Impacting Student Motivation:

Reasons for Not Eliminating Extracurricular Activities

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Think back to your time in high school. Regardless of when you graduated, we all have some of the same memories. Those happy times with friends, going to the prom, passing that math test you spent all night studying for or the time spent at practice or in competition as an athlete or in academic clubs. Those stressful times taking the SATs, practicing and preparing for playoffs, performing in front of an audience in your musical or graduating and walking across the stage. Now think about those awkward times or any other memory that stands out. Regardless of the happy, the stressful, and the awkward times, we have all experienced high school in its fullest. For many of us, that experience included extracurricular activities. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (USCB), 57% of children between 6 and 17 years old participate in at least one athletic extracurricular activity, and 35% participate in other extracurricular activities such as musicals, drama, or academic competitions. On average, 57% of the student body in a district participates in at least one extracurricular activity (10% participating in both; U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). In addition, the USCB annual report shows that schools across the nation spent over 60% of day-to-day expenditures on classroom instruction and salaries in the fiscal year 2017. That would leave roughly 40% of day-to-day expenditures to spend on buildings and grounds, transportation, insurance, construction and renovations., leaving very little left in the budget for extracurricular activities (USCB, 2017).

In today's society there is an emphasis put on budgeting and fiscal responsibilities in public education. This emphasis has led to many extracurricular activities to be cut from public high schools. However, there is more motivation and learning created with these activities than there are in many academic classes. According to the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) and its member state associations, interscholastic sports and performing arts activities promote academic achievement, social skills, and leadership skills in over 11 million students who participate nationwide (The National Federation of State High School, 2015). Given the importance of academic achievement, attendance, social and leadership skills and students' futures in high school today, it is critically important for high schools to offer and keep an array of meaningful extracurricular activities.

Extracurricular Activities

The U.S. Census Bureau defines classroom instructions as activities dealing with the interaction between teachers and students in the classroom or other learning situations (USCB, 2017). Classroom instructions are the core or basic classes offered in all of education. Many believe classroom instructions are the only classes

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that should be supported by districts, administrations and budget. However, Dick Deasy, director of the Arts Education Partnership, liked to say, "Teachers don't teach a subject, they teach kids" (Bauerlein, 2010). This slogan could be for all teachers, coaches and sponsors who are in charge of extracurricular activities. The high school years can be a dangerous time in terms of building confidence, but extracurricular activities can instill a more profound sense of worth for young adults. A study of Iowa graduates found that the mean self-esteem score among those who participated in extracurricular activities was nearly one full grade point average point higher than those who did not participate (Lake, 2015).

The Glossary of Education Reform defines extracurricular activities as activities that may be offered or coordinated by a school but may not be explicitly connected to academic learning. When most of us think of extracurricular activities, we think of athletics and sports, but extracurricular activities can be non-athletic activities such as musical or speech and debate (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2013). For a child to develop, there is a need for emotional, physical and moral development that can be complemented and supplemented by co-curricular activities and extracurricular activities ("Co-curricular Activities," 2013). An examination of North Carolina high schools showed that the number of participants in extracurricular activities had positive academic outcomes for the school even when controlling for school resources.

Claims

While many students get involved in high school athletics for the sheer love of the game, there are significant benefits from these extracurricular activities as well (Chen, 2017). When looking at the benefits of extracurricular activities on students, participation in them instills a sense of pride in school and community, teaches lifelong lessons and skills of teamwork and self-discipline, and facilitates the physical and emotional development of the nation's youth. Participation in high school extracurricular activities is often a predictor of student motivations, GPA, attendance and graduation rate, social and life skills, leadership, and future mindset (NFHS, 2015).

Student Motivations. Not every student is an athlete, and not every student is an artist, but every student has interests outside the scope of academia. An examination of National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) data showed that participation in extracurricular activities created many positive educational achievements, behaviors and aspirations throughout high school, as far

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as through the sophomore year in college (Marsh & Kleitman, 2003). According to the NELS study, students who participated in extracurricular activities had enhanced academic motivation and engagement measures, including a sense of meaning and purpose. In extracurricular activities the positive outcomes were based on student motivations. These motivations included school grades, coursework selection, homework, educational and occupational aspirations, self-esteem, university applications, subsequent college enrollment, and eventual educational attainment (Martin et al., 2013).

GPA, Attendance and Graduation Rate. Within the past few years numerous research studies have attempted to prove whether kids who join in extracurricular activities perform better academically. One study found that nearly 31% of students who participated had a GPA of 3.0 or higher, compared to just 11% of students who had no involvement. There is also a significant amount of debate over whether extracurricular activities influence attendance rates. The same study showed that 50% of participating students had no unexcused absences, while only 36% of non-participants had never missed school (Lake, 2015). The National Association for Music Education study, done in collaboration with a national and an international music association and with Harris Interactive, showed that high schools that have music programs have a 93.3% attendance rate and a 90.2% graduation rates compared to schools that do not have music programs, at 84.9% and 72.9%, respectively (MENC & NAMM, 2006). The National Center for Education Statistics found that high school students who participated in extracurricular activities were less likely to cut class and play hooky than kids who were not involved. Three times as many had a GPA of 3.0 or higher; twice as many scored in the top quarter on math and reading tests, and 68% expected to get a college degree, compared to 48% of kids who were not involved (Kronholz, 2012). A Minnesota State High School League survey of 300 Minnesota high schools showed that the average GPA of an extracurricular activity student was 2.84 and missed an average of only 7.4 days of school each year, compared with the student who did not participate, who had an average GPA of 2.68 and missed an average of 8.8 days of school each year. The North Carolina High School Athletic Association found significant differences between North Carolina high school students who participated in extracurricular activities and those who did not. The GPA for participating students was 2.98, compared to 2.17 for non-participating students. The average days of school per school year missed for participating students was 6.3,

compared to 11.9 for non-participating students. The graduation rate of participating students was 99.4%, compared to 93.5% for non-participating students (Overton, 2001). Another study published in *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise* found that students who were active in extracurricular activities performed 10% better in core subjects such as math, science, social studies and language arts. Because extracurricular activities offer equal opportunity to all students at the high school level, these academic benefits extend to all areas of the student population, including students who might be traditionally underserved (Chen, 2017). Involvement in extracurricular activities among academic leadership groups, arts activities, clubs, and sports promotes a greater sense of belonging at school, increased academic engagement, and higher academic performance as measured by grade point average according to a study of urban, ethnically diverse students, 40.7% Latino, 16.8% African American, 12.7% Asian American, 11.2% Caucasian, and 18.5% other ethnicity or two or more ethnic groups (NFHS, 2015).

Social and Life Skills. In a time when the development of social and life skills has never been so important, it is necessary that we find ways to assist students in developing these skills. Extracurricular activities provide valuable lessons and skills for practical situations such as teamwork, fair play, and hard work. Through participation, extracurricular activities students learn self-discipline, build self-confidence, and develop skills to handle competitive situations. These are qualities students need if they are to become responsible adults, productive citizens and skilled professionals (NFHS, 2015). Students who participate in extracurricular activities often forge close friendships with others on the team or in the group. These relationships are essential for emotional, mental and even physical health. Students bond over the time they spend together at practice and games and build tight bonds that often last long after high school graduation (Chen, 2017). Extracurricular activities also stand out from other aspects of students' lives at school because they provide opportunities to develop initiative and allow youth to learn emotional competencies and develop new social skills. Extracurricular activities also allow youth to form new connections with peers, acquire social capital, and interact with adults (Darling, Caldwell, & Smith, 2005). A study of life skills developed through extracurricular activities saw that the process of participation and striving to win taught life skills such as discipline, work ethic, and emotional control. According to Gould, Collins, Lauer and Chung, "these coaches did not view the coaching of life skills as separate from their general coaching strategies for performance enhancement and while highly motivated to win, personal development of their players was a top priority" (Gould, Collins, Lauer, & Chung, 2007).

Leadership. One of the most essential skills a student can learn in high school is leadership. Few aspects of leadership can be taught by a book or in a classroom; many must be learned through experience. Extracurricular activities give students these experiences. When students advance through the ranks of a high school team or group, they often learn valuable leadership skills. For example, senior athletes are expected to encourage underclass team members and hold them accountable for their actions and performance. Seniors are expected to provide advice and guidance and to set an example both on and off the field (Chen, 2017). Rouse stated, "Since the availability of leadership positions depends upon the existence of school activities that provide such leadership opportunities, the evidence presented in this article indicates that decisions regarding financial cutbacks for extracurricular activities should not be taken lightly" (2012). Extracurricular activities provide many of these leadership opportunities for high school students.

In a study commissioned by the Alberta Schools' Athletic Association, corporate and political leaders surveyed in Alberta cited the following benefits or life skills associated with their involvement in high school athletics: teamwork, discipline, goal-setting, leadership, independence, self-confidence, stress relief, character development and personal growth, fair play, and acceptance of others (Berrett, 2006).

In a study looking at a very diverse group of students participating in high school soccer, students reported learning skills related to initiative, respect, teamwork and leadership (Holt & Tink, 2008). Based on these findings, it is necessary for high schools to retain extracurricular activity opportunities in order to foster adolescents' sense of belonging at school and higher academic performance. It is essential that schools offer a number of extracurricular activities that capture the diverse interests of the entire student body. High schools can maximize the impact of these activities by encouraging disconnected, low-achieving students to join a couple of activities. At a time when school budgets face reductions, this type of research argues for the importance of maintaining a breadth of extracurricular activities opportunities for students attending urban high schools (Knifsend & Graham, 2012).

Future Mindset. When it comes to our students' gains from participating in extracurricular activities, nothing is more important than the students' future mindset. Chen outlined the mindset for success that is instilled in the students who participate in extracurricular activities. Students learn time management skills, creativity in finding ways to improve, strong focus and concentration development, internal skills for handling pressure, learning when to take risks, and taking responsibility for individual performance (2017). The extracurricular activity settings often afford students constructive and developmentally appropriate opportunities. These opportunities enhance their chances of being educationally resilient (Peck, Roeser, Zarrett, & Eccles, 2009).

Participating in extracurricular activities can have a lasting effect that extends beyond graduation day. Students who place a high value on extracurricular activities reported being 6% to 7% happier with the progress they had made toward life, career and family goals (Lake, 2015). The future mindset is impacted in college, the job market, and other essential postsecondary areas. A student involved in at least one extracurricular activity was more likely to achieve educational success. That student was more likely to attend college than the average student who did not participate (Peck et al., 2009). Based on an investigation of the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS), data showed that participation in extracurricular activities is positively associated with post-secondary educational attainment (Gardner, Roth, & Brooks-Gunn, 2008), which is associated with a 5 percent increase in bachelor's degree attainment (Lipscomb, 2007). The NELS data also showed that aside from looking good on a college application, participating in extracurricular activities could potentially work in a student's favor when it comes to entrance exams. A 2014 study conducted by the National Center for Educational Statistics has shown that Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) math scores improved by 45 points and verbal scores improved by 53 points when students were involved in extracurricular activities (Lake, 2015).

However, not all students want to attend college after high school. Many students who participate in extracurricular activities while in high school keep the habit later in life. When seeking a job, many students believe highlighting their involvement in ex-

tracurricular activities increases their chances of being hired. Employers see involvement in extracurricular activities as a way to distinguish those students from other applicants. The employers see extracurricular activity participation positively because they believe extracurricular activities are signals of individuals' competencies or personality (Roulin & Bangerter, 2013).

Other analyses of NELS data showed that schools with higher proportions of extracurricular activity participants reported significantly fewer serious crimes, violent crimes, and suspensions occurring at school (Veliz & Shakib, 2012). These data also showed the effects of participation extracurricular activities on political engagement among young African American adults. The NELS study showed that participation in extracurricular activities was significantly related to political engagement, as measured by registering to vote (Braddock, Hua, & Dawkins, 2007). In addition, student participation in extracurricular activities was associated with a greater likelihood of voting in national and regional elections and volunteering for community and religious groups, according to another examination of NELS data (Zaff, Moore, & Papillo, 2003).

Opposing Side

The biggest argument when it comes to cutting extracurricular activities is money. Cash-strapped school districts are facing redundancies and reduced subject choices and are even running out of paper (Ratcliffe, 2017). The last thing most financially distraught districts can place money into is extracurricular activities. However, this is not the only reason for the elimination of many extracurricular activities. There is also the negative impact of extracurricular activities on academic importance and the focus and attention on academics.

Money Issues. Budgets and taxes impact public school district decisions more than any other issue today. With the cutbacks by local, state and national government in public education funding, some districts are struggling to make ends meet. More than 80% of teachers surveyed by the Guardian Teacher Network stated that their schools are planning or have made cutbacks to extracurricular activities. A third of teachers (34%) reported that schools were planning to attrition teachers who leave, while 14% stated teachers in their districts are being made redundant. One in 10 (9%) respondents reported that activities such as art, music or drama are no longer offered in their districts, and roughly 20% stated that remaining activities were informed that they would be cut in the future (Ratcliffe, 2017).

The United States routinely spends more tax dollars per high school athlete than per high school math student, unlike most countries worldwide. A Texas high school, Premont Independent School District, was facing a shutdown due to financial mismanagement and academic failure; the Premont superintendent, Ernest Singleton, decided to suspend all sports, including football. The football program at Premont cost about $1,300 per player. In comparison, math costs the district just $618 a student. Singleton's rationale was that for the price of one football season, the district could have hired a full-time elementary school teacher for an entire year. As a result, 80% of the students passed their classes in the first semester compared with 50% the previous fall. In addition, about 160 people attended parent-teacher night, compared with six the year before (Ripley, 2013). A high school in Cincinnati shifted all of its extracurricular activities onto community groups. This change is predicted to save $250,000 a year, just in coaching stipends (Kronholz, 2012).

Academic Importance. Another major issue with extracurricular activities is the negative impact on academic importance. As states and districts continue to slash education budgets and eliminate extracurricular activities, more and more students are enrolling in traveling teams outside of school. As the globalized economy demands, children need to focus on learning higher-order skills so they can compete for jobs in the future. With this said, it is worth re-evaluating the American sporting tradition and the arts in general (Ripley, 2013). When it comes to extracurricular activities, sports are usually the main focus. Sports are embedded in American schools in a way that they are not almost anywhere else in the world. Ripley explained, "This difference hardly ever comes up in domestic debates about America's international mediocrity in education." Currently, the United States ranks only 31st in the world in math. The issues that are discussed range from undertrained teachers to entrenched poverty but never the impact high school sports has on our students' academic importance (Ripley, 2013).

District Alternatives

According to the National Federation of State High School Associations, at a cost of only one to three percent of an overall school's budget, extracurricular activities are one of today's best bargains. From a cost standpoint, activity programs are an exceptional bargain when matched against the overall school district budget (NFHS, 2015). This has led to three very distinct alternatives by districts: raising taxes, pitting education against extracurricular activities, and the Pay-to-Play/Participate initiative.

Rasmussen stated, "There are very few things where people can take out their frustration with the system and taxes. The school budget is one of the few things that come before voters" (Rasmussen, 1992). However, when it comes to school budgets, state law excludes all non-essential expenses ranging from equipment purchases to extracurricular activities. The National Federation of State High School Associations examined various school districts' budget information from across the country. This examination revealed that extracurricular activities make up very small percentages of school budgets. In the 2014–15 school year, Chicago, Los Angeles and Miami were examined. The city of Chicago's Public School Board of Education's budget was $4.93 billion. The extracurricular activities portion was $17.6 million. The Los Angeles Unified school district extracurricular activities programs received $6.33 million of the overall $7.27 billion budget. The Miami Dade, FL school district budget of $3.7 billion set aside $17.2 million for extracurricular activities programs. In all these examples, the budget for extracurricular activities programs is less than 1% of the overall district's budget (NFHS, 2015). Frank Deford explained how "eliminating a sport would probably produce more hyste-

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ria than raising taxes would." This belief is why many districts threaten to cut extracurricular activities as a way to raise taxes in certain areas (Deford, 2011). However, that is not always true. In an attempt to close a $2.2 million gap in her $24 million budget, Diane M. Place, superintendent of Towanda school district in Pennsylvania, claimed that she received hate mail and "horrendous calls" when she recommended a $30 per household tax increase. Instead of raising taxes, she was forced to cut the overall classroom budget by 9% and to cut multiple extracurricular activities. She eliminated the rifle team, Junior Robotics Club, junior varsity soccer, majorettes, Future Business Leaders, and half the funding for the speech and debate team (Kronholz, 2012).

How do you tell a student-athlete that their sport is more important than a drama student's musical or vice versa? In all honesty, you don't, you can't; but it is becoming common practice for districts to pit education against extracurricular activities. Frank Deford from National Public Radio explained, "from a strictly realistic, cost-effective, health-effective, culture-effective point of view, it would make the most sense to drop football. That would allow art and music to remain in school and divert boys into safer athletic exercise" (Deford, 2011). Districts use this ultimatum tactic as a way to focus the attention of school boards and community members to a crisis that usually is not as dramatic as it is presented. This confrontation is ineffective and a distraction from the real issues at hand; and in the end it only hurts our children, our students. Marguerite Roza examined the idea of allowing parents to pay for extra services not deemed part of the base such as music. This has led to the Pay-to-Play/Participate initiative. According to the Pennsylvania School Boards Association, there are currently 33 states where a Pay-to-Play/Participate has been initiated. It has been found that some school districts charge students anywhere from $25 to $1,500 to participate in extracurricular activities (Roza, 2009).

For example, the band fee at Medina Senior High in Ohio is $200. Further, in Arlington, Massachusetts, public high schools charge students $405 to join the cheerleading squad and $480 to wrestle. Another example is shown in Lakeville, MN, where students are charged $190 to join the debate team and $110 for the chess club (Kronholz, 2012). Anne Wallace explained how the pay-to-play initiatives would cover salaries for staff who run the extracurricular activities, while the other costs would be paid from gate receipts or fundraising (Wallace Foundation, 2011). Chapman's study of extracurricular and participation fees showed that 58.8% of principals felt that implementing a pay-to-play initiative would result in a drop in extracurricular activities student participation. In addition, 59.6% of principals felt that the implementation of a pay-to-play for extracurricular activities would result in a decline in student participation (Chapman, 2009). Although pay-to-play may seem like a reasonable alternative to eliminating extracurricular activities altogether, it discriminates against students who do

not have the financial means to pay for membership on a high school sports team. Eliminating these programs or implementing pay-to-play is likely to have a more negative impact on students who come from families that are poor, and, generally, students of color are over-represented among low-income families (Lumpkin & Favor, 2012).

Conclusion

Even with an understanding of the issues that districts face, whether financial or political, eliminating extracurricular activities would be harmful to the growth and mindset of our students. Multiple studies have shown the growth, importance and impact of extracurricular activities on student motivation, academic achievement, attendance, social life and leadership skills, and students' futures in high school today. It is critically important for high schools to offer and keep meaningful extracurricular activities. The benefits greatly outweigh the district financial issues, the negative impact on academic importance, and the focus and attention to academics.

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