

Vail School District
8th Grade
Benchmark 1
Informational

DIRECTIONS: Read the information and writing prompt below. Then use scratch paper for your prewriting/planning and your draft.

PROMPT: Critically read and annotate the texts about school sports. Write an expository essay for your Principal or Parent Teacher Association sharing the pros and cons of students participating in school sports.

Your essay should include:

- an introduction, body, and conclusion
- an explanation of your reasons with supporting details from the text
- content and selected details that are appropriate to audience

Remember to edit for spelling, grammar, punctuation, and capitalization. Use the writing guide as a tool to help you.

The Disadvantages of Children in Sports by Lucie Westminster, Demand Media

According to the Center for Kids First in Sports, 30 to 40 million children in the United States compete in organized sporting activities. The benefits of participation include increased physical and mental health, healthy competition among peers and the sense of belonging gained by being part of a team. Despite these valid arguments for children participating in sports, there are a number of disadvantages that should be considered. While the overall recommendation is not to avoid participation, awareness can help prevent any undesirable outcomes.

Physical Injury

According to the National Center for Sports Safety, over 3 million children under the age of 14 incur some type of injury as a result of sports. These may occur as a result of practice or a competitive event. Broken bones can result from direct impact of a ball or a fall during competition. Injuries such as tears of the anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) occur more and more in young athletes due to the rigors of practice and competitions. Repetitive motion sports, such as swimming, may cause injuries to muscles or tendons due to the overuse of specific muscle groups or joints during training.

Unsportsmanlike Behavior

Unsportsmanlike behavior is modeled in a variety of sporting situations. In both practice and competitive events, children are exposed to other children who may exhibit undesirable behavior. Examples include yelling, cursing or violence in response to self-anger or anger at a referee or other player. In addition, children may witness parents engaging in these behaviors. Children learn behaviors by seeing another person complete the same activity, and therefore witnessing these behaviors may lead the child to mimic these in similar situations. Talk to children about appropriate behavior during practice and games and how to manage anger in an acceptable way such as taking a few deep breaths to relax. Any undesirable behavior witnessed by other players or parents should be discussed after the event. Ask the children to give an example of how that particular individual could have better handled the situation. This gives them an example of proper behavior in case they find themselves in a similar circumstance.

Time Commitment

Participation in sports requires a significant time commitment from children. Practices, travel to and from competitions and the events themselves all take time away from children's daily activities. While exercise is important, these activities should not take away from sleep, meals or school. Find a balance of these activities and avoid placing kids in too many sports and overcommitting their time. Encourage children to study during downtime such as travel or between events or games to ensure school remains a priority.

Undue Pressure

Young athletes may feel undue pressure from parents, coaches or other players to compete in sports they are not interested in pursuing. Additionally, children may place excessive amounts of pressure on themselves to perform at a level they are not comfortable with. Participation in sports may then lead to a higher level of day-to-day stress that impacts other aspects of their lives such as sleep or school. Help a child through this by speaking to him about his self-expectations, as well as expectations from others, including yourself. Encourage participation and dedication, but listen to children if they feel the pressure is not something they can handle. Seek the help of a sports psychologist who is trained to help athletes deal with these types of pressures in a healthy and productive manner.

Are High School Sports Good For Kids?

By Daniel Gould, Ph.D.

Director, Institute for the Study of Youth Sports

High school sports are an integral part of the fabric of Americans society with over 5 million youth participating in any school year. Here in Michigan almost 300,000 young people take part in high school sports every year. Moreover, school sports are justified because of their potential educational benefits. For example, the mission statement of the National Federation of State High School Activity Associations indicates that it promotes “participation and sportsmanship” in an effort to “develop good citizens through interscholastic activities

which provide equitable opportunities, positive recognition and learning experiences to students while maximizing the achievement of educational goals.”

Not only are school sports justified on educational grounds, but researchers have shown that participation in them and other extracurricular activities have positive effects on adolescents. For example, a multiyear study conducted in Michigan has shown that children who participate in sports have increased educational aspirations, closer ties to school and increased occupational aspirations in youth. It has been demonstrated, then, that school sports participation has a number of desirable benefits.

This does not mean, however, that school sports are not without problems. An overemphasis on winning, year-round single sport participation, and difficulties finding qualified coaches are but a few of concerns facing leaders in the area. The over-emphasis on winning issue is especially significant as when this occurs the educational objectives for involvement are often forgotten.

And while principals, athletic directors, and coaches have the ultimate responsibility for keeping winning in the proper perspective and must be held accountable for their actions, let's not place all the blame on them. The general public, parents and society is placing more emphasis on winning than ever before which, at times, pressures athletic personnel to deviate from the athlete-centered educational and personal development mission. We cannot let this happen. The educational objectives of high school sports must be recognized and placed in the forefront.

This does not imply that winning is unimportant and should not be emphasized at all. Leading youth development experts contend that one of the potential benefits of sports participation is the development of initiative or the ability to set and go after goals, which is part of the competitive process. Moreover, in a recent Institute for the Study of Youth Sports investigation of outstanding high school coaches who were recognized for the character and citizenship building contributions to players we found that these individuals were highly successful (winning over 70% of their games). They stressed winning, but never put winning before the personal and educational development of their players. Instead, they maintained a strong educational philosophy and did not just talk about building character in their players, but took daily actions to do so while at the same time pursuing excellence.

The bottom line is that high school sports are still a highly desirable activity for students to participate in and should be supported for their educational benefits. However, we as taxpayers and proponents of positive youth development must insist that their educational objectives always come first. We cannot knowingly or unknowingly let winning become the only goal and must support school district, athletic director and coach efforts to always put the education and development of the student-athlete first.

