

# THE ADVOCATE



## Activity Connection

Physical activity jump-starts student performance and serves as a springboard to academic success.

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## Promote the Value

Speech & Debate actively engages students in hot topics and relevant curriculum.

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## Be a Champion

You can help students make valuable personal connections to learning. Student activities provide the relevance and affirmation to keep students engaged.

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## Igniting a Spark

Student Activities Light the Way to a Bright Future

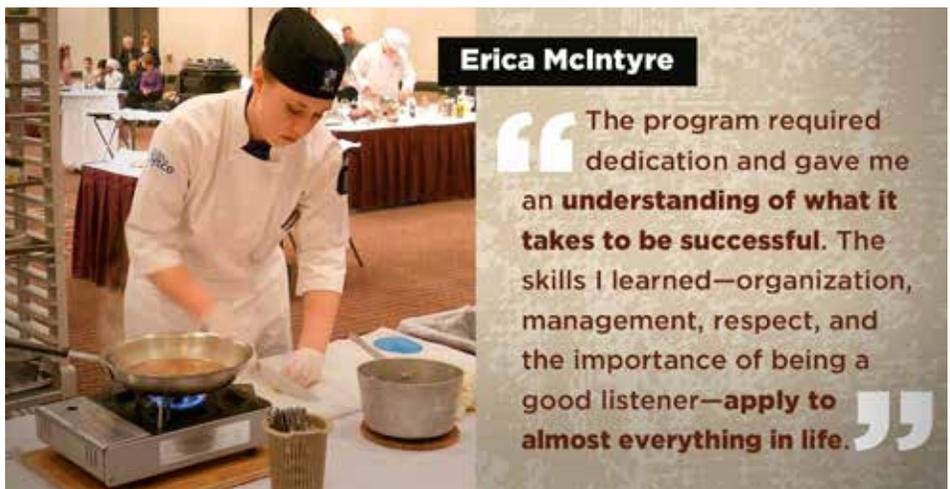
BY KATHLEEN WILSON SHRYOCK

The secret to student success doesn't have to be a mystery. Most youth advocates understand that students thrive when given opportunities to practice their "spark"—an activity that captures interest, allows for creative expression, and motivates each unique student to be his or her best. Unfortunately, too many of today's students are in danger of losing their spark. Budget cuts, scheduling constraints, and renewed directives to teach to the test have reduced creative opportunities for young people to shine. An alarming 75 percent of today's kids feel disconnected from their schools and communities.<sup>1</sup>

Fortunately, there is a way to reverse this trend. Research proves that participation in student-driven, adult-supervised, school-sponsored activities helps students thrive.<sup>2</sup> By giving young people opportunities to practice their sparks in school, interactive extra- and cocurricular activities are the not-so-secret ingredients that pave the way for fulfilling, meaningful engagement in career and community.

### A Recipe for Success

For Erica McIntyre, an interactive high school program offered through the Olathe (KS) School District ignited her interest in culinary arts and served as a springboard to postsecondary education and employment. As one of the district's 21st Century Programs, the culinary arts curriculum gave McIntyre the opportunity to combine her interest with learning. In addition to culinary arts, the district offers 17 other programs in a variety of high-demand career fields, including engineering, science, and health care. Each program uses hands-on applications, instruction from industry professionals, and community connections to provide valuable real-world experiences. ➔



Erica McIntyre

“The program required dedication and gave me an understanding of what it takes to be successful. The skills I learned—organization, management, respect, and the importance of being a good listener—apply to almost everything in life.”

The innovative culinary curriculum helped McIntyre develop industry-specific skills that were directly applicable to her postsecondary education at the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, NY. In addition, she gained self-confidence and valuable leadership abilities. “Before I started the program, I would not necessarily take on leadership roles,” said McIntyre. “But through the program, I grew a lot. I picked up on new concepts quickly, so I became a ‘go to’ person for others. I strengthened my skills as a leader and began to take on more and more management responsibilities.”

McIntyre attributes much of her personal growth to the rigorous training offered through the 21st Century Programs. To help students develop the competencies demanded by the fast-paced industry, the culinary program gives participants the chance to work in an actual on-site restaurant at Olathe North High School. The student-run facility, Les Arts Culinaires, features menu items that students select, prepare, and serve to the public. In addition to food preparation, students learn how to formulate menus, plan a budget, and work as a team.

During her junior and senior years, McIntyre nurtured a passion for her craft by working at Les Arts Culinaires. She was also selected to serve on her school’s team at a statewide culinary competition sponsored by ProStart. Both years, McIntyre’s group advanced to the national competition. McIntyre explains that the many hours spent preparing for each competition were a valuable learning experience that fostered collaboration, commitment, and adaptability.

McIntyre will graduate from the Culinary Institute of America in December 2014. She has already secured a position at The French Laundry, a prestigious restaurant in Napa Valley (CA) and plans to work toward a career in restaurant management. McIntyre believes that her experiences in high school affirmed her interest in the culinary field and provided her with marketable skills that apply to any industry. “The program required dedication and gave me an understanding of what it takes to be successful,” she said. “A program like this is a great way for students to take a trial run while they are still in high school, and the skills I learned—organization, management, respect, and the importance of being a good listener—apply to almost everything in life.”

## A Passion for Politics

Like McIntyre, Jason Rae’s experiences with student activities allowed him to explore his interests and develop aspirations that would define his future. Rae’s fascination with politics dates back to kindergarten when he told classmates that he wanted to be president someday. But it was through experiences with student government at Rice Lake High School in Rice Lake, WI, that Rae’s dreams began to turn into realities.

Throughout his high school years, Rae enjoyed regular stints on the school’s student council. He also served as senior class president and yearbook editor. Rae’s student government experiences in Rice Lake led to his election as vice president of the Wisconsin Association of Student Councils, where he worked with other student leaders throughout the state to determine budget requirements and set statewide leadership goals.

In 2004, while still in high school, Rae took his political involvement to the next level by campaigning for a seat on the Democratic National Committee (DNC). Rae’s hard work and optimistic attitude, along with the skills he learned through involvement in student leadership, paid off. At the age of 17, Rae was elected to serve as the youngest DNC member in history.



Experiences during high school fueled Rae’s desire to continue his involvement in student activities as a political science and history major at Marquette University in Milwaukee, WI. “As I entered college, I knew that I didn’t want my experiences [in student government] to stop with high school graduation,” said Rae. “I firmly believed in the importance of extracurricular involvement. My experiences in student government helped me build strong bonds with my high school and college.”

Rae lost his first bid for Marquette’s student senate, but his tenacity earned him an invitation to serve as parliamentarian. His subsequent college runs were successful and culminated in a term as student government legislative vice president. Rae also served as a superdelegate during the 2008 US presidential election and was viewed by many as an important voice in representing the views of young Americans.

Currently, Rae is a senior associate at Nation Consulting, where he works with a variety of corporate, nonprofit, and political clients. He also serves as the executive director of the Wisconsin LGBT Chamber of Commerce, a nonprofit organization that he founded two years ago. Rae believes that student activities not only equipped him with valuable skills but also allowed him to pursue interests that have helped him to thrive. “I don’t think I would be the person I am today without the experiences I had in student activities. Careers these days are all about collaborative work, and my experiences in school helped me prepare for that. I learned the art of teamwork, how to be a better listener, and how to delegate and prioritize.”

He sees similar traits among other students who have a history of activities involvement. “In my current role [with the consulting firm], I am a primary contact for hiring interns and new associates,” he said. “The students who come in with experiences from student government or leadership roles in other student organizations are the ones most prepared to succeed after graduation. They are ready for the next adventure.”

## Scripting the Language of Human Thriving

As a student at North Penn High School in Lansdale, PA, John Sweeney preferred to fly under the radar. Then he discovered a passion for the performing arts. His involvement in choir, a vocal

jazz group, and theater revealed Sweeney’s creative nature and set the stage for a future punctuated by success and personal fulfillment. “I wasn’t one to let my presence be known in school until I started performing,” said Sweeney. “Student activities set the foundation for who I am today. While it was not necessarily my intent at the time, my interests and abilities developed naturally through my participation.”

In addition to boosting his self-confidence and communication skills, Sweeney’s involvement in the performing arts demonstrated the importance of service. He became involved in community theater and later served as vice president of the men’s glee club and president of the choir at Bloomsburg University in Bloomsburg, PA. Sweeney graduated in 1989 with a degree in communications and was a recipient of the Service Key Award for outstanding service to the university and community. “The combination of extracurricular and leadership opportunities got me involved in giving back,” he said. “Whether it’s giving of our talents or rolling up our sleeves and doing other types of work, service is an important piece of building community and shaping young leaders.”

Today, Sweeney believes that lessons learned through student activities established the groundwork for his current success as a senior product manager for IBM. He is also a part-time actor and director at the largest community theater in the country. Finely tuned communications skills, including the confidence and ability to clearly present ideas on a stage or in a business meeting, are disciplines that Sweeney employs on a daily basis.

At Hale Centre Theatre in West Valley City, UT, Sweeney shares his talents with a thriving theater community that includes an astounding 25,000 season-ticket holders. He assists with a variety of productions throughout the year, including the theater’s nationally acclaimed annual presentation of *A Christmas Carol*, which Sweeney has directed for the past 10 years.

Sweeney’s work at Hale Centre represents another opportunity to give back to his community and to share a love for the arts that began to take shape through his involvement in high school activities. In his role as a director, Sweeney finds that opportunities to work with young people are an important reminder about the value of arts and activities in helping students thrive. “When activities get taken away and students don’t have opportunities to participate, it hurts all of us,” said Sweeney. “In a world that has become so virtual, it is especially important for us to embrace theater and other activities that can serve as outlets for young people to get involved, think creatively,



and learn how to communicate. I would not have achieved my life successes without the chance to be involved in activities.”

Our interests and passions are central to who we are and allow us to express our personalities, discover unique abilities, and move forward through life with a sense of purpose. By providing students with opportunities to discover and explore their own unique sparks, student activities create a culture of student engagement. Activities not only facilitate self-expression, but also allow students to cultivate special interests, develop real-world skills, and nurture the motivation to succeed. ●

**TO SEE** culinary students in action, watch [a4sa.org/ProStartCulinaryCompetition](http://a4sa.org/ProStartCulinaryCompetition).

**TO LEARN MORE** about Jason Rae’s experience as a superdelegate, view [a4sa.org/Superdelegate](http://a4sa.org/Superdelegate).

**TO READ MORE** about Hale Centre Theatre, go to [a4sa.org/HaleCentre](http://a4sa.org/HaleCentre).

#### ENDNOTES

- 1 Peter Benson, “Sparks: How Youth Thrive,” TEDx Talks video, 21:27, April 22, 2011, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=TqzUHCW58Us](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TqzUHCW58Us)
- 2 “When X = Student Activities, Performance Follows. The Research Proves It,” Alliance for Student Activities, accessed November 10, 2014, [alliance4studentactivities.org/resource/research-summary-alliance-bibliography](http://alliance4studentactivities.org/resource/research-summary-alliance-bibliography).

## STUDENT ENRICHMENT RESOURCES



**CTSOs** Through interactive applications and partnerships in business and community, the national coalition of career and technical student organizations provides support to more than two million students and their teachers. Students can explore and prepare for careers in a variety of fields including health care, education, business, and agriculture.



**EDUCATIONAL THEATRE ASSOCIATION** EdTA’s mission is to shape lives through theatre education by honoring student achievement and enriching the theatre education experience. The group also provides professional development opportunities for educators and promotes theatre education as a valuable way for students to develop life skills.



**NATIONAL ART EDUCATION ASSOCIATION** The NAEA’s mission is to advance visual arts education and promote global understanding of the value of an education in visual arts. Members include arts educators, researchers, administrators, and students who are preparing for a career in arts education.

## a4sa.org/resources



**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR MUSIC EDUCATION** NAFME advocates for music education at the local, state, and national levels; provides resources for educators; hosts professional development events; and offers a variety of opportunities for students and teachers.



**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STUDENT COUNCILS** NASC provides middle level and high school student councils and their advisers with the skills, leadership opportunities, and resources that students need to become engaged leaders in their schools and communities.



**NATIONAL FEDERATION OF STATE HIGH SCHOOL ASSOCIATIONS** NFHS provides resources and support for those who oversee high school sports and activities. The organization also publishes playing rules in 16 competitive school-based sports and provides a variety of programs for high school students involved in athletics and activities.

## Let's Move! Physical Activity Boosts Student Performance

**IN THE PAST 30 YEARS**, our lifestyles have changed dramatically. Today's teens spend more than seven and a half hours a day on social media, only six states require physical education in every grade, and two out of three kids are inactive. As a result, childhood obesity rates have tripled, and young people are more at risk for heart disease and diabetes than ever before.<sup>1</sup>

*Let's Move!* Active Schools, powered by a national collaboration of health and education organizations, wants to chart a new course for today's students by helping schools develop a culture in which physical activity is foundational to academic success. Research collected by *Let's Move!* shows that active kids are not only healthier, but also do better academically, have better attendance, and exhibit improved behavior.

To increase the physical and academic well-being of students, *Let's Move!* suggests that schools offer opportunities for students to participate in physical activity before or after the school day. The organization also cites staff involvement as integral to fitness-plan success. School-based, student-driven, adult-supervised activities fulfill several key *Let's Move!* criteria and can be an efficient, affordable solution for transforming every school into an active, vibrant community.

### Take Action

At Chaminade High School in Mineola, NY, the physical fitness club allows students to practice leadership while promoting wellness. Members are qualified upperclassmen who have joined the club for the purpose of instructing inexperienced students at the school's physical fitness center. Together with adult coaches, club members teach proper technique and

provide advice and assistance when needed. The club also offers instructional clinics and weight-lifting programs.

Students at Windsor Middle School in Imperial, MO, have discovered that their "Walk It Windsor" walking club is a fun and simple way to get active after school. The club has more than 50 members who walk a variety of routes together once a week.



This year's theme is "walk around the world." Students will log in their miles and determine at the end of the year if they have walked enough miles to reach their dream destination.

Founded on one mother's desire to get her own kids moving and boost their academic performance, Build Our Kids' Success or BOKS—backed by Reebok—is a before-school program that incorporates physical fitness with teamwork and community. Studies demonstrate that getting kids moving before school can translate to better academic performance during the school day. The program calls for students to arrive at school early. An adult facilitator leads students

through a lesson plan that includes a fun running-related activity. BOKS is a nonprofit organization that offers training, curriculum, and support to its member schools. ●

**FOR MORE INFORMATION** about these programs and other resources designed to bring physical fitness back to school, visit these links:

*Let's Move!* Active Schools at [letsmoveschools.org](http://letsmoveschools.org).

*Let's Move!* video at [a4sa.org/LetsMoveVideo](http://a4sa.org/LetsMoveVideo).

BOKS at [bokskids.org](http://bokskids.org).

<sup>1</sup> "Learn the Facts" (*Let's Move!*, 2014), [www.letsmove.gov/learn-facts/epidemic-childhood-obesity](http://www.letsmove.gov/learn-facts/epidemic-childhood-obesity).

### MAKE THE TIME

## Small and Mighty: Doing More with Less

**WE KNOW THAT** students who participate in activities at school have improved social and academic outcomes. It would be easy to assume that these benefits are enhanced in larger schools, where more resources are available to support activities. But research reveals that high school students in small schools are more involved in extracurricular activities than their peers in larger schools. Further, this high level of participation leads to long-lasting benefits in leadership, responsibility, and motivation.<sup>1</sup> So, *what can larger schools learn from their smaller counterparts?*

**Realize it's all about relationships.** Small schools have higher levels of involvement from parents and the local community, and student activities groups work hard to strengthen these relationships. School events often engage local stakeholders as event attendees, volunteers, and vendors. Robert Mahaffey, communications director for the Rural School and Community Trust, believes that the symbiotic relationship between a school and its locale is advantageous. "In a small community, everyone knows each other. Even in areas with socio-economic



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## Speech & Debate Motivates Students to Raise the Bar

**CHERIAN KOSHY** is the director of development and assistant national tournament director at the National Speech & Debate Association. He is also a former director of debate at Apple Valley High School in Apple Valley, MN. In this interview, Koshy provides insight into the many benefits of speech and debate activities.

### How do skills learned through participation in speech and debate benefit students?

Critical thinking, public speaking, and research skills are crucial to success in college or career. Instead of being presented with material passively, students are actively engaging with primary texts and other course materials. Students are naturally competitive, and the educational backstop of debate and speech activities ensures that subject matter objectives are being met. Speech and debate students gain a lifelong love of engaging with the material they are studying, which leads to a higher level of mastery. Evidence shows that college students and employees who have participated in speech and debate are better situated to exceed expectations in collegiate writing and in their careers because of their ability to communicate ideas concisely and persuasively.

### What are some creative ways that educators can use speech and debate as an avenue for stressing Common Core or other state-specific standards?

First, speech and debate regularly deals with complex texts. One of the driving forces behind coaching speech and debate is the increased complexity of materials from middle school to high school levels, and from beginning to advanced competitions. In every speech and debate event, participation directly correlates with increased reading. Successful participants are proficient readers who are constantly expanding their knowledge and vocabulary. Second, speech and debate is explicitly grounded in evidence from texts. Students are immersed in the texts they are using to formulate interpretations, conclusions, recommendations, and policies. Additionally, these students are involved in making text-based arguments with a focus on improving their own abilities to inform and persuade.

Most importantly, speech and debate is interdisciplinary. Students are frequently integrating English, history, social studies, science, and mathematics. For example, debaters are often assessing the merits of scientific studies by determining sample sizes and margins of error.

We've posted a number of resources on our website, including activities and webinars that identify great ways to integrate speaking and debating into any curriculum. Even quick debates in class are useful in motivating and exciting students. Educators who work with speech and debate see their students excited about course material and deeply involved in collaboration.

### Please share some examples of how speech and debate has made a difference in the lives of student participants.

In my senior year of high school, I lost the final round of a debate tournament to a sophomore. In 2010, Ben Silbermann—the young man from the tournament—launched Pinterest, a website that has revolutionized the way people share their interests and media content. Ben credits his speech and debate experience with much of his success. He built a valuable product and was able to successfully communicate his proposition to users and investors. Ben's day-to-day work includes using evidence, research, and higher-order thinking skills, which he learned through speech and debate many years ago.

In Broward County, FL, the sixth largest school district in the country, our organization has implemented a Common Core-aligned initiative that puts a speech and debate class and after-school program in every high school. The data coming out of Broward—where almost 60 percent of students are from low-income homes—indicates that the participating students are performing better in every metric. Nick is one of the students who greatly benefited from this speech and debate program. Nick was functionally homeless while attending a Broward County school. He couch-surfed throughout most of high school and took multiple buses to get to and from speech and debate practice. Both Nick's motivation and grades improved because of his involvement, and he poured himself into the activity. Nick graduated from high school with a full college scholarship in speech and debate.

On a broader scale, tournaments through the National Speech & Debate Association bring students from China, Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan to compete with students from the United States. In these activities, our students are not only finding common ground with their peers from Asia, but are also being motivated to raise the bar domestically in STEM-related achievements. ●

**FOR MORE INFORMATION** on the National Speech & Debate Association, visit [speechanddebate.org](http://speechanddebate.org).



challenges, people recognize that the school is the heartbeat of the community,” Mahaffey said. “Healthy communities know that there are invaluable outcomes for students who are engaged in student activities. This results in civic and scholarship opportunities for students.”

**Seek student involvement and validate its importance.**

Students in small schools respond to increased opportunities to participate and believe that their involvement is significant. Michael Lasher, executive director of the Oregon Small Schools Association, explains that students in smaller districts are less likely to feel anonymous. Instead of not making the cut because too many students are competing for the same opportunities, students in small schools are actively pursued to join the club. This recruitment sends the message that a student’s participation is important.

**Maximize student-teacher communications.** With fewer students on campus, teachers can more easily identify the individual talents and unique needs of each student. This gives teachers an opportunity to steer students toward activities that might be of interest or benefit.

**Join together to provide community service.** Service campaigns at small schools generally draw on the participation of the entire student body. The Farson-Eden School in western Wyoming serves a town of approximately 500 residents, but the school’s community-service efforts are enormous. In the past five years, the endeavors of a small student council—combined with community pride and generosity—have resulted in more than \$50,000 in donations for the Wyoming Chapter of Make-A-Wish.

On the surface, it may look as though smaller schools are at a disadvantage when it comes to promoting student activities. But a close relationship with the surrounding community, increased prospects for participation, and a cooperative campus environment provide unique opportunities for students to thrive. ●

**FOR MORE INFORMATION** about small schools, view resources from these organizations:

Oregon Small Schools Association at [www.oregonssa.org](http://www.oregonssa.org).  
The Rural School and Community Trust at [www.ruraledu.org](http://www.ruraledu.org).

1 Neil G. Stevens and Gary L. Peltier, “A Review of Research on Small-School Student Participation in Extracurricular Activities,” *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, Fall 1994, [eric.ed.gov/?q=%22Stevens+Neil+G.%22&id=EJ496793](http://eric.ed.gov/?q=%22Stevens+Neil+G.%22&id=EJ496793).

**BE A CHAMPION**

# make the connection

Research shows that **engaged students** experience:

**improved academic achievement**

**higher standardized test scores**

**better social skills**

**reduced dropout rates**

“Students are engaged when they are attracted to their work, persist despite challenges and obstacles, and take visible delight in accomplishing their work.”  
- Adam Fletcher, Youth Engagement Expert

**So, how do we engage students?**

Award-winning researcher Kristy Cooper examined the impact of three well-supported methods that teachers employ to increase student engagement: **lively teaching** that emphasizes “fun,” **academic rigor**, and **connective instruction**.

**Connective Instruction**

**Connective instruction**—or helping students make personal connections to learning—increased engagement over other practices by a magnitude of **seven times**. By providing an outlet for students to connect with educators and mentors, **student activities are the perfect vehicle** for providing many of the connective instruction teaching techniques that are significant to the development of **high-quality student engagement**:

- **Promoting relevance:** relating content to students’ lives.
- **Conveying care:** understanding learners’ perspectives.
- **Providing affirmation:** telling students they are capable of doing well; using praise, written feedback, and opportunities for success.
- **Enabling self-expression:** connecting learning and identity by encouraging students’ expression of ideas, values, and conceptions of self.

source:  
*New Study: Engage Kids with 7x the Effect* (Todd Finley, Edutopia; August 25, 2014)

## Be a Champion.

Alliance for Student Activities

# a4sa.org

## THE ADVOCATE

*The Advocate* is published ten times a year by the Alliance for Student Activities, a nonprofit corporation whose mission is to promote the value of student activities through advocacy, training, resources, and networking.

**a4sa.org**

Submissions of student activities research and other inquiries are welcome. Contact [advocate@a4sa.org](mailto:advocate@a4sa.org)

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