

# Southern Taiwan Model United Nations XVI 2024

**Forum:** United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

**Issue:** (1301) Combatting the complications of child exploitation

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## Introduction

According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), child exploitation is defined as the crime where an individual under the age of 18 is used for coerced labor, sexual gratification, trafficking, and forced marriage. These crimes and actions often result in detrimental physical and emotional effects on the victim, leading him/her predisposed to trauma and mental illness.

Child exploitation is a pervasive global concern, severely affecting both LEDCs and MEDCs. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), over 160 million children are engaged in child labor, with a significant portion of that number engaging in hazardous and life-threatening work. Furthermore, around 1.3 million children are trafficked annually, displacing them in foreign lands. Based on statistics from 2023, one in nine girls and one in 20 boys under the age of 18 have experienced sexual abuse and exploitation. The problem of child exploitation has been gradually deteriorating, threatening the security of children around the world.

Poverty, instability, and weak governments are prominent factors that contribute to the prevalence of child exploitation. Families in impoverished conditions may resort to child labor as an additional source of income, selling their children into various forms of exploitation. Furthermore, these families often lack sufficient education and opportunities to seek help from professionals. Wars and natural disasters also predispose children to exploitation. Under such instabilities, children's rights may often be overlooked. Inadequate laws and enforcement further exacerbate this problem, allowing perpetrators to continue to exploit children without fear of the consequences. While these are salient contributors to child exploitation, other factors such as cultural practices and global demand for cheap labor also aggravate this situation.

The United Nations (UN) and many other organizations have made efforts to alleviate the issue of child exploitation. For example, the UN Global Compact set strict principles on human rights and launched the Business Against Child Labour Platform in 2021. The Business Against Child Labour Platform has been collaborating with private businesses to eliminate the need for child labor while also implementing harsher punishments for children's rights violations; other organizations such as End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography, and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes (ECPAT) and the WePROTECT Global Alliance have been targeting the issue of sexual exploitation of children. While measures have been taken to resolve the pressing issue of child exploitation, more actions must be taken to successfully eliminate this global concern.

## Definition of Key Terms

### *Child Soldiers*

Child soldiers are individuals who are under the age of 18 who are recruited by the armed forces as fighters, cooks, spies, or even sex workers. These children are susceptible to physical damage as well as the mental strain of battlefields. Furthermore, these children are deprived of their opportunities for education and freedom, which violates international law. The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (OPAC) is a UN organization that aims to resolve this issue; it sets firm regulations that prohibit the conscription of individuals under the age of 18 and collaborates with local governments to ensure the implementation. Furthermore, the ICC sees the act of recruiting children under 15 to engage in military activities as a serious war crime. This regulation is strengthened by the Geneva Convention, which requires all nations to implement strict regulations and take immediate action to prevent the use of child soldiers under 15.

### *Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)*

Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) encompasses a wide range of crimes involving the sexual exploitation of individuals under the age of 18 for financial purposes. This exploitation includes child prostitution (1), child sex tourism (2), and child pornography (3). Victims of such exploitations often faced violence and coercion, resulting in severe physical and mental damage. According to statistics collected by the UN, there are approximately one million children worldwide who are victims of CSEC: over 90 percent of those victims are girls. Organizations such as the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography have been attempting to enforce stricter regulations and protect children from abuse.

### *Forced Marriage*

Forced Marriage refers to a situation where a marriage between two individuals under 18 has not received the full consent of either one or both children. This is a common violation of children's rights in certain religions, where marriage is determined entirely by the parents. Restrictions on personal freedom and education are often direct consequences of such actions.

### *Grooming*

Grooming is when an adult attempts to build an emotional connection with a child, either online or offline, in order to exploit him/her. Isolating the child from his/her friends and family and offering gifts and endearments are common tactics adults use in the process of grooming. These actions often result in sexual abuse and exploitation. Grooming is often the result of misinformation and a lack of education.

### *Mandatory Reporting Protocols*

Mandatory reporting protocols are legal requirements for professionals including teachers, healthcare providers, law enforcement officers, and social workers to report directly to authorities regarding any violations of the rights of children. This regulation aims to increase the chances of identifying potential child exploitations by involving professionals.

## **Background Information**

### *Economic Motivations*

Economic motivations are often the primary contributing factor to child exploitation. In LEDC countries such as Bangladesh, Nigeria, and Pakistan, poverty remains a detrimental scourge to families, forcing them to resort to child exploitation for additional income. Under these conditions, children may be sold as child labor or prostitutes. In many cases, parents feel that they have no choice but to send their children to work for the survival of the entire family. This is exacerbated as LEDC countries often rely heavily on industries such as agriculture, mining, and manufacturing, significantly increasing the demand for cheap labor. In many places, child labor is viewed as the optimal form of labor because children are easier to control and they do not demand fair wages. The lack of proper governmental regulations and enforcement allow these exploitative practices to spread. Many LEDC countries suffer from internal corruption and inadequate resources to take effective actions to target child exploitation.

Economic instabilities and the lack of social safety nets are also significant factors related to child exploitation. In the face of issues including, economic recessions, natural disasters, and conflicts, individuals

already living in poverty can be severely affected. With the lack of social safety nets, which are programs designed to help individuals manage risk, escape from poverty, and gain access to more economic opportunities, children may become victims of exploitation for the survival of the family.

In many countries in South Asia, including India, Bangladesh, and Nepal, child labor is considered an acceptable and beneficial way for children to contribute to the family; children in these families are often sent to work in dangerous environments rather than schools, depriving their opportunity for education and perpetuating the cycle of poverty. Limited understanding of the consequences of child labor among parents often fuels this culture, exposing young children to injuries from hazardous work and trauma from exploitation.

### *Social Instabilities*

Social instabilities are significant contributors to the exploitation of children. Wars and conflicts disrupt the lives of families, forcing them to relocate to foreign settlements. Displaced children become susceptible to exploitation as they often lack protection from legal adults and support programs. These children are often recruited as child soldiers or workers in agriculture, mining, or manufacturing; they are subjected to harsher treatments and living conditions because they no longer have a proper home.

The instability caused by wars and conflicts also contributes to the weakening of the governments. Weaker governments are more susceptible to internal corruption and less capable of enforcing strict regulations. This often results in the connivance of child exploitation and the lack of preventive measures. As perpetrators continue to exploit children for economic or sexual purposes with impunity, the unmitigated practices will continue to spread as there are few regulations to stop them.

Cultural norms and traditions can further exacerbate the issue. Some cultural norms may encourage child marriage at a very young age based on the consensus of the parents, robbing children of their freedom of choice and access to education. Child brides are often forced into domestic servitude, facing severe physical abuse. This practice also poses many long-term consequences, as these children are bound together at a young age without their consensus, impacting their emotional well-being.

## **Key Issues**

### *Child Trafficking*

Child trafficking is the illicit transportation of children for economic, labor, or sexual purposes. Victims of child trafficking often face coerced labor, sexual abuse, or even the removal of organs. These child victims are

often kept in isolated and closed locations to prevent them from escaping. Furthermore, they are often given minimal food and water supplies, barely adequate for survival.

The primary cause of child trafficking can be attributed to the lack of proper education and preventive measures from guardians and the government. Traffickers often rely on deceptive language, manipulation, and seduction to get children's attention and strip away their rights. This act directly violates multiple international laws, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography (OPSC), and Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), making it a serious global issue.

### *Legal Frameworks and Enforcement*

A major challenge in combating child exploitation is the weakness of legal systems and enforcement mechanisms, often prevalent in LEDCs. Weak legal systems, often exacerbated by government corruption, allow the proliferation of child exploitation practices as there are little to no regulations that can effectively harm the perpetrators. Corrupt officials often allow such illegal activities in exchange for bribes and political support. Moreover, the laws in many countries are insufficient to comprehensively target child exploitation; these laws often lack strict punishments or detailed regulations to target various forms of exploitation, including forced labor, sexual exploitation, trafficking, and abuse. This situation is worse in LEDCs due to inadequate funding and weaker governments. Additionally, the prioritization of the security of children is often relatively low on the national agenda because these countries are often preoccupied with other issues such as corruption and war.

In countries where there exist sufficient laws to regulate child exploitation, there is often a lack of a firm enforcement system to carry out the regulations. This is often due to reasons including insufficient funding, lack of personnel, and bribery. Without a robust enforcement system, the regulations and laws remain ineffective. This issue deteriorates as not enough resources have been allocated for law enforcement agencies, leading to poor protection from child exploitation.

Another major concern is that child exploitation is frequently a transnational crime, driven by the motivations of traffickers to exploit jurisdictional gaps and maximize profit. The scale of these operations is often beyond the jurisdiction of an individual country, requiring the collaboration of numerous neighboring countries to operate at an international level. However, the differences in legal systems and law enforcement policies between countries pose a significant challenge and can slow down progress. Existing international laws often face challenges in binding different legal systems together; this is because it may result in infringements of countries' sovereignty and political interests. This accentuates the importance of international organizations such as UNICEF and INTERPOL in combating these issues. These international organizations consist of numerous countries and can operate on a global scale with standardized protocols.

### *Education and Awareness*

Education and Awareness play critical roles in the spread of child exploitation. A major problem is the widespread lack of awareness about the consequences of child exploitation and how to prevent it. Many societies, especially in LEDCs or rural areas, are not sufficiently aware of the signs of child exploitation and the long-term consequences it can have on the victim. For example, parents in impoverished communities may feel compelled to send their children to work while being unaware of the hazardous and dangerous working conditions. Furthermore, parents living in certain cultures may endorse child marriage while being ignorant of the education opportunities they just stripped from the children. Government officials, on the other hand, are often reluctant to make drastic social changes in fear of causing public discontent. Therefore, awareness campaigns, like those implemented by ILO and UNICEF, are critical in educating these communities about the dangers and signs of child exploitation.

Children who suffer from exploitation often do not get access to education themselves, reinforcing the stereotype that children from impoverished communities are destined for labor rather than education. As these children grow up without basic literacy and skills, they are likely to remain trapped in exploitative jobs, unable to escape the predicament. This perpetuates a cycle of exploitation where each generation faces the same issue as they may be forced to send their children to labor. For example, in many LEDCs, children work in agriculture, mining, or factories while not partaking in educational activities. This can significantly limit their future employment prospects and increase the likelihood of continued exploitation. To combat this perpetual cycle, the UN implemented the Global Education First Initiative (GEFI), which aims to provide every child with access to quality education.

Education also plays an important role in preventing child exploitation online through social media platforms. With the proliferation of digital technology, children are at greater risk of exploitation online, including grooming, sextortion, and trafficking. This can be detrimental to the well-being of children as they are often exposed to emotional manipulation, shaming, and stunted social growth. Education programs that teach children how to stay safe online are becoming crucial to successfully mitigate these risks. The establishment of these programs often requires comprehensive curriculums, well-trained educators, and collaboration with tech companies and governments. Many schools have integrated these programs into their curricula to raise awareness and build digital literacy among children.

### *Physical and Mental Burdens on Victims of Child Exploitation*

Victims of child exploitation often face severe physical harm and mental stress that can significantly impair their development. These children are often forced to work in hazardous conditions and perform demanding tasks not suitable for their age. For example, children working in mining operations are exposed to high concentrations

of toxic chemicals and risk of injuries. Similarly, children working in the agricultural sector are forced to work long hours in extreme weather conditions while operating dangerous equipment. These illegal activities all pose significant dangers to young children. These damages are often irreversible as they often result in distorted self-image and chronic health issues. Moreover, some victims of sexual exploitation can face issues including sexually transmitted infections and unintended pregnancies, detrimentally affecting their offspring.

Moreover, victims of child exploitation may often be exposed to violence and sexual abuse, exacerbating their mental and physical stress; these abuses can happen both digitally and physically. Children trafficked for sexual exploitation suffer assaults, physical injuries, sexually transmitted infections, and other health concerns. For example, victims of sexual exploitation often develop Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), causing continuous anxiety and depression. This can result in detrimental long-term consequences, if not treated properly, isolating the children from society.

Frequently, these victims suffer long-term consequences that extend into adulthood, hindering social interactions and acceptance. The trauma and the absence of education experienced by these victims often affect employment prospects as they are often more equipped with sufficient knowledge and social skills. This often results in a vicious cycle of poverty and exploitation, making it difficult for victims of child exploitation to escape the predicament.

## Major Parties Involved and Their Positions

### *International Labour Organization (ILO)*

Established in 1919, the ILO is dedicated to eradicating all forms of child labor that deprive them of their right to education, childhood, dignity, and well-being. It has developed and implemented many initiatives as well as supported other organizations in achieving similar goals. For example, the ILO developed the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC), which works with over 90 countries to combat child labor. IPEC promotes educational programs and supports community-based interventions to prevent child labor. In Zimbabwe, for example, it facilitated an advocacy to improve child protection laws. Furthermore, the ILO supports and funds Alliance 8.7, a global partnership committed to achieving Target 8.7 of the Sustainable Development Goal, which aims to end child labor in any form by 2025. This alliance collaborates with governments, organizations, and companies to share the best practices for eradicating child exploitation. The ILO also partnered with UNICEF to collect data on child labor. Recently, they released that child labor has risen to 160 million children worldwide, accentuating the need for action. The ILO has also been actively engaging in advocacy campaigns to promote the rights of children.

### *ECPAT International*

Established in 1990, ECPAT International is a global network that combats the sexual exploitation of children. It has been actively engaged in research, education, and advocacy. For example, ECPAT International and its partners launched an initiative that targets the sexual exploitation of boys, an often overlooked issue. The initiative brought attention to specific methods to stay clear of sexual exploitation, while also promoting research to more comprehensively understand this issue. ECPAT International has also worked with other NGOs, including Save the Children, World Vision, and UNICEF, to promote more accessible education on digital safety in this modern era. It aims to bring attention to sexual abuse online and advocate for stricter digital regulations. It has successfully raised awareness about the consequences of child sexual exploitation and conducted research to acquire more insights into the aforementioned issue.

### *The International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL)*

INTERPOL plays an important role in combating child exploitation and trafficking on a global scale by maintaining justice and punishing international criminals through operations. For example, the coordination of an international operation that targets human traffickers and child exploiters, mobilized soldiers across many countries to unravel networks involved in child exploitation. The operation was extremely successful, resulting in the rescue of 253 victims of human trafficking, and the arrest of 32 suspects. Other operations such as Operation Cross Country, Operation Predator, and Operation Trident have also resulted in successfully rescuing hundreds of child victims. Moreover, it has also improved the International Child Sexual Exploitation (ICSE) database to more effectively combat this issue. The aforementioned dataset has been enhanced by the implementation of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies to analyze large volumes of data with greater accuracy and speed. This enhancement has allowed INTERPOL to more effectively identify victims of child exploitation and take early action.

### *United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)*

UNICEF is an active sector of the UN that plays an important role in combating child exploitation. UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage is a key initiative that targets one of the forms of child exploitation by eliminating the practice of child marriage. While this goal has not yet been completely achieved, it has successfully decreased the rate of child marriage worldwide by over 10 percent. It collaborates with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to establish regulatory frameworks to restrict child marriage by setting a minimum legal age requirement. UNICEF also implemented many child protection and gender-based violence programs to protect children from physical and mental abuse. These programs provide services including counseling, legal assistance, and emergency protection protocols. Moreover, UNICEF has launched many initiatives to address the increased risk of child exploitation during the COVID-19 pandemic. It hosts regular awareness campaigns that educate parents about the dangers of sexual exploitation online and offers financial support to those in need.



### *Burkina Faso*

Burkina Faso, a landlocked country in West Africa, faces one of the highest prevalences of child labor in the world. Due to its internal issues, including widespread poverty, economic instability, and lack of education, Burkina Faso remains plagued by cases of child exploitation. Many of these children are engaged in hazardous work that exposes them to physical and physiological harm. In recent years, Burkina Faso has made efforts to combat this pressing issue through regulations and initiatives. It has also worked with international organizations and NGOs such as UNICEF and ILO to improve the situation. These efforts were successful in lowering child trafficking and exploitation rates because the government was able to allocate more personnel and resources to address the issue.

### *United States of America (USA)*

In the USA, the protection of children from child labor is primarily governed by the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). The FLSA is a significant piece of federal legislation enacted in 1938 that establishes a detailed and comprehensive framework concerning child labor. It includes key restrictions on the types of work children can perform as well as strict punishments for violations. These punishments include fines for violation, public exposure, and imprisonment. This Act protects the rights of children and prevents work from interfering with their education and development. Under FLSA, older minors, aged 16 and 17, are also protected by restricting the number of hours they can work and prohibiting employment in hazardous working conditions. The USA has a strong structure for the prevention of child labor, with the U.S. Department of Labor collaborating with other international organizations and NGOs. It has also been actively funding programs that combat child exploitation in LEDCs, including India, Mali, and Ethiopia.

### *People's Republic of China (PRC)*

In the PRC, child exploitation remains a complicated issue. Because of strict governmental intervention and regulations, child exploitation in urban areas is relatively low compared to rural areas, where law enforcement becomes more difficult. Children in rural areas sometimes perform harsh labor including agricultural work, domestic service, and small-scale manufacturing. These activities often do not face government intervention because of the lack of personnel and limited resources. Migrant children, on the other hand, are also susceptible to exploitation as they are often not protected by the law and governmental regulations.

## **Timeline of Events**

Date	Description of event
November 20, 1989	The UN General Assembly adopted the <b>Convention on the Rights of the Child</b> ; this convention is a comprehensive human rights treaty that accentuates the rights of children.
June 17, 1999	The International Labour Organization (ILO) adopts the <b>Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention No. 182</b> to eliminate child exploitation including slavery, prostitution, and child soldiers. This was successful in mitigating child labor worldwide.
May 25, 2000	The General Assembly of the UN adopts the <b>Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography</b> .
July 30, 2010	The General Assembly of the UN adopted the <b>Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons</b> ; this initiative has been very successful, rescuing thousands of victims from exploitation.
December 18, 2013	The General Assembly of the UN officially made July 30th the <b>World Day Against Trafficking in Persons</b> to raise awareness about the dangers of child trafficking. This event was born in response to the increasing numbers of child trafficking.
December 18, 2014	The General Assembly of the UN adopted the <b>Resolution on Child, Early and Forced Marriage</b> to protect the freedom of decision and education for children, successfully challenging cultural norms.

## Relevant UN Resolutions, Treaties, and Events

- Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), 20 November 1989 (**A/RES/44/25**)
- Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, 25 May 2000 (**A/RES/54/263**)
- United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons, 30 July 2010 (**A/RES/64/293**)
- World Day Against Trafficking in Persons, 18 December 2013 (**A/RES/68/192**)
- Resolution on the Rights of the Child, 18 December 2014 (**A/69/157**)

## Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

### *Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention*

The Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention was adopted by the ILO on 17th June, 1999 with the agreement of member states, trade unions, and other organizations, etc. This convention, ratified by 187 countries, was developed to combat child exploitation on a global scale. It targets the most severe forms of child labor, including slavery, child trafficking, child recruitment, child prostitution, and pornography.

This convention mandates all ratified countries to eliminate the worst forms of child labor through legal policies and rehabilitation programs. Countries are required to implement regulations to prevent child labor and provide rehabilitative programs to reintegrate the victims into society. Furthermore, member states are also required to increase the accessibility of education on child exploitation, both physically and virtually, to equip individuals with adequate knowledge to forestall exploitation.

This convention is successful as it is one of the most widely ratified conventions in the history of ILO. This widespread acceptance brought international attention to the issue of child exploitation while also pressuring countries to take immediate action. However, despite its widespread ratification, the implementation of this convention is often insufficiently comprehensive for the eradication of the worst forms of child exploitation. For example, in LEDCs, while there may have been regulations against child labor, there is a lack of a firm enforcement structure and adequate resources to carry out the punishments. Moreover, the financial and technical resources allocated by the ratified countries have often fallen short of needs, making it difficult to operate on a global scale.

### *Child, early and forced marriage (CEFM): resolution / adopted by the General Assembly*

In 2014, the UN General Assembly adopted the CEFM to eliminate early and forced marriage, prevalent in certain cultures. This practice is detrimental to the growth of children, as they are often tied by family responsibilities and stripped of education opportunities and personal rights. This convention mandates all nations to set a minimum age for marriage to protect children in their youth. Moreover, this convention urges the implementation of strict regulations that prohibit forced marriage, as it violates the fundamental rights of the children.

The CEFM also encourages public awareness campaigns that accentuate the negative effects early and forced marriage can have on children. Furthermore, the resolution targets cultural norms that encourage such harmful practices. While it has received criticism for the violation of cultural respect, it has been widely ratified among various countries.

This resolution has been successful as it led to many countries raising the minimum age for marriage as well as raising awareness of the consequences of early and forced marriage. In 2015, Malawi passed a law raising the minimum age for marriage to 18. According to a 2019 report by UNICEF, the percentage of girls married before the age of 18 dropped by over 10 percent. In 2016, Zimbabwe successfully banned child marriage by deeming it unconstitutional. India, on the other hand, launched the Save the Daughter, Educate the Daughter campaign to highlight the importance of education in eliminating child marriage. According to the National Family Health Survey, child marriage in India declined from 27 percent in 2015 to 23 percent in 2019. These are all direct responses to the CEFM, making it a successful convention. Nevertheless, some cultural norms remain too strong to be impacted by the convention, thus requiring further efforts.

## Possible Solutions

### *Increasing the Availability of Education and Online Safety*

One of the most effective ways to combat child exploitation is to increase the availability of education to promote both physical and online safety. This targets the root cause and allows individuals to take early actions to prevent exploitation. The resolution encourages nations to fund or establish public education programs that raise awareness of the dangers of exploitation and ways for prevention. These programs should target rural and impoverished communities where children are most vulnerable to exploitation. In order to increase the acceptance of these programs, incentives such as scholarships and food supplies should be provided to families who participate in the program. The Education for All Movement in India, which aims to provide universal elementary education, models this resolution. Governments can also reach out to international organizations and NGOs including UNICEF, UNESCO, and ILO to acquire more resources and experts.

This resolution also stresses the importance of integrating online safety education into school curriculums to help students understand the risks associated with the internet. This can build digital literacy among children to prevent online harassment and exploitation. Furthermore, it's crucial to establish community workshops as well as assistant programs that educate the public on the signs of child exploitation and ways to seek help. Children should be encouraged to talk to trusted adults such as teachers and parents if they encounter any suspicious acts. Furthermore, international organizations should establish laws and regulations that ensure children get sufficient education by mandating them to complete at least middle school, which they can request financial needs for.

### *Providing Sufficient Support for Victims of Child Exploitation*

Ensuring that victims of child exploitation receive adequate support is critical for their reintegration into society. Effective support can reduce the severity of the physical and mental burden victims experience. For preventive measures, the resolution urges member states to ensure that professionals such as teachers,

healthcare providers, social workers, and law enforcement officers are educated to follow the Mandatory Reporting Protocols and are capable of identifying signs of child exploitation. Family members are also accountable for protecting the rights of their children at home and in private settings. Furthermore, immediate medical care and psychological support should be offered to victims of child exploitation, regardless of wealth and social status, to prevent devastating long-term consequences. Moreover, the resolution urges nations to establish accessible rehabilitation programs that include education and immediate support. These programs can provide victims of exploitation sufficient education to prevent future incidents as well as reenter society. Psychological support and counseling are also crucial services that can mitigate the mental stress these victims have experienced. These programs should be funded by the government and free of charge to incentivize families to participate.

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