

THE CASE FOR HIGH SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

INTRODUCTION

The National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) and its membership believe that interscholastic sports and fine 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.

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.)
- 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.

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

- 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.

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.

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