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The Positive Effects of Extra Curricular Activities on Students

by Erin Massoni

(Education 1100)

Abstract

Extracurricular activities are found in all levels of our schools in many different forms. They can be sports, clubs, debate, drama, school publications, student council, and other social events. A student's future can be determined in the things that they do in the hours after school and before their parents get home. This paper describes the role of extracurricular activities and the positive effects that they can have on students of all kinds ranging from the above average student to the student that is on the brink of dropping out of school.

Keywords: afterschool activities, athletics, extracurricular activities, goals of education, school activities, school clubs, United States Department of Education (USDE), Grade Point Average (GPA)

The Positive Effects of Extracurricular Activities on Students

Extracurricular activities are activities that students participate in that do not fall into the realm of normal curriculum of schools. They are found in all levels of our schools. There are many forms of extracurricular activities such as sports, clubs, governance, student newspaper, music, art, and drama. Extracurricular activities are totally voluntary so students that do not want to participate in them do not have to. Lunenburg states in his article that "Extracurricular activities serve the same goals and functions as the required and elective courses in the curriculum. However, they provide experiences that are not included in formal courses of study. They allow students to apply the knowledge that they have learned in other classes and acquire concepts of democratic life."(2010, 2) Extracurricular activities have many positive effects on education. The positive effects that extracurricular activities have on students are behavior, better grades, school completion, positive aspects to become successful adults, and a social aspect.

Extracurricular activities began in the United States in the 19th century. At first they were just an additional part to the normal academic schedule for the year. Extracurricular activities usually had some practical or vocational interest that was included into the activities. The first extracurricular activities that were well known in schools started at Harvard and Yale University. They were literacy clubs that consisted of different debate clubs and Greek systems such as fraternities and sororities. Students in American schools were the first to initiate athletic clubs. (Casinger, J. 2011) These soon became popular and literacy clubs began to decline. Around the time of World War I, schools started adding clubs such as journalism, and newspaper. (Casinger, J. 2011) Now these clubs have become popular and many public high schools and grade schools have clubs for all interests. Today about 1 in 4 students participate in academic clubs. (Miller, Zittleman, 2010, 189) It costs about \$250 million to establish extracurricular activities in rural and inner city schools. (Girod et al., 2005, 64) The USDE funds school's extracurricular activities.

The first effect that extracurricular activities have on education is behavior. Students that participate in extracurricular activities have reduced behavior problems. In sports, they show discipline in drills, practices, and routines. They have a responsibility to perform those tasks correctly, whether it is basketball or football plays, dance routines, or signals in baseball. When students perform these things correctly they are rewarded for their good behavior and they take pride in their accomplishments. Because of the pride they achieve, they gain better self respect, self esteem, and self confidence. Education world states that "Participation in school activities, especially

athletics, leads to higher self esteem and enhanced status among peers, which some argue is deterrent to antisocial behavior.” (Brown, M.D., 2000) The most dangerous time for bad behavior is the time after school and before parents get home, which is usually the time between three o’clock and seven o’clock. (Holloway, J. H., 2002) This is the time when they are at the most risk at committing violent acts and victimization. The ages that usually are involved in poor behavior during this time are between twelve and seventeen years old. (Howie et al. 2010, 120) Between the ages of nine and seventeen are when kids learn to make their own decisions and control their behavior. This is a crucial time for students to be in extracurricular activities because they are under supervision, guidance, and they are in engaged and enriched learning experiences. They are then better able to resist unsafe behaviors such as drug and alcohol use, gang involvement, and criminal activities.

Higher grades and positive attitudes towards school is the second effect that extracurricular activities have on students. Self esteem can be a predictor of academic performance. Students that don’t like school won’t do as well as the students that do like school because they are not motivated to succeed. If students don’t like school, it is usually because they do not feel as though they are succeeding or that they can succeed. “Participation in an after school program that is designed to build self esteem, had positive effects on standards test scores in math and reading, while receiving extended time to complete homework did not have the same positive effects on self esteem or achievements”. (Cosden et al., 2004, 223) Participation in extracurricular activities provides students an opportunity to create a positive and voluntary connection to their school. In a study done by the USDE, “It was revealed that students who participate in extracurricular activities are three times more likely to have a grade point average of a 3.0 or higher. This is higher than students who did not participate in extracurricular activities. This is regardless of their previous background or achievement.” Students that participate in extracurricular activities also showed positive changes in students self confidence, teacher perception, and greater confidence, and then developed positive school related adult attachments. Extracurricular activities increases a students connection to school, raises their self esteem, and positive social natures. Below is a story from Cosden, Morrison, Gutierrez, and Brown about a girl who improved her grades because of her participation in extracurricular activities.

Stephanie was a 14-year-old eighth grader. Throughout her early school years, her teachers described her as a good student. During fourth grade, Stephanie’s parents separated and she witnessed a lot of conflict in the home. Stephanie’s grades began to slip and her teacher commented that Stephanie was preoccupied with the events occurring in her home life. In sixth grade her grades continued to plummet. In seventh grade, her brother suggested she become involved in sports. Stephanie enjoyed basketball, and she became the captain of the seventh-grade basketball team. At the same time her grades began to improve. When Stephanie was asked what made seventh grade different from sixth grade, she answered, “playing basketball and being the team captain.” She indicated that she plans to continue to play basketball because it has been a positive influence in her life and it gives her an outlet in which to channel some of the negative energy she was experiencing within her home life. As a result of her desire to engage in this sport, she made a conscious effort not to let her family life interfere with her schoolwork. (2004, 223)

The third effect that extracurricular activities have on students is school completion. The Average drop out rate in the United States is about 10%. (Casinger, 2011) Students who participate

in extracurricular activities are less likely to drop out and more likely to have higher academic achievement. Those students that are at risk of failure appear to benefit even more from participation in extracurricular activities than those who are normal achievers. This is especially important for students who belong to ethnic minorities, students with disabilities, and at risk of dropping out because students in some of these groups have almost a 40% drop out rate. (Casinger, 2011) Engagement in extracurricular activities is linked to decreasing rates of early drop out rates in both boys and girls. Sports are one of the biggest extracurricular activities to have effects on students. The athletic programs reduce the drop out rate by 40 %. (Holloway, J. H., 2002) There are also laws that are for kids in sports. One of the most known laws is the No Pass No Play act. Many states use this law. This law states that a student that is participating in sports has to have a certain grade point average and they can not flunk more than two classes or they won't be able to participate in the sport. This encourages many students to keep up on their grades, which prevents them from failing or dropping out. There are also laws that say that students cannot participate in sports if they break the law. These things include using drugs, drinking alcohol, and tobacco use.

The fifth way that extracurricular activities have effects on students is because they have positive aspects that students need to become productive students and adults. By participating in extracurricular activities students learn lessons in leadership, teamwork, organization, analytical thinking, problem solving, time management, learning to juggle many tasks at once and it allows them to discover their talents. When a student decides they want to join an extracurricular activity, they look for one that interests them and one that they like or enjoy. When students are in high school or college, this could be the thing that helps them find a career. By participating in extracurricular activities, they will find something they enjoy and see how they can use that as a career. Participating in certain extracurricular activities having to do with the field that the student is interested in could help them find a job. If someone is looking at a resume for a potential employee, and they see they have experience or interest in what they are looking for, they will be more likely to hire that person. These students will then have higher career aspirations. Certain extracurricular activities also look good on college applications. Colleges look to see if students participate in certain things before they are accepted. Participation in some of these activities could also help a student get a scholarship for college. When students participate in extracurricular activities, especially at a young age, it teaches them about long term commitments. If they want to participate in a certain activity, they sign up for a long time. Not just for a week or a few days. This is good for students to learn because school is a long term commitment, jobs, and other things that they will have to deal with as adults.

The final effect that extracurricular activities have on students is the social aspect. Students that are involved in extracurricular activities meet many new people. Each club or sport is different, so students meet different people in all different groups. By joining different ones they meet people with the same backgrounds they have and people they share interests with. Most times the people that students meet are students that they would never talk to or become friends with on a normal basis. In different extracurricular activities students learn about group work, and sometimes they end up having less conformity to gender stereotypes.

Extracurricular activities are a part of students every day life. They play important roles in student's lives. They have positive effects on student's lives by improving behavior, school performance, school completion, positive aspects to make successful adults, and social aspects. As teachers, we need to be aware of the effects that extracurricular activities have on education.

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