

A fellow AD's perspective...

Getting Your Students Connected



Scott Kibby

In celebration of National High School Activities Week, I was asked to write about the impact of activities on my life and the lives of the students I see daily. My hope is that as you read this you will have a sense of what I believe. Activities are a powerful tool of enhancement in our students' education, and activities not only belong in the school setting but also are a vital component of a comprehensive school experience.

I've been an educator for nineteen years. Athletics, as well as music, have been a part of my whole life. I recall the days when my parents ran me to YMCA baseball games. I remember shooting hoops on the driveway and pretending I was announcing the games as I played. I've participated in organized athletics in football, basketball, golf, track and baseball through school and community organizations. I played the trumpet in school band, also. Unlike most, though, I turned that love for activities into my career by teaching high school mathematics and coaching at all levels from seventh grade to high school varsity for sixteen years. Three years ago I took that passion for activities one step further when I became the Associate Principal in charge of activities at Jefferson High School in Cedar Rapids. It was my lifelong goal.

Many people believe the main role of an Activities Director is all about the games and the scores. And though I love that part of my job, the real role of activities is the role it plays within the educational process. We, at Jefferson, constantly speak of co-curricular programs and not "extra-curricular" programs and that is because we believe that ALL activities have value for our students. Activities (athletics and fine arts) are not "extras"; they are a vital component of high school and middle school.

We've been collecting data on students' academic performance in relation to their participation in activities for several years at Jefferson. That data is contained in the chart below:

AVERAGE GPA'S:	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	5 yr. avg.
GPA for students who are in no activities:	2.14	2.26	2.32	2.34	2.37	2.29
GPA for students who are in 1 or more activities:	3.07	3.06	3.06	3.09	3.11	3.08
GPA for students who are in 2 or more activities:	3.30	3.34	3.24	3.31	3.30	3.30
GPA for students who are in 3 or more activities:	3.46	3.39	3.38	3.47	3.45	3.41

The data speaks for itself. Students who are involved in activities do better in school than those who are not involved. I'd go one step further and submit that those who are the "most" involved do the best in school.

We can speculate as to why this might occur. I believe several things are involved. First, students that are in activities are "connected" to school. They have pride in their school and their performance, not only on the fields and in the concert hall, but in the classroom, too. Secondly, I believe that activities place students in other situations where they are with caring, supporting educators. These coaches and directors make "connections" with the kids, too. These coaches and directors monitor attendance, behavior, and grades of their participants. They are mentors that help students with personal as well as academic issues. Finally, I believe, as most do, that activities teach a strong work ethic and many personal skills like responsibility to the team. Activities teach students to set goals and the process by which they can be obtained. I can't emphasize enough my first two premises, that a "connection" to the school and being in multiple situations where they are around caring, hardworking mentors are vital to academic success.

There is much discussion statewide and nationwide on increasing Educational Standards and improving student performance. There are all sorts of programs and ideas out there on what we can do to increase the performance of our students. I have a radical thought.... Why not require students to be in a minimum of one co-curricular program every year. I am so passionate about the power of activities that I submit we would see increased performance in our students.

We, at Jefferson, are collecting data relative to our participation across socio-economic lines and ethnicity and we even track it based on where our students live within our community. We have challenged ourselves to continue to increase our participation levels for "all kids." I encourage the schools of Iowa to work to leave "no child behind" in activities and get as many students "connected" as we can. If we do, I believe we will see the payoff in our academic achievement, too.

--Scott Kibby, AD, Cedar Rapids, Jefferson