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OPINION

Carlos Aguilar: The rising cost of youth sports in the San Gabriel Valley

Rancho Cucamonga senior Nicole Alfred made her season debut last week and claimed the individual title from the Tom and Vickie Duncan senior girls race at the Chaffey Invitational. (File photo by Will Lester, Inland Valley Daily Bulletin/SCNG)

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By **CARLOS AGUILAR**
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As a parent of two active kids in the San Gabriel Valley, I've long believed in the power of sports to shape young minds and bodies. My 15-year-old daughter's dedication to track, cross country and color guard at Claremont High School fills me with pride. Watching my 12-year-old son's passion for football and basketball in local leagues is thrilling. But lately, I've found myself facing a harsh reality: the rising costs of youth sports are pushing us to the brink.

This issue hits close to home for me, not just as a parent, but as a former teacher in La Puente and as a flag football coach. I've seen firsthand how the play gap disproportionately affects Hispanic children. The 2024 Play Equity Report commissioned by The LA84 Foundation reveals that Latino children have some of the lowest participation rates, with 40% participating in sports or physical activities fewer than three times a week. This lack of access not only impacts their physical health but also deprives them of crucial developmental opportunities.

I'm not alone in this struggle. According to the survey, a staggering 63% of parents struggle to afford the costs associated with their children's sports

participation. This hit home for me when I tallied up our annual expenses: between league fees, equipment, uniforms and the often-overlooked costs of parking and entrance fees for competitions, we're easily spending over $3,000 a year. And that's just for two kids.

The survey reveals that 35% of parents spend between $500 and $1,000 annually on their child's primary sport. It's no wonder that cost ranks as the top reason why children stop playing sports, with 62% of parents citing it as a major factor.

But here's the thing: 94% of parents believe that all young people should have the opportunity to participate in sports, regardless of income, gender, race, ethnicity, or ability level. We recognize the immense benefits — 92% of parents see sports as crucial for confidence-building and social skills development. I see it firsthand

in my daughter's growing self-assurance as she competes in meets and performs with the color guard, and in my son's skills honed on the football field and basketball court.

Last weekend, at the Chaffey Invitational in Ontario, I watched in awe as one student after the next, from high schools up and down California, pushed their minds and bodies to their limits. They took great strides, not only in pursuit of the finish line but in the formation of their characters.

I couldn't help but smile as teammates ran alongside each other, cheering, down the final stretch. At a cross country meet, one might cross the finish line first but somehow no one loses. These opportunities ought to be open to everyone.

So, what's the solution? The report shows that 86% of parents support increasing funding at the state and local level to expand opportunities for all young people to participate in sports. I wholeheartedly agree. We need our policymakers in the San Gabriel Valley and across California to step up and recognize that play equity isn't just about fairness, I5's about investing in our children's physical and mental health, their social skills, and their future.

As I cheer from the sideline, I can't help but think of the students I taught, many of whom never had these opportunities. It's time we level the playing field, especially for Hispanic children who are often left behind. Our children's access to the transformative

power of sports shouldn't depend on the size of our wallets, our ethnicity, or our ZIP code. Let's work together — parents, educators and policymakers in the San Gabriel

Valley and beyond — to ensure that every child, regardless of their background, has the opportunity to play, grow, and succeed through sports. The future of our youth, and the health of our diverse communities, depends on it.

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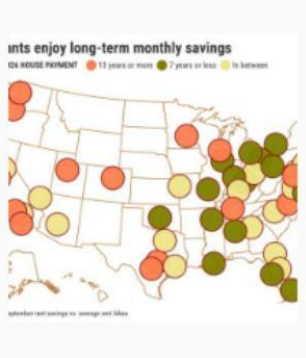
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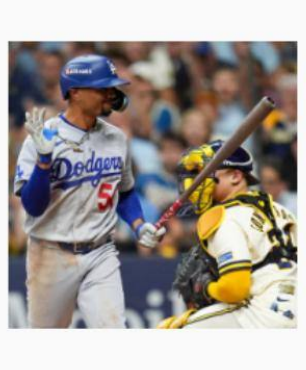
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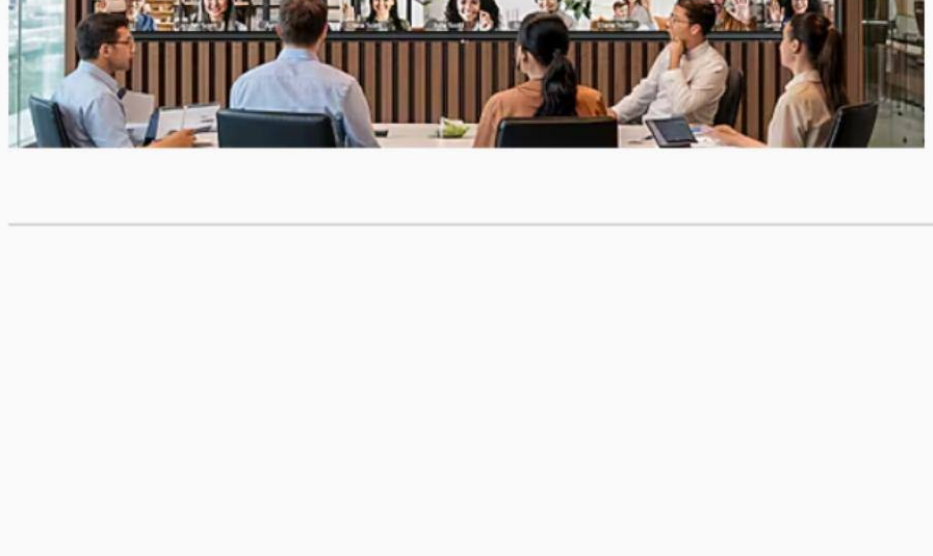
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