

From the President - August 2004

Extracurricular Activities Benefit Kids

As another school year gets under way, parents may want to add one more item to their list of how to help their kids succeed in school – and in life. And that's to encourage their kids to participate in extracurricular activities. That doesn't mean children's schedules should be so overloaded that they scarcely have time to breathe, as in the "hurried child" syndrome. It does mean helping children and teens choose selectively from the many different types of activities that are out there and supporting their choices.

Research shows that participating in extracurricular activities is good for kids apparently both because it may keep them out of harm's way and also because of what this participation can bring into their lives. Recent evidence indicates that such activities are indeed popular among youth. An example is the some of the latest information posted on the Child Trends DataBank (a continuously updated online resource of statistical information on children and youth that our organization launched in 2002). The DataBank reports that in 2001, the most recent year for which data are available, more than one-third (38 percent) of children in kindergarten through eighth grade participated in after-school activities.

But that still leaves a significant proportion of kids who are not involved in any such activities, and these kids lose out.

Whether they are active in sports teams, drama productions, poetry and music groups, tutoring programs, community service organizations, or religious activities, children and teens can derive multiple benefits from this involvement. Teens, for example, can learn new skills, gain confidence, hone their leadership abilities, and both mentor others and be mentored themselves. Younger children can learn to share and compromise and stay on task. And children of varying ages can demonstrate their abilities in a different setting than that of a typical classroom, with its more traditional notions of who's an achiever and who's not.

Such benefits have been shown to have positive effects on young people's social, emotional, and cognitive development during the years they are involved in extracurricular activities. But these effects don't end then.

Research indicates that regular participation in extracurricular activities during adolescence can lead to long-term payoffs. Studies find that teens who are involved in extracurricular activities are more likely to go on to attend college, which, in turn, can increase their potential lifetime earnings. These involved teens are also more likely as adults to vote in national and local elections and to volunteer in community and religious organizations, thus making real the concept of *civic engagement*.

These findings are from a study by Child Trends researchers published in the *Journal of Adolescent Research* (Vol. 18, Issue No. 06, November 2003). The article, "Implications of Extracurricular Activity Participation During Adolescence on Positive Outcomes," is authored by Jonathan F. Zaff, Kristin A. Moore, Angela Romano

Papillo, Stephanie Williams was and based on analyses of data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988, a nationally representative long-term study that followed a sample of eighth-graders through high school and into early adulthood. The results of these analyses showed that, even after taking into account family background, teens who consistently participated in extracurricular activities from eighth- through 12th-grade were:

- 70 percent more likely to attend college;
- 66 percent more likely to vote as young adults; and
- 50 percent more likely to volunteer.

Consistency makes a real difference. Just starting an activity and quickly dropping it seems unlikely to reap the same benefits. In the case of teens who only occasionally participated in extracurricular activities, for example, the percentages of college attendance, voting, and volunteering were considerably lower (48 percent, 52 percent, and 32 percent, respectively) than those of their more involved peers.

There's a message for society in this research. That message is that participation in extracurricular activities doesn't just help the youth involved; the benefits can spread throughout the communities that these youth call home – and beyond. Extracurricular activities, then, are a worthwhile social investment.

There's also a message for parents. That message is that it's not only important to encourage your kids to participate in extracurricular activities; it's also important to encourage them to participate consistently. In other words, help them to see that getting involved is good; but staying involved is even better.

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President and Senior Scholar

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From: Montza Williams
To: Angela B. Burkham; Ballard, Faith; Brad Davis; Cody Stone; Cross, K. Scott; Dan James; Felder, Courtney L; Foster, Pamela; Hall, Gayle W; Jeff Howard; Karr, Kalico; Kevin Chilek; Locke, Darlene; Martha E. Couch; Newberry, Cheryl; Reeves, Jim E; Ron A. Howard Jr.; Saldana, Luis; Tarpley, G. Matt; Toby L. Lepley
Date: 8/20/04 11:45AM
Subject: Fwd: Child Trends E-Newsletter, August 20, 2004

I know that Dan, Faith and Angela saw this from Mary, but I thought the rest of you may be interested.
Montza

>>> Mary Strickland 8/20/2004 11:10:20 AM >>>

Many of you may receive this newsletter. I wanted to draw your attention to the article on ExtraCurricular Activities. Thought you would enjoy - Mary

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