

In this issue...

Rather than isolating curriculum from the competing demands of students' lives, a variety of sources support the idea that educators should integrate the two by implementing and maintaining positive school activities as part of a rigorous and relevant educational experience.

The Essence of Integrating Student Activities With Classroom Curriculum

By Dr. Melissa Sohn

If one were to ask a high school graduate to recall his high school experience, he would most likely refer to positive memories which included some sort of school activity. Scholars of different theoretical arenas support the concept that school activities provide numerous benefits to student participants. Human capital theorists support the theory that student participants are "smarter, more capable, better able to handle the academic and social demands of formal education" while socialization theorists support the belief that student activities assist in "binding their hearts and minds to the academic enterprise" (Kaufman and Gabler 146). The educational system has encompassed school activities since the beginning of the 1900's. For over one hundred years, the educational system has supported some sort of school activity allowing the students to reap numerous benefits from participation.

The National Federation of State High School Associations reported in 2005–2006 that student participation increased for the 17th consecutive year (Personett 1). A survey conducted by NFHS to the 50 state high school athletic/activity association indicated that participation for 2005–2006 rose 141,195 students to a total participation of 7,159,904 student participants. A first-time record was set with the total number of female participants totaling 2,953,355 and the male participation rate of 4,206,549 was the second highest since the 1977–1978 school year (Personett 1). Data also indicates subpopulations participate at varied rates in school activities. For example, usually wealthier students have higher participation rates than low income students. Also participation rates are higher in smaller schools; white students have a higher participation rate (80%), than black students (74%), and than Hispanic students (63%) (Cadwallader, Wagner, and Garza 8). Interestingly enough the MCAS Student Questionnaire reported that within the Boston pub-

lic schools, "after school activities participation rate decreases as the grade level increases" (After School Activities Participation 1).

Time for Activities

Student activity programs are excellent resources for students. Student participants not only increase their chances of successfully graduating from high school, but also reduce their chance of participating in risky behaviors from 3:00 to 6:00 pm (After School Activities Participation 1 ; DeAngelis 1). Student participants make a conscience decision to spend their time in a productive manner. Only 44% of a high school student's day is spent in school. College students "spend 22–25 hours—approximately 20% of their waking hours—each week on curriculum related activities" (Wilhite and Banset 1). Therefore, the question arises to make one wonder what high school and college students do with the remaining time. School personnel need to realize that 80% of students' time is available for participation in student activities. "The co-curricular component of a complete education, which takes place in the 80% of a student's time spent outside of a classroom, is every bit as important to the process as is the formal curricular component" (Wilhite and Banset 1). Thus, it is imperative for school systems not to ignore the 80% of students' time and implement and maintain positive school activities.

In 1994 The Strong Foundations for General Education proposed 12 principles to assist educational institutions develop curriculum. Among the 12 principles are the following:

- #3 strong general educational programs continuously strive for educational coherence;
- # 4 strong general educational programs are self-consciously value-based and teach social responsibility;
- #5 strong general educational programs attend

Students who participate in student activities are 70% more likely to attend college than non-participants. ... The results of a study of 292 college students indicate that “participation in extra curricular activities improves both the academic and social development of students.”

carefully to student experience;

#11 strong general educational programs reach beyond the classroom to the broad range of student co-curricular experiences (Wilhite and Banset 1, AAC's Project 1).

Integrating Activities and Curriculum

Educational systems and educators must address the challenge of analyzing student activities in the broadest sense and to maximize curriculum for a meaningful relevance for student participants. Rather than isolating curriculum from the competing demands of students' lives, educators should integrate the two to develop a rigorous and relevant educational experience for students. Sadly, of most high school students who plan to pursue post secondary education, “few describe their high school program of study as college prep” (Wimberly and Noeth Section 3). Yet, “teachers indicate that motivating students to learn and to participate in learning activities may be the most difficult task” (Smittle 4). As a result, educators should attend to the everyday life experiences of students and integrate classroom curriculum with student activities to maximize learning opportunities. Through participation in student activities, students can experience concrete examples and apply them to real world situations that will help students realize how curriculum is pertinent to their future.

Students have much to gain from the integration of student activities and academic classroom curriculum. Educators can easily do this by taking the academic focus of the classroom into the community. Educators can develop small learning groups with cooperative learning methods. This technique will meet students' needs and help them to find new perspective in the classroom as well as the community, which is a vital aspect of their growth. Teaching moments will arise through student activities that may not arise otherwise in the classroom setting. Educators must ask, “what if we could tap into the unintentional learning that occurs outside the classroom and make students' co-curricular experiences intentionally meaningful in the larger context of their whole education?” (Wilhite and Banset 1).

Enhancing the curriculum with student activities can teach students “organization and time management skills, analytical skills and creative problem solving skills” as well as “character building” (Hol-

Irah 2). Many of these skills will be developed with student activity programs that introduce global perspectives, multiculturalism, and diversity. Students' experiences outside the classroom often lend to students taking greater responsibility for their own learning. “Extra curricular activities provide a channel for reinforcing the lessons learned in the classroom, offering students the opportunity to apply academic skills in a real-world context and thus considered part of a well rounded education” (O'Brien and Rollefson 1).

Activities and College Admission

Students who participate in student activities are 70% more likely to attend college than non-participants (Moore 1). Nearly all eighth grade students planned to attend postsecondary education or training, “over three quarters (77%) of students indicated that they planned to enter a four year college or university” (Wimberly and Noeth Section 3). “Unfortunately, a sizable proportion of students (22%) had yet to think about and explore the types of educational training, and work they might pursue after high school. These findings vary somewhat by grade level, as 24% of 8th and 9th graders and 19% of 10th graders had not yet started to explore their postsecondary options” (Wimberly and Noeth Section 3). Yet, a variety of factors, especially student activities, can assist students by engaging in post secondary education planning and goal setting. Again, educators can assist students by aligning students' curriculum and course offerings with student activities to focus on college education and career planning, which can develop talents and skills within specific career areas.

Once students decide to attend a post secondary institution, the question arises, “What role do extra-curricular and other non-academic enrichment activities play in the college admission process?” (Kaufman and Gabler 146). Mary Rombokas conducted a study asking 292 college students if there was a connection between involvement in activities and academic achievement. The results of the study indicated that “participation in extra curricular activities improves both the academic and social development of students” (Extra-Curricular Activities 2). The fact of the matter is that colleges do pay attention to student participation in activities. Participation in student activities can reveal if a student has made a meaningful contribution, a student's non-academic interests, a student's ability to make a

long term commitment, a student's ability to manage time and make priorities" (Extracurricular Activities: Life Outside the Classroom 1). Nanci Tessier, a college admissions director explains, "We're looking for a commitment to and a passion for an activity outside of the academic setting—we're looking for depth rather than breadth" (Extracurricular Activities: Life Outside the Classroom 1).

College admission can be a difficult challenge, however; universities analyze not only grade point averages and test scores but also leadership abilities and student activity participation. Colleges acknowledge that participation in student activities is significantly related to college attendance. Studies also "indicate that success in the first year of college depends on how effectively students connect to the institution—both academically and socially" (Wilhite and Banset 2). Cross reports that students who drop out of college are not connected to the people on campus or events of the college (Smittle 5). Students who have experienced a rigorous and relevant curriculum integrated with student activities in high school will contribute to a university's campus. Student participants are able to engage in a challenging curriculum. "Two thirds of students who participate in school activities complete at least a bachelor's degree while about half of nonparticipants do so" (O'Brien and Rollefson 1).

Research indicates student activity participants attend college at higher rates than nonparticipants. Therefore, college graduates increase their potential lifelong earnings. The changing global community

has forced earning gaps between college and high school graduates. In 1980 college graduates earned only 19% more than a high school graduate. However, the workforce and skill set needed to compete in the job market has college graduates earning 58% more than a high school graduate in 1999 (US Department of Education, 2003).

District Support Needed

Educators spend their entire career striving to teach excellence. With the integration of classroom curriculum and school activities, that excellence can be achieved. Yet, unfortunately, financial support for student activities is steadily declining as participation rates steadily incline. Because school administrators are given meager budgets, and they want to spend money efficiently, student activities are usually sacrificed. Often it is easier to look at cost-cutting factors than curricular reform for enhancement of student learning.

Garrett County Board of Education in Oakland, Maryland is focusing on student learning by integrating the curriculum with student activities.

"Curricular, co-curricular, extra-curricular activities are integral parts of the total educational program. In analyzing the value of such experiences, it is most important to justify them in terms of their contribution to the overall objective of education. The primary purpose of attending school is to acquire knowledge in the basic subjects of the curricula. The curricula in elementary, middle, high school include all the formal and informal learning experiences provided through the program of studies. These learning experiences make it possible to strengthen all aspects of a student's development" (Garrett County Board of Education: Oakland, Maryland).

Educators must vehemently believe that everything they do either supports or opposes the process of learning and students' educational experience. Thus, it is imperative to create a rigorous and relevant learning journey for students that includes challenging classroom curriculum as well as meaningful student activity programs.

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