

THE ADVOCATE



Activity Connection

Through fitness activities and advocacy, SHAPE America is helping educators support a healthier student body.

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News of Note

A recent study reveals that high levels of school spirit are directly related to positive outcomes. It's no surprise that student activities are a key factor.

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Be a Champion

Sailing club helps students build powerful connections with the great outdoors and provides them with valuable opportunities to develop real-world skills.

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Critical Links

Academics + Activities + Administrative Champions = Student Success

As the primary leaders of our nation's schools, principals have an enormous responsibility. They are charged with facilitating a quality education for each and every student who walks through the classroom doors. And while mandates often require schools to "teach to the test," many administrators are discovering that academics alone are not enough to prepare their students for a promising future. Instead, the most successful administrators understand that academics and a vibrant student activities program go hand in hand.

With more than 31 years in the education arena, John Glimco has served as a director of student activities and as assistant superintendent for the DuPage Regional Office of Education in Illinois. He is currently the principal at Pleasantdale Middle School in Burr Ridge, IL. Glimco's varied roles have provided him with a unique perspective on the importance of a holistic education. "With current testing requirements, it can be difficult for administrators to juggle priorities," Glimco said. "But we need to keep our eye on the big picture and consider what it is that makes kids successful in the long-term. The inclusion of a variety of well-chosen activities gives our kids additional opportunities to shine and allows our schools to serve as thriving educational communities."

Glimco agrees with the many studies citing the benefits of student activities, and he stresses that the best programs offer something for everyone. At Pleasantdale Middle School, a crochet club has been a simple and affordable way for kids to take a break from electronic devices and develop a new skill in a low-stress setting. "Involvement in activities like the crochet club instills a sense of belonging. Through connections with peers and adult mentors, students have access to new allies and additional resources that can help them develop their interests and solve problems," he said. "Activity participation empowers some kids to discover talents they didn't even know they had. When you add in relevant topics like ➔

“Involvement in activities instills a sense of belonging. Through connections with peers and adult mentors, students have access to new allies and additional resources that can help them develop their interests and solve problems.”

- John Glimco



STEM-skill development, diverse activities can help to move our kids forward towards college and career.”

Active Leadership

But a strong activities program doesn't just happen by chance. In order for student activities to really flourish, administrators must buy into the benefits and provide active support. Rob Powers, student council adviser and curriculum leader at Apponequet Regional High School in Lakeville, MA, suggests that administrators view their roles not as gatekeepers who say “yes” or “no” to programming requests but as stakeholders with a vested interest in the value of activities. “The results of successful programming often align with the professional goals of administrators,” he said. “Principals should see well-crafted activities as cocurricular learning experiences, and allocate the time and resources that allow all students to participate.” Powers believes that the most impactful activities give students a chance to be heard and offer administrators an opportunity to develop healthy connections with students beyond the principal's perceived role of disciplinarian.

Paul Branagan is the state director for the Massachusetts Association of Student Councils (MASC) and the principal and student council adviser at Middleborough High School in Middleborough, MA. He agrees that principals need to take an active role in supporting activities. “If administrators don't recognize activities, they are missing opportunities to ensure that students know they matter,” said Branagan. “As an administrator, your face

might always be at the big events like the game or the dance, but by also taking the time to make students feel heard and ensuring that the school offers something for everyone, you can create a culture that encompasses the entire student body.”

Branagan describes several initiatives that allow him to take the pulse of the school by giving students at all levels a chance to be heard. Each month, Branagan hosts a Round Table discussion that includes a student leader from every club, organization, and athletic team within the school. The meeting follows a formal agenda and provides students with a chance to discuss important issues with their principal. While the Round Table includes students who are already engaged in activities, the Forum is a monthly town-hall meeting that is open to all students, but specifically targets those who are unable to connect through activities because of job commitments or other reasons. “Experiences like the Forum are enlightening. You are talking with kids who may not show up at the dance or the battle of the bands, but who have really great input into how to shape a school.”

At Grafton High School in Grafton, MA, administrators welcome the chance to work with students directly. This two-way communication helps students feel connected to their school and validates the importance of their input. “Our administrators have an open-door policy and invite students to talk about projects and events they are planning,” explains Erin Lachapelle, student council adviser and a divisional director for MASC. “When administrators get to hear the students' ideas and the reasons behind them, they are much more likely to support the program.”

ADVICE FOR ADMINISTRATORS

An Emphasis on Activities

A THRIVING student activities program leads to a host of positive outcomes, and administrative support is a key to creating and maintaining a vibrant initiative. Administrators can play a dynamic role in supporting student activities by employing these simple strategies:

- **View activities** with the same level of commitment as an academic class or a varsity sports team.
- **Be intentional** with recognition. Celebrating students and faculty leaders who are involved in activities sends a strong message that validates the importance of diverse initiatives from music to math.
- **Accept invitations** that offer simple, appropriate ways to get involved. Visit a club to talk with students and observe their creativity in action. Participate in a friendly match with a chess club member or board-game group. Appear in a brief cameo in the school play.
- **Get focused.** Meet with faculty members in the summer to discuss programming goals for the upcoming school term. Hold regular meetings throughout the year to ensure that activities are receiving the attention they deserve.
- **Give students** a chance to be heard. Recruit students at all levels to join monthly town-hall meetings.

A Shared Vision

With increasing pressures for schools to perform, principals are already managing a full plate. Still, Glimco urges educators to view activities with the same level of commitment as they would an academic class or a varsity sports team. Being intentional about making time for activities and celebrating students (and faculty leaders) who are involved sends a strong message that validates the importance of diverse initiatives from music to math. And while administrators need to take the lead in demonstrating the value of a strong activities program, there are things that advisers can do to facilitate administrative involvement.

Because they are undeniably busy, Glimco recommends extending invitations that offer administrators quick, easy ways to get involved. Ask the administrator to visit a club to chat with students and observe their creativity in action. Challenge the principal to a friendly match with a chess club or board-game group. Arrange for a brief cameo in the school play. By being respectful of the administrator's time and offering imaginative opportunities, the adviser can foster important connections within the school community.

Communication and courtesy are additional keys to securing administrative support. “My advice is to include your colleagues and encourage them to be involved,” said Janet Roberts, activities director at Chino Hills (CA) High School and past president of the California Association of Directors of Activities. “I share our plans and event details with administrators in advance and ask their permission so that they are not surprised. I want them on board, so I need them to trust me. In addition, I always make shirts for the entire staff to wear. And my students send thank-you notes every time our staff attends anything or helps with an event.”

Advanced planning is also important in enabling administrators and advisers to work effectively as a team. At Apponequet Regional,



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advisers meet with the administrator in the summer to discuss goals for the upcoming school term. Regular meetings throughout the year ensure a common purpose. “Administrators can be an invaluable resource if they are included in the long-term planning and the crafting of the vision surrounding activities,” said Powers. “[Regular meetings] help us run our programs better and let the administration see where student activities can best support the mission of the school.”

Lachapelle affirms the value of open communication and well-defined plans. “Advisers and administrators need to be on the same page and support each other,” she said. “An adviser cannot say ‘yes’ to something that an administrator will not approve. I expect my administrators to come to me and my student groups when they need help on a project, just as we can go to them [the administrators] if we need support.” To facilitate these healthy relationships, Lachapelle encourages students to be well prepared with a detailed plan of action before presenting their ideas to decision-making administrators.

At Middleborough High School, Branagan uses organization and communication to create partnerships with students and faculty members and to encourage accountability in activities management. In order to maximize programming, he establishes a master calendar that encompasses all school-related events and activities. He

also requires each adviser to prepare a year-end review that includes an evaluation of his or her program and a vision for the future. The reviews are intended to include substantial input from student leaders. “Each adviser’s own organization, activity, or club should be important to them. It’s easier for administrators to support something when the adviser shows a high level of engagement,” he said. “When advisers really take the time to develop a well-organized plan, then administrators and advisers can work together to make that vision a reality.”

Ever-increasing time and budget constraints can make it difficult for administrators to effectively manage all their responsibilities while creating a school climate that is conducive to both academic achievement and student engagement. But many school leaders are finding that a vibrant student activities program is an effective, efficient way to promote a wealth of positive outcomes. According to Branagan, “It is essential that administrators understand the link between academics and activities [including arts and athletics]. When administrators put time and energy into student programs and hold everyone accountable for bringing these programs to life, it allows for the creation of healthy partnerships. It evolves a culture where all students have an entry point into high school involvement, and everyone is equally celebrated.” ●

SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR RESOURCES



CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION OF DIRECTORS OF ACTIVITIES (CADA)

As the largest statewide support network for activity directors in the nation, CADA’s mission is to promote leadership development through student activities. The organization offers extensive resources for advisers, administrators, and their students.



ED-TECH RESOURCES

This *eSchool News* article by Meris Stansbury lists ten user-friendly technology resources that can help administrators manage their tasks more easily and efficiently.



EDUCATION WORLD

This online resource includes a section specifically for school administrators. Scan hot topics and read advice from other administrators in the field.



EDUTOPIA: RESOURCE ROUNDUP

This comprehensive list of resources for principals and other school administrators includes videos and articles about an array of topics including effective leadership strategies, partnering with teachers, and cultivating a healthy school climate.



FOSTERING SCHOOL CONNECTEDNESS

This booklet by the US Department of Health and Human Services provides school administrators with strategies—including the use of clubs and activities—for improving student health and achievement.



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

This organization provides middle level and high school principals, assistant principals, and school leaders with the research-based resources, practical tools, and materials they need to serve as visionary school leaders.

a4sa.org/resources

Shaping Up America's Schools

ON MAY 1-7, schools across the country will take part in National Physical Education and Sport Week, an event designed to bring attention to the value of physical education and activity in the lives of our nation's young people. This special week is sponsored by SHAPE America, a membership organization composed of health and physical education professionals. In addition to hosting the annual Sport Week—which serves as the kickoff to the National Physical Fitness and Sports Month sponsored by the President's Council on Fitness, Sports, and Nutrition—SHAPE America provides leadership and advocacy for physical education programs from preschool to university.

The theme for this year's week is "50 Million Strong by 2029." This phrase highlights the organization's commitment to ensuring that by the time today's preschoolers graduate from high school in 2029, *all* of America's students will be benefiting from the skills, knowledge, confidence, good health, and opportunities offered by meaningful physical activity.

With the rise in technology and changes in habits, many of today's students are spending less and less time being physically active. This lack of activity is leading to a potential health crisis. In addition, reduced levels of activity can lead to problems in the classroom. Advocates like SHAPE America President Dr. Stephen C. Jefferies are quick to note the well-established relationship between physical activity, good health, and strong academic performance. Because of the importance of physical activity in contributing to the overall wellness of students, SHAPE organizers encourage physical activities both in and out of school. They hope that a focus on physical activity and education during this special week will instill good habits that will continue throughout the year.

"America faces an inactivity crisis that threatens catastrophic consequences for the social, emotional, intellectual, and physical health of the nation's school-age students," said



Jefferies. "No one is better prepared to get kids healthier and more physically active than K-12 health and physical education teachers. Collectively, these educators regularly spend time and develop relationships with students during the most significant developmental years of their lives. Physical educators see their purpose as not only getting kids to be more physically fit, but more importantly, encouraging students to value good health and the joy of living physically active lives."

To help schools celebrate National Physical Education and Sport Week and to encourage schools to promote fitness activities throughout the year, SHAPE America has created resources to support educators and advocates. Their website features a variety of lesson plans for elementary and secondary grade levels, a sample press release, social media messages, and a certificate of participation that teachers can distribute to students.

In addition, two new guidance documents have recently been released:

"Essential Components of Physical Education" defines the four essential components of physical education. The document raises awareness and identifies physical education as a key element of a well-rounded education for all students. View this document at a4sa.org/SHAPE-Elements.

"Appropriate Practices for Health Education" gives teachers, administrators, curriculum specialists, and teacher trainers a detailed blueprint for designing and delivering health education that meets national, state, and local standards. View this document at a4sa.org/SHAPE-Practices.

"We urge every school in the country to coordinate a physical activity event during National Physical Education and Sport Week," said Jefferies. "We want to motivate students to jump-start their physical activity routine." ●

TO LEARN MORE about SHAPE America, go to ShapeAmerica.org.

NEWS OF NOTE



We've Got Spirit! How 'Bout You?

WHEN WE THINK of school spirit, we may envision pep rallies or crowds of students clad in school colors under the Friday-night lights. But according to a recent Harris poll, commissioned and summarized in a white paper by Varsity Brands, the effects of school spirit transcend traditional events. In fact, students with higher levels of school spirit perform better academically, are more socially and civically engaged, and are happier in general. Further, the research indicates that student activities are a key factor in promoting positive school spirit and a sense of belonging.

The results of the survey reveal that many school administrators are well aware of the correlations between school spirit, activities, and student achievement.

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Sailing Into Student Engagement

SPANNING 137,700 acres and boasting 88 miles of beautiful shoreline, Lake Winnebago in eastern Wisconsin is a freshwater paradise for nature lovers and outdoor-sports enthusiasts. But in recent years, hectic schedules and increased preoccupation with technology have depleted the time that families spend in nature and led to a decline in outdoor recreation. For sailing enthusiasts Steve and Sara Eliasen, this trend represents a missed opportunity for our youth. Today, the Eliasens' vision to reintroduce students to the great outdoors has evolved into a nonprofit organization that has served more than 6,000 students since 2008.

The mission of International Youth Sailing of Oshkosh (IYSO) is multi-faceted: through sailing-based activities and techniques, IYSO invites students to experience an outdoor sport, learn valuable skills, and apply classroom concepts to the outside world. "The founding premise is that the science of sailing has so much inherent knowledge embedded within it," said Steve Eliasen. He lists aerodynamics, applied mathematics, and ecosystems as topics that can be explored through the study of sailing. And while IYSO was initially designed to target STEM-skill development, both character education and creative collaboration became natural complements to the program.



"I believe it's so important that our kids connect with the natural world. Without that firsthand connection, the need to preserve, protect, enjoy, and share our world will seem like an odd proposition."

The IYSO initiative challenges students to design and fabricate a sailing rig using plastic tarps, duct tape, and other supplies. Before diving into the process, students attend classroom sessions to review mathematical principles, ratios, and desired performance characteristics. Students then sketch their designs, build models, and ultimately, craft their rigs. Finally, teams of students test their rigs on the water and make appropriate adjustments before participating in an actual boat race. Through the years, project organizers have

fine-tuned the program to include lessons in resourcefulness (using repurposed materials) and communications (having students "pitch" their design to local businesses).

It's difficult for the Eliasens to believe that what started out as a casual conversation over coffee has developed into such a vibrant program. To date, six school districts have participated in the program, and the Oshkosh Recreation Department and other area businesses have provided sponsorship and support. Steve Eliasen's efforts also led to his being recruited to run for the Oshkosh Board of Education, where he currently serves as a board member.

Although the establishment of IYSO has required numerous hours and lots of elbow grease, Eliasen and his team are fully committed to the success of the project. "I believe it's so important that our kids connect with the natural world," he said. "Without that firsthand connection, the need to preserve, protect, enjoy, and share our world will seem like an odd proposition."

Eliassen encourages teachers, parents, and other education stakeholders to advocate for activities and issues they believe in, and to never underestimate the power of a small group of committed individuals. He offers five key pieces of advice for anyone who is serious about starting a new student activities program:

- **Embrace an unwavering resolve** that what you are doing matters and is worth seeing through.
- **Be willing to invest** a significant amount of your own time and energy.
- **Invite the support** of a few key champions who believe in the project as much as you do.
- **Work tirelessly** for a perfect safety record.
- **Never stop asking** people for support. And remember that in addition to funding, support can mean equipment, volunteers, use of community resources, and approval from school administrators and city leaders.

Perhaps it's only fitting that in a place with access to so many natural resources, the IYSO sailing program has expanded to include outdoor sports for all seasons. During the 2013–2014 school year, the group launched an afterschool skating club on the same lake where students sail in the warmer months. This winter, the program expanded to include daytime and afterschool skiing at several schools. Learn-to-ski events, sledding, and cross country skiing are also being added to the agenda.

Eliassen is happy that he did not listen when naysayers told him it couldn't be done. He remembers starting out with two sailboats and a dream. "We started with just that—doing what we could. The rest followed," he said. "Everything came into place inexplicably, beautifully, organically." ●



Of the principals surveyed, 92 percent of them believe that higher levels of school spirit lead to big benefits, and a majority commonly use activities and events to drive school spirit. In addition, 90 percent of principals actively promote clubs and organizations.

“When students feel a sense of efficacy, they tend to be more involved, more in tune with the great opportunities that exist on their campus,” said one principal who participated in the survey. “If they are not doing well in school, they are not involved in athletics or many of the activities. Additionally, they do not take personal responsibility for not doing well and tend to blame the school or other factors. Students who are achieving strongly tend to be involved in all aspects of high school. They join clubs, they start clubs, and they participate in different events, activities, and athletics on site.”

And while today’s students are busier than ever with academics, work, activities, and community involvement, taking pride in and building a positive connection with their campus communities are still important. For many of these students, school pride has evolved into hands-on activities that promote leadership, service, and community connections. The survey showed that during the 2013–2014 school year, high school students were involved in an average of eight activities per student. “Getting involved, caring about your school, being a good citizen, and supporting teams and clubs” were cited as reasons for their participation.

These high levels of involvement and a positive perception of school are directly related. Of students who ranked high in school spirit, 88 percent regularly attend dances, athletic events, and other social activities. And 76 percent of students with high levels of school spirit participate in band, choir, drama, clubs, and other school-based activities.

For many students, school spirit signifies pride in community and a healthy sense of self. By providing students with opportunities to connect with peers and faculty members and to practice their areas of interest, the student activities arena is the perfect venue for creating a campus where all students are encouraged to thrive. ●

TO READ *School Spirit: The Connection Between Achievement, Involvement, and Confidence* (2014) from Varsity Brands, go to a4sa.org/VarsityBrandsWhitePaper.

🗨️ PROMOTE THE VALUE

quality connections

linking

clubs & activities

with

success

Simply participating in any club or activity increases a student's chances of college enrollment. But the odds of enrollment **double** if a student joins a group with an average GPA that's one point higher than his or hers.

Gibbs, Erickson, Dufur, and Miles, 2014

A study found that participation in after-school activities in 8th grade boosted standardized reading scores by **2%** and math scores by **2.9%**. In 10th grade, reading scores went up by **4%** and math scores went up by **5.7%**.

Schreiber and Chambers, 2002

THE BOTTOM LINE:
When a student participates in one or more clubs or activities, he or she is *virtually guaranteed* to earn better grades, go to college, and make better life decisions!

Students who participate in at least one activity in each year of high school are **70% more likely** to attend college, **60% more likely** to vote, and **80% more likely** to volunteer than those who only participate in *some* years.

Zaff et al., 2003

Students who participate in just one or two extracurricular activities are **2X less likely** to smoke tobacco, **2.5X less likely** to smoke marijuana, and **50% less likely** to drink alcohol.

Elder, Lever-Dunn, Wang, Nagy, and Green, 2000

Promote the Value.

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

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