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INVOLVEMENT IN EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AND OVERALL HIGH
SCHOOL EXPERIENCE: ACADEMICS, SCHOOL BELONGING, AND
CAREER/COLLEGE READINESS

by

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Education

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St. Paul, MN

August 2018

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The purpose of this paper to find out if there is a connection between extra-curricular (EC) activities and high school belonging, academics, and college/career readiness that makes school a more positive experience overall. There is a growing number of students who are doing online learning or alternative learning in other high schools that has changed the school climate and numbers affecting graduation rates at public schools (Clarke, 2008). What is the underlying reason for students to opt out of using traditional learning methods and is there connection with EC activities and academics that can affect their school belonging? My research question is “What is the connection between participation in EC activities and academics, school belonging and college/career readiness?” By researching this, educators can get a sense of what we can do to help students achieve their goals whether they are academic or social goals in our public schools.

Personal Connection

I believe because of my involvement in EC activities since kindergarten (wrestling, football, baseball), I have been motivated in my academic and career success as an adult. While being a high school three-sport athlete and having a part-time job on the weekend, I was able to carry a GPA higher than 3.00 and remained in the top 25% of my class. I feel the activities outside of the classroom helped steer me toward a goal-oriented life. I carried that work ethic into my undergraduate experience where I competed in two sports at the collegiate level, maintained a part-time job, and was able to

keep my GPA well above the minimum for an Education major.

Overall, I feel like EC activities, in particular athletics, has helped keep me on track to graduate. Being involved in athletics has also helped open doors in my profession as a teacher, and has given me the decision-making skills necessary to make choices to work with my spouse to do what is best for our children. In my undergraduate studies, maintaining grades was important for me. A high GPA meant I was able to participate in wrestling and track. When applying for teaching jobs, the question arose numerous times of, “Can you coach? If so, what do you coach?” Being in athletics requires tough decisions in terms of how to manage time, how to manage money, and doing what is best for the family. Decision-making skills have now filtered into my home life and they help lead my family in a positive direction.

As a student. As a six-year old, I started wrestling two nights a week with tournaments each Saturday. Wrestling was something that I truly enjoyed. My early elementary years are also some of my best school memories. I developed a family type relationship with the people that were on the wrestling team. I felt that they would help me with any problems and they would be there for me my whole life.

As I got older, I joined more sports. I was interested in sports I saw on television or games I would play on the playground with friends including baseball, football, basketball, etc. Without knowing, athletics became a normal part of life for me. It seemed that sport activities would be the center of how I would spend my time. Things were scheduled around what activity I was involved with at the time. These activities also gave me a sense of belonging beyond the classroom. The people that were involved in the

same activities would become friends. They were the people that I would have the most in common with and therefore would be the people I would spend a lot of time with outside of school.

Through sports and other non-athletic activities including Operation Aware and Youth Group, I gained knowledge of teamwork and responsibility. People relied on me to do a job. If the job was not completed, the team failed. This was an added stress; I needed to make sure I did my job so the team would be successful. The team failing because of my minimum effort was not an option for me. I would work hard, listen in practice, and study my sport so that I would be able to do my part to the very best of my ability. This mentality carried over to the classroom. I wanted to make sure there was no reason to let myself do poorly. I would pay attention in class and study outside the classroom to make sure I did well. I would never skip an assignment or turn one in late. I felt I would be letting the teacher down and this betrayed all I knew about working with a team. I think this was learned by seeing the effects caused by missing a practice. This would result in a poor performance in a game or an event. Missing an assignment or being late in the classroom would result in a poor grade on a test or in the course.

High school athletics and high school classes became more demanding than those of my earlier years of schooling did. I could have easily dropped some of my activities and focused on the schoolwork. I do not think the idea of quitting came into my head though. This was because I did well in athletics and I did not want to let my teammates, parents, or coaches down; it had become a priority in my life. My work ethic and attitude became how people would identify me and I loved that! It felt great to have recognition

after striving for the best I could in academics and athletics. This mentality was a reason that I continued my education and my athletic career into college.

As a teacher and coach. The school I taught and coached for the first years of my career gave out an award for students who were out for at least three activities outside of school. Out of 300 students, ten students received the award. These students, in my eyes, were probably the best students to work with in the classroom and on the field, court, or mat wherever they competed. In addition to participating in at least three EC activities, these students also had at least a 3.00 GPA or higher. They were students who were willing to help other students during school. These students received this award because they were hard workers and they excelled in three sports or activities; something that was not being done by all of the student body.

I believe students who only participate in one activity fared well in school also. As a teacher, I could tell they were active in their activity/sport as it spilled over into the classroom. Their attendance was better, attitudes towards school were more positive, and they generally performed well in their academics. When these students were not in their activities, however, I found that students were not as engaged and on-task with school. These students' goals and behaviors shifted from staying on top of their schoolwork to procrastination, which often leads to late schoolwork.

In my experience, the students who do not have outside activities other than school generally do not perform well academically compared to those who participate in school activities. From experience in the classroom, these students lack a connection, a sense of belonging to school, in general. In my opinion, when students do not feel they

belong, they often do not care for school and, in turn, schoolwork suffers. The idea that no one does care, either way, if an assignment is completed or not could result in lack of commitment. In my experience, this also can roll into adult life, where community and jobs are affected if there is no sense of commitment to any aspect of their life.

Activities, whether they are athletic or not, give students structure in their lives. They can see firsthand what happens as a result of hard work. The obvious reward for hard work in the classroom is a better grade. However, what does a grade mean in the aspect of the world? A grade only reflects how someone did on any one topic in the classroom. It does not have the lasting effect as would say a state championship may have on someone. In my experience, I have heard many people talk about their athletic experiences at length many years after they had occurred, whereas, I have heard few people talk about a grade they earned on a math test longer than maybe a week or two later. By combining sports and other activities outside of school, students may become better-rounded, successful individuals later in life. The key is to find what the best balance is for that student whether it is just athletics, just fine arts, or a combination of both EC activities.

Summary

Without athletic, I may have had a difficult time in school, because it helped me remain focused on goals, gave me a sense of belonging, and provided structure. Sports served me a venue to release energy and gain purpose in life. Sports gave me discipline and drive for goals that I created to attain. Focus on goals in athletics is a standard for success and it correlates back into the classroom. Overall, I believe the goal setting skills

provided in sports can and do set a foundation for success in school and life. In this research, I am hoping to uncover how EC activities can enhance the overall high school experience and develop a sound base for college/career readiness.

In Chapter 2, focus will be on researched based on how Every Student Succeeds Act influences developing well-rounded students, how participation in EC activities can create a sense of belonging, positively effect on academic success, and increase probability of a successful college and/or career readiness. Chapter 3 outlines the methods used to research students on academics, sense of belonging, career readiness and/or sense of belonging. Using qualitative and quantitative analysis, this will determine the positive effects of EC activities for high school students. Chapter 4 will outline results of the research using statistical methods of trends and qualitative analysis from student interviews. Finally, Chapter 5 will summarize the data to support that EC activities increase the sense of belonging, academic success, and promote career/college readiness.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Chapter two of this capstone focuses on the literature surrounding extracurricular (EC) activities, academics, school belonging, and career/college readiness. This chapter will also focus on the Every Child Succeeds Act, which outlines how schools need to prepare high school graduates for career or college paths. Themes include introduction with the importance of EC activities, participation in EC activities, history of EC activities, benefits of EC activities with regard to mental health, physical health, and academic achievement.

Introduction of Literature

In the United States, there is an increasing trend in education for students to be more involved in school either by joining athletic teams or EC activities. According to research done by Agus Prianto, “The Parents’ and Teachers’ Supports Role on Students’ Involvement in Scouting Program and Entrepreneurial Values” graduates who were actively involved in EC activities are likely to be major public figures in various social organizations, economics, and politics (Prianto, 2016). Prianto (2016) also stated that “Sporting events, musical accomplishments, and academic success, proved a significant demonstration of a ‘well-rounded’ student” (p. 198).

Ebie (2005) found that student involvement in sports and music appeal equally predictive of encouraging quality behaviors with respect to expectations to earn a four-year degree or higher; go directly to college; highest test quartiles; never cutting

class; and viewing grades as important. In addition, sports and other EC activities can act as a foundation for the dominant cultural values and bodily expectations of the United States economy. Students who participated in high school activities show discipline and hard work when they enter the marketplace to work (Ebie, 2005, p. 3). To further this analysis, Blomfield and Barber (2010) found that participating in activities has been linked to greater school attachment and sense of belonging, better academic achievement, higher academic aspirations, and less risky behaviors such as alcohol and drug use or dropping out of school. (p. 114). There has been a direct positive link between activity participation and educational outcomes that endure throughout much of young adulthood, present even 8 years after high school ends (Blomfield & Barber, 2010, p. 115).

“Schools of the past”, according to Meier and Wood (2004), were concerned that smaller schools would lead to prejudices, racial bias, and narrow-mindedness. However, they also felt that larger consolidated districts would be able to provide a wider array of options for students. One of the downfalls of school consolidation is how students no longer value community and something needed to take that role of citizenship. In the larger schools, students began to recreate their own small schools made up their like-minded and look alike peers. For example, students created peer groups through EC activities they were involved in with each other. This is where many of the EC activities began to explode into the schools, because students were no longer able to have an identity for community anymore; students relied on EC activities make and create friend groups (Meier & Wood, 2004). Although EC activities play a major role in the advancement of well-rounded students, Congress has created an education plan that relies

solely on academic achievement.

Every Student Succeeds Act

Every Student Succeeds Act or ESSA was established in 2015, to be in full effect for the school year 2017-2018. According to the website Ed Week in their research regarding this act,

There are four indicators for school accountability systems. First indicator is state test proficiency, governed locally by individual states. Second is English Language proficiency, regulated again at each state level. Third, growth on state test and/or graduation rates in relation to state and national level. Finally, is a state-chosen measure of accountability, which could be any of the following: student engagement or educator engagement, advanced coursework, post-secondary readiness, or school climate/safety. Schools who receive funding of \$30,000 or more need to allocate 20% of funding towards a program developing well-rounded students. (2016, March 31)

Through this idea of making a well-rounded student, government funding is encouraging involvement in EC activities. This tells us that having accountability through test proficiency, graduation rates, student engagement, school climate and post-secondary coursework, students are given a better opportunity to being well-rounded as adults.

Participation in EC Activities

Many students participate in EC activities including arts and athletics. For instance, in 2003, according to Rees and Sabia (2010), 57.6% of 9th through 12th graders reported playing at least one team sport. In researching Title IX and the evolution of

sports in school, Stevenson (2007) found there are over seven million participants in high school activities each year. According to Stokvis' (2009) research on the social functions of high school athletes in the United States, the origins of EC activities date back to the end of the nineteenth century and turn of the twentieth century. Stokvis (2009) found in his research that school activities are the most important functions for the survival of schools. Stokvis (2009) further argued that students who do not feel a part of the school atmosphere could become part of the school by representing them in an activity. Stokvis (2009) also found that athletics and other EC activities were powerful weapons used to motivate students to have a continued interest in their community. Stokvis (2009) also argued that school activities were created in order to help communities acquire prestige in a larger region.

The highpoint of the creation of EC activities can date into the 1960's. EC activities in schools received more funding to create a community effect in schools (Stokvis, 2009). From 1970 to 1999, EC activities participation for females has grown from below 10% to nearly 40% of active participants, according to Stevenson (2007). Male participation had cycled around 50% during this same time span. Male sport participation has grown in following sports since 1971: football, baseball, cross country, lacrosse, and track (Stevenson, 2007). In 2005-2006, 53.5% students participated in school athletics. Of those students, over three million were female high school athletes compared with four million male athletes (Stevenson, 2007).

A longitudinal survey from the National Educational Longitudinal Survey revealed that 51% of girls and 67% of boys participated in sports during 10th through 12th

grades of school (as cited in Stevenson, 2007). Stevenson (2007) also found that athletic participation falls with school size for both boys and girls, but a greater extent for boys. In addition, states where more parents own their own home and those where women were likely to be in the labor force proved to have higher athletic participation rates for boys and girls (Stevenson, 2007).

According to the 2015-2016 Minnesota State High School League Annual Report there were 316,718 participants in athletic and fine arts activities (p. 3). The most popular activities were choir (32,516), band (31,254), and football (25,650). The most popular sports activities for boys were football (25,650), track and field (16,896), and basketball (13,542). The most popular sports activities for girls were volleyball (16,222), track and field (15,842), and softball (13,209).

Student participation in both sports and fine arts overlap during the year as the activities are offered at the same time. These numbers suggest many students are making the commitment to their respective schools. There are a number of students working towards the idea of a well-rounded student.

In Finland, they have an integrated school day with EC activities and the duration shows a benefit for school success in decreasing unsupervised time and increased positive growth development (Fischer, Radisch & Schupbach, 2014, p. 7). The positive youth development approach suggests that EC activities stimulate the development of intellectual, psychological, and social skills because they offer opportunities to belong to a group and the presence of an autonomy-supporting adult guidance and promoting feelings of physical and psychological safety. All-day schools in Germany influence the

needs for autonomy, competence, and social relatedness in EC activities as conditions for beneficial effects on school attachment and achievement. Also, in England, a school day traditionally includes the early afternoon participation in EC activities and this “extended services” government aid for the poor (Fischer, Radisch & Schupbach, 2014, pp. 5-9). Compared to Korea, the United States spends double the amount of time playing sports, with approximately 100 minutes a day to 40 minutes a day. Won and Han (2010) of the University of Missouri explored out of school activities among middle school students in the United States and Korea and found the association between playing sports and achievement is positive in the United States.

Overall, across three countries evaluated, all students benefited from EC activities. They showed increase in autonomy, psychological, and social skills with a stronger sense of belonging to their schools.

Benefits of EC Activities

Literature in terms of the benefits of EC activities is vast in the United States. Researchers have been discussing the benefits to EC activities and have found numerous benefits of students being involved in EC activities. Those benefits include physical activity, developing a healthy body, mind, and attitude. Physical activity is known to improve the working cardiovascular system. Another set of benefits would be developing a good emotional mindset with finding self. EC activities allow students to explore their talents either on the court or in the auditorium. EC activities have been linked to a higher grade point average. Structured EC activities also lessen the amount of leisure time that may be used for other non-beneficial activities.

Physical activity. Fox, Barr-Anderson, Neumark-Sztainer, and Wall (2010) conducted research on the physical activity and sports team participation regarding academic outcomes for students in high school. The researchers gathered previous studies and found that higher physical activity levels are associated with greater academic achievement (Fox, Barr-Anderson, Neumark-Sztainer, & Wall, 2010). Results revealed positive associations with academic outcomes and physical activity (Fox, Barr-Anderson, Neumark-Sztainer, & Wall, 2010).

Chomitz, Slining, McGowan, Mitchell, Dawson, and Hacker (2009) conducted research on the relationship between physical fitness and academic achievement. The outcome showed that the odds of passing both the MCAs (Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System) in mathematics and English increased as the number of fitness tests passed increased (Chomitz et al., 2009). The research also presented information that physical fitness and physical activity reveal positive effects on cognition and concentration (Chomitz et al., 2009). Also according to Iri, Ibis, and Aktug (2017) in their research with regards to physical academics and academic success, physical activity causes a rise in the level of neurotrophines, an expansion in neurons, an increase in blood tissue and development of neuron links. Such physiological changes occurring in the brain affect concentration, data processing and memory strategies, and coping strategies, thus improving academic success (Iri, Ibis, & Aktug, 2017, p. 122).

Hall, Poston, and Harris (2015) in their research regarding executive functions and the brain, found that physical activity is linked towards executive function, which are the brain's management skills, impulse inhibition, the ability to plan and organize tasks,

and the ability to transition from one task to another (p. 55). Executive functions are linked to many aspects of learning including language comprehension, reading, and writing (Hall, Poston, & Harris, 2015, p. 55).

The ability of physical activity to increase blood flow neurologically helps for concentration and cognitive develop. Memory and coping strategies are strongly developed during physical activity. Executive function abilities are enhanced through the process of physical activity.

Mental and emotional activity. Research has pinpointed activities for physical well-beings of students involved in EC Activities, but information regarding mental and emotional activity are important as well.

Researchers Ekeland, Hagen, and Nordheim (2004) conducted research regarding exercise and improving self-esteem in children and young people. The research found that physical activity involved in EC activities related to higher levels of self-esteem and lower levels of anxiety and stress each of which have been associated with enhanced academic performance (Ekeland, Hagen, & Nordheim, 2004).

Ebie (2005) suggested that participants in high school choral experienced many intrinsic and extrinsic rewards and that the educational experience becomes more meaningful as a result. Students who participate in EC activities develop a sense of community and culture among one another and within the schools (Ebie, 2005). With the development of community Ebie (2005) linked lower dropout rates, better attendance, and for a predictor of success in college and later in life.

Through EC activities individuals develop and sense of belonging to each other

and to their schools. This development of belonging aids an emotional sense of feeling wanted and liked within their respective groups. This type of feeling allows students to succeed in the classroom and in life challenges.

Grade point average and graduation. Fox, Bahr-Anderson, Neumark-Sztainer, and Wall (2010) also found the mean grade point average (GPA) for middle school boys who participated on sports teams earned higher GPAs than those who did not participate on sports team. The researchers also found a positive relationship that existed between the number of sports teams in which high school students participated and their GPA. High schools boys, for example, who participated in 0, 1, 2, and 3 or more sports teams had respective GPA means of 2.5, 2.69, 2.79, and 2.94. High schools girls in this sample also showed the same trend in terms of the more sports or activities they were involved in, the higher their mean GPA was overall (Fox, Bahr-Anderson, Neumark-Sztainer, & Wall, 2010).

Rees and Sabia (2007) researched sports participation and academic performance. They found that playing an active sport one or two times per week increased their math and reading GPAs by .109. When students participated in activities three to four times a week, it increased the GPAs by .151. Finally, when students participated in activities at least five times or more, their GPAs increased by .187 (Rees & Sabia, 2007).

Researchers argue that involvement in EC activities may support students who are at-risk of not graduating. According to John Holloway, in his article regarding EC activities, maintain, enhance and strengthen the student-school connection. Also concluding that students who participate in athletics, fine-arts, academics, and other

organizations are an estimated 1.34 times more likely to stay in school as opposed to drop out. Athletic participation reduced the probability by almost 49% (Holloway, 2000).

The involvement with EC activities and increase of GPA is a significant advantage for students. The reflection of higher GPA and participation shows that individuals development skills that aid in the learning process. This also suggest the relative importance between higher achieving and involvement in EC activities in regards to graduation rates. Students who are involved in EC activities have a drive for success and have an increased possibility towards graduation.

Long-term effects and development of self. Researchers Fredricks and Eccles (2002) gathered information on EC participation and its long-term effects on students. In their previous research on promoting youth development, the research concluded that participation in high-quality EC activities, such as sports and school clubs, is a productive use of adolescents' leisure time and can provide distinct opportunities for growth and development. The researchers also found that participation in a range of activities predicted favorable academic adjustment, heightened psychosocial competencies, and more favorable peer context (Fredricks & Eccles, 2006). Fredricks and Eccles (2006) noted that participating in a variety of structured activity provided adolescents with opportunities to develop a range of competencies and interests while giving them exposure to different experiences and people. Eischens et al. (2004) concluded EC activities provide a way for youths to improve their social skills and enhance their sense of self, ultimately increasing their self-efficacy in avoiding substance abuse.

Barron, Ewing, and Waddell (2000) conducted research on the effects of high

school athletic participation on education and the labor market. The research revealed that male students involved in EC activities furthered their education at a higher rate compared to students who were not involved in EC activities (Barron, Ewing, & Waddell, 2000).

EC activities help students develop a niche to which students then work at for self fulfillment. The individuals in their environments then are influential in many of their decisions and life paths. Those people that are doing good things and trying to better themselves will influence the people around them.

Leisure time. Benefits of EC activities also bridge into what adolescents are doing in their leisure time. Fredricks and Eccles (2006) found that marijuana in the 11th grade between males and females decreased in correlation to the number of activities they were involved in. Hofferth and Sandberg (2001) in research on how American children spend their time, found the association between playing sports and achievement is positive in the US, which is consistent in the literature (Hofferth & Sandberg, 2001). In comparison to these findings, Won and Han (2010) found that in the United States, those considered high achievers and played an active role in their schools used their time constructively through use of self and time management compared to those who do not participate in activities outside of school.

Blomfield and Barber (2010) suggested that better peer relationships and emotional adjustments at school, while unstructured time is associated with poorer emotional adjustment and work habits. During the unstructured or unsupervised discretionary time the influences of the social environment is a risk factor for substance

abuse among adolescents (Eischens et al., 2004). On the other side higher test scores and school grades are associated with less time watching television and more EC activities (Blomfield and Barber, 2010).

Many things can happen during leisure time but when it can be regulated and structured it can be beneficial to the learning process. The setting for leisure time can also influence good or bad interactions. Leisure time is a time to unwind and develop meaningful insight.

School Belonging

Belonging is a major factor that contributes positively to an individual's psychological development (Amand, Girard, & Smith, 2017, p. 108). Eccles and Roser (2009) concluded school belonging had a positive effect on academic achievement and school engagement. Kestenberg and Kestenberg (1988, p. 536) define school belonging as “ Belonging encompasses many spheres of interest. It is a component of identity and object of relationships. It manifests itself familiar space and objects to whom the space belongs.” Amand, Girard, and Smith (2017, p. 109) determined four attributes of school belonging as such:

1. Positive emotions from the group.
2. Positive relations with his or her peers and teachers.
3. Demonstrate energy and willingness to get involved in a meaningful manner.
4. Harmonization within the group.

Zaff, et al. (2003) suggested that there is a direct link between sense of belonging

to school and student engagement in school activities. In addition to this, in other studies the direct link between sense of belonging to school and school attendance, prep for school, fulfilling tasks and homework, and active participation at social and sports activities as revealed (Vural et al., 2013, p. 217). Suggesting that EC activities were in effect influencing a sense of belonging to the school.

College and Career Readiness

Higher educational and occupational aspirations are associated with participation with EC activities, both during school and two years after (Marsh, 1992). There has been a direct positive link between activity participation and educational outcomes that endure throughout much of young adulthood, present even 8 years after high school ends (Blomfield & Barber, 2010, p. 115). In 2001, Clotfeder discovered that alumni donor characteristics in regards to level of contribution was associated with having participated in EC activities.

Business students who participated in EC activities demonstrated higher interpersonal competency skills (Bartkus et al., 2012, p. 693). Business student participation in EC activities was viewed as an effective way to instill leadership and interpersonal skills (Barking et al., 2012, p. 693).

There are many positives to EC activities and the relationships to a school setting. There are also some aspects of EC activities that can draw some negative interactions. The next section will discuss some of those interactions.

Drawbacks Included in EC Activities and Students

Although various research has suggested that students fare better in terms of

GPA, achievement, and leisure time, there is research-supporting drawbacks that are involved with students who use their time focusing on EC activities. Time commitment, stress and activity, development of self, and drug and alcohol abuse are major considerations when considering EC activities.

Time commitment. Clark (2008) conducted research on EC pursuits for girls and school choice. In the research, Clark (2008) found that several students were concerned about over-exertion since they had activities always planned. Research also found that time commitment for both students and parents are more likely to be available only for middle-class parents with the knowledge and resources required to ferry their children from EC lesson-to-lesson (Clark, 2008).

Stress and anxiety. Research completed by Fredricks and Eccles (2006) found participation in highly competitive EC activities can increase stress and anxiety. Research also concluded by Mahoney and Stattin (2000) found that less-structured leisure settings, where there is a greater likelihood that adolescents will be recruited into a risky peer group. The research further outlined that students in unstructured activities led to increased problem behavior (Mahoney & Stattin, 2000).

Development of self. Cassel, Chow, Demoulin, and Reiger (2000) conducted research on the involvement of students in EC activities. The researchers discovered that students considered to be the “role models” of high school who became heavily involved in EC activities are creating an uncomfortable environment for those students who are not as involved in school (Fredricks & Eccles, 2006)

Overall, EC activities can lead to good interactions with others in their

environments, but there is also the possibility of getting into bad relationships. Students have the will to make decisions for themselves, but in some instances younger students are put into situations with older students that can influence them negatively. When students are put into high stress environments some of them will not make the right decisions.

CHAPTER THREE

Research Methodology

The purpose of this paper was to find out if there is a connection between extra-curricular (EC) activities and high school belonging, academics, and college/career readiness that makes school a more positive experience overall. Academic success was measured using grade point average (GPA) for the student body within the study. How do EC activities either foster or degrade a sense of belonging to the school?

This chapter describes the methodology and procedures used to conduct the study. My research paradigm was mixed-methods (Creswell, 2014), using both numerical and subjective evidence. Creswell stated on page 14-15, “As a method it focuses on collecting, analyzing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or series of studies. Its central premise is that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches, in combination, provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone.” It will address the following topics: (a) setting, (b) participants, (c) review of the data collection techniques used to answer the research questions, (d) methods, (e) research tools, and (f) data analysis methods. To address this research, understanding the setting will be addressed first.

Data Collection

Setting. The population for this study consisted of one rural high school located in southeastern Minnesota during the 2017-2018 school year. There are approximately 230 students in the high school grades 9-12.

Participants. The high school student population is 90.8% White, 3.9% Latino,

1.5 % Black/African American, 1% Asian/Indian American, and 1.9% of 2 or more races, according to the Minnesota Department of Education (2018).

Review of data collection techniques. Students in high school involved in EC activities (sports and other activities) and those not involved in EC activities took part in these interviews. All students in grades 9-12 had an opportunity to answer. Those who chose no EC activities were not able to submit answers. Of the student population, 85 students chose to participate in the survey. Those students chosen to be interviewed were in grades twelve for qualitative analysis, given questions that were open-ended. By having both methods of instrumentation, this provided more information for analysis.

Instrumentation. Both quantitative and qualitative methodologies were used to determine the effectiveness of activity involvement. Mills (2007) suggested during interviews to use open-ended and closed questions. This allowed for questions to be answered with accurate detail and also allowed for individuals to add extra input. The quantitative analysis was the percentages used in the student survey based on likert-survey questions along with grade point average analysis of the questions posed to see what populations would say independently. The qualitative analysis was provided through the students surveyed chosen by the interviewee. Responses were gathered, and analyzed to determine if there were any similarities and differences in the answers provided by the students (see Appendix A).

Data Collection Procedures

In order to fulfill the research, I need reported my intent to Hamline University for approval in the form of an IRB report. I then mailed a letter asking the high school to

participate in the action research project. Once approved, by the participating school, a permission slip was given to students to bring home to parents/guardians to ask students to be involved in the study. The letter from me explained the format of the study and the reason for their participation in the study.

Likert surveys. Students were sent an email requesting them to participate in an online survey (see Appendix A) involving extra curricular activities. There was a total of 85 students who submitted data which was used in the research. Some data was not used because of either being a non-student or they answered not involved in EC activities. Some staff received an email and they submitted data. Those that entered not involved were automatically ended.

Grade Point Average (GPA). I obtained academic records from the participating school for the 2017-2018 school years. The GPA was analyzed based on male and female gender, grade level comparison, and overall student surveyed GPA for students involved in EC activities compared to those who did not complete the survey. Because of the likert scale questions, analysis in comparison of how students responded per question was analyzed based on what the student's overall GPA is for his/her high school career.

Interviews. Students in grade 12 who took the survey were chosen to take the interview, there was a total of 4 students (2 male, 2 female). They were asked a series of questions both convergent and divergent, which have been prepared (see Appendix A) to ensure consistency. Interviews took place in my classroom, this allowed the participant to feel comfortable to answer questions with confidence and accuracy. Each interview was a one on one set up with myself asking the questions and each interviewee answering

questions. Each question was analyzed and documented in Chapter 4.

Summary

In conclusion, the methodology of this study involves determining the students' involvement in EC activities, if those students feel a sense of belonging, and if those students' activities have a relationship to academic success and confidence for their next step in life. The quantitative (GPA and survey) and qualitative (interviews) methods used determined the influence of EC activities on academics, college/career readiness, and school belonging. Chapter 4 will present a detailed description of the surveys with statistical analysis of the quantitative research to find a connection between extra-curricular (EC) activities and high school belonging, academics, and college/career readiness that makes school a more positive experience overall.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

The intent of this study was to examine the connection between extra-curricular (EC) activities with regards to academics, school belongingness, and college/career readiness. Participation in EC activities according to Fox, Barr-Anderson, Neumark-Sztainer, and Wall (2010) found that physical activity and sports team participation regarding academic outcomes for students in high school students show greater academic achievement (Fox, Barr-Anderson, Neumark-Sztainer, & Wall, 2010).

The study used an online survey administered to the student body consisting of 9th through 12th grade students. The survey was available for completion for a two-week period. Through the survey, students were selected to participate in an interview based on involvement in EC activities. If a student was not involved in any EC activities, he/she was not allowed to continue onto the survey. These students selected had an option during the survey to be interviewed. The questions from the survey were posed with a Likert Scale of 1 to 5 with 1 strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 neutral, 4 agree, and 5 strongly agree. The questions read, "Extra curricular activities..." with the following at the end of each question: has increased my sense of school belonging, increased my connection with peers, increased my connection with my school, increased my school spirit, increase my sense of college/career readiness for life after high school, has encouraged me do well academically, and has improved my time management skills. Eighty-five students in grades 9-12 who were involved in at least 1 EC activity completed the survey out of the total of 225 in the student body.

The first question regarding an increased sense of school belonging, the students answered with a mean of 3.62. Out of the 85 students responses 38% of them strongly agreed that being involved in EC activities increased their sense of belonging, 9% agreed, 35% answered neutrally, 13% disagreed, and 5% strongly disagreed (see Figure 1). As a whole, there are more students who answered either agree or strongly agree with a total of 47% of the students questioned that EC activities has helped increase their sense of school belonging according to the survey.

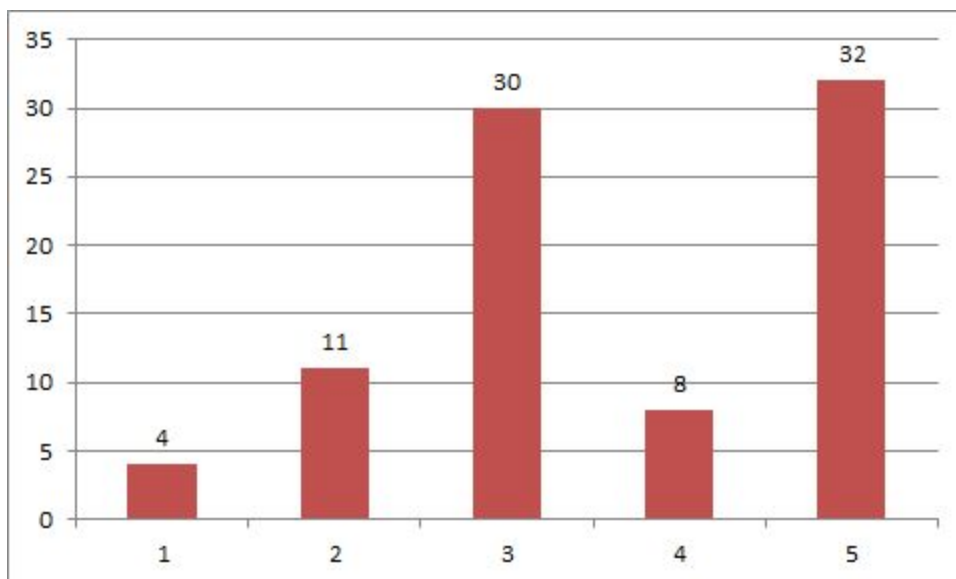


Figure 1. Responses pertaining to having an increased sense of school belonging for students in Grades 9-12. (key-1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree)

The second question stated, “Being involved in EC Activities has increased my connection with peers.” The results of the survey conclude a mean of 3.9. Out of the 85 responses, 53% strongly agreed, 9% agreed, 19% remained neutral, 12% disagreed, and 7% strongly disagreed. Overall, 62% of students either agreed or strongly agreed that they have developed relationships with peers through EC activities.

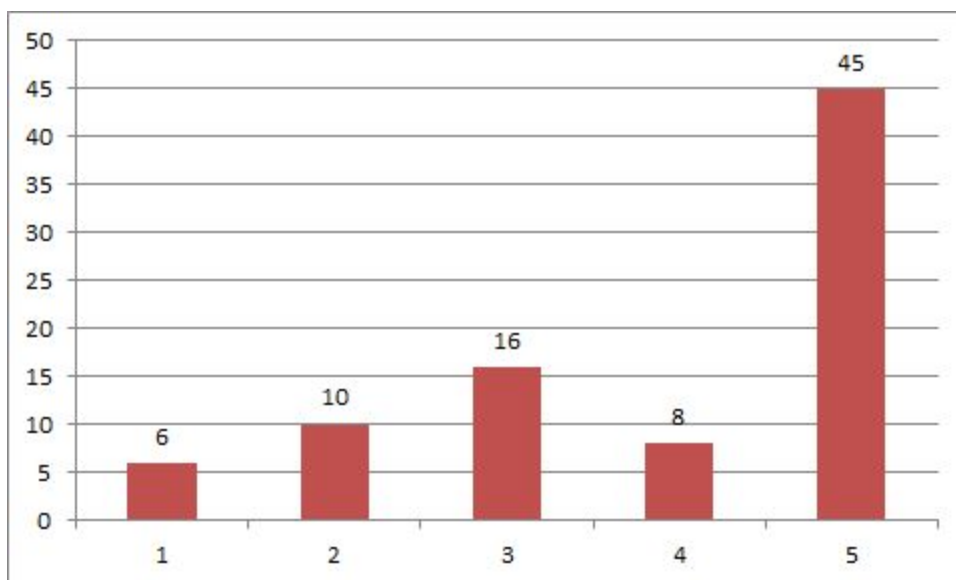


Figure 2. Respondents in Grades 9-12 answering in regards to having an increased connection with peers. (key-1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree)

The third question stated, “Being involved in EC activities has increased my connection with my school.” The students answered with a mean of 3.37. The students answered that neither being involved in EC Activities has increased or decreased his/her connection to peers. Students responded with 30% Strongly Agreed, 11% Agreed, 33% Neutral, 20% Disagreed, and 7% Strongly Disagreed. In review, there would be null outcome or a neutral position of being in EC activities and feeling connected to the school.

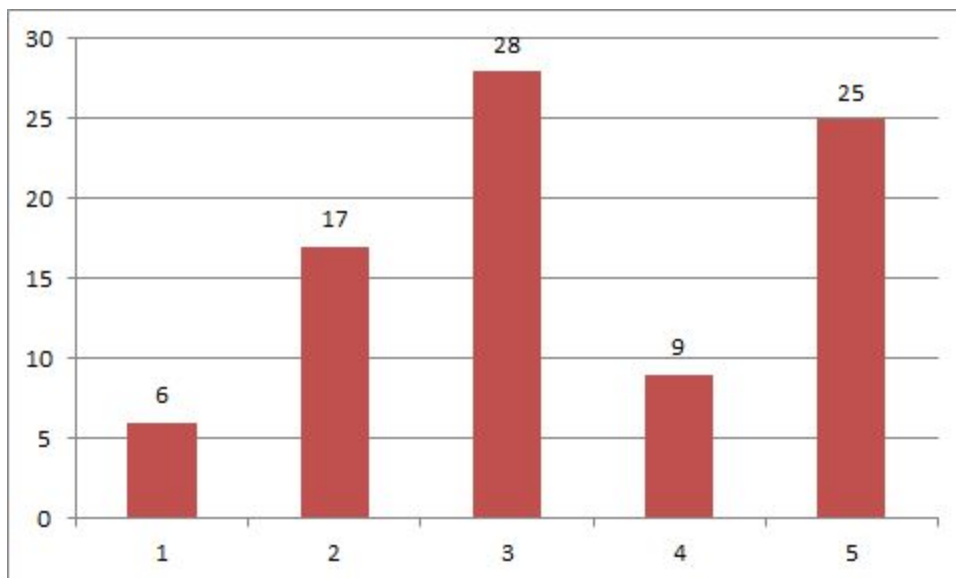


Figure 3. Data collected from Question 3 pertaining to students and having an increased connection with school due to being involved in EC Activities. (key-1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree)

The fourth question stated, “Being involved in EC activities has prepared me for college or career after graduation.” The students answered with the mean of 3.24.

Students in this survey neither feel that EC activities have helped or hurt their sense of college and career readiness after graduation. The students responded with 27% Strongly Agree, 6% Agree, 39% Neutral, 20% Disagree, and 8% Strongly Disagree. Overall, the students felt that being involved in EC Activities has not increased or has not decreased their college or career preparation post secondary.

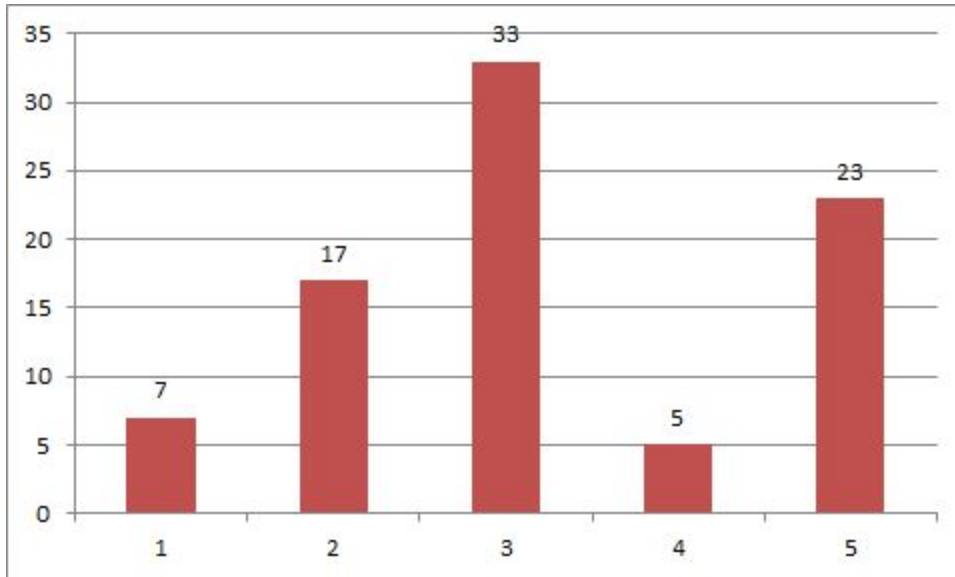


Figure 4. Bar graph comparing respondents and their view on how EC Activities have helped or hindered college and career preparation. (key-1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree)

The fifth question asked, “Being involved in EC activities has increased my connection with my school spirit.” The results are a mean of 3.6. The students answered that 40% Strongly Agree, 5% Agree, 36% Neutral, 11% Disagree, and 8% Strongly Disagree. Students strongly agree and agree with a total of 45% that being involved in EC activities heightened their connection with school spirit.

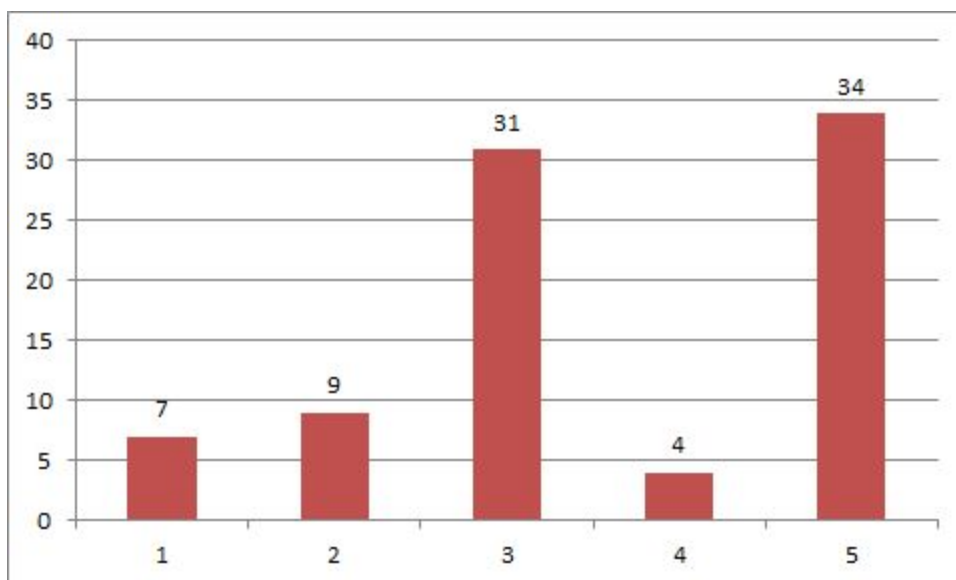


Figure 5. Students' responses in compared to having a feeling of connection with regards to school spirit. (key-1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree)

Question 6 stated, "Being involved in EC activities has improved my academic success." The students answered with a mean of 3.59. students conclude that 27% Strongly Agree, 16% Agree, 40% Neutral, 12% Disagree, and 5% Strongly Disagree (see Figure 6). Although some feel it has no effect, there is at least 43% that agree that academic success is improved when involved in EC activities.

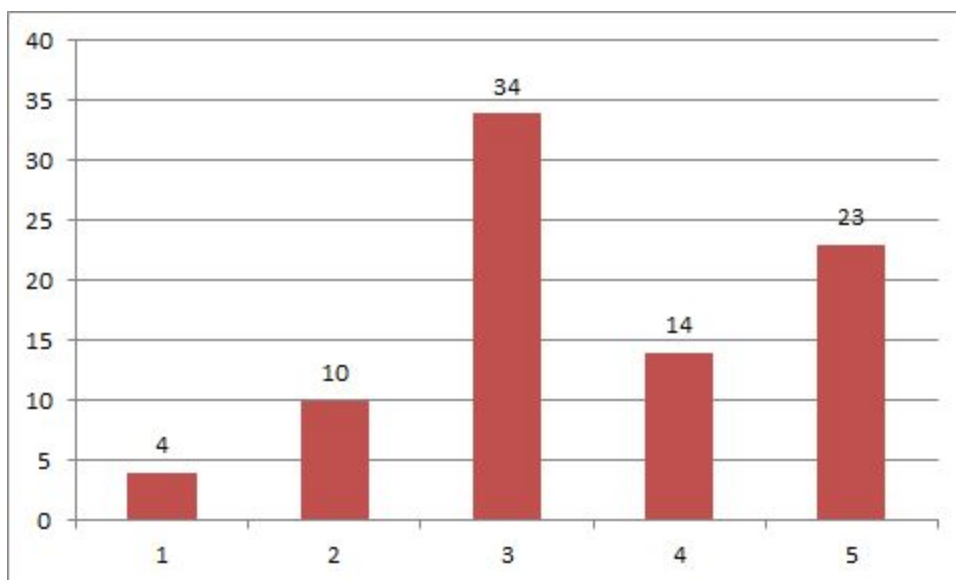


Figure 6. Question pertaining to academic success and EC Activities. (key-1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree)

Question 7 stated, “Being involved in EC activities has increased my time management.” The mean is 3.09, respondents answered with 18% Strongly Agree, 14% Agree, 35% Neutral, 21% Disagree, and 12% Strongly Disagree. Students report that there is a neutral connection time management and being involved in EC Activities. See

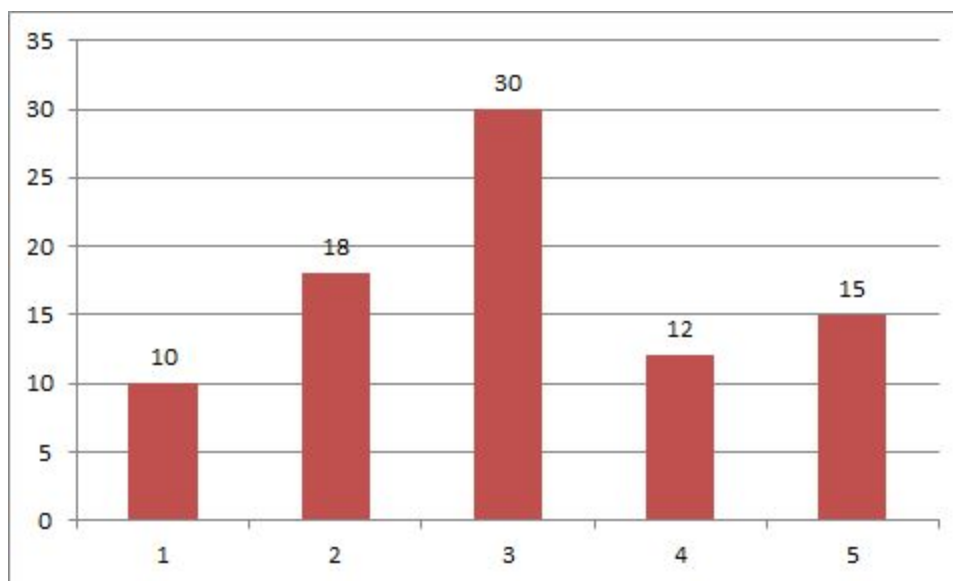


Figure 7.

Figure 7. Respondents questions pertaining to time management. (key-1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree)

Question 8 asked, “Being involved in EC activities has increased my sense of readiness for life after school.” The students responded answered with 18% Strongly Agree, 11% Agree, 39% Neutral, 21% Disagree, and 12% Strongly Disagree. Students with this question responded more favorably with more strongly agree and agree with a total of 50%. The mean if this question was 3.5.

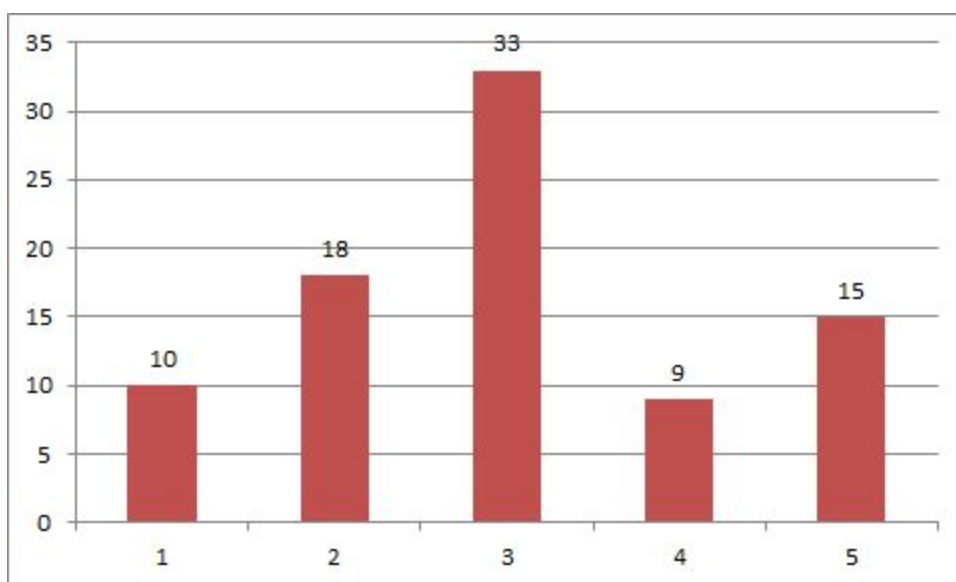


Figure 8. Analysis of question 8 pertaining to being prepared for life after school. Students responded with neutral answers.

Summary of Questions

Students surveyed suggested that EC activities strongly increased (37.6%) their sense of belonging versus those who felt it strongly decreased their sense of belonging (4.7%). Connection to peers was strongly increased through EC activities (52.9%) to strongly decreased (7.1%). Connection to school was more of a neutral trend with most

students suggesting a neutral stance (32.9%) compared to a strong increase (29.4%) and a strong decrease (7.1%). Although school spirit was strongly increased due to EC activities (40%) versus the strongly decreased (8.2%).

Academic success was considered a neutral consideration with regards to EC activities (40%) with more suggesting strongly increasing (27.1%) versus strongly decreasing (4.7%). College readiness was similar to academic success most selecting a neutral position (38.8%) with more suggesting strongly increasing (27.1%) versus strongly decreasing (8.2%). Most students did not take a position when it came to career readiness (38.8%) or time management (35.3%) considered them neutral with regards to EC activities. Both career readiness and time management were close when suggesting strongly increasing (17.6%) versus strongly decreasing (11.8%) when discussing EC activities.

Grade Point Average and Analysis

Students' GPA were compiled and reviewed in order to address the academic part of the research question. In review of Chapter 2, students in EC activities had an increase in overall GPA when compared with students who were not involved in EC activities. "High school boys who participated in 1 to 3 sports had higher mean GPAs. Girls also showed the same trend of higher overall GPAs." (Fox, Bahr-Anderson, Neumark-Sztainer, & Wall, 2010). Rees and Sabia (2007) stated "When students participated in activities at least five times or more a week, their GPAs increased by .187." (p. 755).

Outlined below is the chart identifying female students per grade, male students

per grade and overall average for students who took the survey.

Grade	Male GPA	School GPA	Female GPA	School GPA
Freshman	3.01 (9)	2.75 (26)	3.68 (12)	3.07 (30)
Sophomore	3.35 (10)	2.71 (37)	3.62 (9)	3.45 (16)
Junior	3.14 (11)	2.71 (24)	3.40 (11)	2.81 (21)
Senior	3.02 (11)	2.61 (28)	3.45 (12)	3.25 (20)
Overall GPA	3.34 (41)	2.70 (115)	3.53 (44)	3.12 (87)

Table 1. A breakdown of GPA for grades 9-12 who took the student survey along with male and female average for overall school in EC activities. School GPA is added for comparison. Numbers in parenthesis indicate students per category.

Breaking it down further, students were asked how many activities they were involved in. Students had to choose 0 to 1, 2 to 4, or 5 or more. The breakdown of GPA is as follows:

Grade	0 to 1 Activity	2 to 4 Activities	5 or More Activities
Freshman Female	3.67 (1)	3.54 (7)	3.89 (4)
Sophomore Female	None	3.70 (6)	3.48 (3)
Junior Female	4.00 (2)	3.26 (6)	3.25 (3)
Senior Female	3.35 (4)	3.54 (6)	3.27 (2)
Freshman Male	3.48 (1)	3.15 (6)	2.68 (2)
Sophomore Male	2.93 (2)	3.38 (5)	3.68 (3)
Junior Male	2.73 (2)	3.29 (8)	2.48 (1)
Senior Male	None	3.02 (8)	3.21 (3)

Table 2. GPA breakdown of students based on gender identification and how many activities each answered on his/her survey. Numbers in parenthesis indicate students who participated per category.

Based on the GPA data (see Table 2), analysis showed that students involved in at

least 2 to 4 activities have a trend to make a 3.00 or better, which 3.00 GPA is the measurement needed to make the B honor roll. All females in grades 9-12 continued to have an average GPA above 3.0 with 5 or more activities. On the other hand, males in grades 9-12 did not have a correlation between being involved in 5 or more activities or in 0 to 1 activity. Although GPA was measured based using the surveyed students, a student Interview to further examine EC activities and overall HS experience was given to students in Grade 12.

Student Interviews

Four students volunteered to do an interview in regards to the online survey. They were allowed to visit with me in my classroom during a time they had chosen. During the interviews they were asked a series of questions which can be found in Appendix A. The first question asked was, “What EC activities are you involve in.” The activities included Track and Field, Knowledge Bowl, Theater, Drama Club, Student Council, Board Game Club, Choir, Football, Wrestling, Baseball, Girls Basketball, Softball, and Trapshooting. As a teacher at the school I know the students left a few activities off the list such as FCCLA, Wem Stock, and Band.

The next question asked, “What year they became involved in this activity?” For all four students, elementary was when they became involved in their athletic events. All other EC activities were started at varying times from 7th grade and on. Another constant variable was Choir in which all interviewees started choir in 5th grade.

The third question asked, “Why did you become involved in these particular EC activities?” All four interviewees answered with getting to know peers outside of school

and building bonds with classmates and teachers. One student felt being involved in EC activities, “allows you to break out of your comfort zone and open your eyes to new things.” Another student felt it would help her with learning how to become more responsible while helping others. One interviewee further said that, “having a stronger bond with your teachers outside of school teaches you how be respectful towards adults.”

Fourth question asked in the interview pertains to, “Do you believe the EC activities give you a sense of school belonging? Why or Why Not?” All four respondents said yes due to varying answers. One student believes that this will teach him how to be more responsible for his actions. Another student felt that it allows for students to hang out with fellow classmates outside of their circle of friends. Two students felt that it allowed for a feeling of self-worth. Overall, students feel that being involved in EC activities, with varying answers why, has given them a sense of school belonging.

Question five stated, “Do you think EC activities have helped you develop skills needed for career or college readiness? Explain.” Three of the four students answered yes, with all saying they felt it taught them how to communicate with different people. One interview went on to say that because of her EC activities, she was able to obtain leadership roles, which will help her in college. Two students said that by having EC activities daily have taught them responsibility and time management. Although three of them answered yes, one did say there are positives and negatives to it. Two positives it has taught them included; responsibility and always trying hard. Two of the negatives include stress levels go up and time constraints making it difficult during the school day to get everything done for class. As a whole, there were more positive aspects to being

involved in developing skills needed for college and career readiness than there were negative for this question.

Question six asked, “Do you believe that your involvement in EC activities has helped your academics? How has it affected your academics.” All four students answered by saying that because of the expectations set forth in their EC activities they had to have good grades in order to participate. Two students had said that it helped them with time management along with teaching responsibility. Another student said that although he felt more stress about getting good grades because of his activity, it helped him stay focused so he could compete. The other student answered by saying that although you can be exhausted at times, knowing that you have to always do your best forces you to stay on top of getting good grades. For question six, it appeared that students felt it helped their academics as they had to work through time management, learn about how to deal with stress and exhaustion, and overall staying on-top of your grades.

Summary

The results suggest most students that are involved in EC activities would say they have developed friendships through these activities. Students feel they have better sense of belonging to the school and a higher regard for the school. Most students felt life after high school was not affected by their involvement in EC activities. Either suggesting they had not thought about moving on from high school or feeling no impact had resulted from their involvement. In interviews students felt their involvement had helped them prepare for college or career. Students stating they gained confidence through leadership

roles.

In the survey the students suggested they felt activities did not have a major impact on their academic outcomes. The individuals interviewed suggested otherwise, stating that it had given them direction and purpose for obtaining their grades. Dissecting the grade point average of the participants in the survey suggested individuals participating in two to four activities had a higher grade point average. There seemed to be a cap for the benefits when students were in more than four events as there seemed to be no benefit or a slight negative response.

In Chapter 5, I will discuss the literature, which is influential to the study and helped focus the research. I will address the results of the research questions which peaked interest in areas of EC activities and college/career readiness. Finally, I will suggest possible implications and recommendations from these interests. I will then discuss some limitations that occurred during the study.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to find out if there is a connection between extra-curricular (EC) activities and high school belonging, academics, and college/career readiness that makes school a more positive experience overall. When I started this research, my overall assumption was going to be an absolute yes to all my questions in regards to high school belonging, academics, and college/career readiness. In my personal experience, I have held this to be true. When doing the research, however, I found out a few things about myself and about the students. The findings will include: results that spiked interest, literature that is most influential to my study, possible implications, limitations to the study, and recommendations for further research.

Results that Spiked Interest

College and career readiness correlation. Sufficient findings proved to be interesting in this study. One such finding occurs in the question posed to students regarding involvement in EC activities and college/career readiness. Students answered with one of the lowest means of 3.24. This told me that students do not see a correlation between being involved in EC activities and helping them with college/career readiness. Those individuals in the interviews suggested that they were at an advantage because of their involvement in EC activities. Students felt that they had developed a means of better communication, a leadership role within themselves, and developed sense of responsibility.

When students were asked in a qualitative format about college/career readiness

all students did not feel that being involved in sports and activities neither helped nor hindered them for college/career readiness. Along with students not finding the correlation with EC activities and college/career readiness, they also did not feel time management was affected.

Time management is not increased or decreased. Students in the survey were asked if time management has been increased due to being involved in EC activities. Students answered with the lowest mean score of 3.09, suggesting that students were neither positively affected or negatively affected. While finding that time management and college/career readiness were not positive or negative influences for students, a specific amount of activities affected their GPA.

GPA is above average for students in EC activities. The students were analyzed based on GPAs and activity level, and generally there was a positive influence. Students, based on age group or gender, all had GPAs fall above a 3.0 when students were involved in 2 to 4 activities. This suggested that being involved in more than one activity, but no more than 4 activities resulted in concrete academic success.

Students who took the survey on average had a higher GPA than the overall student body in general. This suggest students involved in EC activities earn higher GPAs than those who do not participate.

When looking at these findings, it is important to look further into influential literature. Because students felt that time management and college/career readiness were not helped or hindered for EC activities according to their survey, literature in regards to this can be explored to see if although there is neutral feeling at this point, will it change

when they get older. Also, having GPAs that are above average are also seen in the literature.

Influential Literature

In reading the literature for school belonging, one researcher found that students, due to consolidation of schools who have smaller populations, had an increased sense of school belonging and community awareness found within their EC activities (Williams, 2003). Another researcher, Ebie (2005), found that students who participate in activities develop a sense of school community and culture creating a school belonging. Blomfield and Barber (2010) in their research also suggested that better peer relationships occur. In regards to the research, Holloway (2000) found that students involved in activities have an enhanced student-school connection as well. Students surveyed determined this to be true, confirming that EC activities enhance their connection for community and school belonging.

Student's perception in regards to their academic success does fall in line with literature as seen through Fox, Bahr-Anderson, Neumark-Sztainer, and Wall (2010) with regards to mean grade point averages for those who participated in teams earned higher GPAs than those who did not participate on sports team. Rees and Sabia (2007) also found that being involved in EC activities increased math and reading GPAs by .187. This told me that although the perception of the students is that GPA does not have much of an effect on college/career readiness, there is the research that supports this as seen through research of Rees and Sabia (2007). The GPA data also suggests that it has a

positive impact to a point. This can be seen through research from Barron, Ewing, and Waddell (2000) who found that those involved in EC activities furthered themselves in college and the labor market. Students may not see the connection now, but during further study into post-secondary work, there will be the positive impact.

Limitations

One of the major limitations would be the state of the building. The school building has a number of things that could be updated. There is no air condition, sometime the heat does not work correctly, and broken down equipment. The school has been trying to get a new building for the past two decades. I think this has an impact on the sense of pride or belongingness of the school. Students regularly comment on the state of the building in a negative manner. I feel that they are somewhat embarrassed by the lack of quality of our facilities. This idea of embarrassment may affect the question of school belongingness.

It would be nice to see the results of a neighboring school that is similar in size but with updated facilities. This would increase the number of participants to develop better accuracy in the numbers. It would also look at the idea of facilities affecting the outcome of some aspects of the study.

An aspect of time limits this research. Being able to follow students from high school to college or career would benefit this research. Developing a narrative over a duration of years would help increase insight on career preparedness. Checking on what life experiences lead to where they are in their lives. Allowing the students to reflect back on what they have experienced since leaving high school.

Possible Implications

Ekeland, Hagen, and Nordheim (2004) suggested that exercise increases self esteem, lowers anxiety, and relieves stress which leads to enhanced academic performance. The Every Student Succeeds Act allocates 20% of the funding given to schools to develop well rounded students. This money could be used to develop morning activities that would increase physical activity and expressive art forms. Schools could set up structured morning exercise routines, music lessons, or art classes. These activities would be free to students that attend the schools and activities could be supervised by school personnel. Students would develop relationships with other students and teachers in different settings. This could increase academic success and increase a sense of belonging to the school and the people that work at the school.

These morning sessions would get students ready for the day so students are engaged in their learning. Many times students in the first hour of the day are dragging their feet. This time period allows them to get prepared for the day in an enjoyable setting. When they complete their morning activity they will be more alert and focused for the learning process.

Recommendations

To further the research, I would suggest following up with the people interviewed and see if their perspectives have changed. College and career readiness is one of the aspects that I found difficult to find information on during my literature review.

Developing a comprehensive follow up of the individuals that have moved on from the school would benefit the development of the actual career readiness.

This study would be nice to develop over a number of years. Suggesting picking a certain graduating class and conducting the research each consecutive year from freshman year to senior year of high school. This would allow for growth and development of research. Students could then use reflection as a tool in advancing their education process.

In conclusion, as a teacher and coach, I will make sure I communicate my views on EC activities and education. I have a number of avenues to communicate these views to including the athletic director, high school principal, the school board, my PLC group, and our school superintendent. I believe EC activities will enhance any students high school experience. I myself had the opportunity to enjoy EC activities and it helped advance my education. I was able to use the skills developed in those activities to increase my position as a teacher and a coach. I also believe that EC activities allowed me to become more of a leader in my community. EC activities allow students to grow and develop into well rounded people who can contribute to their communities.

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APPENDIX A

Student Interview Questions

1. What EC Activities are you involved in?
2. When did you start participating in these EC activities?
3. Why did you choose these specific EC activities?
4. Do you believe the EC activities give you a sense of school belonging? Explain why or why not?
5. Do you think EC activities have helped develop skills needed for career or college readiness? Explain why or why not.
6. Do you believe the EC activities have helped or harmed your academics? Explain?
7. Are there any other comments you would like to add?

- Students were asked to participate in interviews after completing the online survey.
- The interviews were conducted in a classroom, where it was a one on one setting.
- Interviewees were allowed as much time as needed to answer questions.

APPENDIX B

Survey Questions Emailed to Students

Emailed Survey (survey was not anonymous)

Do you participate in extracurriculars?

Grade

Gender

How many EC?

Likert scale (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree)

- Being involved in EC has:
 - Increased my sense of school belonging
 - Increased my connection with peers
 - Increased my connection with my school
 - Increased my school spirit
 - Has prepared me for college or career
 - Has encouraged me do well academically
 - Has improved my time management skills

Would you be willing to participate in an interview about your EC activities? If so, please write your name.