** - \$75 per season per athlete with a student and/or family cap of \$225.
- **Marching Band** - \$50 per year per Marching Band participant with a family cap of \$150.
- **Other** - \$25 per activity per participant with a student and/or family cap of \$75 (e.g., intramurals, club sports, select ensembles, and select competition groups).

The rationale for the three different fee rates is connected to the frequency and intensity of the activity. For example, the interscholastic athletic teams practice 5 – 6 days per week for 2 – 3 hours. The athletic seasons may last for several months. Intramurals on the other hand only meet a couple times per week for a shorter period of time.

How do I know whether my child is involved in an activity that requires a fee? Where do I get the form?

If your child is involved in an activity that requires a fee, they will receive the cover letter and form from their coach/sponsor. A link to participation fees and the form has also been placed on the North Allegheny School District website.

How does the “cap” concept work?

The “cap” concept is designed to ensure that no single family could ever pay more than \$450 total dollars during the school year for the participation fee policy. Each “level” or “category” described earlier has a separate “cap.” The following examples are meant to describe the application of the fee structure to various students or families:

Single Child – John Smith participates in football (\$75), winter weight training intramural (\$25), and track-and-field (\$75). The total participation fee for this student for the school year would be \$175.

Multiple Children – Child #1 participates in cross country (\$75), basketball (\$75), and track-and-field (\$75). The total cost for Child #1 is \$225. Her sister, Child #2, participates in the Marching Band (\$50), jazz ensemble (\$25), and track-and-field (\$0 due to the athletic cap of \$225 that was already reached by Child #1). The total cost for Child #2 is \$75. Child #3 is involved in forensics (\$25), the spring musical (\$25), and the PA Junior Academic League (\$0 due to the \$75 dollar “other category cap” of \$75 already being reached). The total cost for Child #3 is \$50. The total cost for the family is \$350 (i.e., Child #1, Child #2, and Child #3).

Using the second family as an example, the cost is \$350. That cost covers participation in four athletic seasons, Marching Band, and four other activities.

Are there different options to pay?

The following payment options are available:

- **Check** - Made payable to the “*NASD/School Initials*” with the Student ID in the Memo line. *For example, a Carson student would have the check made payable to NASD/CMS.*
- **Money Order** - Made payable to the “*NASD/School Initials*”. *For example, a Carson student would have the check made payable to NASD/CMS.*
- **Online Payment** – PayForIt.net is available as an online payment option for families. This is the same system used for cafeteria purchases, but it is organized through a participation fee link. An additional service fee is assessed based on the amount of the transaction. It is available via a link from the North Allegheny School District website at www.northallegheny.org. *Parents should enclose a hard copy of the transaction receipt in an envelope. Please be careful that you do not use the cafeteria link.*

What if our family is encountering financial difficulties?

If a financial hardship exists, the parent is only asked to provide a brief written explanation of the circumstances and return it to the Building Secretary in an envelope for each activity. The participation fee will be waived in these circumstances with no additional follow-up conversation.

Who should I call if I want to ask more questions?

If you have questions about this process, please contact the Building Secretary in the school in which your child receives his or her regular academic program.

Has the participation fee caused a decrease in the number of students participating in athletics and activities?

The District is continuing to monitor the participation numbers for various activities. During the fall season, the participation in interscholastic athletics and Marching Band were the same as any other year. The number of participants in intramurals was much lower. It should be noted that the District also needed to reduce the overall number of intramural offerings available to students as part of the budget development process. We will continue to monitor participation statistics.

If my child is injured and unable to participate, will the money be refunded?

If a refund is approved for any reason, that check will be issued from the District Business Office. As a general principle, an external and/or uncontrolled event that prevents participation for the majority of the season is the only rationale for a refund. Examples of acceptable reasons include a severe illness, severe injury, and/or unexpected family situation that make further participation impossible. Examples of unacceptable reasons include quitting, irregular attendance, ineligibility for any reason (i.e., grades, attendance, and discipline), or issues related to playing time. If a student independently decides that he/she will not continue in the activity, a refund will not be provided.

Where does the revenue generated from participation fees get deposited? Are they spent on the areas for which the parents paid?

The money received from participation fees is deposited into the general fund of the North Allegheny School District. The purpose of the participation fee structure is to allow the District to continue operating as many extra- and co-curricular programs as possible. These programs require significant – but varied – financial support to cover the costs of supplies, equipment, coaches/sponsors, and/or facility usage.

Can North Allegheny increase the actual rate assessed for participation fees next year or in the future?

The School Board and District Administration recognize the importance of a rich and diverse educational program for students. At the same time, the financial challenges facing Pennsylvania school districts have never been so severe. The “cap” concept was one of the elements built into the participation fee structure to help limit the cost for a single family. However, the potential exists that the rate could change in the future. That change could reflect a decrease, increase, and/or fundamental change in the fee structure. The School Board would have the responsibility for voting on any change. While this concept can seem troubling, the alternative could mean the elimination of the wide variety of extra- and co-curricular programs available to the students.