



# 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 life-long 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.

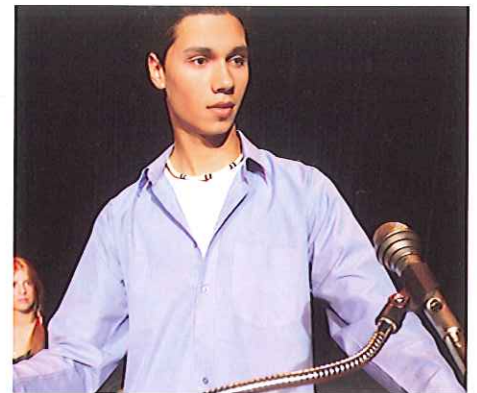
At a cost of only one to three percent (or less in many cases) of a school's overall budget, high school activity programs are one of the best bargains around. It is in these vital programs – sports, music, speech, theatre, debate – where young people learn lifelong lessons that complement the academic lessons taught in the classroom.

To review the complete report, you can download it from the NFHS Web site, [www.nfhs.org](http://www.nfhs.org).



## 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.

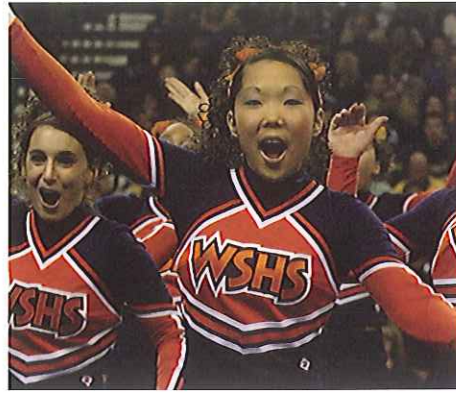
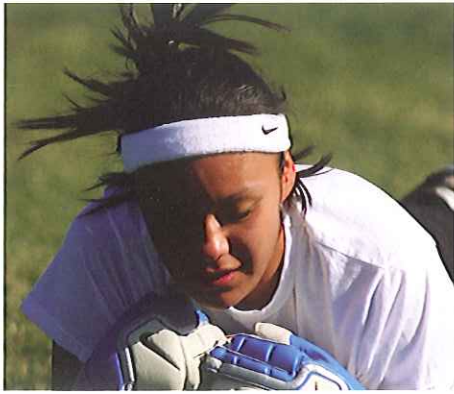
Following are some of those benefits, with case studies, where applicable, listed to document the benefits. While many of the studies refer to "extracurricular activities," the NFHS prefers the use of the term "cocurricular activities," believing that activities support the academic mission of schools and are inherently educational.

## Participation in high school activities is a valuable part of the overall high school experience.

- 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.

## 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.)



## 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).

## 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, 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.

## 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.)



## About the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS)

The NFHS, based in Indianapolis, Indiana, is the national leadership organization for high school sports and fine arts. Since 1920, the NFHS has led the development of education-based interscholastic sports and fine arts activities that help students succeed in their lives. The NFHS sets direction for the future by building awareness and support, improving the participation experience, establishing consistent standards and rules for competition, and helping those who oversee high school sports and activities. The NFHS writes playing rules for 17 sports for boys and girls at the high school level. Through its 50 member state associations and the District of Columbia, the NFHS reaches more than 19,000 high schools and 11 million participants in high school activity programs, including more than 7½ million in high school sports. As the recognized national authority on interscholastic activity programs, the NFHS conducts national meetings; sanctions interstate events; produces publications for high school coaches, officials and athletic directors; sponsors professional organizations for high school coaches, officials, spirit coaches, speech and debate coaches and music adjudicators; serves as the national source for interscholastic coach training; and serves as a national information resource of interscholastic athletics and activities. For more information, visit the NFHS Web site at [www.nfhs.org](http://www.nfhs.org).

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