



# The Case for High School Activities



## INTRODUCTION

The National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) and its membership believe that interscholastic sports and performing arts activities promote citizenship and sportsmanship to the 11 million students who participate nationwide. Activity programs 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.

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, theatre and debate, activities enrich a student's high school experience, and the programs must be protected and kept alive.

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, theatre, debate – where young people learn lifelong lessons that complement the academic lessons taught in the classroom.



## The NFHS supports cocurricular endeavors through many avenues, including:

- **Rules-writing Process** – The NFHS produces more than eight million copies of publications and support materials annually for 15 rules books covering 17 sports. The NFHS publishes case books, officials' manuals, handbooks, and simplified and illustrated books in many sports.
- **The NFHS Coaches Education Program** – The NFHS Fundamentals of Coaching Course provides a unique student-centered curriculum for interscholastic coaches that assists coaches in creating a healthy and age-appropriate sport experience. The course can be taken either online or in a face-to-face blended delivery option.
- **National High School Activities Month** – The nation's high schools are encouraged to promote the values inherent in high school athletics, speech, music, theatre, debate and spirit squads during this celebration in the month of October.
- **Public-service Announcements** – Various sportsmanship messages are created and distributed in electronic and radio formats, as well as healthy lifestyle messages that tackle difficult but current topics such as steroid usage, and hazing education.
- **High School Activities: A Community Investment in America** – This presentation is an NFHS educational product. It documents the value of high school athletic and fine arts activities through an excellent PowerPoint presentation with videos on a CD-ROM. You can order this CD-ROM by calling NFHS customer service at 800-776-3462.
- **SPORTSMANSHIP. IT'S UP TO YOU.™ TOOLKIT** – This is the newest initiative for improving sportsmanship in schools and in the community. Sportsmanship is an issue that affects everyone and is everyone's responsibility. Our new Sportsmanship. *It's Up to You.*™ campaign is based on respect and involves personal responsibility. It starts with a mindset and ends with behavioral choices. The toolkit contains two DVDs, radio spots, customizable posters, Student Pledge Cards and an implementation guide on how to utilize the components of the toolkit. You can order this toolkit by calling NFHS Customer Service at 800-776-3462.

## 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, 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 students need if they are to become responsible adults, productive citizens and skilled professionals.
- **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 healthy 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.

- Students who spend no time in extracurricular activities are 49 percent more likely to use drugs and 37 percent more likely to become teen parents than those who spend one to four hours per week in extracurricular activities (United States Department of Education. *No Child Left Behind: The facts about 21st Century Learning*. Washington, DC: 2002.)
- In their 2006 report, *Effects of Title IX and Sports Participation on Girls' Physical Activity and Weight*, Professors Kaestner and Xu of the University of Illinois at Chicago, found that the dramatic increase in sports participation among girls in the aftermath of the passage of Title IX was associated with an increase in physical activity and an improvement in weight and body mass among adolescent girls. They conclude that Title IX and the increase in athletic opportunities among adolescent females it engendered had a beneficial effect on the health of adolescent girls.
- A *Harvard Educational Review* article in 2002 found that participation in extracurricular activities in high school appears to be one of the few interventions that benefit low-status, disadvantaged students – those less well served by traditional educational programs – as much or more than their more advantaged peers.
- In telephone interviews of a national sample of teens in 2001, more than half (54 percent) said they wouldn't watch so much TV or play video games if they had other things to do after school. The same survey found that more than half of teens wish there were more community or neighborhood-based programs available after school, and two-thirds of those surveyed said they would participate in such programs if they were available.

- Bonnie Barber and her colleagues, contributors to the 2005 book, *Organized Activities as Developmental Contexts for Children and Adolescents*, concluded that making diverse clubs and activities available to a wide range of students is important. The opportunity to embed one's identity in multiple extracurricular contexts and to experience multiple competencies facilitates attachment to school and adjustment. Activity participation is also linked to affiliation with peers who are academically focused. Adolescents can benefit from this synergistic system when they have opportunities to participate in diverse activities.

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

- According to the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, students who participate in the arts nine hours or more each week for at least a year are four times more likely to be recognized for academic achievement, win a school attendance award, participate in a science and math fair and win an award for writing. They are also three times more likely to be elected to class office.
- A Minnesota State High School League survey of 300 Minnesota high schools showed that the average GPA of a student-athlete was 2.84, compared with 2.68 for the non-participating student, and that student-athletes missed an average of only 7.4 days of school each year, compared with 8.8 for the non-participating student. (Trevor Born. High Standard for GPA, in *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, May 14, 2007.)
- A study published in the August 2007 issue of *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise* found that students who took part in more vigorous sports like soccer or football or skateboarding, did approximately 10 percent better in math, science, English and social studies classes.
- According to the College Entrance Examination Board, music students scored about 11 percent higher than non-music students on the 2001 SAT. Students with coursework/experience in music performance and music appreciation scored higher on the SAT than students with no arts participation. Students in music performance scored 57 points higher in the verbal area and 41 points higher in math, and students in music appreciation scored 63 points higher on verbal and 44 points higher on math.



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

- Participation in extracurricular activities provides all students – including students from disadvantaged backgrounds, minorities and those with less-than-distinguished academic achievements in high school – a measurable and meaningful gain in their college admissions test scores according to researchers Howard T. Everson and Roger E. Millsap, writing for the College Entrance Examination Board in 2005.
- In a 2006 research project published by the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement (CIRCLE), it was found that 18- to 25-year-olds who participate in sports activities while in high school were more likely than nonparticipants to be engaged in volunteering, voting, feeling comfortable speaking in public settings, and watching news (especially sport news).
- An extensive study commissioned by the Alberta Schools' Athletic Association found in that Canadian province in 2006, an average of 78.3 percent of Alberta's top corporate CEOs and members of the Legislative Assembly had participated in interschool sports. Nearly 80 percent indicated that being involved in school sports significantly, extensively or moderately complemented their career development and/or academic pursuits. This same study pointed out that a normal participation rate for students in high school sports is around 30 to 35 percent.
- The corporate and political leaders surveyed in Alberta (see above) cited the following benefits 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.



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

Examinations of various school districts' budget information across the country reveals that activity programs make up very small percentages of school budgets. In the 2007 school year, the city of Chicago's Public School Board of Education's overall budget was \$4.6 billion, and activity programs received only \$36.2 million. In the Charlotte-Mecklenburg area, activity programs received only \$4.7 million of the overall \$1.2 billion budget for 2008. Finally, in the Seattle Public School System, its Board of Education has a 2008 overall budget of \$339.7 million dollars, while setting aside \$3.2 million for activity programs. All of these examples are less than one percent. There is no better or more effective investment being made in America's education programs today.

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

- Researcher Richard Learner, writing in *Promoting Positive Youth Development through Community After-School Programs*, found that informal educational and developmentally supportive experiences offered to young people in the context of after-school or community-based programs are a potent source of resources – increasing the probability of positive development among youth.
- In 2003, the *Journal of Adolescent Research* reported that extracurricular activity participation is linked to lower rates of dropping out of school, greater civic involvement and higher levels of academic achievement. Moreover, research tracking participation from eighth through twelfth grades and examining outcomes in the postsecondary years concluded that consistent participation has positive effects.
- Extracurricular activities stand out from other aspects of adolescents' lives at school because, according to the Winter 2005 issue of the *Journal of Leisure Research*, they provide opportunities to develop initiative and allow youth to learn emotional competencies and develop new social skills.
- A study conducted by Boston University, and published in *Adolescence*, Winter 2001, reported on a survey of 1,115 Massachusetts high school students. Survey results indicated that athletes were significantly less likely to use cocaine and psychedelics, and less likely to smoke cigarettes.
- Researchers writing in 2004 in the *American Journal of Health Behavior* conducted an examination of cross-sectional data from a nationally representative sample of high school students enrolled in public high schools in the United States. They showed that students participating in organized sports were 25 percent less likely to be current cigarette smokers.
- Stephanie Gerstenblith and her fellow researchers, writing in the 2005 book, *Organized Activities as Developmental Contexts for Children and Adolescents*, state, "Just as schools with efficient procedures and structure have been found to have positive outcomes, our findings indicate that participants in after-school programs with these qualities experience reductions in rebellious behavior and increases in intentions not to use drugs."

## Cocurricular activities teach lessons that lead to better citizens.

- Nancy Darling, et al., writing in the 2005 *Journal of Leisure Research*, notes that extracurricular activities allow youth to form new connections with peers and acquire social capital. Activity programs are one of the few contexts, outside of the classroom, where adolescents regularly come in contact with adults to whom they are not related.
- Students who spend no time in extracurricular activities are 49 percent more likely to use drugs and 37 percent more likely to become teen parents than those who spend one to four hours per week in extracurricular activities (United States Department of Education. *No Child Left Behind: The facts about 21st Century Learning*. Washington, DC: 2002.)
- On June 23, 2000, then-President Bill Clinton issued an Executive Memorandum directing the Secretary of Health and Human Services and the Secretary of Education to work together to identify and report within 90 days on “strategies to promote better health for our nation’s youth through physical activity and fitness.” The resulting report entitled “Promoting Better Health for Young People Through Physical Activity and Sports” was released in November 2000 and stated that “enhancing efforts to promote participation in physical activity and sports among young people is a critical national priority.”
- In a recent report entitled “Sports Participation and Health-Related Behaviors Among U.S. Youth” published in the *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine* from September 2000, it was reported that “nationwide, 62.4 percent of high school students reported participating on one or more school and/or nonschool sports teams in the previous year. The major conclusion drawn from the analyses performed in this study is that, in the most populous demographic subgroups of U.S. high school students, sports participation is associated with multiple positive health behaviors. . . .sports programs may promote positive health behaviors and deter negative health behaviors by placing a premium on personal health and fitness as prerequisites to optimal sports performance.”
- In a study done by researchers at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, in 2001, “middle-school kids in inner-city neighborhoods who play organized team sports have a higher sense of self-worth and better social skills than their less athletic peers.” The Clark researchers noted that “kids living in poor urban neighborhoods have, on average, 40 hours of unstructured, unmonitored time each week. Organized team sports could be a positive alternative to drug use and other delinquent activities.” – “Batters More Likely ‘Up’”, Amanda Gardner, *HealthScoutNews*.



- Another study (2001) done by Gary Overton, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at East Carolina University, in collaboration with the North Carolina High School Athletic Association<sup>1</sup>, of the academic performance of high school student-athletes in North Carolina revealed significant differences between athletes and non-athletes. Some of the major findings in the study include:
  - o **Grade-point Average:** The mean GPA for athletes in the study was a 2.98, while the mean GPA for non-athletes was only 2.17.
  - o **Attendance:** The average number of absences was significantly lower for athletes than non-athletes. The mean average number of days missed by athletes was 6.3 days per 180-day school year, as compared to 11.9 days for non-athletes.
  - o **Discipline referrals:** The percentage of discipline referrals by the reporting schools was lower for the athlete group than the non-athlete group; referrals for athletes ran at a 33.3 percentage while the referral percentage for non-athletes was 41.8 percent.
  - o **Dropout rate:** There was a dramatic difference in the dropout rate; the mean dropout percentage for athletes was miniscule 0.6 percent, while the corresponding percentage for non-athletes was 10.32 percent.
  - o **Graduation rate:** The percentage of graduates was significantly higher for the athlete group than the non-athlete group; the mean graduation percentage for athletes was 99.4 percent as compared to 93.5 percent for non-athletes.



<sup>1</sup> North Carolina High School Athletic Association Bulletin, Vol. 54, No. 1, Fall 2001.