



Indicator: The school expects all students to participate in activities to develop skills outside of the classroom (e.g., service learning, athletics, enrichment, internships). (5090)

Explanation: The evidence review suggests that high performing school staffs espouse a culture of achievement. Setting high expectations includes all students participating in service learning projects, athletics, enrichment, and/or internships. High performing schools encourage participating in service learning projects because doing so tends to enhance critical thinking skills as students identify and solve issues that transcend the traditional school boundaries. In addition, service learning opportunities promote connections between academics and real world experience. An inclusive, not exclusionary, athletics program promotes for participants not only time management, persistence, patience and the value of practice, but also fosters social relationships, teamwork, fitness and improved academics. Enrichment opportunities can invite students to take academic risks through the investigation of a domain which does not reside within the traditional curricula. Structured internships provide students additional chances to apply their learning in a real world setting.

Questions: How will the school ensure that all teachers promote a culture of achievement that sets high expectations for student participation in service learning? How will the school ensure that all teachers promote a culture of achievement that sets high expectations for inclusive athletic opportunities? How will the school ensure that all teachers promote a culture of achievement that sets high expectations for student participation in enrichment offerings? How will the school ensure that all teachers promote a culture of achievement that sets high expectations for student participation in internships? What processes will the school use to design, implement and monitor student service learning projects? What training will the school provide to teachers to equip them to arrange, oversee and/or facilitate service learning? How will the school ensure that athletics are equitably inclusive and not exclusionary? What processes will the school use to implement and manage a comprehensive menu of enrichment offerings?

What type of activities can schools provide outside of the classroom to benefit students?

While the term extracurricular activities may evoke memories of student government elections and football games, Eccles and Barber (1999) outline five different types of beneficial extracurricular involvement that are organized by schools. These types are:

1. Prosocial (church and volunteer activities),
2. Team sports (any school team),
3. School involvement (pep club, student council),
4. Performing arts (drama, marching band), and

5. Academic clubs (science club, foreign language club) (p. 13).

These categories include many different opportunities for students to build skills, find mentorship, and grow their peer networks. However, other types of activities may provide these elements but also enhance student understanding of the larger community, of a particular trade, or what the working world is like. Other opportunities, which are tied to the academic part of the school day, can have extracurricular components as well. Darling-Hammond, Aness, and Ort (2002) simply call these “external learning experiences” (p. 660). Two of these ever-growing opportunities are career-focused internships and service-learning.

Why is extracurricular involvement beneficial to students?

Not all foundational learning experiences occur in the classroom. Particularly in high school, participation in structured, school-based activities, referred to as extracurricular activities, have long been found to promote positive outcomes for students. Fredricks and Eccles (2006) discuss a long list of benefits to students who are involved in extracurricular sports, clubs, and activities, including: higher achievement in classes and on standardized tests, greater engagement with the school and community, better mental health and self-esteem, decreased negative behaviors, and a higher likelihood of going to college (p. 698). Darling, Caldwell, and Smith (2005) found that extracurricular involvement “leads to processes that bind students to the adult-oriented values of the school (e.g., good academic performance, high academic aspirations, and high academic aspirations)” (p. 72). Eccles and Barber (1999) found that a wide range of activities – from volunteering to student council to team sports to performing arts – all led to a higher than expected grade point average and a higher likelihood of postsecondary enrollment and retention.

In addition to the academic benefits of participating in a sport or club, students engaged in these groups are also exposed to new people, ideas, and activities that they may not have connected with in the classroom. Extracurricular participation is also tied to having an expanded positive social support network and a more voluntary connection to and engagement with school itself (Mahoney & Cairns, 1997; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Darling, Caldwell, & Smith, 2005). As these types of activities

have adult supervision, they often result in positive adult-student relationships that are less formal than those between teacher and student (Darling, Caldwell, & Smith, 2005). Not only are students more engaged with school when they participate in extracurricular activities, but they also report that, simply put, they like school more when they are involved (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Darling, Caldwell, & Smith, 2005).

Both service-learning and work-based internships provide a different type of experience. While research connects both types of programs to providing an outlet for student voice and interests, better peer group engagement, and mentorship from adults at the school, they also connect their outside experiences to the classroom in ways that other activities cannot. They each provide different real-world experiences that can expand student understanding, connect students to possible career paths, and enhance their future civic engagement (Scales, et al., 2006; Darling-Hammond, Aness, & Ort, 2002).

What can schools do to promote extracurricular involvement?

The rate of student participation in school activities is related to their perception of school climate, as well as school size. In schools with larger student bodies and less positive climates, student participation in athletics and other activities may be lower (McNeal, 1999). This is partly due to an issue of access – there are only a certain number of positions on a sports team or roles in a student governing body, so when there are more students vying for those spots, a lower percentage of students will ultimately get to participate. It is up to schools to provide more opportunities and remove barriers for students to engage outside of the classroom.

On a more individual level, the focus on what students enjoy and do well – instead of mandatory material that some students may struggle with – is a particularly meaningful aspect of extracurricular activities, especially for students who may not be as academically successful. For this reason, sports and performing arts are powerful levers to keep students engaged in school; whenever possible, barriers such as minimum GPA or prerequisite expertise should be used sparingly (Mahoney & Cairns, 1997).

Service-learning and internships are intrinsically tied to the curriculum and theme of the school and are therefore an extension of the classroom that takes place in real communities and workplaces. In different ways, they allow students to apply their academic learning to real experiences and build skills and understanding that will stay with them beyond high school (Scales, et al., 2006; Darling-Hammond, Aness, & Ort, 2002). Both approaches have both been found to be most effective when there is classroom-based preparation prior to the real-world experience and guided reflection during and after the experience (Scales, et al., 2006; Kemple & Snipes, 2000). Focusing on student processing of the experiences as much as the experiences themselves will be critical for educators to maximize their students' experiences and reap potential benefits.

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