

The Case for High School Activities...

Introduction

At a cost of only one to three percent (or less in many cases) of an overall school's budget, high school activity programs are one of the best bargains around. It is in these vital programs – sports, music, speech, drama, debate – where young people learn lifelong lessons as important as those taught in the classroom.

Unfortunately, there appears to be a creeping indifference toward support for high school activity programs by the general public. This neglect undermines the educational mission of our schools and the potential prosperity of our communities.

There is no better time than today to assert “The Case for High School Activities.” Education and community leaders across the nation must be made aware of the facts contained in this material. From interscholastic sports to music, drama and debate, activities enrich a student's high school experience, and the programs must be kept alive.

The National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) and its membership believe that interscholastic sports and fine arts activities promote citizenship and sportsmanship. They instill a sense of pride in community, teach lifelong lessons of teamwork and self-discipline and facilitate the physical and emotional development of our nation's youth.

The NFHS supports cocurricular endeavors through many avenues, including:

The Citizenship Through Sports and Fine Arts curriculum – The curriculum is designed to help coaches and advisers use teachable moments to create better young people through cocurricular activities.

National High School Activities Week – The nation's high schools are encouraged to promote the values inherent in high school athletics and other activities such as speech, music, drama, band and spirit squads during this week-long celebration the third week in October.

Student Activities: An Integral Part of Education – This presentation documents the value of high school athletic and activity programs and includes a slide presentation and video.

Benefits of Cocurricular Activities

Activities Support the Academic Mission of Schools. They are not a diversion but rather an extension of a good educational program. Students who participate in activity programs tend to have higher grade-point averages, better attendance records, lower dropout rates and fewer discipline problems than students generally.

Activities are Inherently Educational. Activity programs provide valuable lessons for practical situations – teamwork, sportsmanship, winning and losing, and hard work. Through participation in activity programs, students learn self-discipline, build self-confidence and develop skills to handle competitive situations. These are qualities the public expects schools to produce in students so that they become responsible adults and productive citizens.

Activities Foster Success in Later Life. Participation in high school activities is often a predictor of later success – in college, a career and becoming a contributing member of society.

Following are some of those benefits, with case studies, where applicable, listed to document the benefits (while many of the studies refer to extracurricular activities, the NFHS prefers the use of the term cocurricular activities, believing that activities support the academic mission of schools and are inherently educational):

Participation in high school activities is a valuable part of the overall high school experience.

Of the 60 students listed in the May 14, 1998, USA Today's All-USA High School Academic First, Second and Third Teams and the 51 who earned honorable mention, 75 percent were involved in sports, speech, music or debate.

The 29th annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools of September 1997 reflects an increase in perceptions about the value of cocurricular activities. In 1978, 45 percent of the public judged extracurricular activities to be very important. That figure fell to 31 percent in 1984. In 1985, the figure was 39 percent and jumped to 63 percent in the 1997 poll. The 1997 poll also asked about the emphasis placed on such sports as football and basketball. Fifty-three percent of the respondents believed the current emphasis was about right.

The Role of Sports in Youth Development, Carnegie Corporation, New York, in a report of a meeting in March 1996, found that evidence showed that the involvement of young people in sports produces multiple benefits for them. At their best, sports programs promote responsible social behaviors and greater academic success, confidence in one's physical abilities, an appreciation of personal health and fitness, and strong social bonds with individuals and institutions. Teachers attribute these results to the discipline and work ethic that sports require.

In a survey of 4,800 high school students in March 1995, the Minnesota State High School League found that 91 percent of them said students who participate in school activities tend to be school leaders and role models; 92 percent said that participation in school activities provides an opportunity not found in a regular classroom setting to develop self-discipline.

Adolescent Time Use, Risky Behavior, and Outcomes: An Analysis of National Data, issued in September 1995, by the Department of Health and Human Services found that students who spend no time in extracurricular activities are 57 percent more likely to have dropped out of school by the time they would have been seniors; 49 percent more likely to have used drugs; 37 percent more likely to have become teen parents; 35 percent more likely to have smoked cigarettes; and 27 percent more likely to have been arrested than those who spend one to four hours per week in extracurricular activities.

A study by Search Institute in 1995 indicates that cocurricular activities play a central role in students' healthy development. Yet too many schools are finding it necessary to cut these programs for budgetary reasons. With asset building as a focus, these programs are not peripheral to the school's mission, but important components of a comprehensive strategy.

School-age children and teens who are unsupervised during the hours after school are far more likely to use alcohol, drugs and tobacco, engage in criminal and other high-risk behaviors, receive poor grades, and drop out of school than those children who have the opportunity to benefit from constructive activities supervised by responsible adults. In a 1994 Harris poll, more than one-half of teachers singled out "children who are left on their own after school" as the primary explanation for

students' difficulties in class. This information comes from the National Education Commission on Time and Learning.

Research conducted in 1991 by Skip Dane of Hardiness Research, Casper, Wyoming, revealed the following about participation in high school sports: 1) By a 2-to-1 ratio, boys who participate in sports do better in school, do not drop out and have a better chance to get through college. 2) The ratio for girls who participate in sports and do well in school is three to one. 3) About 92 percent of sports participants do not use drugs. 4) School athletes are more self-assured. 5) Sports participants take average and above-average classes. 6) Sports participants receive above-average grades and do above average on skills tests. 7) Those involved in sports have knowledge of and use financial aid and have a chance to finish college. 8) Student-athletes appear to have more parental involvement than other students. 9) Students involved in athletics appear to change focus from cars and money to life accomplishments during the process.

A 1989 nationwide study by the Women's Sport Foundation indicated that athletes do better in the classroom, are more involved in school activity programs and stay involved in the community after graduation. The study also revealed that high school athletic participation has a positive educational and social impact on many minority and female students. The study, based on an analysis of data collected by the U.S. Department of Education's High School and Beyond Study, indicated that: 1) Girls receive as many benefits from sports as boys. 2) The "dumb jock" stereotype is a myth. 3) Sports involvement was significantly related to a lower dropout rate in some school settings. 4) Minority athletes are more socially involved than non-athletes.

In 1985, the NFHS sponsored a national survey of high school principals and nearly 7,000 high school students in all 50 states. The survey, funded by a grant from the Lilly Endowment in Indianapolis, was conducted by Indiana University in cooperation with the National Association of Secondary School Principals. Following are the results of that survey.

- 95 percent believed that participation in activities teaches valuable lessons to students that cannot be learned in a regular class routine.
- 99 percent agreed that participation in activities promotes citizenship
- 95 percent agreed that activity programs contribute to the development of "school spirit" among the student body.
- 76 percent said they believe the demand made on students' time by activities is not excessive.
- 72 percent said there is strong support for school activity programs from parents and the community at large.

Students who compete in high school activity programs make higher grades and have better attendance.

A study of nearly 22,000 students conducted by a University of Colorado professor for the Colorado High School Activities Association which was released in the fall of 1999 indicates students who participate in some form of interscholastic activities have "significantly higher" grade-point averages than students who do not. Data obtained from the spring 1997 study by Dr. Kevin J. McCarthy revealed student participants in Jefferson County high schools had an overall grade-point average of 3.093 on a 4.0 scale, while the GPA for non-participants was 2.444. Jefferson County School District, the state's largest school district, has matched the academic success of its

students with success on the playing field. The 16 district schools have won a combined 39 state championships in the 1990s in sports, while its music programs consistently bring home “superior” ratings.

A study in the September 1998 issue of **NASSP Bulletin** compared academic performance, behavior and commitment of basketball and volleyball athletes and non-athletes in a rural Canadian high school. The article compares mid-term and final grades, visits to an administrator for disciplinary referrals and demerit points for improper behavior and estimates the mean weekly time commitment for athletes in each sport. Findings showed support that athletes match or exceed non-athletes in academic and behavior performance.

In the March 1997 issue of **School Counselor**, 123 students involved in interscholastic soccer are analyzed. Results indicate that activity participation does not harm and may enhance academic performance. Male athletes showed in-season improvements in academic performance.

In a comprehensive, statewide study of the academic performance of high school student-athletes in North Carolina over a three-year period, the North Carolina High School Athletic Association found significant differences between athletes and non-athletes. Five criteria were used, including grade-point average, attendance rate, discipline referrals, dropout rate and graduation rate, for the 1994-95 academic year.

	Athletes	Non-athletes
Grade-point average	2.86	1.96
Average number of absences per 180-day school year	6.52 days	12.57 days
Discipline referrals	30.51%	40.29%
Dropout rate	0.7%	8.98%
Graduation rate	99.56%	94.66%

Findings from the National Center for Education Statistics, *Extracurricular Participation and Student Engagement*, June 1995, revealed that during the first semester of their senior year, participants reported better attendance than their non-participating classmates. Half of them had no unexcused absences from school and half had never skipped a class, compared with one-third and two-fifths of non-participants, respectively. Students who participated were three times as likely to perform in the top quartile on a composite math and reading assessment compared with non-participants. Participants also were more likely than non-participants to aspire to higher education; two-thirds of participants expected to complete at least a bachelor’s degree while about half of non-participants expected to do so.

A 1992 study by the Colorado High School Activities Association and the Colorado Department of Education revealed that Colorado high school students who participate in some form of interscholastic activity have “significantly higher” grade-point averages and better attendance. Of the students surveyed, the average participant’s GPA was 2.96 (on a 4.0 scale), compared to 2.35 for the non-participant. In one school, participants had an average reading test score of 76.30, compared to 58.91 for non-participants. In another school, participants scored 16.17 on the math standardized test, compared to 13.31 for non-participants. A participant missed school an average of 3.59 days a year, while a non-participant missed 5.92 days. The survey showed that the larger the school, the more pronounced the differences in participant and non-participant test scores and attendance results.

High school students who compete in activity programs in New Mexico had a 2.80 grade-point average, compared to 2.00 for non-participants, according to a 1992 survey by the New Mexico

Activities Association. The survey also indicated that more than 60 percent of the state's principals found that GPAs of at-risk students improved by being active in interscholastic activities.

1990-91 study in the Randolph (North Carolina) County school system showed a strong correlation between participation in athletics and positives such as improved grades and increased attendance rates. Athletes in grades 9 through 12 in the school system's four high schools recorded an 86 average, compared to 79 for the general population. Athletes averaged four absences, while the general population averaged seven. Eleven percent of the athletes had discipline referrals, compared to 25 percent of the general population. None of the athletes dropped out, while 3.7 percent of the general population were dropouts.

In a 1988 survey, John Chevrette and Kenneth Patranella concluded from an investigation in San Antonio, Texas, that educational outcomes related to scholastic performance are enhanced for those secondary students who participate in activity programs. A study of a high school population of 3,536 students found that secondary pupils who participated in more than one activity during a semester tended to experience higher academic performance levels than other participants and non-participants.

Students participating in a number of activities not only achieve better academically but also express greater satisfaction with the total high school experience than students who do not participate, according to a 1985 survey conducted for the NFHS by Indiana University. The grade-point average for "high activity" students was 3.05 on a 4.0 scale, compared to a GPA of 2.54 for "low activity" students. Researchers defined high activity as involvement in four or more activities, while low activity students were involved in one activity or none.

Participation in activity programs yields positive results after high school as well.

The May 5, 1999, issue of **Education Week** reported on two studies presented at the April annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association. The studies both drew on data from a national sample of 25,000 high school students. The Center for Research on Sport in Society at the University of Miami in Florida looked at how often behavior problems cropped up among 12th graders who had taken part in athletics at some point in their high school careers. Even when the researchers controlled the numbers to account for students who already had behavior problems in 8th grade or those who were predisposed to have more prosocial attitudes toward school, sports participation had a positive effect.

A separate study done by the Center for the Social Organization of Schools at Johns Hopkins University found that sports had a "small but consistent" impact on a variety of other positive school outcomes, too. The more involved that 10th graders were in athletics, for example, the more likely they were to feel confident of their academic abilities or to be engaged in their schools.

The Spring 1999 issue of **Assets**, Search Institute, looked at a report from the North Carolina High School Athletic Association. The NCHSAA identified assets that any school-based sports program would inherently develop, along with an additional 26 that purposeful planning could help foster, including:

School boundaries – Schools provide clear rules and consequences. Most athletic programs have codes of conduct or rules for behavior in addition to school policies.

Youth programs – Young person spends three or more hours per week in sports, clubs or organizations at school and/or in the community. This is a given with most secondary school interscholastic athletic programs. In fact, far more than three hours per week is usually required.

Achievement motivation – Young person is motivated to do well in school. Most athletic programs have minimum standards of achievement that must be met in order to participate in athletics.

Planning and decision making – Young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices. Because of practice and game schedules, in addition to other responsibilities, secondary school athletes have learned to manage their time.

The February 1996 **Career World** examines the factors that really matter in gaining acceptance to a college or university. Admissions officers consider grades, test scores and involvement in extracurricular activities in deciding whether to accept or reject an applicant.

Admission officers at Harvard, Yale and 70 percent of the nation's other major universities have stated that high school credit and achievement in the arts are significant considerations for admission to their institutions. This finding was from *Can Colleges Help School Fine Arts Programs?* in a 1992 article in Connecticut Music Educators Association News.

Results of a 1987 survey of individuals at the executive vice-president level or above in 75 Fortune 500 companies indicated that 95 percent of those corporate executives participated in sports during high school. In addition, 54 percent were involved in student government, 43 percent in the National Honor Society, 37 percent in music, 35 percent in scouts and 18 percent in the school's publication.

The American College Testing Service compared the value of four factors in predicting success after high school. "Success" was defined as self-satisfaction and participation in a variety of community activities two years after college. The one yardstick that could be used to predict later success in life was achievement in school activities. Not useful as predictors were high grades in high school, high grades in college or high ACT scores.

The College Entrance Examination Board's Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) was examined in much the same way. It was found that having a high SAT score did not necessarily indicate success in a chosen career. The best predictor of later success, the study showed, was a person's independent, self-sustained ventures. Teens who were active in school activities, had hobbies or jobs, were found to be most likely to succeed at their chosen profession and make creative contributions to their community.

From a cost standpoint, activity programs are an exceptional bargain when matched against the overall school district's education budget.

Generally speaking, the NFHS has determined through information received across the country that activity programs make up only one to three percent of the overall education budget in a school. In Chicago, that figure is even less. In 1992, the overall budget for the Chicago Board of Education was \$2.6 billion, and activity programs received only \$2.9 million, a minuscule one-tenth of one percent (.001).

Activity programs fulfill students' basic needs, help in students' attitudes toward self and school and minimize dropout and discipline problems.

A report on The Condition of Education, United States Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics in 1995 found that participation in extracurricular activities may affect academic performance, attachment to school and social development. The report further stated that almost every high school in the United States offers some type of extracurricular activity, such as music, academic clubs and sports. These activities provide opportunities for students to learn the values of teamwork, a channel for reinforcing skills and the opportunity to apply academic skills in other arenas as a part of a well-rounded education.

American Youth and Sports Participation, a survey of 10,000 students by the Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association (1990) revealed that the No. 1 reason that girls and boys participate in high school sports is to have fun. Conversely, lack of fun was the leading reason for dropping out of participation. Winning was not seen as a major benefit of sports by young people who participate – it was ranked No. 8 by boys and No. 12 by girls. Skill development was considered a crucial aspect of fun – it was considered more important than winning even among the best athletes. Another finding: The most rewarding challenges of sports are those that lead to self-knowledge. Finally, intrinsic rewards (self-knowledge that grows out of self-competition) are more important in creating lifelong athletes than extrinsic rewards (victory or attention from others).

Cocurricular activities teach lessons that lead to better citizens.

An opinion survey conducted in July 1998 by Peter D. Hart Research Associates for Shell Oil Company found that respondents felt the top two goals for schools should be teaching values such as respect and honesty and teaching students how to reason and think well.

A Wyoming High School Activities Association Statewide Student Activities Survey compiled in the summer of 1998 points out addiction dangers of tobacco use. Yearly, monthly and weekly reported use of tobacco by high school students is low when compared to the high percentage of daily users. Approximately 25 percent of those involved in athletics or activities report daily tobacco use, compared to 40 percent for non-participants. For students involved in both athletics and activities, that percentage drops to 13 percent. A focus of future WHSAA surveys will explore the reasons for this outcome.

In light of these findings, the WHSAA encourages coaches and activity sponsors to continue (or begin) an emphasis on teaching the addictive dangers of tobacco and make solutions known and available to all students.

The Alberta Schools' Athletic Association (ASAA), in conjunction with the Metro Edmonton High School Athletic Association and the Alberta Centre for Well-Being, completed a survey of 883 students. The survey, completed in November 1997, was undertaken to assess the potential impact that high school athletics has on the lives and attitudes of students in Alberta.

Findings showed student-athletes are less likely to smoke (30 percent versus 44 percent), and if they do smoke, they are less likely to smoke heavily. Overall, 35 percent of students reported they currently smoke cigarettes. The survey findings indicated student-athletes (9 percent) are less likely to report drinking more than once a week in comparison to non-athletic students (20 percent).

“The results of this survey suggest that students who participate in school-based sport programs are good school citizens and may be even better school citizens than their non-sport peers,” said John

Paton, executive director, ASAA. "School athletes demonstrate positive lifestyle behaviors, such as less smoking and less drug use when compared to non-sport students."

Paton also indicated that if administrators, teachers or parents are concerned that school sport programs compete for students' attention and participation with other cocurricular activities, the study disputes these concerns. Student-athletes tend to participate at a greater rate in other school activities, and they have a more positive perception of their school.

A study conducted by Public Agenda released in June 1997 (*Kids These Days: What Americans Really Think About the Next Generation*) found that more than six in 10 adults, or 61 percent, said youngsters' failure to learn such values as honesty, respect and responsibility is a very serious problem. Only 37 percent believe today's children, once they're grown, will make the United States a better place. Those polled also said greater availability and use of school programs and volunteer groups would be an effective way to help children.

Consider the captain at a track championship who had won the long jump and was the leader in the triple jump when he reported to the start of the 100-meter dash. Upon his arrival, he discovered another runner from a rival school had forgotten his spikes. This young man was the only person in the league with a chance to defeat him. Without hesitating, he gave the boy his backup pair of spikes. The young man with the borrowed spikes won in the final while setting a league record in the event. The same scenario played itself out in the finals of the 200-meter dash. The boy who lent the spikes indicated, "It never occurred to me to do anything else."

Early in a soccer championship game, a forward and defender both jumped to head the ball. Their heads collided, and one player was injured but did not drop to the ground at the signal to the referee to stop play. The coach on the opposing team recognized the distress of the player and despite his team having the opportunity to clear the ball and take the advantage in play, he directed his team to kick the ball out of bounds. He gave up possession of the ball near his goal to stop play and allow the player to be assisted.