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COMPARISON OF STUDENTS ELIGIBLE FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION WHO
ARE INVOLVED IN EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES
AND THOSE NOT INVOLVED

by
Lisa Owen

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Masters of Arts Degree
of
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at
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May 9, 2000

Approved by _____
Professor

Date Approved 5-9-00

ABSTRACT

Lisa M. Owen
Comparison of Students Eligible for Special Education Services Who
are Involved in Extra-Curricular Activities
and Those Not Involved
Spring, 2000
Dr. Dihoff
School Psychology

The difference in academic achievement of students eligible for special education services who are involved in extra-curricular activities and those not involved was studied. Academic achievement referred to the report card grades and semester grade point averages of the students. Extra-curricular activities included those associated with the high school. The purpose of the study was to identify the differences in academic achievement between these two groups of students.

There were 193 subjects from a suburban high school in Southern New Jersey. The sample was from varying ethnic and economic backgrounds. They were eligible for special services under 8 different classifications, and their program type ranged from fully mainstreamed to self-contained classes. A Pearson Correlation was used to analyze the data.

Semester grade point averages were compared for students eligible for special education services who were involved in extra-curricular activities and those not involved.

The analysis showed that the correlation between involvement and grade point averages was significant. In this study, students who are involved in extra-curricular activities had higher academic achievement than those not involved.

MINI-ABSTRACT

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This study examined the extra-curricular involvement of students eligible for special education. Grade point averages were compared for Group One, students involved in extra-curricular activities and Group Two, students not involved in extra-curricular activities. Analysis showed that the correlation between involvement and grade point average was significant.

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CHAPTER 1: THE PROBLEM

Need

It is necessary to know more about extra-curricular involvement of students in special education. By definition of a learning disability (perceptual impairment in the state of New Jersey), students are not achieving in accordance with their potential ability. This failure to achieve often starts at an early age and allows them to become classified students placed in special education. Students realize that their academic achievement is not at the same level as other students who are the same age. Helping the students to realize that they can reach a high level of academic achievement is very important.

There is a vast difference between students in special education who are high achievers who strive to do their best in many situations and low achievers who do not. One area that seems to make a difference in academic achievement is student involvement in extra-curricular activities.

There is a need to examine how much better academic achievement is for students in special education who are involved in extra-curricular activities. If students involved have higher academic achievement, then parents, teachers, counselors, case managers, and any other person who can influence students should strongly encourage and guide them to become involved. It would be imperative to encourage students from a young age so that they get the benefits of experiencing involvement and success.

This thesis can lead to further research. Many studies discuss involvement of students in extra-curricular activities and academic achievement, but very few focus on

students in special education. Further research can focus on students in special education at various ages and the amount of their involvement in extra-curricular activities that is necessary before a significant increase is seen in their academic achievement. More specifically, it would be good to study students at the elementary and middle school levels, as well as specific grade levels. The amount of involvement would look at the number of extra-curricular activities each individual was involved. Research could also branch out into other areas affected by extra-curricular involvement including self-esteem, peer acceptance, drug and alcohol use, and behavior problems. Students who believe they can achieve in extra-curricular areas also believe they can achieve in other areas. By researching extra-curricular involvement, many students in special education can benefit.

Purpose

The differences in academic achievement of students in special education who are involved in extra-curricular activities and those not involved was studied. The report card grades of a high school population of students eligible for special education services, including those placed in mainstreamed, inclusion, resource center, or self-contained classes was examined and compared to their involvement in extra-curricular activities. Extra-curricular activities include those associated with the high school.

The purpose of this study is to identify the differences in academic achievement between students in special education who are involved in extra-curricular activities and students in special education who are not involved in extra curricular activities.

Hypothesis

Students eligible for special education services mainstreamed, inclusion, resource center, or self-contained classes who participate in at least one extra-curricular activity in the high school setting have higher academic achievement in the form of report card grades than the same classified students who do not participate in any extra-curricular activity.

Theory

Achievement concerns the development of motives, capabilities, interests, and behavior that have to do with performance in evaluative situations (Steinberg, 1999). Many studies of academic achievement focus on performance in educational settings and their hopes and plans for future scholastic and occupational careers (Steinberg, 1999). Society places an extraordinary emphasis on achievement, competition, and success. Students are continually assessed to determine how they stand in relations to their peers. Examples such as grade point averages, principal's list, honor roll, and class rank are some ways that high schools assess and encourage high academic achievement. Every student deserves the opportunity to achieve at the highest level. Participation in extra-curricular activities may be one way to foster high academic achievement. Achievement is a life long concern.

In 1938, Henry Murray developed a theory of personality organized in terms of needs and motives. Today, it remains the broadest ranging effort of its type. He developed a catalog of human needs with emphasis on psychogenic, or secondary needs. He studied many different needs, but achievement, dominance, affiliation, and nurturance received the

most research attention from other psychologists. He believed the need for achievement underlies one of the most important motives in human behavior (Carver, 1996).

Achievement motivation is the desire to do things well and take pleasure in overcoming obstacles.

An assessment device called the Thematic Apperception Test, or TAT is frequently used to assess needs. Motives are assessed as a person views a set of ambiguous pictures, in which it is not clear what is going on. The person is asked to display his/her creativity by writing a story about each picture. According to the principle of apperception, the themes that show up in the stories reflect motivations. People put the motivational concerns that occupy their minds into the stories they create (Carver, 1996). Most studies of achievement motive were assessed by using the TAT, but some have used paper and pencil self-report measures (Helmreich, 1978; Mehrabian, 1969).

Studies of people high in achievement motivation versus those who are low in achievement motivation have found that they differ in several ways in how they approach achievement related situations. For instance, consider what happens when a person chooses a task. The task can be easy, hard, or somewhere in the middle.

People with low achievement motivation prefer tasks either very easy or very difficult. In an easy task, there is not much pressure, and it is nice to get something right even if it is not very hard. People with a low achievement motivation do not work on a very difficult task for the challenge of it. Doing poorly on a very difficult task does not reflect badly on that person, and there is always the possibility of getting lucky and getting it right (Carver, 1996).

People with a high achievement motivation prefer tasks of moderate difficulty. These tasks provide information about ability. If the person does well on an easy task or fails at a difficult task, he/she does not learn much about ability. In the middle, the person can find out a lot about ability (Carver, 1996).

The need for achievement is positively related to persistence in the face of failure (Feather, 1961). It is related to actual task performances (Lowell, 1952) and grades in school (Schultz, 1976; Atkinson (1978). This motivation variable clearly plays an important role in a variety of achievement related behaviors. Motivation to learn or participate is essential to the success of any program. For students in special education, lack of motivation is often a roadblock to success.

By getting students involved in extra-curricular activities in areas of interest to them, their motivation to do well in these areas is likely to increase. As they become successful in extra-curricular activities, their motivation to do well in other areas is also likely to increase. The need for achievement in extra-curricular activities can also carry over into their need to achieve in academics. By fostering this need for academic achievement, students will become more achievement oriented. This is a lifelong concern that will be a benefit for all future endeavors.

A program at the University of Kansas Institute for Research in Learning Disabilities focuses on producing independent and active learners. To accomplish this goal, interventions are aimed at training self-control skills such as goal setting, self-evaluation, and self-reinforcement (Haring, 1994). Extra-curricular activities focus on these same skills. By encouraging students to become involved, they can experience these important

classroom and life skills in other areas and then carry them over into academic achievement.

One recurring theme in literature on motivating students in special education is the need to involve the student. Kerr and Nelson (1989), recommend encouraging students to participate in all aspects of the curriculum. They should be involved in selecting their own academic and social goals (Haring, 1994). Educators do not let students choose academic goals without guidance. Teachers, case managers, counselors, and parents aid the student in selecting academic goals and choosing what will best fit his/her individual needs. The same should be done with social goals. Students are often unaware of extra-curricular activities and sports which are available to them, what they entail, or how to get involved. Extra-curricular activities are one way to give students the opportunity to set social goals for themselves. These activities will benefit the student in numerous ways.

Definitions

Special Education Instruction designed for students with special learning needs.

Special education is evidence of society's willingness to recognize and respond to the individual needs of students and limits of regular school programs to accommodate those needs.

Learning Disability A label a student receives to make him/her eligible for special education classes. For this classification, a student shows a significant discrepancy between their academic ability and achievement. This discrepancy cannot be the primary result of a visual, hearing, or motor handicap; mental retardation; emotional disturbance; or environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.

Perceptual Impairment (PI) The state of New Jersey's label given to students with a learning disability.

Extra-Curricular Activity Sports, clubs, or organizations associated with a school.

Mainstreamed Class Classified special education students are placed in a regular classroom setting and follow the regular education curriculum. The class is taught by a regular education teacher.

Inclusion Class Classified special education students are placed in a regular education setting and follow the regular education curriculum with modifications when necessary. The class is cooperatively taught by a regular education and special education teacher.

Resource Center Class Classified special education students are placed in a resource classroom with up to nine students in the class. The regular education curriculum is adapted to meet the individual needs of each student in the class. The class is taught by a special education teacher.

Self-Contained Class Classified special education students are placed in a classroom with the same group of students who have similar needs. The class stays together for the entire school day. All subjects are usually taught by one special education teacher.

Report Card Grades The school year is divided into four marking periods. At the end of each marking period, the student receives a numerical grade ranging from 0 to 100 for each class. The grading scale is as follows: 90 - 100 = A; 80 - 89 = B; 70 - 79 = C; 65 - 69 = D; 0 - 64 = F.

Need An unsatisfactory internal condition that motivates behavior.

Motive Clusters of cognitions organized around a preference or readiness for certain qualities of experience.

Primary (Viscerogenic) Needs Needs based on our biological nature.

Secondary (Psychogenic) Needs Needs either derived from biological needs or are inherited in our psychological make-up.

Apperception Process of projecting fantasy imagery onto an objective stimulus.

Assumptions

All special education students eligible for special education who are placed in mainstreamed, inclusion, resource center, or self-contained classes were researched for involvement in extra-curricular activities.

Eligibility to participate in extra-curricular activities requires students to carry a certain grade point average. Eligibility requirements are the same for all students.

Teachers have the same grading system for report card grades. An "A" in one class is the same as an "A" in another. An "F" in one class is the same as another.

Limitations

Highland High School is overcrowded and on a staggered school day. Freshman arrive at 9:30 and are dismissed at 4:01. Because of this staggered session, freshmen students have fewer opportunities for involvement in clubs, however, they have access to the same number of sports.

This research is only based on one semester.

Overview

Extra-curricular involvement of students in special education was studied throughout of this thesis. In chapter 2, relevant literature was reviewed. The research focused on the involvement of students in extra-curricular activities including various sports, clubs, and organizations. The research contrasted the academic achievement of students who were involved with students who were not involved. In chapter 3, the design of the study was explained. An explanation of the sample and how the hypothesis was tested is provided. In chapter 4, the results of the study are presented. In chapter 5, a summary of the findings and the conclusions were explained.

High academic achievement is something educators want from all of their students. Those students involved in extra-curricular activities are often higher achievers than those who are not involved. To lend credibility, a review of the literature is discussed.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Overview

The research on extra-curricular involvement of high school students is quite varied. The research is scarce in the particular area of special education students and their extra-curricular involvement. Only modest attention has been given to the effects of extra-curricular involvement for marginal students, yet they could benefit the most. Three areas of focus include the benefits of extra-curricular involvement, athletic involvement and achievement, and extra programs that benefit students.

Benefits of Extra-curricular Involvement

Research has shown that extra-curricular participation is associated with leadership, academic excellence, and popularity (Mahoney, 1997). There are few ethnic differences in overall activity participation, so various students benefit from involvement. High school extra-curricular involvement increases substantially because it provides adolescents with more opportunities for activity participation that is suited to their interests and abilities. Extra-curricular involvement may be one component of transition to high school that could help shift balance toward greater engagement in school (Mahoney, 1997).

Clear evidence that participation in extra-curricular activities during the high school years provides a protective context in terms of both academic performance and involvement in risky behaviors (Eccles, 1999). The benefits in self-esteem one attains

from the increase in peer status associated with successful participation in extra-curricular activities is great. There is added skill and attitude acquisition, both interpersonal and personal, and increased membership in important social networks (Eccles, 1999).

As one moves through adolescence, individuals become identified with particular groups of friends or crowds. Being a member of one of these crowds helps structure both what one does with one's own time and the kind of values and norms one is exposed (Eccles, 1999). Many extra-curricular activities take up considerable amounts of the adolescent's time and are done with other adolescents and adults. Participation in some of these activities directly affects the adolescent's peer groups precisely because such participation structures a substantial amount of peer group interaction (Eccles, 1999). Extra-curricular activity participation can facilitate the adolescent developmental need for social relatedness and can contribute to one's identity as an important and valued member of the school community. Adolescents seek out an identity that allows them to feel effective, successful, and connected in their everyday activities. Extra-curricular activities provide youth with the opportunity to form such identifies (Eccles, 1999). The strongest element of a student's integration is the peer group. Along with identity formation, membership in extra-curricular activities contributes to personal development (McNeal, 1995).

During adolescent development, students need to feel integrated into school. This integration has been related to dropout rates. Dropout is a considerable concern for educators and the community. Dropping out of high school in the United States is related to the increased probability of criminal behavior, lower occupational and economic prospects, lower lifetime earnings, increased likelihood of becoming a member of the

lower class, lower levels of academic skills, poorer levels of mental and physical health, lower tax revenues, and increased expenditure for governmental assistance programs (McNeal, 1995).

Engagement in extra-curricular activities is linked to decreasing rates of early school dropout in both boys and girls. The outcome is observed primarily among students who were at the highest risk for dropout (Mahoney, 1997). For students whose prior commitment to the school and its values has been marginal, participation provides an opportunity to create a positive and voluntary connection to the school. Unlike alternative procedures which focus on the deficits of students and serve as a catalyst in the formation of deviant groups, extra-curricular activities can provide a gateway into conventional social networks while promoting individual interests, achievements, and goals (Mahoney, 1997). School dropout may be effectively decreased through maintenance and enhancement of positive characteristics of the individual that strengthens the student-school connection.

Recent research indicates positive consequences of participation in organized activities. Extra-curricular activities were related to lower chances of school dropout. There has been a connection to reduced rates of criminal acts. Adolescents involved in a broad range of activities report lower rates of substance use than non-involved peers (Eccles, 1999). Participation in extra-curricular activities has been linked to increases in positive development such as self-concept, high school grade point average, school engagement, and educational aspirations (Eccles, 1999).

A view that dropping out is determined in part by the student's level of integration allows for the student to voluntarily reduce his/her likelihood of dropping out.

Involvement is the most important aspect of a student's social bond to school. A higher level of integration leads to a decreased likelihood of exiting the school environment. The concept of integration is critical because the level of integration into an environment determines whether an individual remains or departs from a group (McNeal, 1995).

Integration into school effects dropping out. Participation in the athletic arena significantly reduces the student's likelihood of dropping out. Athletics is generally the most prestigious extra-curricular activity. Participation in athletics may be more integrating because of the frequent interaction with peers and a more time intensive commitment. Participation in athletics has the largest impact on variables for students staying in school (McNeal, 1995).

Other extra-curricular activities also have an impact on dropping out. The impact of participating in fine-arts may individually effect dropping out. Fine arts activities are a way of gaining access to the more elite population. It may be that gaining entrance to this group exposes students to peers who have better attitudes toward school and this may have a contagious effect (Yassa, 1999).

There is a clear connection between learning that takes place in drama courses and a student's personality development. Active participation in creative drama leads to a positive gain in personal qualities such as poise and self confidence, as well as in interpersonal qualities such as empathy, tolerance, and adaptability (Yassa, 1999). Students in fine arts find it easier to apply social skills such as communication, empathy, and negotiation to their wider social network. Creative drama enables students to search for new possibilities within themselves and within the broader world. Fine arts helped build a more flexible and tolerant society, one that recognizes the differences between

people. Although these activities are not as prominent as athletic activities, the values taught through fine arts may be more conducive to completing school (Yassa, 1999).

A student's desire or need to be involved may drive the need to be part of a group which may lead a student to participate in activities and persist in school (McNeal, 1995).

An overview of educational and psychological literature on the effects of extra-curricular activities indicates only modest attention has been given to the effects of extra-curricular participation for marginal students, yet these students could benefit the most. School dropout rate among at risk students was markedly lower for students who had earlier participated in extra-curricular activities compared with those who did not participate (Mahoney, 1997). Many activities such as math club, French club, and National Honor Society, are closely linked to academic achievement and performance, but participation in non academic activities are just as beneficial. Participation can raise an individual's status within school and extend her or his social affiliations in the school community. The impact would be to render school a more meaningful and attractive experience for students who have experienced few successes in academic subjects (Mahoney, 1997).

Involvement in school predicts positive outcomes that are maximized if the student maintains multiple, expanding forms of participation in school relevant activities. Extra-curricular activities have potential for contributing to students sense of identification with the school, and that enhanced academic self-concept may result from increased identification (Marsh, 1992).

Extra-curricular activities are favorably associated with social self-concept, academic self-concept, taking advanced courses, time spent on homework, postsecondary

involvement, and absenteeism (Marsh, 1992). Participation in sports, school-based leadership, school spirit activities, and academic clubs predicted increased likelihood of being enrolled full time in college at age 21 (Eccles, 1999). Extra-curricular participation also has shown a positive effect on education, occupation, income, and personal-social adjustment fifteen years after high school (March, 1992).

More importantly, there is a link between adolescent extra-curricular involvement and adult educational attainment, occupation, and income (Eccles, 1999). Involvement in high school extra-curricular activities is predictive of several indicators of healthy adult development, including active participation in the political process and other types of volunteer activities, continued sports engagement, and better mental health (Eccles, 1999).

Promoting extra-curricular activity participation is likely to have positive benefits across a wide variety of educationally relevant outcomes for students from diverse backgrounds. Participation has typically facilitated academic outcomes rather than detracted from them (Marsh, 1992). Research has found that students who participate in extra-curricular activities tend to have higher levels of academic achievement (McNeal, 1995). A productive use of time plays into successful adolescent development. Constructive, organized activities are a good use of the adolescent's time (Eccles, 1999).

ATHLETIC PARTICIPATION AND ACHIEVEMENT

Studies indicate that participation in high school sports does not mean having to sacrifice academics. In fact, playing sports can boost grades and even help in college and career (Chalkley, 1989).

Many school boards and legislatures have decided that high school students must meet a minimum grade point average in order to compete in extra-curricular activities. The purpose of the rule is to motivate students and raise their level of academic performance (Paulsen, 1989).

Most of the research reviewed has focused on white males (Melnick, 1992). Recent research has focused on females and minorities, especially African Americans and Hispanics. Females and minority high school athletes do better academically than non athletes (Chalkley, 1989).

Many people have developed a negative stereotype about athletes and academic achievement. The research for female athletes actually supports the opposite. As cited by Sabo, Melnick, and VanFossen, most studies of sports and achievement have found a positive effect (Hanson, 1998). Extra-curricular activities like sports, give students the opportunity to learn and practice the attitudes, skills, and values that are important for future status success. Sports pull together groups of people and create a sense of unity, identification, and personal identity (Hanson, 1998). Involvement in sports connects students to other students who plan to attend college, and to coaches and teachers who pay special attention to athletes. These connections may contribute to a greater attachment to and identification with school and compliance with traditional academic notions of success (Hanson, 1998). High status is often a result of success in sports. This feeling of recognition and accomplishment may give young women self-confidence and a feeling of recognition that compels them to achieve success in other areas such as academics (Hanson, 1998).

Sports may work to the advantage of all involved. Sports may perform a pattern-maintenance function by providing a learning environment that socializes young women to values and norms of mainstream life and thus contributes to smooth running and stability of society (Hanson, 1998). Related to this is attainment of goals. An emphasis on goals of winning, and success together with values of hard work, delayed gratification, planning, competition, cooperation, and organization are thought to prepare people for success in other areas. Sports has a pattern maintenance, integration, and goal-attainment function for young women because of world competition, whether in sports or other areas, and male networks have often excluded women. When girls enter sports, they enter networks that are larger, less intimate, and based on achievement. It is this type of network that may give them an edge in other areas of achievement as well. According to Sabo (1993), women who are athletes have been found to be more achievement oriented, independent, self-confident, and inner controlled than non athletes (Hanson, 1998).

Hanson and Kraus believe that participation in sports has a positive influence on academic achievement of young women. Young women's involvement in high school sports often has a strong and positive association with their success. They decided to test their theory in the area of science. According to the American Association of University Women, many girls begin to lose interest and do less well in science in the high school years. A theme common to many of the explanations for the gender gap is that science is a male domain with rules and expectations that create obstacles for women. Another domain in the United States that is also inarguably male is sports (Hanson, 1998). Young women who compete well in one domain may develop skills, networks, and attitudes that help them in the other. Sports encourages a range of behaviors beyond traditional female

socialization, and it may well encourage achievement in the traditionally male domain in science. The characteristics that sports engenders in young women include self-confidence, motivation to achieve, independence, and androgyny are precisely the characteristics that are important for success in science (Hanson, 1998).

Results of the research were consistent with the author's thoughts about participation in sports and academic achievement in science. Involvement in a sport is more likely to have a significant effect on science experiences of the female than of male students. Senior year participation in varsity sports had a significant positive effect on the female students' access to and attitudes toward science and achievement in science. Participation in cheerleading and pep clubs, traditional female activities, was related to lower levels of success in science for young women (Hanson, 1998).

One other area that supports female involvement in sports and positive academic achievement is collegiate graduation rates. Athletes in general graduated at a rate slightly higher than that of other undergraduates. Graduation rates for all athletes is 58% which is two points higher than the rates for fellow students. Female athletes graduated at a rate of 70% in comparison to 61% of all female students. The largest difference in graduation rates was for black female athletes who graduate 58% compared to 42% of all black female students. These graduation rates were reported to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) for all athletes and students in Division I colleges (Ethier, 1997).

Sports play a role in the lives of female athletes that carries over into academics. Through sports, women gain physical strength and confidence which transfer into other areas in life (Duffy, 1996). Female athletes are found to have higher levels of self-efficacy

and control which is associated with better performance in the classroom and on the field (Haney, 1995).

There is a positive relationship between athletic participation and athletic achievement for African American and Hispanic youth. Athletic participation enhanced popularity and contributed to greater involvement in extra-curricular activities and school engagement. Athletic participation was significantly related to lower dropout rates for minority youth (Melnick, 1992).

Whether high school sports programs support or interfere with the educational mission continues to be a serious debate. Sports participation seems to have a positive effect on educational aspirations, competitive orientation, self-esteem, college enrollment, college graduation, and adult earnings (Melnick, 1992).

EXTRA SCHOOL PROGRAMS AND BENEFITS TO STUDENTS

There are many extra-curricular programs throughout the country that are benefiting students in many positive ways.

At Bell Elementary School in Indianapolis, Indiana, after school extra-curricular programs get students hooked on school in the elementary grades to keep them from dropping out later. Extra-curricular activities can help children feel good about themselves and about school. According to Constance Dumas, an elementary education teacher, education is about more than books. It is about educating the whole child culturally, artistically and so forth. She thought if she could get a strong, interesting extra-curricular program going, she could keep more kids in school and off the streets (Moyers, 1993).

Dumas works to involve parents and tries to build up the community. She met with parents to get input about obstacles to their children's enrichment. She made these concerns core objectives in the program. She believes one cannot educate the whole child without parents. Efforts have made a much more involved parent community.

The list of extra-curricular activities keeps growing. Activities have a broad range of interest from basketball to computers to photography. There are many positive changes as a result of these extra-curricular activities. Students are excited about school, and talking about clubs and activities. They are excited to go to school and the important thing is they are going to school (Moyers, 1993).

Getting students interested in school from an early age is very important. Using extra-curricular activities to access their interests is working at Bell Elementary School.

At Webb Middle School, in Austin, Texas, gang violence was playing a role in the lives of some of their students. Because of this gang violence, someone needed to do something

YMCA/YWCA groups, boy scouts, girl scouts, boys and girls clubs, and various civic and church affiliated youth groups focus on helping young people build a positive sense of identity. At Webb Middle School they decided to focus on the same issues as these other groups. The school formed clubs that would meet during the school day and they were determined to find something of interest to each student. Faculty and students brainstormed a variety of clubs and the roster grew to fifty different clubs (Juarez, 1996).

Administration decided to make an adjusted class schedule to make time for club meetings to accommodate everyone, and students chose clubs that they wanted to join. There were no failures in clubs, only opportunities to succeed. Some students who were

making F's in academic courses demonstrated extraordinary abilities in the clubs. Success from clubs carried over to success in academics in the classroom (Juarez, 1996).

Employees and nearby businesses acted as community volunteers that tutored students, acted as mentors, or simply shared their time. Some volunteers hosted sports tournaments for all students where everyone was a winner.

After beginning the in school clubs, the school saw a sharp reduction in truancy and dropout rates which dropped to almost zero. Instead of gang colors, students wore colors of club uniforms donated by neighborhood businesses.

School clubs and volunteer mentors were beginning to meet identity needs that compelled youngsters to seek out gang membership in the first place (Juarez, 1996). Helping students find a way to feel connected to the school through extra-curricular activities benefits them in so many ways.

At Vine Street Elementary School in Bangor, Maine, at least 80% of children in a classroom choose to participate in an academic program that extended their school day. Before and after school clubs provide a positive, proactive approach to the negative reactive practice of staying after school. The purpose of the clubs is to encourage children to be responsible for their own learning by providing opportunities for them to make their own choices according to their strengths, interests and needs (Brountas, 1993). Personalized instruction meets individual needs by accommodating those who need reinforcement of skills and strategies, by providing a variety of enrichment activities to challenge advanced learners, and by assisting children in exploring special personal interests (Brountas, 1993).

The most important component to the program is student choice. Participation is voluntary and arranged by student request. Students initiate participation by selecting long or short range goals. The Before School Clubs starts a half hour before school in the morning. The After School Clubs also starts off with a half hour session and builds up to an hour. For some children, clubs are scheduled three mornings and two afternoons a week. There are no late or early buses. Children's commitment is actively supported by parents to transport them to and from the clubs (Broutas, 1993).

An important part of the club is students learn metacognition and practice interaction with others. Students become involved in classroom presentations. Science experiments are prepared during club presentations, and then presented to the rest of the class. Centers are manned by children as they teach classmates how to do experiments. Social studies and health lessons are also student taught mini lessons. Students know how to help each other and themselves, and no longer rely solely on the teacher. Most of the club participants have made a conscious choice and have taken the first step on road to lifelong learning (Broutas, 1993). Children volunteer to take charge of their education.

Hymera School is a kindergarten through eighth grade school. They have instituted a Literacy Club, and the purpose is to allow students to take ownership in the process of inspiring students to read and write about books. The Clubs' Board of Directors is made up of three students from each of the 6th, 7th, and 8th grades, the librarian, a parent, and two teachers. The board meets weekly to discuss ways to promote reading in the school. Major emphasis is placed on reluctant readers and writers. Activities such as sustained silent writing (SSW) allow students to write about books they are reading or any other thoughts they might want to record in their journal. Student

board members conduct class meetings during SSR and SSW times. In meetings, student leaders provide special activities to inspire reluctant readers, conduct contests to promote reading and encourage students to share thoughts about books they have been reading (Bush, 1994). According to Mrs. Bledsoe, a home economics teacher at Hymera, the Literacy Club has helped develop more interest in reading by having several activities to promote reading and writing. It gives the students a chance to be involved in planning activities (Bush, 1994).

Any extra incentives for children to excel in reading and writing is important for lifelong learning. At Hymera, their Literacy Club is helping students strive to be better academically.

At an English speaking public school in Eastern Township in Quebec Canada, teachers have developed reading groups to help low functioning students do better academically. In Eastern Township, 75-80% of students are second language learners in first grade classes. The teachers designed reading clubs in which small groups of students thought to be at risk for failure are coached daily.

Second language and first graders are in a position of having to learn to read concurrently with learning a second language. School experiences are often designed for children whose home language and literacy most match the language and literacy of school children. While first language children attempt to understand written text, second language children were still attempting to understand oral language. Children who are reading very well and who have good vocabulary will read more, learn more word meanings, and read even better. Children with inadequate vocabulary who read slowly

without enjoyment, read less and have slower development of vocabulary knowledge which inhibits further growth in reading ability (Kreuger, 1997).

The club utilizes small groups, three or four students in each group, for thirty minutes of daily instruction. All children in the reading club are non-readers. Most experienced difficulty with names and sounds of alphabet letters. Each session began with a warm-up which introduced and reviewed names and sounds of letters. The warm-up was followed by a quick review of the previous day's lesson or homework. The day's lesson followed and took-up the major segment of time. Students were then given new homework materials (Kreuger, 1997).

This highly repetitive instructional program was very successful. All children were successful in their ability to independently read the weekly story by Friday and were able to achieve 90% on the summary of story.

Children's writing began to improve and emerge. There was a positive transference to their daily journal in classroom writing. As children began to have reading and writing control over an increasing vocabulary, their confidence in their ability as readers and writers grew (Kreuger, 1997).

Of 23 children enrolled in the Reading Club, 19 progressed in reading and writing enough to move with peers into the second grade. Although reading was below class average, the learning curve was much steeper than before the club. Nineteen of the students were confident enough in writing to write what they wanted to say and could communicate what they intended. The students now have taken steps from copying words they see around room to attempting unique stories (Kreuger, 1997). These students had

progressed in one term from being too low to register on the test of measurement to registering in the middle of grade one.

This club managed to help students move onto the next appropriate grade. Without this club, students were in danger of damaged self-esteem, and the emotional effects of being retained. This club works at eliminating the dilemma of deciding to retain students. The club's goal is to help make sure that all first graders succeed in learning to read and write.

Individually research shows that students who participate in athletics are having higher academic achievement. An example of one successful school district is North Allegheny High School in Wexford, Pennsylvania which offers the best in athletics and academics. No one in the state does it better (White, 1995).

Academic achievement is unbelievable. Four North Allegheny schools were honored with National Blue Ribbon Flags of Excellence. This is a high honor awarded to schools by U.S. Department of Education. The average score on the Scholastic Achievement Test in 1994 was 1004, more than 100 points higher than the national average and 125 points higher than the Pennsylvania average. Ninety percent of their graduates went on to college. Forty-six seniors were named Advanced Placement Scholars (White, 1995).

Athletically they are just as impressive. They have won nine Western Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic League (WPIAL) team championships. Only two other schools won more than one and no other school won more than three. WPIAL is the largest district in Pennsylvania and has more than 130 football teams. Two teams won state championships, one finished second, and four finished third. The school district

sponsored twenty-two sports with a combined record of 297-62-1 and a .830 winning percentage (White, 1995).

This school has found the way to encourage high standards academically and athletically. According to Athletic Director, Tim O'Malley, people who live in town have a great deal of work ethic and they pass it down to their children. There is a serious commitment by students and teachers to academics. This carries over into athletics (White, 1995). Most importantly, the same traits that make athletes successful are those traits that need to be emphasized in the classroom. It is possible to raise academic standards.

A program in a high school in northern California should be given the attention of educators. It is promoting achievement in school through sports (PASS). PASS helps athletes attain greater academic success and at the same time improve performance on the field. PASS speaks to a need that significant numbers of athletes have to pick up their grades and also to teachers who may learn how to adapt several methods of learning "on the field" to their classroom (Griffin, 1991).

The class is open to all students with an interest in athletics, but students who typically enroll include those whose academic performance is lagging or who have attitude or attendance problems. Results have been encouraging. PASS students' grades and attendance have improved. Parents note a greater confidence, personal initiative, and self-discipline. The Athletic Director reports that students he thought would never again be eligible to participate are back on the team (Griffin, 1991).

Personal qualities and skills required for success in sports are the same as those for success in school work. In the program, students identify these characteristics and

abilities, extend them, and then apply them to exceed their current achievement in school and sport.

The PASS curriculum has three major elements. First, there is a stress on students' concepts of themselves and on personal philosophy. They focus on the kind of people they are. The program promotes an arete (from ancient Greeks) view of the athlete that stresses excellence and self-transformation in body, mind, and spirit. PASS students read and discuss materials on arete concept and engage in many different activities. Both orally and in writing, they reflect upon their own perspectives of themselves in relation to the arete ideal, exploring the consequences of their current orientation and arete vision for their academic and athletic accomplishments.

The second element they learn is the Fundamentals of Athletic Mastery (FAMs) including concentration, balance, relaxation, power, rhythm, flexibility, attitude, and instinct. These abilities will be the basis for students' work to improve their levels of achievement in sport and in the classroom. The experiences of these qualities adds to students' confidence as they realize they have acted in that way in some part of their life in the past. They are capable people. They just need to commit themselves academically and athletically (Griffin, 1991).

The third element incorporates what has been learned and involves the student designing a personalized Academic and Athletic Project. The project is directed at improving both students' school and athletic performance. Each student is helped by the instructor and other students to develop a plan of action to accomplish the goals of the project, to set up a system of self-monitoring and adjustment, and define a means to access the results of the work. The PASS class acts as a team encouraging each students'

development and implementation of his or her project and viewing success for any classmate as success for all. This team concept gives a boost to those students who may feel more connected to and supported by their peers on the athletic field than by the peers in the classroom.

PASS also teaches skills of reading, writing, oral expression, critical thinking, problem solving, planning and collaborative strategies and personal problem resolution. PASS students can practice ways of approaching their teachers and coaches with assistance.

PASS has several positive concepts. PASS provides an alternative to traditional tutor and rules centered approach to improving the athlete's academic performance. PASS focuses on creating personal responsibility, initiative and effectiveness in athletes. Students like it. The program does not tell young people who love sports that they must stay away from athletics to do well in school. Sports and school work are seen as equally important. PASS encourages intense interest and engagement with sport. That sport involvement should serve as a guide to students' participation in school (Griffin, 1991). Coaches like it. Improvement in athletic and academic performance offers the promise of eligibility and better grades and higher graduation rates, but having a commitment to the sport, they will have more motivated and proficient athletes (Griffin, 1991).

PASS helps young people to more effectively take advantage of the school circumstance. The program emphasizes personal choice. This attitude toward the responsibility and possibility of the students to make it good for themselves (Griffin, 1991).

There are many examples of schools that are incorporating extra-curricular programs to benefit their students academically and help prepare them for life. Extra-curricular involvement is one key to help students achieve at their highest level.

SUMMARY

Research presents clear evidence that participation in extra-curricular activities benefits the student's academic performance. Participation in activities affects the adolescent's peer group and improves integration with the school. Involvement can positively contribute to adolescent identity development and to help them feel successful in everyday activities.

Engagement in extra-curricular activities is linked to decreasing rates of early school dropout. For marginal, at risk students, extra-curricular involvement is a positive voluntary connection to the school. Through extra-curricular involvement, students feel more connected to the school and are more likely to graduate. School becomes more meaningful and this can carry over into academic achievement. Students who participate in extra-curricular activities have higher levels of academic achievement, but more importantly, there is a link between adolescent extra-curricular participation and healthy adult development.

Research indicates that students who participate in high school sports have higher academic achievement. Most schools require a minimum grade point average in order to compete in extra-curricular activities. The purpose is to motivate students to raise their academic performance. Sports participation gives students the opportunity to learn skills and values important for future success. The most positive research has focused on females and minorities. Women athletes have been found to be more achievement

oriented, independent, and self-confident than non athletes. Involvement in sports often has a strong and positive association with success. Female athletes have the highest college graduation rates.

There is also a positive relationship between athletic participation and achievement for African American and Hispanic youth. Participation contributed to greater school engagement and lower dropout rates.

Various programs in many different schools raise academic achievement. Extra-curricular programs at the middle and elementary school level offer various clubs to accommodate different interests. These programs get students interested in school and keep them off the streets.

Literary programs and book clubs have been set up outside of the regular curriculum to promote an interest in reading and to raise academic achievement in reading and writing.

Regardless of the extra-curricular activity, evidence in research suggests that there are benefits to a student's academic achievement if they are involved.

CHAPTER 3: DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Sample

The subjects for this study are from Highland Regional which is a suburban high school in Southern New Jersey. The subjects are from various socioeconomic backgrounds including students who qualify for the lunch program to upper middle class families.

There are 193 students participating in the study. The sample includes all of the students in special education from one high school who are eligible for special education services. Students may be in a variety of classes throughout the day, but they are considered to be in one program type by the state of New Jersey. Of the 193 students, 6 are mainstreamed, 78 are in inclusion classes, 88 are in resource center classes, and 21 are in self-contained classes. These are the program types accepted by the state of New Jersey. Their program type is determined by the percentage of time spent in the program throughout the day.

The students are eligible for services under varying classifications. 153 are perceptually impaired, 12 are traumatic brain injured, TBI (until recently this was considered neurologically impaired), 11 are emotionally disturbed, 10 are multi-handicapped, 4 have other health impairments, 1 is orthopedically handicapped, 1 is visually impaired, and 1 is auditory handicapped.

There are 127 boys and 66 girls. The age of the students range from 14 to 20 with a mean of 16.4 years of age. All participants are in ninth through twelve grade. There

are 64 ninth graders, 11 who are repeating ninth grade, 38 tenth graders, 4 repeating tenth grade, 36 eleventh graders, and 40 twelfth graders. The subjects are of various ethnic backgrounds including 135 Caucasians, 44 African Americans, 10 Hispanics, and 3 Asians/Pacific Islanders, and 1 American Indian .

Design

Existing data was studied to compare students involved in extra-curricular activities and students not involved in extra-curricular activities. The Highland special education directory was generated by the high school's special education department providing information about all of the special education students. The information includes student's name, address, parent or guardian, identification number, periods in school, race, classification, program type, percentage of time in program, date of birth, and grade level.

The student activities coordinator at the high school provided a list of every student who participated in an extra-curricular activity. This list provided the student's name, grade level, and all of the extra-curricular activities in which that student participated.

These two lists, the list of students in special education and the list of students involved in extra-curricular activities, was compared. The students in special education who are involved in extra-curricular activities are Group One, and the students in special education who are not involved in extra-curricular activities are Group Two. This study was a two group design which is between subjects approach.

Report card grades were provided by the high school's child study team office. Report card grades for every school subject were examined for the first semester of the

1999-2000 school year. The grades for each marking period were recorded next to the name of each student in both groups. The total number of A's, B's, C's, D's, and F's were recorded along with the cumulative grade point average for the semester for each student. Group One, students involved in extra-curricular activities, was compared with Group Two, students not involved in extra-curricular activities, to see which group had better academic achievement in the form of report card grades.

Charts and graphs are provided to show all the data collected and the results.

Testable Hypothesis

The Null Hypothesis states there will be no difference found in academic achievement of students involved or not involved in extra-curricular activities.

The Alternative Hypothesis states academic achievement in the form of report card grades for the first two marking periods will be better for students in special education who are involved in extra-curricular activities than for special education students who are not involved.

Analysis

The independent variable was the students' involvement in extra-curricular activities.

The dependent variable was the report card grades of the students.

A Pearson Correlation was used to measure the data. It shows a relationship between involvement and grade point average.

Summary

Group One are the students in special education who are involved in extra-curricular activities. Group Two are the students in special education who are not involved in extra-curricular activities. These two groups were compared to see which group did better academically. Academic achievement refers to the report card grades of each student.

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

The hypothesis states that students in special education who are involved in extra-curricular activities will have better report card grades than students in special education who are not involved in extra-curricular activities.

Report card grades were computed into a semester grade point average. The Pearson Correlation Analysis showed that the correlation between involvement and grade point average was significant at the 0.01 level.

In Table 4.1, semester grade point averages are shown for students involved in extra curricular activities and compared to students not involved in extra-curricular activities. The breakdown for grade point average shows where students fall in a range. The breakdown was 3.5 to 4.0, 3.0 to 3.49, 2.5 to 2.99, 2.0 to 2.49, 1.5 to 1.99, and 0 to 1.49. Table 4.1 shows that many more students who are involved in extra-curricular activities achieved between a 3.0 to 4.0 than students who were not involved. About the same number of students, whether they were involved or not, achieved a 2.0 to 2.49. Fewer students who were involved achieved a 0 to 2.49 grade point average than those who were not involved.

Letter grades are important because they show academic achievement for students each marking period. In Table 4.2, letter grades are shown for students involved in extra-curricular activities and compared to students who are not involved. The letter grades were A's, B's, C's, D's, and F's. Students involved in extra-curricular activities received many more A's and B's than students who were not involved. For C letter grades,

Table 4.1

Semester GPAs for Students Involved and Not Involved in Extra Curricular Activities

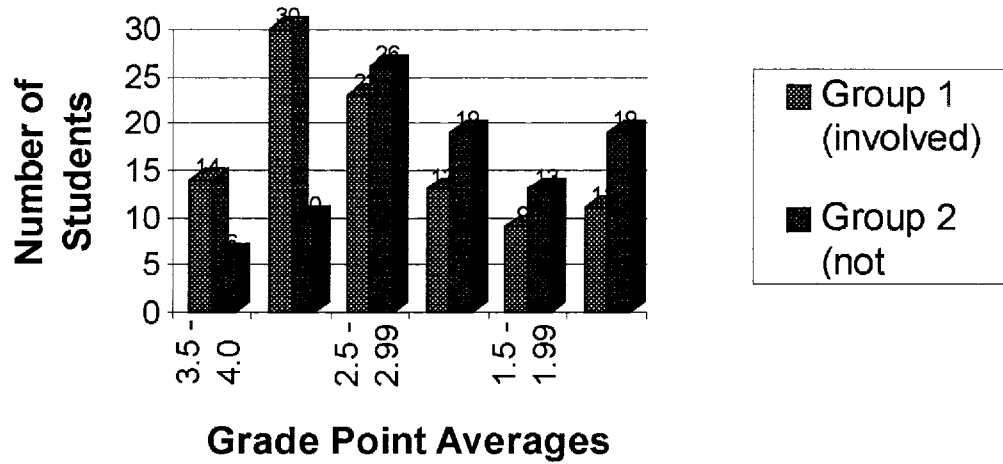
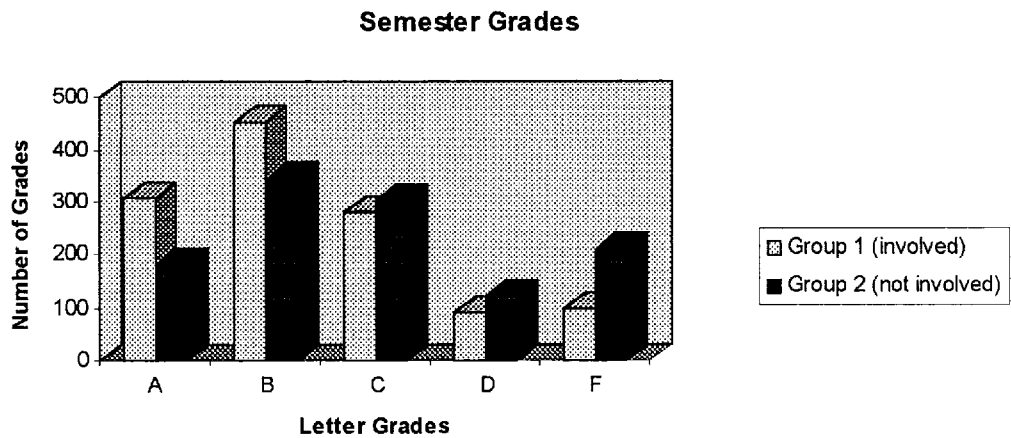


Table 4.2



students involved had less than those students not involved, but it was closer in number than the other letter grades. Students involved had far fewer D's and F's than students not involved.

Cumulative grade point averages show academic achievement over the student's academic career in high school. In Table 4.3, cumulative grade point averages are shown for students involved in extra-curricular activities and compared with students who are not involved. The breakdown for cumulative grade point averages was the same as semester grade point averages. Table 4.3 shows more students fall into the range of 3.0 to 4.0 for the cumulative grade point average than students who are not involved in extra-curricular activities. About the same number of students fall in the range of 1.5 to 2.99. A few more students involved fall in the 2.5 to 2.99 range and a few less students who are involved fall in the 2.0 to 2.49 range. One less student who is involved falls into the 1.5 to 1.99 range. Far fewer students involved fall in the 0 to 1.49 range than students who are not involved.

There are 193 students eligible for services in special education. 127 are male and 66 are female. 70 males are involved in extra curricular activities which is 55 percent of that population. 30 females are involved in extra curricular activities which is 45 percent of that population. Table 4.4 shows a breakdown of males and females involved and not involved in extra curricular activities.

There are 100 students in special education who participate in extra-curricular activities. 33 are in ninth grade, which is 44 percent of the population, 20 are in tenth

Table 4.3

Cumulative GPAs for Students Involved and Not Involved in Extra-Curricular Activities

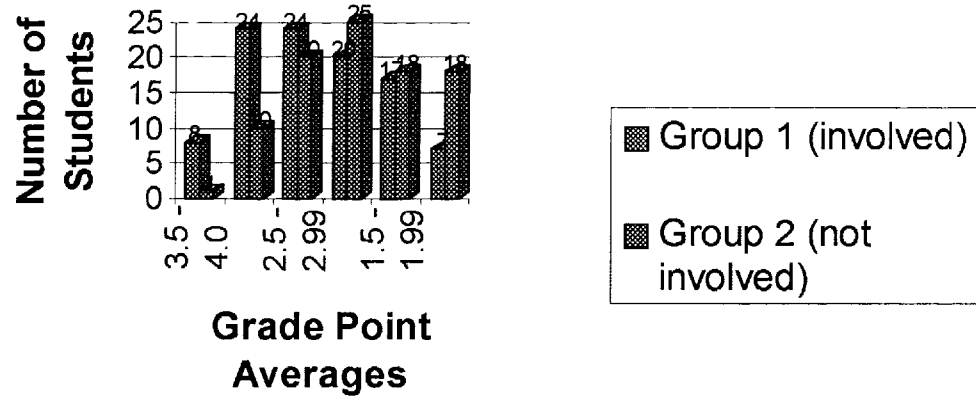
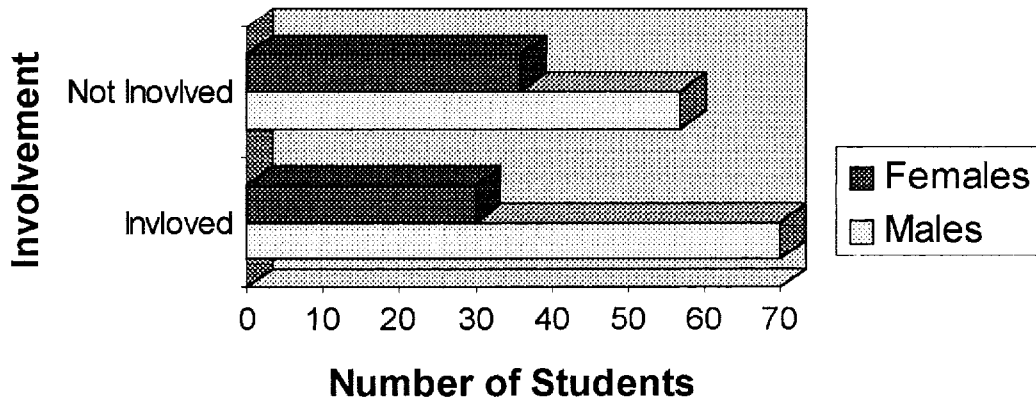


Table 4.4

Male and Female Involvement in Extra-Curricular Activities



grade which is 48 percent of the population, 19 are in eleventh grade which is 53 percent of the population, and 28 are in twelfth grade which is 70 percent of the population. Table 4.5 shows the grade level for students who are involved in extra-curricular activities and students not involved. The trend seems to be that students become more involved in extra-curricular activities as they move into higher grade levels.

Of the 100 students involved in extra-curricular activities, 65 are Caucasian, 48 percent of the population; 25 are African American, 57 percent of the population; 7 are Hispanic, 70 percent of the population; 2 are Asian or Pacific Islanders, 67 percent of the population; and 1 is an American Indian, 100 percent of the population. Table 4.6 compares ethnicity and extra-curricular involvement. Race does not seem to have an impact on whether a student becomes involved in extra-curricular activities. Hispanics, Asians / Pacific Islanders, and American Indians have a higher percentage involved, but the number of students of these ethnic backgrounds are far fewer than Caucasians and African Americans.

Students are placed in a program that is in the least restrictive environment where they can be academically successful. In this high school, there are four levels of program placement including fully mainstreamed, inclusion classes, resource center classes, or self-contained classes. Program placement may or may not effect student involvement in extra-curricular activities. Of the 100 students involved, 2 are mainstreamed, 33 percent of the population; 42 are in inclusion classes, 54 percent of the population; 50 students are in resource center classes, 57 percent of the population; and 6 students are in self-contained classes, 29 percent of the population. Table 4.7 compares program placement

Table 4.5

Grade Level Involvement

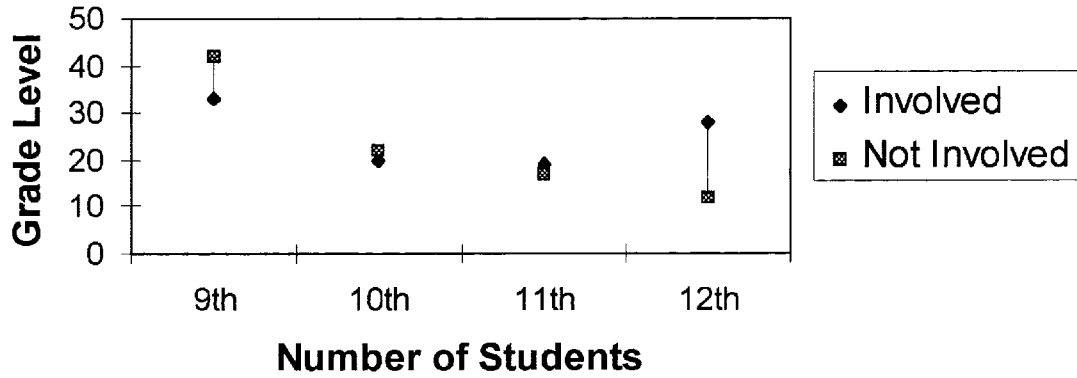


Table 4.6

Ethnicity Involvement in Extra-Curricular Activities

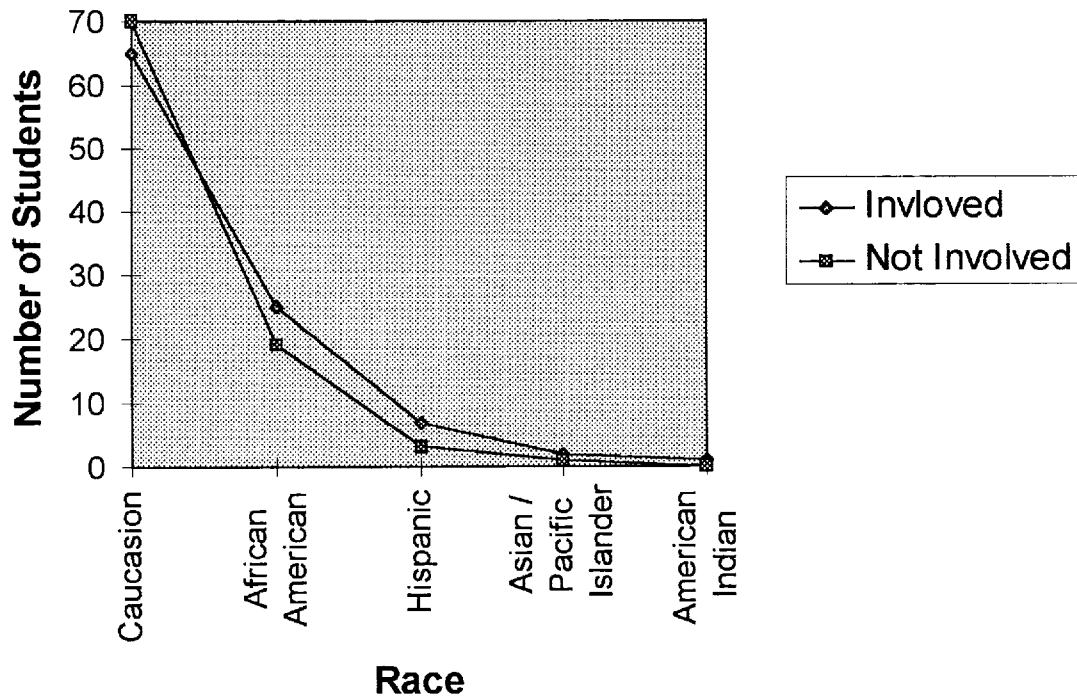
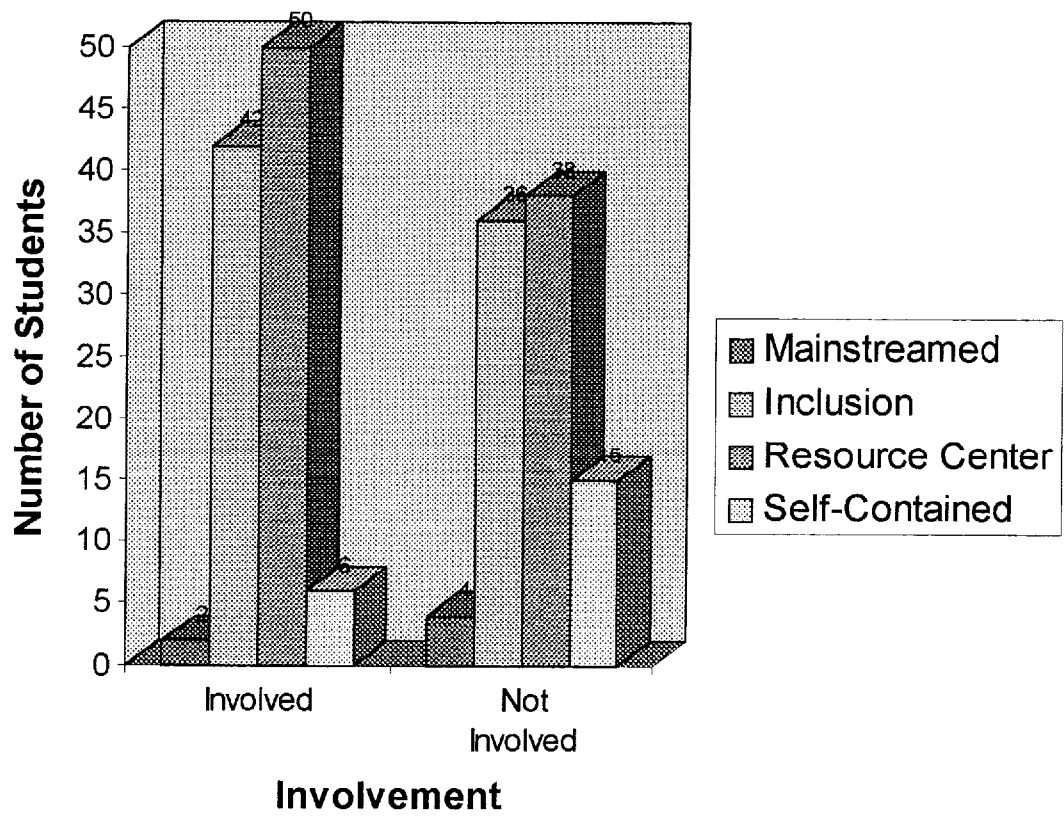


Table 4.7

Program Placement in Special Education



and involvement in extra-curricular activities. Students who are in inclusion or resource classes participate more than students who are mainstreamed or in self-contained classes.

In the state of New Jersey, students are eligible for special education services but under that eligibility there is a classification. Of the 100 students involved, 78 students are classified as having a learning disability, 51 percent of the population; 10 are classified with traumatic brain injury, 83 percent of the population; 5 are classified with multi-disabilities, 50 percent of the population; 4 are classified as emotionally disturbed, 36 percent of the population; 2 students are classified with other health impairments, 50 percent of the population; and 1 is orthopedically handicapped, 100 percent of the population. Table 4.8 shows a comparison of classification eligibility and involvement in extra-curricular activities. Classification does not seem to impact whether the student is involved in extra-curricular activities or not.

Table 4.9 shows the number of activities in which students are involved. 51 percent are involved in one activity, 34 percent are involved in two activities, 9 percent are in three activities, 5 percent are in four activities, and 1 percent is in 5 activities. Table 4.9 shows the number of participants in extra-curricular activities. The number of activities does not seem to impact academic achievement.

There are many factors to consider when comparing student involvement in extra-curricular activities or not being involved and their academic achievement. Students who are involved in extra-curricular activities have higher academic achievement than students who are not involved.

Table 4.8

Classification Eligibility for Special Education Services

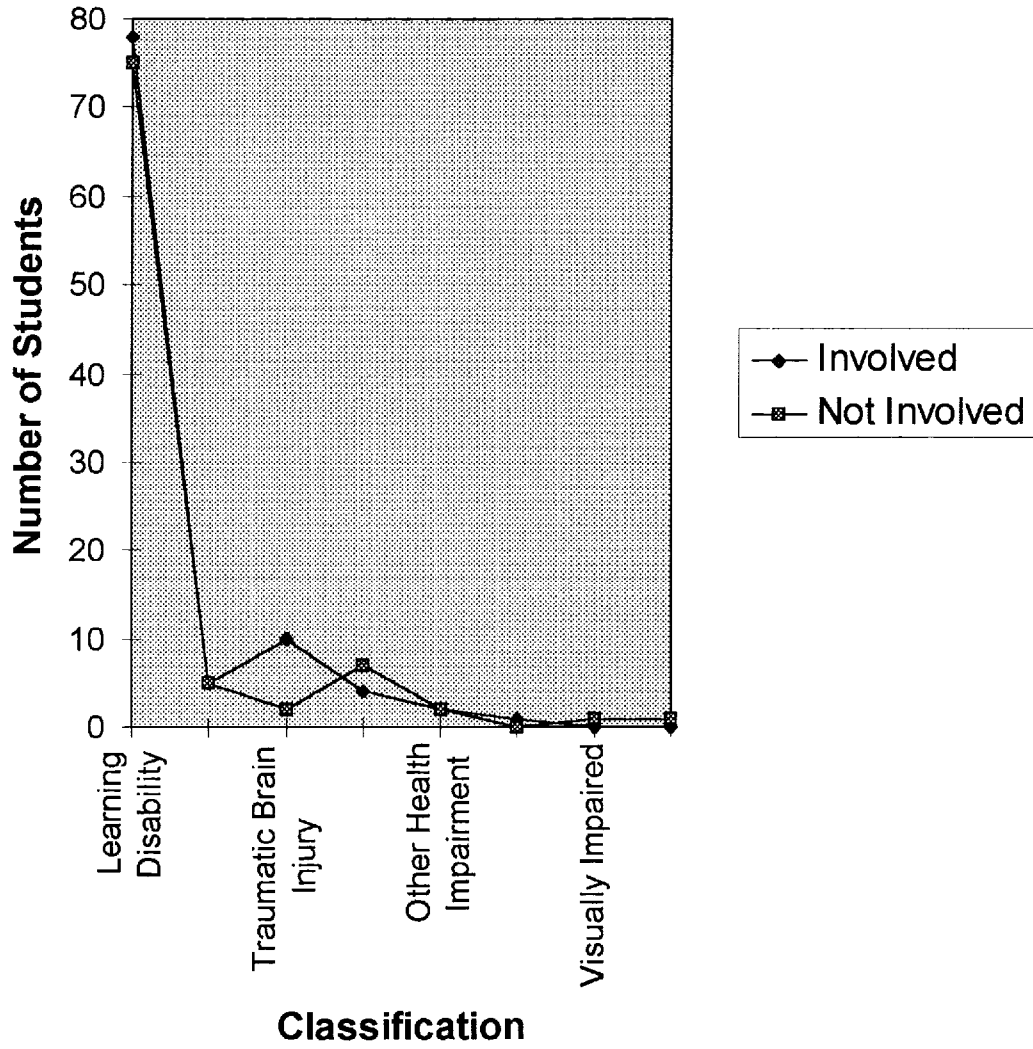
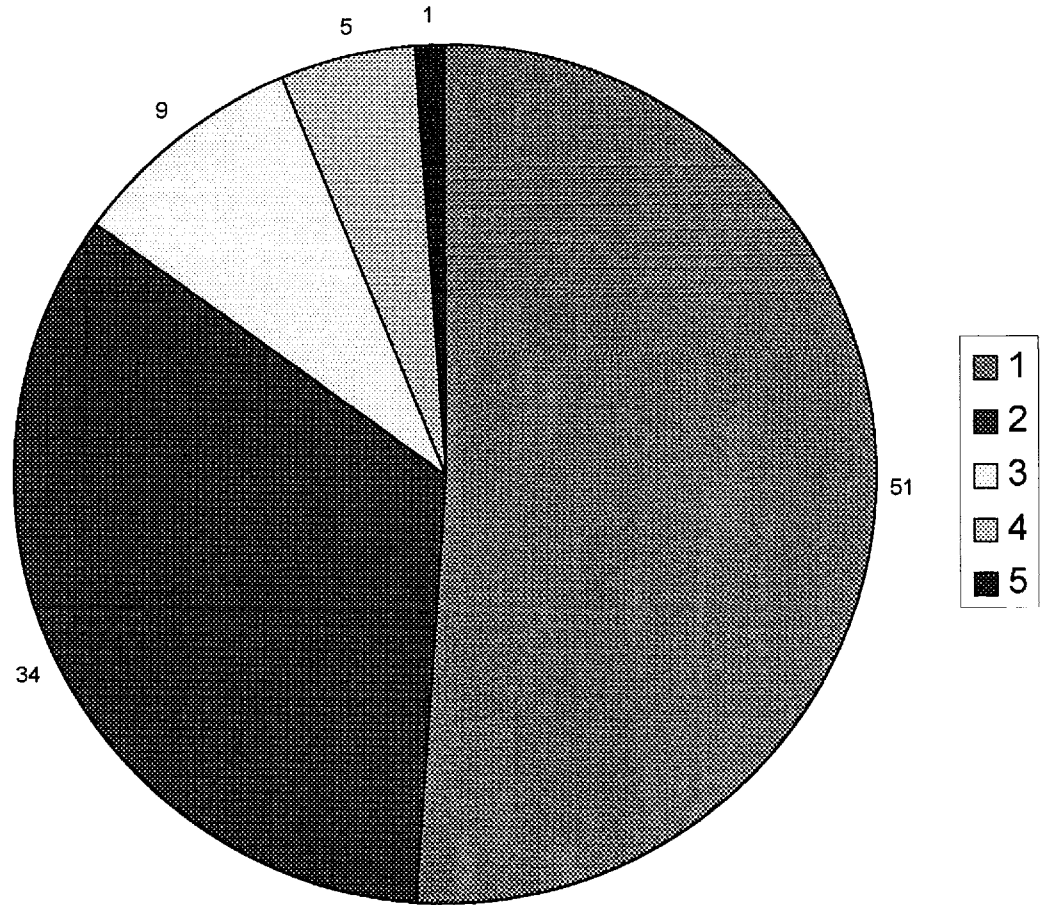


Table 4.9

Number of Activities in which Students are Involved



CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

The difference in academic achievement of students eligible for special education services who are involved in extra-curricular activities and those not involved was studied. Academic achievement referred to report card grades and semester grade point averages of students. Extra-curricular activities included those associated with the school including sports and clubs. The purpose of the study was to identify the differences in academic achievement between students who are involved and those not involved in extra-curricular activities.

There were 193 subjects from a suburban high school in Southern New Jersey. The sample was from varying ethnic and economic backgrounds. They were eligible for special education services under 8 different classifications, and their program type ranged from fully mainstreamed to self-contained classes.

Semester grade point averages were compared for students eligible for special education services who were involved in extra-curricular activities and those not involved. A Pearson Correlation Analysis was used and it showed that the correlation between involvement and grade point averages was significant. In this study, students who were involved in extra-curricular activities had higher academic achievement than students who were not involved.

Discussion

Research on extra-curricular involvement of students is varied. This study is encouraging because it supports that students who are involved in extra-curricular activities have higher academic achievement. In the past, only modest attention has been given to the effects of extra-curricular involvement for marginal students, yet these students could benefit the most.

Research has shown many benefits of extra-curricular involvement such as higher self-esteem, leadership qualities, better social skills, and higher academic performance. Students in special education are often lacking in these areas. If participating in extra-curricular activities can foster such positive qualities, then all students should be encouraged and shown ways that they can participate. According to Mahoney and McNeal, participating in extra-curricular activities decreases the likelihood of students dropping out. This participation in activities gives students a feeling of integration in their school. This integration may drive them to be a part of a group. Being part of a positive group associated with the school may help them to persist in academic areas as well as activities. Beyond academics, extra-curricular participation also has shown a positive effect on education, occupation, income, and personal-social adjustments in adult years. Part of the role of the high school is to prepare adolescents to become successful adults. The same qualities that are fostered in extra-curricular activities are necessary in becoming successful in the real world.

Research has supported many positive attributes of participating in extra-curricular activities. This study supports higher academic achievement of students eligible for special

education who are involved in extra curricular activities. This is just one area of success for students who are involved in extra-curricular activities.

Implications for Further Research

This study supported one small area of extra-curricular activities. Some of the limitations included only using one semester of grades and focusing on just one high school in the area. Research possibilities in this area are endless. Students could be monitored over their entire high school career. It would also be a benefit to study students in elementary and middle school to monitor extra-curricular participation at those levels. The number of activities and which activities in which students are involved is important. Academic achievement is just one area of importance linked to extra-curricular participation. Other areas to study could be self-esteem, peer acceptance, drug and alcohol use along with other risky behaviors, and behavior problems in school. Extra-curricular participation is important for all students, but so little of the research focuses on students in special education. It is important to find ways to encourage these students in all areas to help them be successful in and out of school. Fostering participation in extra-curricular activities may be just one way to help these students succeed. Further research in these areas could support that idea.

Conclusions

In a small way, this study supported the notion that students eligible for special education services who participate in extra-curricular activities have higher academic achievement. However small this support, it is important to encourage students to become involved in activities outside of the regular curriculum. Students can benefit in so

many ways. I would like to further this research at a later date to lend support this idea. Getting students involved at an early age can foster a positive academic experience that can help them both in and out of the classroom as well as later in the future in real world experiences. Extra-curricular participation is an important area that can help students attain higher academic achievement.

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