



Strike the Balance: Sports and Other Out-Of-School Activities

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INTRODUCTION

The most common extracurricular activity for today's youth is sports. There are numerous research studies to show the benefits of youth being engaged in sports including higher academic achievement, positive social development, and psychological well-being (Barber, Eccles, & Stone, 2001; Brunelle, Danish & Forneris, 2007; Gore, Farrell, & Gordon, 2001). In addition, youth development research also shows the benefits of youth involved in other structured out-of-school time activities such as higher academic and occupational achievement, reduced rates of delinquency and development of identity and initiative (Barber Eccles, & Stone, 2001). Is there a balance between these types of activities to most effectively help today's youth become positive and contributing members of society?

RESEARCH TO PRACTICE POINTS

1. Participation in sports activities has a positive influence on youth.
2. Youth involved in sports plus other youth development activities show greater developmental benefits.
3. A sports-only focus is better than no engagement in positive out-of-school activities.

DETAILS ON RESEARCH TO PRACTICE POINTS

Participation in sports activities has a positive influence on youth.

Parents should continue to encourage their children to become involved in sports activities. Youth involved in organized sports activities report higher incidences of liking school, higher academic performance, more total years of college education by age 25, and attaining a job at age 24 that offers autonomy and a promising future (Barber, et al., 2001). In addition, when comparing youth that participate in sports to those involved solely in art, community service or other school activities, student athletes are less likely to engage in risky behaviors such as smoking cigarettes, marijuana, cocaine, and other drugs (Page, Hammermeister, Scanlon, & Gilbert, 1998), as well as have lower rates of depression (Zarrett, Fay, Carrano, Phelps & Lerner, 2009) and lower incidences of suicidal behavior (Barber, et al., 2001).

Youth involved in sports plus other youth development activities show greater developmental benefits.

Youth engaged in sports in combination with other youth development activities demonstrate higher indicators of positive youth development (including Richard Lerner's 5 C's of development: competence, confidence, character, connection, and caring) when compared with youth who are only involved in sports activities or no out-of-school activities (Zarrett, Peltz, Fay, Li, & Lerner, 2007). Youth should be encouraged to be involved in sports, as well as additional structured out-of-school activities that focus on youth development.

A sports-only focus is better than no engagement in positive out-of-school activities.

If youth are only given the opportunity to participate in sports, they will still show higher positive youth development scores than their non-engaged peers. In addition, youth involved in only sports show lower depression levels than highly engaged youth (Zarrett et al., 2009).

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Participating in structured out-of-school activities promotes positive youth development. In today's society, the majority of youth are involved in sports and youth development research indicates that these youth are developing the skills that will benefit them into adulthood. To further maximize the chance for positive youth development, youth should engage in additional out-of-school time activities with other structured youth organizations. These more highly-engaged youth showed higher levels of competence, confidence, character, connection, and caring. However, regardless of which activities are available to youth, they should be encouraged to participate in any positive, structured extracurricular activity.

AREAS WHERE ADDITIONAL RESEARCH IS NEEDED

Further research is needed to determine what the best balance is between sports and other out-of-school activities for positive youth development. In addition, researchers should determine if certain youth development activities complement sports activities better than other activities.

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