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# EXAMINATION OF THE IMPACT INTERSCHOLASTIC ATHLETICS HAS ON PARTICIPATING STUDENT-ATHLETES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL, ATHLETIC DIRECTOR AND SCHOOL COUNSELOR

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PARTICIPATING STUDENT-ATHLETES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE HIGH SCHOOL  
PRINCIPAL, ATHLETIC DIRECTOR AND SCHOOL COUNSELOR**

By

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**  
**Physical Education, Sport, & Exercise Science**

The University of New Mexico  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

**May, 2018**

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## Dedications

This dissertation is dedicated first and foremost to my incredible wife Brooke, for her love, encouragement and support. Without her this dissertation could have never become a reality. I consider this PhD “our PhD” because of the amount of sacrifice she dedicated to ensuring its completion. She encouraged me every step of the way and at times certainly led the way. I have the privilege of being married to my best friend and the most loving and caring person I know and for this I consider myself truly blessed.

This dissertation is also dedicated to my two amazing daughters, Gabriela and Olivia, who always made sure to ask about the “dissertation streak” and for never letting me lose focus of what is truly important in life. Writing a dissertation while raising two little girls was not only challenging, but incredibly rewarding. Although it took me over a decade to complete this degree, it is my hope that they will understand the value of hard work, perseverance and that education is ultimately a journey and not a destination.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For 367 consecutive days I have worked on this dissertation. I never allowed myself to take a day off. Every day for over a year, I found time to do “something” to move in a positive direction. Some days the time came at 3:00 am before a long drive to Buffalo for work. Other days, the only available time was to read research in a parking lot before gymnastics car pool pick up. No matter what, I found time each and every day to keep the “dissertation streak” alive. This dissertation is a testament that anything is possible if one is willing to sacrifice and focus.

I would like to acknowledge my parents, Linda and Bob, for all they did to stress the importance of education and for the many sacrifices they made to ensure I was always provided with a quality education while growing up. I remember attending their college graduation as a young boy and the lasting impression it made upon me to accomplish all that I have academically.

I would also like to thank my twin brother Mike, for all his support and encouragement to complete this dissertation. The daily phone calls each morning and the texts of encouragement helped keep me motivated. I would certainly not be the person I am today without having a brother like Mike; he is an incredible father to three wonderful boys, a loving husband, but more importantly a great man.

Sincere thanks go out to my extended family that supported my pursuit of this doctoral degree; my younger sister Kelly, my uncles Raoul, Larry and Richard, my grandmother, Silvia, (Nani) and my incredible in-laws Vickie and Steve.

I am honored to have worked with such an amazing dissertation committee who guided me throughout the dissertation process while living nearly 2,000 miles away. Dr. Todd Seidler, Dr. David Scott, Dr. Glen Hushman and Dr. Robert Lombardi provided constructive feedback and unwavering support to help me complete this dissertation.

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**ABSTRACT**

The National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) reports over 7.5 million high school students participate in interscholastic athletics each year (National Federation of State High School Associations, 2017). The impact of interscholastic sports participation has been researched and examined for over a century. Research has certainly brought attention to the impact and the many positive benefits students receive when given the opportunity to participate. It is evident high school sports participation enhances academic performance while promoting life skills and lessons. Those who support interscholastic sports participation value the opportunities for character development, while critics often cite the costs and potential distractions from academics as reasons to keep sports out of schools.

The majority of previous research on sport participation has utilized large sample sizes in longitudinal studies, using a quantitative design. This research takes a different

approach. It examines the impact of participation by applying a qualitative design (exploratory case study) to examine the impact of participation, from the perspective of those who work closely with students in an administrative capacity in the high school setting. School principals, athletic directors and counselors can witness the manner by which students are impacted by their participation in the sports programs offered by the school. Principals, athletic directors and counselors are the advocates for program development, budgetary assistance and sustainability. Without the support of these key stakeholders, interscholastic sports programs will struggle to survive at high schools throughout the country. Research has shown students are positively impacted from being “connected” to their school; connectedness and satisfaction is enhanced when schools have successful sports programs.

Through the review of literature, three theoretical frameworks became evident: (a) *Zero-Sum Model*, (b) *Development Model*, and (c) *Identification/ Commitment Model*. The goal of this qualitative design was to determine if the individuals most responsible for high school sports programs were familiar with and discussed the characteristics of these frameworks. I was also interested in determining if principals, athletic directors and counselors brought attention to other consequences latent not considered in previous research. Research detailing the impact of extracurricular activity participation is critical at a time when school administrators are facing intense pressure to eliminate or reduce school activities not viewed as directly contributing to the core academic curriculum.

This qualitative research study was performed during the middle of a school year with 12 tenured administrators in several diverse high schools of comparable size in the



Albany, New York area. The research provides evidence for the perceived impact of interscholastic athletic participation from the perspective of the high school principal, athletic director and school counselor.

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## Chapter I – Introduction

### History of Interscholastic Athletics in the United States & the NFHS

In the late 1800s interscholastic athletic participation was looked down upon because it was believed to interfere with a student's academics (Gholson & Buser, 1983). The introduction of sports and activities in high schools has sparked considerable discussion and debate (Trent & Braddock, 1992). Research conducted by Fraunce (1960) identified three areas of extracurricular development. Disinterest and opposition consumed the first era from 1880 to 1896 as educational leaders stressed traditional education curriculum while rejecting extracurricular programs. From 1896 until 1917 administrators were apathetic and somewhat accepting of programs for students that extended beyond the classroom. Fraunce declared that leaders began to see the important aspects of extracurricular programs in 1918 as part of the overall educational program.

According to Burnett (2000) many educators in the early 1900s thought participation in school activity programs led to students becoming more productive citizens. G. Stanley Hall, the founder of the first psychological journal in America, *The American Journal of Psychology* in 1887, argued academics were not as important to retaining male students as the need to provide social experiences to develop leadership skills. Utilizing Hall's philosophy, educators began to justify interscholastic athletics as a mechanism to encourage boys to attend school (Tyack & Hansot, 1992).

The Public School Athletic League (PSAL) became the first interscholastic athletic association in the United States in 1903. The PSAL was created in New York City to set standards for high school athletics; this was the first-time standards had been developed for

interscholastic competition. Over the next 19 years other athletic associations evolved throughout the country in an effort to establish standards, rules and regulations to govern school-based sports.

In 1918, after three years of work, the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education, appointed by the National Education Association of the United States, submitted a report entitled "Cardinal Principals of Secondary Education." Within the report, the Commission warned the health of students "cannot be neglected without serious danger to the individual and the race" (p. 5). The report also brought attention to the importance of organizing an effective program of physical activities. The report stated, "to carry out such a program it is necessary to arouse the public to recognize that the health needs of young people are of vital importance to society, to secure teachers competent to ascertain and meet the needs of individual pupils and able to inculcate in the entire student body a love for clean sport..." (p. 5). The Cardinal Principals of Secondary Education clearly highlighted the significance of sport participation nearly a century ago at the height of the progressive educational movement.

In 1922, the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) was formed to take an active role in the administration of interscholastic sports programs on a national scale. The NFHS, based in Indianapolis, Indiana, is the national leadership organization for high school sports and performing arts activities. For nearly a century the NFHS has led the development of education-based interscholastic athletics and performing arts activities. The NFHS establishes direction for the future by improving the participation experience, building awareness and support, establishing consistent standards and rules for

competition, and assisting those who oversee high school sports and activities throughout the country. The NFHS writes playing rules for 17 sports for boys and girls at the high school level.

Through its 50-member state associations and the District of Columbia, the NFHS reaches more than 19,000 high schools and nearly 12 million participants in high school activity programs, including more than 7.8 million in high school sports (National Federation of State High School Associations, 2017). Each State has representation on the NFHS National Council and although similar in many ways, the State Associations also differ (i.e. number of schools, budget, board structure, staff size, etc.).

As the recognized national authority on interscholastic activity programs, the NFHS conducts national meetings, sanctions interstate events, offers online publications and services for high school coaches and officials, sponsors professional organizations for high school coaches, officials, speech and debate coaches, and music adjudicators, serves as the national source for interscholastic coach training, and serves as a national information resource of interscholastic athletics and activities (NFHS, 2017).

### **Interscholastic Athletics Today**

Unfortunately, school districts throughout the United States today have encountered significant reductions in local and state funding, which have caused school boards and administrators to target non-academic areas to reduce expenses and balance dwindling budgets. Sadly, athletics have become an easy target for the reduction of the number activities and transportation related costs (Gutierrez, 2004; Starr, 2000). Schools are also forced to meet the increasing demands of the Common Core curriculum, which



may result in minimizing the importance of other areas of a student's overall education.

Those who support interscholastic sport participation value the opportunities for character development, while critics often cite the costs and potential distractions from academics as reasons to keep sports out of schools. Early critics of sport participation (Coleman, 1961; Gordon, 1957) questioned the role of extracurricular activities in the school setting.

Coleman's (1961) Zero-Sum Model argued that activities only took students away from their academic studies and actually have a negative impact on student achievement. Because of the disparaging research related to the value and benefit of extracurricular activities, more research has been conducted to provide evidence of the positive attributes and outcomes of participation (Darling, Cadwell & Smith, 2005; Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Morrissey, 2005; Otto, 1982; Otto & Alwin, 1977; Reeves, 2008; Spady, 1970).

Interscholastic sports have changed significantly in the past two decades. Club sports and specialization have revolutionized the way students participate in sports; the heightened level of influence from parents has also varied the dynamics of interscholastic sports. An article published in the January 2014 issue of Athletic Business stated "Club sports were once revered nationwide by high schools for helping enhance the young athlete and preparing him or her for the more competitive high school environment. But various factors have played a role in transforming club sports from high school athletics supporter to slayer..." (Van Milligen, 2014, p. 51). Today children are encouraged to play one sport year-round to gain an advantage they are led to believe they need in order to earn a starting role on their high school team or earn a college scholarship. Statistics released by the NCAA and various high school athletic associations throughout the country, have

revealed approximately 7% of high school athletes (about 1 in 14) go onto play a varsity sport in college and only about 2% of high school athletes (1 in 50) go onto play at the NCAA Division I level. A June 30, 2017 Buffalo News article included the following: “The average athletic scholarship is \$14,270 for men and \$15,162 for women, according to the site scholarshipstats.com. The average annual cost is about \$44,000 for a private college (counting room and board), about \$20,000 for in-state public schools and about \$35,000 for out-of-state public schools.” These are statistics and figures students and their parents need to fully comprehend.

### **Impact of Participation**

Research continues to bring attention to the benefits students receive from participation. In general, student-athletes in high school excel academically, graduate at a higher rate, have increased levels of educational aspirations, and score higher on state assessments than those students who do not participate (Barber, Eccles, & Stone, 2001; Dornbusch, 1986; Durbin, 1986; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Lipscomb, 2007; Silliker & Quirk, 1997; Trudeau & Shephard, 2008). Becky Wright Barden wrote in her 2002 dissertation, "the extracurricular programs in schools must be an extension of, rather than a diversion from, the schools' missions for their existence and funding to be justified" (p. 2). Feldman and Matjasko (2005) reported National Center for Education Statistics that 43% of contemporary high school seniors in the United States participated in some form of athletics (2002). Participating in interscholastic athletics has become a common aspect of the United States educational experience. In her research Fejgin (1994) describes several benefits of participation in sports. She believes participation shapes “locus of control”

enabling students to learn the connection between actions and consequences while experiencing both success and failure. Being admitted to a team is associated with specific social rewards and enhanced levels of self-concept and finally teaches students about the rewards associated with rule compliance and respect for authority.

O'Brien and Rollefson (1992) found 50.4% of participants in athletics had no unexcused absences, 50.7% never skipped class, 30.6% had a GPA of 3.0 or above and 29.8% achieved in the highest quartile on a composite math and reading assessment. Percentages for non-participants on these same measures were 36.2%, 42.3%, 10.8% and 14.2% respectively. Lumpkin and Favor (2012) found clear differences between athletes and non-athletes in graduation rates, dropout rates, GPAs and performance on ACT and Kansas State Assessments. Kniffin, Wansink, and Shimizu (2015) found former student-athletes are expected to have higher levels of leadership, more self-confidence and greater self-respect than people who did not participate in athletics.

Lumpkin and Stokowski (2011) stated high school athletes "learn about responsibility, respect, teamwork, accountability, time-management skills, the difference between right and wrong, how to cope with failure and success, and how to do the right thing despite peer pressure and other situational influences" (p. 125). Marsh (1992) conducted research on over 10,500 sophomores and seniors involved in a range of extracurricular programs (i.e. athletics, drama, dance, community clubs, vocational clubs, music, etc.) and found participation was correlated with social self-concept, academic self-concept, taking advanced courses, time spent on homework, grade point average, parent involvement, school attendance, and college attendance. Marsh and Kleitman (2002)

conducted research to examine the effects of participation of extracurricular school activities on 12th grade and post-secondary outcomes. They also found evidence supporting the claim that extracurricular school activities encourage school identification, which benefit diverse academic outcomes.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The influence of the internet and technology, club sports, and increased focus on sport specialization has rendered past research out dated or even irrelevant. It is critical for research to focus on highlighting and promoting the many benefits of interscholastic athletics as being part of a student's education; or these programs disappear like past vocational offerings. Because school districts have to closely monitor budgets, the debate of whether participation in high school sports enhances or detracts from the educational achievement of students has resurfaced. "At the heart of this debate is the question of how students should spend their time for maximum academic, psychological, and social benefits and to support future accomplishments" (Marsh & Kleitman, 2002, p. 464).

As schools attempt to meet the increasing demands of the Common Core curriculum, schools may minimize the importance of other areas of a student's overall education. Unfortunately, school districts throughout the United States have encountered significant reductions. These reductions have forced school boards and administrators to find programs to cut, to reduce expenses while balancing stricter budgets; athletics have become an easy target. Unfortunately, remaining resources are allocated to other areas and athletic programs are underfunded or eliminated. It is commonly reported that athletic

budgets make up one to three percent of a school districts overall budget (Pressley & Whitley, 1996).

Many research studies have examined the academic performance of extracurricular participants and their non-participating classmates. Research in this field of study tends to focus on the benefits gained by students who participate in extracurricular programs such as higher grades, increased rates of attendance, greater acceptance into college and fewer discipline referrals.

The perception principals, athletic directors and counselors have related to the impact students receive from participation could facilitate development strategies to promote the benefits and lead to additional research. As educational paradigms shift, so have the educators. Today more and more administrators do not have "athletic" backgrounds (Levy, 2015, p. 281) and may not have an understanding of the benefits students receive when participating in athletic programs; these are the same administrators who are making funding decisions for the future of athletic programs.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study is designed to examine the impact sports participation and interscholastic athletic programs have on students from the perspective of the high school principal, athletic director and counselor. The goal is to provide information that will assist school administrators in making well-informed and sound decisions related to interscholastic athletic programs. Since school budgets are constantly being scrutinized, the impact participation has on students may justify the funding or lack of funding for future participation opportunities. It is the intent of this study to provide beneficial information

for school leaders to rationalize greater emphasis on and more funding for interscholastic athletic programs.

Most research conducted on the influence of sport participation utilizes quantitative analysis of data with large nationally representative samples in an effort to generalize to a larger population; often the data is outdated, and policy context has changed since the collection of those datum. Few sport participation research studies have used a qualitative analysis approach to examine the impact of participation on students from the perspective of those who work with them on a daily basis. The bulk of research in the following literature review was based on quantitative designs; Macaluso (2013) and McCorkle (2012), both found students benefited from participation by utilizing qualitative single case studies. Holland and Andre (1987) brought attention to the need for fewer large-scale, comprehensive studies focused on participation because of the impractical application of such studies. Instead they recommend smaller scaled studies to provide a more complete picture of the effects of participation.

### **Research Question**

Research questions serve as the basis for qualitative research. The research question and sub-questions used in this study are focused on the perceived impact of participation on students in interscholastic athletics from the perspective of the high school principal, athletic director and counselor. The National Association of State High School Associations (NFHS) estimate nearly 7.5 million students participate in high school athletics in the United States. The following research question will guide this study:

What is the perceived impact of interscholastic athletic participation upon student-athletes from the perspective of the high school principal, athletic director and counselor?

Sub-questions:

- 1.** Do students who participate in interscholastic athletics do better in the classroom, experience fewer discipline issues, graduate at a greater rate, and attend college at a greater rate than their non-participating classmates?
- 2.** What skills do students acquire from participating in interscholastic athletics?
- 3.** What is the greatest benefit a student receives from participating in interscholastic athletics?
- 4.** How would education in your school district change if interscholastic athletics were to be eliminated?
- 5.** Do students who participate in interscholastic athletics have an advantage over those students who do not participate? If so, what is/are the advantages?
- 6.** Why is it important for students to have the opportunity to interact with adults (i.e. coaches)?
- 7.** In your experience, does participation in interscholastic athletics inhibit/encourage certain types of behavior?

## **Significance of the Study**

This study is exploratory in design and includes supporting narratives. It is significant since limited research exists pertaining to the perceived impact of interscholastic athletics from the perspective of the high school principal, athletic director and counselor. This study also provides beneficial information for school leaders to rationalize greater emphasis on and additional funding for interscholastic athletic programs. Furthermore, with a greater understanding of the impact of interscholastic participation, survey instruments and research can be conducted in an effort to provide for greater justification of the value of interscholastic athletic programs.

The perception of the impact of participation from the perspective of the high school principal, athletic director and counselor could help develop strategies for promotion of the benefits and lead to additional research. Today more than ever before, school administrators do not have "athletic" or coaching backgrounds which have provided the previous generation of administrators with an understanding of the impact athletic programs have on participating students (Levy, 2015, p. 281); these are the same administrators who have the responsibility of advocating for future athletic program funding.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The perceived impact of interscholastic athletics on participating student-athletes from the perspective of the high school principal, athletic and school counselor was explored through the use of the following theoretical frameworks: (a) Zero-Sum Model, (b) Developmental Model, and (c) Identification/ Commitment Model. "Most studies of



participation have contained neither a detailed theoretical rationale for the research nor a description of the theoretical processes by which participation should influence individual development (Holland & Andre, p. 452).

Based upon my review of related literature and research, I used the three theoretical models to explain the associated impact of interscholastic sport participation. These models and theories have all been evaluated within sport participation research. This section provides an overview of the three theoretical frameworks.

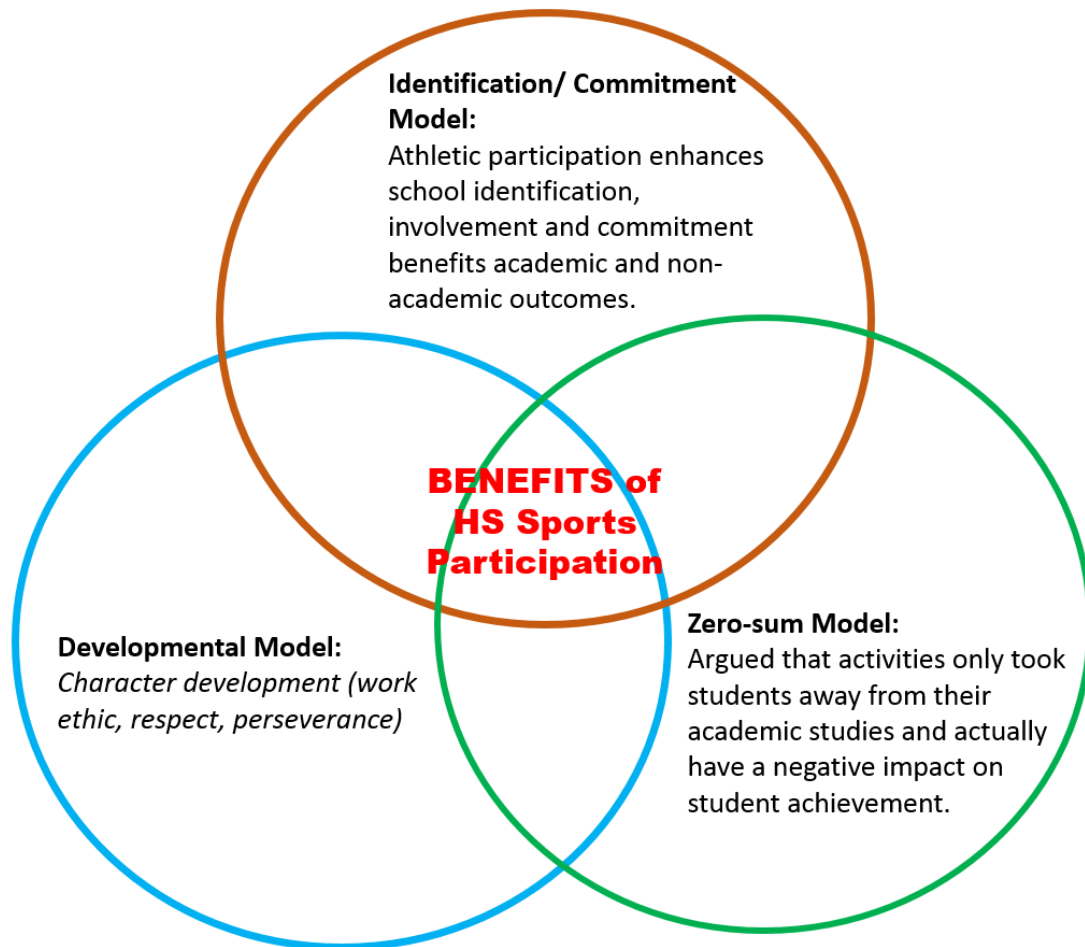


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

### **Zero-Sum Model**

Coleman's Zero-Sum Model (1961; also see Marsh, 1992; Otto & Alwin, 1977) argued school activities, outside of the traditional classroom setting, only took students away from their academic studies and actually had a negative impact on student achievement. Essentially, Coleman believed athletics and academics compete for a student's time and an increase in one (i.e. athletic participation) leads to a decrease in the other (i.e. academics). This theoretical framework is being utilized not in support of the model, however in opposition and reaction to the model. Past research has found participation in athletics is related to positive academic outcomes including higher GPAs and college aspirations, fewer disciplinary referrals, lower absentee rates, and decrease in dropout rates (Darling, Cadwell & Smith, 2005; Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Morrissey, 2005; Otto, 1982; Otto & Alwin, 1977; Reeves, 2008). The Zero-Sum Model is described by Marsh and Kleitman (2003) as "the most influential theoretical model in athletic participation research" (p. 205). Spady (1970), Otto (1982), and Otto and Alwin (1977) reported participation in sports was positively correlated with higher educational aspirations, perceived social status and an increased level of educational attainment.

### **Developmental Model**

A wealth of research has been conducted on sport participation related to its positive influence on life skills and academic achievements (Holland & Andre, 1987; Marsh 1992; Otto, 1976, 1982). In contrast to Coleman's Zero-Sum Model (1961), Holland and Andre (1987) proposed the developmental model in which extracurricular school activities are seen as "experiences that further the total development of the individual students" (p.

438). The developmental model proposes sport participation promotes some narrowly focused academic outcomes and non-academic outcomes such as character building, self-discipline, collaboration and peer learning, among many others. Holland and Andre's research provides an overview of empirical findings on extracurricular activities, with an emphasis on the developmental model, which stresses that "school programs should provide experiences that further the total development of individual students" (p. 438).

Holland and Andre bring attention to the claim that non-academic programs can be as important as academic programs in the development of the student. Serving a diverse population of students is the reason the majority of schools in the United States exist; however, schools simply serve as one of many ways to socialize students. "Consistent with the developmental perspective...participation may lead adolescents to acquire new skills (organizational, planning, time-management, etc.), to develop or strengthen particular attitudes (discipline motivation), or to receive social rewards that influence personality characteristics" (Holland & Andre, p. 447).

### **Identification / Commitment Model**

In his Identification/ Commitment Model, Marsh (1993) contends athletic participation fosters identification with the school and other school-related values. Furthermore, Marsh argues participation enhances school commitment, involvement and school identification in a way that promotes more specific academic outcomes in addition to nonacademic outcomes. Eccles and Gootman (2002) bring attention to the impact supportive adults and academically-focused peers have on students who participate because they provide encouragement to comply with school values and established norms.

Several researchers (Finn, 1989; Mahoney & Cairns, 1997) cite extracurricular involvement increases a student's sense of school commitment, sense of belonging and decreases the potential for dropping out. Participation also helps students establish goals and develop interpersonal competence, which can increase educational aspirations (Fredricks, 2011).

A 2013 study (Bohnert et al., 2013) examined the social adjustment of 151 students (58% male) in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade as they transitioned from 8<sup>th</sup> grade (spring) to 9<sup>th</sup> grade. The study found student involvement in sports led to fewer depressive symptoms as they neared the completion of 9<sup>th</sup> grade and helped students with friendship development during their transition. Anderman (2002) found high school and middle school students who experienced an increased sense of belonging with their classmates had fewer problems at school and achieved a higher-grade point average, when compared to students with a lower sense of belonging. "Having a greater sense of belonging at school may promote adolescents' academic motivation, engagement and achievement" (Knifsend & Graham, 2011, p. 380).

Many schools throughout the country have adopted "no-pass, no-play" policies to limit athletic participation as a result of students not maintaining a minimum academic standard. These policies reinforce the connection between participation and academic values. Gerber's research (1996), likely in response to proponents of no-pass, no-play policies, determined that a positive relationship existed between student achievement and extracurricular activity participation. Gerber wrote that it was "clearly not the case that extracurricular participation is detrimental to student behavior" (Gerber, 1996, p. 48).

Those who support no-pass, no-play claim extracurricular participation is negatively related

to student outcomes, specifically academic achievement (Silliker & Quirk, 1997; Slate, 1988).

### **Limitations of the Study**

In any research focused on the impact of student participation, it is imperative to keep in mind that determining correlations between sport participation and outcomes is challenging because participation in sport is self-selected. Marsh (1993) said “there may never be a completely adequate solution to this problem” (p. 36).

I have been involved in the field of interscholastic athletics for nearly two decades and certainly have strong opinions related to the impact of participation upon those students who participate. While conducting interviews and during data collection personal biases often influence the questions asked which may affect the outcome of the study. Therefore, I used a reflective journal to track my thoughts, ideas, assumptions and opinions while conducting this research. Patton (2002) recommended the use of a reflective journal to provide credibility of qualitative research and the trustworthiness of the study.

The data was collected from school principals, athletic directors and counselors in high schools in the capital region near Albany, New York. Every effort was made to gather data from diverse high schools taking into consideration school size, social economic factors as well as ethnicity. A limitation of the study could have been the lack of diversity in the research participant’s schools.

Qualitative research is sometimes not as well understood or accepted as quantitative research within the scientific-research community. The qualitative nature of the research has many strengths, however qualitative designs also have limitations. There

should be no attempt to generalize the findings of this research to a larger population of principals, athletic directors or counselors; nor should the perceived impact of participation be associated to students outside of the school in which the subjects were associated. The amount of data collected during the interviews made analysis and interpretation somewhat time consuming. The intent of the research was to provide an in-depth analysis of the perceived impact from the administrator's perspectives. Finally, qualitative research has greater concerns for confidentiality and anonymity since personal issues and problems can surface when presenting findings.

The three theoretical frameworks selected as the foundation of this research attempt to highlight the positive aspects of participation and dispel the perception of personal bias. In addition, the frameworks are fundamental in establishing trending opinions regarding interscholastic participation.

### **Delimitations of the Study**

The results of this study were based upon the information received from various school principals, athletic directors and counselors at the time the study was conducted. The study's focus is the perceived impact of interscholastic participation on the students who participate. Obviously, the study was delimited by the subjects' personal experiences with interscholastic athletics both professionally and personally.

For convenience, the data was collected from school principals, athletic directors and counselors in high schools in the capital region near Albany, New York. The subjects' location within the state of New York and even the capital region could have played a role in their responses to the interview questions. The study was delimited by each subject's

geographic location; however, it was not possible to conduct a national sample because of associated expenses and time involved.

For future research, gathering a sample from subjects located in various parts of the United States from diverse school districts may provide a truer perspective on the perceived impact of interscholastic athletics.

### **Methodology**

The study utilized a qualitative exploratory case study research approach to investigate the impact of interscholastic athletic participation on students from the perspective of the schools' principal, athletic director and counselor.

### **Key Terms**

**NFHS:** National leadership organization for high school sports and performing arts activities; National Federation of State High School Associations. The NFHS is headquartered in Indianapolis, Indiana and has 51 State Association members (50 States and the District of Columbia).

**Developmental Model:** Sport participation provides students with the opportunity to develop positive attributes (i.e. strong work ethic, respect for authority, perseverance).

**Zero-Sum Model:** Emphasis on extracurricular activity participation detracts from a student's education.

**Identification/ Commitment Model:** Athletic participation fosters identification with the school and other school-related values.

## Chapter II – Literature Review

The literature review begins with a history of interscholastic athletics found throughout research. After the historical perspective is provided the literature review explores the reasons why students participate, followed by criticisms related to high school athletic participation. The final section examines research related to the specific and most commonly cited impacts of participation in interscholastic athletics.

### **Beginning of Interscholastic Athletic Participation**

Robert Purter's book *The Rise of American High School Sports and the Search for Control, 1880–1930*, details how sport entered the secondary educational system mainly through the efforts of students, who began to imitate the programs created by men at the college level in the late nineteenth century in the Northeastern part of the United States. With the expansion of extracurricular programs and activities, came concern from teachers and administrators regarding the overemphasis on winning high-profile competitions and the commercialization of high school athletics. In the late 1800's, interscholastic athletic participation was often looked down upon because it was believed to interfere with a student's academics (Burnett 2000; Coleman, 1961; Gerber, 1996; Gholson & Buser, 1983). G. Stanley Hall, the founder of the first psychological journal in America, the *American Journal of Psychology* in 1887, argued academics were not as important to retaining male students as the need to provide social experiences to develop leadership skills. Utilizing Hall's philosophy, educators began to justify interscholastic athletics as a mechanism to encourage boys to attend school (Tyack & Hansot, 1992). According to Burnett (2000) many



educators in the early 1900s thought participation in school activity programs led to students becoming more productive citizens.

In the 1920s many high schools participated in inter-sectional contests, which were often hosted by higher education institutions including the University of Pennsylvania, University of Chicago and Northwestern University. Pruter writes that “commercialization increased as [these universities] built up these competitions into first sectional championships and then national championships” (p. 189). Shortly after the turn of the century, cities and states began creating athletic governing bodies with a focus on the amateurism of high school sport. The newly formed state associations began to object to the national championship atmosphere being created. In 1922, the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) was formed to take an active role in the administration of interscholastic sports programs on a national scale and played a key role in getting colleges and universities out of high school athletics. By the mid-1930s many of the national competitions, meets and tournaments were shut down and replaced with competitions being administered at the state level.

In his research, Fraunce (1960) identified three areas of extracurricular development. Disinterest and opposition consumed the first area from 1880 to 1896 as educational leaders stressed traditional education curriculum while rejecting extracurricular programs. From 1896 until 1917, administrators were apathetic and somewhat accepting of programs for students that extended beyond the classroom. Fraunce declared that leaders began to see the important aspects of extracurricular programs in 1918 as part of the overall educational program.

## Why Students Participate in Interscholastic Athletics?

Feldman and Matjasko reported in 2015 that "43% of contemporary high school seniors in the United States reported participating in some form of athletics" (p. 161). The reasons for participation in high school sports are as diverse as the students who play them. Some students simply love sports, others may enjoy the thrill of competing, while others want to spend time with their friends, or parents may be the driving force behind the desire to participate. Public School Review's website brings attention to the link between friendships and sport participation. Sports provide the opportunity to foster close relationships with teammates; these friendships are important for emotional and mental health throughout a student's time in high school. The connection students form through their passion for sports, and the amount of time spent together at practice, games and on trips, strengthens the bond that often leads to friendships that endure long after high school graduation (Chen, 2017).

School connectedness is described as the psychological state of belonging in which individual students perceive they are well taken care of, trusted and appreciated by a group of adults (Whitlock, 2006). Brown and Evans (2002) and Dotterer et al. (2007) found that students who participated in extracurricular activities associated with their school, felt more connected and had an enhanced sense of belonging. More recent research in 2015 (Kamau, Rintaugu, Muniu, Amusa) stressed the importance of competitive sport participation in promoting school connectedness.

Interscholastic sports programs provide an environment "within schools that are uniquely poised to promote friendships, as they are typically voluntary, [and] safe settings

that allow adolescents space to interact and engage with their friends” (Schaefer et al., 2011). Research continues to show students certainly benefit from their participation in athletic programs (i.e. consistent attendance, improved grade point average, likelihood of graduating, probability of college attendance, and healthier self-concepts. Participation in organized activities offers valuable opportunities for youth development and student growth (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Holland & Andre, 1987; Larson, 2000).

### **Criticisms of Sport Participation**

With the amount of positive research findings related to the impact of interscholastic sport participation, there are also studies which question the value of participation. Prior to 1900, school-based sport participation was often criticized (Burnett, 2000; Coleman, 1959, 1961; Gerber, 1996) because non-academic activities were viewed as a distraction and detrimental to academic success. Coleman (1961) has been the reference point for study on this topic since the 1960s. He has been at the forefront of the research focusing on the negative relationships between participation and academic achievement for the last sixty years.

Melnick and his colleagues conducted numerous longitudinal studies on sports and education; their findings suggested participation in sports is not correlated to educational achievement (Melnick, Sabo, & VanFossen, 1992a, 1992b; Melnick, VanFossen, & Sabo, 1988; Sabo, Melnick, & VanFossen, 1993). Early critics of sport participation (Coleman, 1961; Gordon, 1957) questioned the role of extracurricular activities in the school setting. Coleman's (1961) Zero-Sum Model argued activities only took students away from their academic studies and actually negatively impacted student achievement. “It is possible that

the time investment required to either participate in a large number of activities or participate intensively in an activity can start to cut into time for homework” (Fredricks, 2011, p. 304).

Those who oppose sport participation argue that while participation on school teams results in several positive outcomes, school-based sports teams could be viewed as unfavorable to non-participating students since sports has the capability to increase antagonism and tension between groups in a school (Fejgin, 1994). Grabe (1981) reported students who are not successful in extracurricular activities may feel estranged from school, especially when there is a lot of pressure to participate. Coleman’s (1961) argument about sport participation relied on his findings that athletic participation was a main element of social status of male high school students and, therefore, students may prefer to dedicate time and energy in sport activities and neglect academic work that is not necessarily valued by their classmates. Sport participation could increase identification with the activity to the point that it actually decreases identification with the school (Fredricks, 2011).

Eitzen argued that school sports are organized in “nondemocratic, opportunistic, and oppressive” manners (1992). Fernandez-Balboa (1993) contended that through school-based sports, students are socialized into “accepting particular modes of thinking and acting that support and legitimize power structures and social inequalities. These modes are characterized by apathy, indifference, apolitical attitudes, dependence on institutional control, compliance with authority, anxiety and powerlessness” (p. 248). Stearns and Glennie found school size and poverty levels impacted the number and types of activities

available, with more affluent students and larger schools offering more activities for participation (2010).

One of the most commonly used criticisms of interscholastic sports is the associated cost. Some believe high school sports are some of the costliest practices in the United States educational system. A Washington Post article from August 5, 2015 stated, "high school athletics represent one of the largest costs that a school system incurs that is not mandated by law." In truth, the NFHS reports the average budget for an interscholastic athletic program is approximately 1% to 3% of a school district's overall budget (NFHS - The Case For High School Activities). As school resources continue to be a topic of debate related to school-based sports programs, Holland and Andre (1987) stated "the examination of the effects of extracurricular activities is especially timely and important in an era of limited financial resources for schools" (p. 437). A February 2011 New York Times article summarizes the current situation in a relevant manner: "In education, many administrators are quick to cut athletics, band, cheerleading, art and music because they have the vague impression that those are luxuries. In fact, they are exactly the programs that keep kids in school and build character" (Brooks, 2011, para. 8).

In their research Marsh and Kleitman in 2002, recommend that although schools are faced with difficult financial pressures, extracurricular school activity programs - especially team sports - should not be reduced. Through their study they came to the conclusion that "an exciting program of extracurricular school activities is likely to benefit all students" (p. 508). Likewise, Pressley and Whitley (1996) believe increasing extracurricular activities are

the most inexpensive way to instill socially acceptable values in students and improve academic success.

### **General Benefits of Interscholastic Athletics**

Participating in interscholastic athletics is assuredly a common part of the United States educational experience. Stearns and Glennie (2010) reported “extracurricular activities are seen both to supplement existing academic curricula and to allow students the opportunity to build non-academic, civic and political skills such as teamwork” (p. 296). In general, former student-athletes are expected to have higher levels of leadership, more self-confidence and greater self-respect than people who did not participate in athletics. Several researchers have brought attention to participation in organized activities that offer valuable opportunities for positive youth development and growth (Cooper et al., 1999; Davalos et al., 1999; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Holland & Andre, 1987; Larson, 2000; Mahoney, 2000; Mahoney & Cairns, 1997; Marsh 1992; Osgood et al., 1998; Quiroz et al., 1996). Past research has found participation in athletics is related to positive academic outcomes including higher GPA, fewer disciplinary referrals, lower absentee rates and a decrease in dropout rates (Darling, Cadwell & Smith, 2005; Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Morrissey, 2005; Otto, 1982; Otto & Alwin, 1977; Reeves, 2008). “Overall, high school students who are involved in one or more activities report more positive attitudes about school, higher aspirations for academic achievement, and better grades than their uninvolved peers (Knifsend & Graham, 2011, p. 380). Spady (1970) discussed the impact of participation to include increased perceived social status and popularity. Lumpkin and Favor (2002) found clear differences between athletes and non-athletes in graduation rates,

dropout rates, GPAs and performance on ACT and Kansas State Assessments. "Based on their review of research conducted prior to 1990, Marsh (1992) and Holland and Andre (1987) concluded that, particularly for methodically stronger research studies, there was a preponderance of support for the positive effects extracurricular school activities have on a variety of academic, social, and psychological outcomes, and little or no evidence to suggest extracurricular school activities had negative effects" (Marsh & Kleitman, 2002, p. 466).

Marsh and Kleitman (2002) conducted research to examine the effects of participation of extracurricular school activities on 12th grade and post-secondary outcomes. They found evidence supporting the claim extracurricular school activities encourage school identification/ commitment which positively impacts diverse academic outcomes. Marsh (1992) conducted research on over 10,500 sophomores and seniors involved in a range of extracurricular programs (i.e. athletics, drama, dance, community clubs, vocational clubs, music, etc.) and found that participation was correlated with social self-concept, academic self-concept, taking advanced courses, time spent on homework, grade point average, parent involvement, school attendance, and college attendance. In his prior research, Marsh (1983) found sports participation positively impacted several important senior and postsecondary outcomes.

Kniffin, Wansink and Shimizu (2015) conducted research on sixty-six adults and reported "former high school student-athletes tend to demonstrate significantly higher scores than those who did not participate in high school sports for leadership, self-confidence and self-respect" (p. 223).

## Specific Impacts of Interscholastic Athletics

### Participation and GPA

Past research has shown a discernable correlation between academic success and interscholastic sport participation since athletics help increase students' concentration and general academic success (Lipscomb, 2007; Trudeau & Shephard, 2008). A large portion of the research conducted on the impact of sport participation has investigated the relationship between sport participation and student achievement, as measured with standardized test scores and GPAs. It is well documented that students who participate in interscholastic athletics receive better grades; this topic has been researched and studied for decades (Dornbusch, 1986; Durbin, 1986; Silliker & Quirk, 1997).

Caldwell, Darling, and Smith (2005) found participation in extracurricular activities predicted higher grades and academic ambitions and a more positive attitude toward school. A study examining physical activity and academic performance in younger students found those who participated in strenuous physical activity did approximately 10% better in math, science, English, and social studies than students who did little or no physical activities. The study also noted many of the students reporting higher levels of vigorous activities were involved in organized sports, such as soccer, football, or basketball. (Coe et al., 2006).

At a high school in Omaha, Nebraska Stegman and Stephens (2000) found a positive correlation between participation in high school sports and class rank, overall GPA and math GPA. In Streb's 2009 research, participants in extracurricular activities had higher GPAs and ACT test scores than did their non-participating classmates. Streb used longitudinal data for



students in grades 8-12 from a sample of 492 graduating students in a large Midwestern high school.

Other research controlled for demographic characteristics and prior adjustment, found students who participated in extracurricular activities reported higher grades, more positive attitudes toward school and higher academic aspirations (Darling, Caldwell, & Smith, 2005). Fejgin (1994) found participation in high school sports as 10th graders was positively correlated to students' improved grades in the same year. After conducting large scale longitudinal studies, Eccles and Barber (1999) and Barber, Eccles, and Stone (2001) found extracurricular participation was linked with better than anticipated GPAs in high school.

Kilrea's (1998) research supported the value of extracurricular participation on the academic achievement of students by providing evidence that denying a struggling student participation opportunity actually further contributed to the student's academic difficulties. Kilrea examined ACT composite scores of 186 high school seniors, 103 of these students had played or participated in at least one activity during their four years of high school. Camp's research findings in 1990 also raised questions pertaining to the rationale of rules which excluded students who struggle academically because academic achievement was enhanced by participation.

### **Participation and Discipline**

Numerous research studies support the claim that extracurricular participation promotes prosocial behavior and actions. Rombokas, Heritage and West (1995) found statistically significant data to provide evidence participants involved in athletics were less

likely to have to be suspended or have discipline problems when compared to non-participating students. In research conducted nearly a decade earlier involving 1700 students, Segrave and Hastad (1984) found student-athletes had fewer discipline issues than non-athletes. Hawkins (1988) found students who were involved in extracurricular school related programs were less likely to misbehave or be suspended from school than those students who were not involved. In research conducted by Landers and Landers (1978), a lower rate of delinquent acts was significantly related to participation in athletics or service activities. Whitley's research on athletic participation (1999) controlled for race, social economic status and gender, found athletes consistently had fewer discipline referrals than non-participating students.

### **Participation and Attendance**

Participation in extracurricular activities was the "driving force" behind some students having a desire to attend school (Burnett, 2000). Whitley (1999) provided evidence that student-athletes have greater rates of school attendance than non-athletes. A study conducted by the Minnesota State High School League (MSHSL) of 300 Minnesota high schools showed student-athletes only missed an average of 7.4 days of school each year, while the non-participating student missed 8.8 days a year (Born, 2007). The MSHSL study supports a previous study done in collaboration with the North Carolina High School Athletic Association that found athletes missed an average of 6.3 days per school year and non-athletes missed nearly double the amount of days at 11.9 days per year (Overton, 2001).

### **Participation and Dropout Rates**

A number of research studies provide evidence to support the concept high school athletes dropout of school at a lower rate when compared to their non-participating classmates. Several researchers' (Davalos et al., 1999; Jansen 1992; Zaff et al., 2003) work on the relationship between drop-out rates and participation showed participation appears to minimize the risk of dropping out of school. Mahoney (2000, 2001) and Mahoney and Cairns (1997) suggested that participation in extracurricular activities may reduce dropout rates because they enhance the feeling of belonging. School connectedness is a sense of belonging when students feel they and their classmates are well cared for, appreciated and trusted by adults (Whitlock, 2006). Furthermore, Blum (2005), reported that school connectedness is impacted by three factors: (a) culture of the school, (b) environment, and (c) students and staff. A number of researchers (Blum, 2005; Cohen et. al., 2009; Klem & Connell, 2004) have provided evidence of school connectedness being positively correlated with a decrease in school violence, drug use, social and emotional stress, as well as drop-out frequency.

McNeal (1995) found participation in certain extracurricular activities (athletics and fine arts) has a significant impact on reducing a student's chances of dropping out of school. Eccles and Barber (1999) also reported athletic participation to be associated with reduced rates of high school dropout.

### **Participation and College Attendance**

According to Holland and Andre (1987), research results have typically shown a positive correlation between activity participation and increased educational completion

and academic ambition. Spady (1970) and Otto (1976) found non-participating students were less inclined to have college aspirations when compared to students who participated in extracurricular activities, especially service leadership activities. Eccles and Barber (1999) found athletic participation to be associated with increased rates of university attendance. Marsh (1992b) was able to show a positive correlation between participating in athletics in the 11th and 12th grade and educational aspirations as well as higher college attendance when compared to non-participating classmates. Rees and Howell (1990) also found participating students had increased aspirations for college attendance and higher occupational goals than those students who chose not to be involved in extracurricular programs. Snyder (1969) and Snyder and Spreitzer (1990) provided evidence that sport participation increased the probability of attending college. In a study of 11<sup>th</sup> grade students' extracurricular involvement, Fredricks and Eccels (2006) found that students who participated in more sports and activities as high school juniors achieved higher GPAs and possessed greater expectations related to educational attainment while in high school. Fredricks (2011) used data from the 2002 Educational Longitudinal Study to find "the breadth and intensity of extracurricular participation was positively correlated with math achievement test scores, grades and educational expectations in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade" (p. 302).

Dating back to Snyder's research in 1972, he found that "the coach's advice whether to attend college and his advice where to attend college were positively associated with the player's decision concerning college attendance" (p. 320). Snyder's research supported other research (Rehberg, 1969; Rehberg & Schafer, 1968; Schafer & Armer, 1968; Synder,

1969) showing participation in high school athletics was correlated with higher academic aspirations and achievement.

Everson and Millsap (2005) conducted a report for the College Entrance Examination Board in an effort to examine the relationship between Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores and extracurricular activity involvement in high school. Their report concluded that “participation in extracurricular activities provides all students – including students from disadvantaged backgrounds, minorities and those with less-than-distinguished academic achievements in high school – a measurable and meaningful gain in their college admissions test scores. The important reasoning abilities measured by tests like the SAT, evidently, are indeed developed both in and out of the classroom” (p. 7). The researchers analyzed more than 480,000 high school students’ SAT verbal and mathematics scores after controlling for a number of academic achievement and socioeconomic factors.

Marsh (1992) was able to show a positive correlation between students participating in athletics in the 11th and 12th grade and non-participating classmates. When the data from the National Center for Education Statistics compared the two, educational aspirations as well as greater college acceptance was clearly more prevalent with the participating students. Marsh and Kleitman (2003) used a comprehensive list of background variables and controls in their regression analysis to provide evidence of the positive relationship that exists between athletic participation and educational aspirations. Rees and Howell (1990) also found participating students had increased aspirations for college attendance and higher occupational goals than those students who chose not to be involved in extracurricular programs.

### Chapter III – Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the perceived impact of interscholastic sport participation from the perspective of high school principals, athletic directors and school counselors. So often when research is conducted on the impact of interscholastic sport participation, researchers rely upon archival data which limit the outcome measures to standardized test scores and grade point averages. Qualitative research can provide insight into the impact of participation on students when they participate in athletic programs to a much greater degree than simply examining data based on academic outcome variables. By conducting in-depth interviews, I had the ability to gain a better understanding of the impact of interscholastic athletic participation.

School principals, athletic directors and counselors witness firsthand the manner by which students are impacted by their participation in the sports programs offered by the school. Principals, athletic directors and counselors are often the only advocates for program development, budgetary assistance and sustainability. Without the support of these key stakeholders, interscholastic sports programs would struggle to survive at any high school in the country.

Chapter III will present information on the methods used to conduct this research study. This chapter is organized in accordance with research design beginning with information about the researcher, followed by discussion of the sampling method. The measures and instrumentation are then highlighted prior to a description of the data collection procedures. The chapter concludes with a data analysis plan.

## Research Design

This research study was an exploratory qualitative design based solely on participant interviews. Interviews provide insights into the issue and often reveal trends in thought and opinions; it is a model of research most commonly used to collect qualitative data.

Qualitative research allows for flexibility, spontaneity, adaptation and in-depth comparison of individual responses to a compilation of questions. These questions may be slightly altered for each interview (Mack & MacQueen, 2005). The qualitative researcher must carefully listen to the participant's responses and engage with them to encourage more refined and elaborate answers.

The researcher is faced with a number of options for conducting qualitative research (Creswell, et. al. 2007). According to Creswell (2007) and Creswell and Maietta (2002), five popular qualitative designs exist (a) narrative research, (b) case studies, (c) grounded theory, (d) phenomenology, and (e) participatory action research. The basis of this research design study was the instrumental case study approach, which is aimed at providing insight into an issue or problem or in an effort to refine a theory (Stake, 1994).

The exploratory case study approach focuses in-depth on a particular situation or case. Yin (2003) stated, "You would use the case study method because you deliberately wanted to cover contextual conditions – believing that they might be highly pertinent to your phenomenon of study" (p. 13). Creswell (2007) wrote, "Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual

material, and documents and reports) and reports a case description and case-based themes” (p. 62).

### **Researcher Perspective**

While conducting the research on the perceived impact of interscholastic athletic participation, it was imperative to remain objective throughout the data collection and interpretation process. I certainly hold firm beliefs that participating in interscholastic athletic programs impact students in a number of positive ways. I am aware, however, the perceived benefits students gain from their participation could be related to the students self-selecting the athletic programs (i.e. the more dedicated, goal oriented, high academic achieving students participate in athletics, while students with less drive, desire and academic aspirations simply choose not to participate). Many quantitative research studies, with acceptable levels of statistical significance, have provided evidence of the positive impact participation has upon students, but correlation does not equate to causation.

This study was conducted in an effort to analyze the perceived impact participation has on students in athletic programs by using a qualitative research approach. Examining the impacts of participating via a qualitative case study design highlighted the unique benefits and emphasized the need for expanding interscholastic athletic programs within communities.

### **Researcher Background**

For as long as I can remember, I have enjoyed participating in and being around sports. I ran my first 10k when I was in the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade and played several sports while in elementary and middle school. When I entered high school, I played soccer, baseball and



ran track during my freshman year. The summer between my freshmen and sophomore year had a profound impact upon the rest of my life. As a 110-lb. incoming high school sophomore, an assistant football coach convinced my twin brother and I to play football. At the time, only the biggest, strongest and most athletic students played football; I had never considered playing the sport.

On the first day of football practice, I entered the locker room and was immediately greeted by one of the student managers who asked, “Are you going to be a manager too?” My confidence level from that moment has never been the same, as I replied, “No, I am going to play football.” I endured plenty of bumps and bruises, nearly broke my left arm, went home sore each afternoon but absolutely loved everything about being a member of the football team. I had the chance to play for a legendary coach, who coached with an “old school” mentality. I quickly learned how to handle adversity and accept constructive criticism. As much as I loved football, it was in distance running that I experienced the most success. Gaining such a positive outcome in that sport led to unwavering dedication to running my senior year.

I was fortunate to run cross country and track at a small Division II college and received a minimal athletic scholarship which was based more upon my academic skills than my athletic talents. Following college, I coached and taught middle school and high school and thought I had found my life-long profession. I enjoyed having the opportunity to work with kids as a coach and saw my role as a mentor in helping students become successful.

After three years of teaching and coaching, I decided to go to graduate school in 2002. At this same time, I began working for the state high school athletic association. I

started at an entry level position, but soon worked my way up to the role of Associate Director. I spent ten years with this association and learned a great deal about athletic administration, interscholastic sport participation, and event management. This experience led to my desire to pursue a PhD in sports administration.

In 2012, I decided to apply for the Executive Director's position at one of the largest high school athletic associations in the country, in a state nearly 2,000 miles away. These positions are often politically controlled and extremely challenging to get, especially with no contacts or prior relationships. I strongly believe the confidence that was instilled in me as a skinny sophomore high school football player was the deciding factor in my becoming the youngest Executive Director of a high school athletic association in the country.

My participation in interscholastic athletics established the foundation for the work ethic that I possess today. I attribute my commitment to being a member of a team, my ability to problem solve, my leadership qualities and my capacity to effectively communicate to the lessons I learned through interscholastic athletic participation. I am a firm believer participating in high school sports positively impacts a young person's life. High schools must accept the responsibility to develop a wide range of athletic programs that will afford students the opportunity to participate. Principals, athletic directors and school counselors are the driving forces of a school's athletic program, which is why I decided to interview these key stakeholders for this research study. These individuals have brought significant attention to the positive impact participation has upon students in interscholastic athletics.

## **Sample and Population**

This study was artificially bounded by the established criteria for selection of individuals participating in a case study. The most important aspect of a case study is obviously determining the “case” or “cases” to be studied. The cases for this study were 12 individuals (4 principals, 4 athletic directors and 4 counselors) from a specific interscholastic league in the Albany, New York Capitol Region.

Selecting interview participants is based on an iterative process referred to as purposeful sampling which seeks to maximize the depth and richness of the data to effectively address the research question (Kuzel, 1999). Purposeful random sampling was utilized to determine the individuals to be interviewed following Internal Review Board (IRB) approval. With purposeful random sampling, the researcher must develop a systematic way of selecting the cases (interviewees) within a population that is not based upon prior knowledge of how the outcomes will appear. Using this method increased credibility but did not foster representativeness. Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research findings are not seeking to generalize to a larger population.

## **Instrumentation**

A pilot study was used to certify validity and reliability of the questions to be asked during the research study. Pilot interviews were conducted with a principal, athletic director and counselor to ensure the questions were categorically clear and led to responses beneficial to the area of study and were feasible and easily understood. Following the pilot interviews, five questions were dropped, and two questions were added.

Pilot interviews will not guarantee success of the study; however, they will increase the potential for success.

The research interviews were semi-structured and were conducted face-to-face at the school where the participant was currently employed. Participants were asked to secure a quiet location at their school to avoid interruption during the interview. The semi-structured interview is widely utilized throughout qualitative research. It allows for predetermined open-ended questions, with other questions materializing from the dialogue between interviewer and interviewee(s).

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Interviews with 12 individuals (4 principals, 4 athletic directors and 4 counselors) were conducted to analyze the perceived impact participation has on students who are involved in athletics. The individual interviews allowed for more in-depth questioning and ability for specific follow up questions. The semi-structured interviews were repeated until the findings showed nothing new was likely to materialize and the research question had been answered (Grbich, 2007). “This iterative process of data collection and analysis eventually leads to a point in the data collection where no new categories or themes emerge. This is referred to as saturation, signaling that data collection is complete” (Kuzel, 1999, p. 42).

Analysis focused on identifying common themes throughout the interviews. Open coding was used at the first level of coding to identify distinct concepts and categories in the data. Axial coding, which is the process of relating core themes and categories to one another, was then used as a process of connecting core themes during the qualitative data

analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Finally, the concepts and categories will be transferred into a data table to organize the results of the interviews.

## Chapter IV – Data Analysis

### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of interscholastic athletic participation from the perspective of the high school principals, athletic directors and school counselors and to provide beneficial information for school leaders to rationalize greater emphasis on and more funding for interscholastic athletic programs.

The impact of interscholastic sports participation has been researched and examined for over a century. Research has certainly brought attention to the impact and the many positive benefits students receive when given the opportunity to participate (Darling, Cadwell & Smith, 2005; Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Morrissey, 2005; Otto, 1982; Otto & Alwin, 1977; Reeves, 2008). It is evident high school sports participation enhances academic performance while promoting fundamental life skills (Dornbusch, 1986; Durbin, 1986; Knifsend & Graham, 2011, p. 380; Marsh & Kleitman, 2002, p. 466; Silliker & Quirk, 1997). Those who support interscholastic sport participation value the opportunities for character development, while critics often cite the costs and potential distractions from academics as reasons to keep sports out of schools (Burnett, 2000; Coleman, 1959, 1961; Gerber, 1996).

This chapter is divided into three distinct sections. The first section provides brief background information on the 12 participants; four high school principals, four athletic directors and four school counselors served as the research study participants. Participants were randomly selected from high schools who participate in a specific interscholastic league in upstate New York. The second section of this chapter answers the research questions by citing the data collected during the 12 participant interviews. Finally, the third

section examines four themes which developed throughout the data collection process using the collected data.

### **Section One: Research Study Participants**

In an effort to maintain confidentiality and privacy, the participants' names are not disclosed. The 12 participants have been labeled using their title (i.e. principal, athletic director, counselor) and a number (1, 2, 3, 4) to provide the reader with a level of consistency and understanding of the responses gathered. The 12 research participants have a combined 230 years of educational experience, with nine of the 12 participants spending more than ten years in their current position. To be eligible to participate in this study, all participants had to be employed in an Albany, New York capitol region school district, which was a member of a specific interscholastic league.

**Principal 1:** Principal 1 has been a principal for the past 10 years and recently completed 18 years as an educator. After starting in an alternative education classroom environment with a certification in social studies, Principal 1 pursued an administrative certificate. While in the process of completing the administrative certificate, a dean position opened at the participant's school. After two years as Dean, the role transitioned into an assistant principal. Principal 1 worked with freshmen for nine years before assuming the position of head principal at the high school.

**Principal 2:** For nearly three decades, Principal 2 has worked in the educational field. Principal 2 entered the teaching profession as a special education teacher, but also held a social studies teaching certification. Principal 2 held football coaching responsibilities at the

school for five years before becoming an assistant principal. After only two years as an assistant principal, Principal 2 became the head principal in 2001.

**Principal 3:** Principal 3 has been a principal for the past 13 years and has worked in education for 18 years. Principal 3 started as a social studies teacher and coach at the middle school level, teaching special education and coaching basketball. After only five years, Principal 3 assumed athletic director responsibilities, and maintained his classroom teaching position. Since it was a small school, teaching and administrative duties were often assigned together. Principal 3 moved to another school to become an assistant principal and athletic director and is now serving as building principal.

**Principal 4:** Principal 4 received a teaching position right out of college and began teaching at a Massachusetts high school. After five years in the classroom, Principal 4 began coaching varsity lacrosse and moved to New York to accept a position as a Global History teacher and coach. After ten years, Principal 4 obtained an administrative certificate and oversaw a summer school program for three years. Principal 4 is now building principal and has worked in education for a total of 17 years.

**Athletic Director 1:** Athletic Director 1 has been in the education field for 14 years. The participant has spent the past nine years as a high school athletic director. The participant's career began as a business teacher, but eventually transitioned into athletic director responsibilities along with teaching duties. For the past four years, the participant has served as the full time athletic director.

**Athletic Director 2:** Athletic Director 2 has worked in public education for 22 years and has spent the past 14 years as a high school athletic director. Prior to becoming an



athletic director, the participant served two years as a middle school assistant principal and six years as a classroom teacher. At beginning of Athletic Director 2's career, the participant was a 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade elementary teacher, but eventually returned to school to receive a physical education certification.

**Athletic Director 3:** Athletic Director 3 has been in the educational field for 18 years; the last 12 years as a high school athletic director. The participant's career began as a physical education teacher at an elementary school for four years. At that time, the participant was also coaching varsity soccer at a school nearly 40 minutes away. Athletic Director 3 went on to teach and coach at a high school for six years before going into administration. The participant received an athletic director position and spent eight years at an upstate New York school.

**Athletic Director 4:** Athletic Director 4 has been in the educational field for the past 29 years; 19 years as a high school athletic director. Athletic Director 4 spent eight years in an inner-city school as a teacher and coach before pursuing an administrative certification. After serving as an assistant principal for nearly 3 years, the school's athletic director was forced to take a medical leave and the superintendent asked Athletic Director 4 to assume the athletic director responsibilities. Athletic Director 4 filled this position for 8 years. For the past 11 years, Athletic Director 4 has been the athletic director at an upstate New York suburban school district.

**Counselor 1:** Counselor 1 has been at the same school since entering the field of school counseling in 1993; 24 years ago. Counselor 1 started out as a substitute teacher

while pursuing a master's degree in school counseling. Counselor 1 has also served as the school's girls' soccer coach.

**Counselor 2:** Counselor 2 entered the field of school counseling a decade ago after working in sales and marketing at an education consulting company. The beginning of Counselor 2's career as a school counselor was spent as an at-risk counselor, which was funded by a grant on an annual basis. For the past 9 years, Counselor 2 has been at the same high school.

**Counselor 3:** Counselor 3 has been working in the area of school counseling for the past eight years and has spent the last six years at the same high school. After graduating with a master's degree in school counseling, Counselor 3 started at a community college as an Academic Advisory and Success Advocate for students who were considered double developmentally delayed (tested into remedial math and English courses). Prior to entering the high school setting, Counselor 3 was a Mental Health Counselor and an assistant women's basketball coach at the college level. Counselor 3 has been at the same high school for the past six years and currently coaches girls' basketball and softball.

**Counselor 4:** For the past 23 years Counselor 4 has served the same school district as its school guidance counselor. Counselor 4 has worked with 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> graders for over two decades; ten years ago, Counselor 4 started working with student-athletes and is viewed as the "go to" counselor for questions of NCAA eligibility and course requirements.

## **Section Two: Research Questions**

This research utilized a qualitative case study methodology to gather data related to the following research question: *What is the impact of interscholastic athletic participation*

*upon student-athletes from the perspective of the high school principal, athletic director and counselor? Seven sub-questions were used to answer the research question. The following pages will detail participant responses in an effort to answer the research question and seven sub-questions.*

**Sub-question 1:** *Do students who participate in interscholastic athletics do better in the classroom, experience less discipline issues, graduate at a greater rate, and attend college at a greater rate than their non-participating classmates?*

**Student-Athletes and Grades:** This study provides support for past research which has shown a strong correlation between academic success and interscholastic sport participation. Athletics unequivocally help increase students' concentration and general academic success (Lipscomb, 2007; Trudeau & Shephard, 2008). All participants responded in a positive manner, by correlating interscholastic participation to improved grades and overall classroom performance.

When asked to compare student-athletes and their non-participating classmates regarding grades, Counselor 1 said *"I see a significant correlation between kids that are involved, whether its athletics or other things like marching band."* Athletic Director 2 responded by saying *"To me, there's an absolute connection. Student athletes are focused on grades."* And Athletic Director 3 said *"You do see the kids that are involved in athletics do make a commitment to their academics and it translates onto the field. The kids that are dedicated to doing well academically, they're driven, they're disciplined, they have a commitment to their grades."* It is certainly well documented that students who participate

in interscholastic athletics receive better grades; this topic has been researched and studied for decades (Dornbusch, 1986; Durbin, 1986; Silliker & Quirk, 1997).

According to Counselor 3, student-athletes have an “internal motivation” and can rely on teachers and administrators who are looking out for them; these factors contribute to enhanced performance in the classroom. Counselor 3, who also coaches, provided a perspective pertaining to a student-athlete’s academic success:

I have a unique kind of perspective because I’m also a coach in the high school. I see firsthand the differences between student athletes and also students who participate even in like drama or choir versus students who just go home. Again, it’s case-by-case. Every kid who is not an athlete doesn’t mean they are not going to do well but I think there is that internal motivation and a lot of students lack that; like your Valedictorians who are not athletes, maybe, they have that motivation to succeed. Whether it’s parenting or just how they were raised, they have that internal motivation to do their best. Sometimes students don’t have that and I think that kind of gap is where you see, in my perspective, looking at grades constantly, I think athletics sometimes can kind of put that over their heads especially with coaches on them and people always constantly talking about them. It’s not just about sports all the time – I can’t play a sport if I’m not doing well in classes. I think that push does increase student performance. Again, like I said, it’s case-by-case. You can have a football team or a basketball team that are studs and you’re going to have two or three guys that sometimes become ineligible; it’s happened. But I think with the pressure from Administration and coaches and counselors and teachers

that know that they're athletes in the building from girls and guys that play any sport they know, hey, I know you're playing tonight; let's get this in. I think students take that and use that as a motivation to do better in school (Counselor 3).

Principal 2 and Principal 3 both had similar observations relating student-athlete academic success to "in-season" athletic participation. Attention is seldom paid to the reality that schools and interscholastic athletic associations limit the time period for interscholastic sports seasons (i.e. Fall season is 15 weeks, Winter season is 22 weeks, and Spring season is 15 weeks). If students tend to have more success during the "season", one would presume the season would have no limit to afford students more time to participate and reap the benefits of participating. Principal 2 questioned whether in-season participation helps a student because they have less free time or the routine of their schedule aides in their study habits:

I think student athletes overall as a sub-group tend to be a little more goal oriented but, again, I don't know if that's by design or just by how they operate. I think that transfers a little bit into their academics. I've noticed that kids historically have done better while they're in season. I don't know if that's because they have less free time and they have to be more focused or if it's just because they're more into routine and studying is part of the routine so the routine of practice and training transitions to the routine of studying (Principal 2).

Principal 3 provided an example of how students can be impacted during the off season compared to their academic performance during the season:

Anecdotally I can tell you, without a doubt, I've had kids before that they are a soccer player and they're eligible and they're passing and then soccer season ends and we're struggling and we're bringing them in for additional assistance. Time and time again and I can tell you what happened. And a social worker or myself or a counselor will say, the season ended and now the kid is tanking. A lot of times it relates to attendance and that trusted influence in their life. It might be a little different at a large school because sports tend to be more 365 but at a small school, the kid plays a sport and now that coach is not as involved with the kid so the coach can't lean on him, he can't say hey, I'm going to talk to Coach whoever. I've definitely seen that impact where sports are a positive impact on the kids in season (Principal 3).

Principal 1 cited the sense of belonging and the connection that can be made between participation and classroom responsibilities, as reasons why student-athletes have success in the classroom:

There are always the outliers who you would think you have a theory on something and then the complete opposite, but I think overall when the student athletes feel as though they're part of something greater than them or bigger than them and they have a responsibility to others, they know that they can't mess up whether that be socially or academically. While our particular high school does not have an academic policy tied to participation, I think we still view our expectations the same as a school that would. We have them pull the kid off because you're failing "X" amount of classes but we do work with our classes and say there is an issue here and we

need to fix this issue because we're students before athletes. I think it's easier to make a connection when you're talking with a kid who is struggling a bit to get them to understand how important it is not just to them individually but to the people that rely on them. I think it makes that conversation much more fruitful when you have something else to bring into it besides what do you do when you go home at the end of the day. Hang out, this and that, play games. If you go to practice and you know the coach and you know the other guys on the team, you can use that as, not leverage, but part of the conversation. I definitely find great value in that (Principal 1).

Counselor 4 also brought attention to the belief that students do better in school when they feel like they belong to a team or organization within the school. This is a valid observation since many school districts limit the number of students on a team by conducting cuts. Creating more opportunities for students to develop relationships and gain a sense of belonging is increased when schools create non-interscholastic programs such as intramurals or clubs. Counselor 4 said:

We're in a large school district and what I have found, whether its athletics or something else, the kids do best when they feel like they belong to something; it's about relationships. For some students, it's the teams that they're on. It could be that they're in the theatre program or whatever it is having that something outside of the classroom and having adults or other people and whether it's a club or whatever it is having that support and feeling like they belong, and they matter has been key to bring the best out of people (Counselor 4).

Finally, Principal 4 discussed his thoughts on the unique characteristics of students who participate in athletics:

Generally speaking, kids who participate in athletics I feel they are more organized and manage their time a lot better. A lot of the at-risk population kids that I work with, I'm always trying to get them to do extra-curriculars whether it's athletics, getting involved after school in clubs but there's definitely just a sense of being involved in the school culture. Our athletes, they're recognized in the hallway; they're part of a larger team. Some of our kids who aren't really involved, they're here from the school day to school end and they're gone. They don't really have anything vested. I see with a lot of our athletes they're more prideful – they're more prideful of the school, the community, they do more. It's always good to kind of reach out to their coaches and have that sort of support system for them so I'm always trying to push kids into athletics (Principal 4).

**Student-Athletes and Discipline:** The majority of the participants involved in this study believe student athletes have fewer discipline issues and receive fewer referrals when compared to their non-participating classmates. Athletic Director 4 mentioned, *"I think athletics is a tremendous carrot to keep kids doing the right thing."* As described in the literature review, Hawkins (1988) found students who were involved in extracurricular school related programs were less likely to be suspended from school and misbehave, while research conducted by Landers and Landers (1978) found a lower rate of delinquent acts was significantly related to participation in athletics. My research supports Hawkins and Landers and Landers findings.



Athletic Director 1 and 2 both reported student-athletes had fewer discipline issues than students who chose not to participate; reasoning suggests that student-athletes feel as if they have something to lose. Athletic Director 1 said students-athletes are “held to a higher standard and you have a lot more to lose.” Athletic Director 1 went on to provide some examples of this statement:

The kid that gets in a fight in the hallway that’s not involved in basketball or not involved in the Chess Club, all right they’re going to get suspended from school but their life goes on other than that. But if you’re involved on the football team, on the track team and you get into a fight, a lot of those things are going to be taken away from you for a little bit so I think those kids know I need to be on my best behavior all the time and it shows in the hallways. I think our teachers and our community sees that as well that our student athletes are well behaved (Athletic Director 1).

Athletic Director 2 used the same phrase- *“they feel like there is something they have to lose”* in response to why student-athletes seem to experience fewer discipline issues:

Same, absolutely. I regularly check in on our student-athletes; we have grade level principals basically the Deans of Students. They sandwich my office – there’s literally one there and one there. We have a little habit we do every morning. We grab a cup of coffee, the three of us, I touch base and make sure all student athletes are doing ok and our student athletes are never really trouble, I don’t want to say never; very, very rare situations, and it’s usually something fairly minor and that’s, again, been the case pretty much in the districts I’ve been. They feel like there is

something they have to lose. There is something to lose. They understand, and we make it really clear. (Athletic Director 2).

Classroom teachers, administrators and coaches have the ability to make connections and provide students with a sense of belonging which is an incredible benefit of interscholastic athletic participation. Brown and Evans (2002) and Dotterer et al. (2007) found that students who participated in extracurricular activities associated with their school felt more connected and had an enhanced sense of belonging. Principal 1, Principal 3 and Athletic Director 3 all discussed the importance of students having a sense of belonging. Principal 1 referenced non-participating students when responding to the question related to student-athlete discipline:

They have no sense of belonging. They're not connected to anything that exists within this building. They either come here because they have to or they're just programmed to wake up and go to school (Principal 1).

Principal 3 discussed the challenges of holding students accountable when their athletic season is over or they are not involved in sports, as well as the motivating factors of athletic participation:

Yes, definitely, the same instance like what's going on with this kid, well, the season over and I think the conversations around discipline sometimes are different and maybe that's my fault or our fault. We just had a kid this morning get in trouble and we talked about leadership, time to grow up and people look up to you. It's a lot harder to have that conversation with a kid who is not involved in anything. We're talking about sports, obviously, but I think that goes for clubs or other stuff. Hey,

you're on the football team. When you're in practice how does it go? How do you work harder? We can draw those connections with discipline where we can't if a kid is not involved. That will go for drama productions or different clubs but just having the kid involved, our conversations are more productive because we can draw on the analogies – I could become a sports person and I was involved and I can relate. But those conversations are richer and I think they're more fruitful for the kids because we can, I think, we can get more growth out of a kid when there are discipline issues involved with sports. And you have that ability to kind of use that for better or for worse, we don't want to hold things over kids' heads - listen, I'm not taking Math away. You've got to go to Math every day. I'm not taking it away. You don't have to go to swim practice; you don't have to go to wrestling so those kinds of things I think are motivating for a lot of kids. To be honest with you, we have less discipline problems in my career with athletes than non-athletes (Principal 3).

Counselor 1 had a simplistic approach to the reason why student-athletes experience fewer discipline issues and referrals, "They don't have time to get into trouble".

Counselor 1 went on to give an example of a time a player on the soccer team had a discipline issue and how the situation was handled solely because the student was on the soccer team and valued that participation opportunity:

I can give you the example of my students over at \_\_\_\_\_ High School. I had 19 girls on my varsity soccer team, maybe one discipline referral. The parent called me right away and said, can you talk to my daughter, and I did immediately. I said to her – if I see this again, you're not going to be playing soccer. It turned right around.

Very seldom do I see my athletes, or athletes in general, that are involved in discipline (Counselor 1).

**Student-Athletes and Gradation Rates:** Past research (Davalos et al., 1999; Jansen 1992; Zaff et al., 2003) provides evidence student-athletes graduate at a higher rate than their non-participating classmates. These researchers' findings are supported by the participants in this study. Overwhelmingly the participants could not recall an athlete failing to graduate on time. Principal 4 viewed the support system offered by the coaching staff and athletic director as a factor in student-athletes graduating on time:

Yeah, I think, by-in-large our coaches do a really nice job monitoring their progress. We don't really have a lot of athletes that don't make it across the stage. Once in a while we'll have someone that just didn't get it done their senior year, but I think it all goes back to that support system with the coach and our Athletic Director, who does a nice job monitoring the grades. If we see a kid whose struggling and tell them, hey, listen, you still want to play baseball this spring, you need to keep those grades up, and that's really a hook for them (Principal 4).

Graduating on time was a common theme for all research participants, while Counselor 2 discussed encouraging students to play any kind of sport because sports have the ability to keep students engaged. Studies attribute a range of benefits in sports participation, especially for at-risk populations:

I'm a proponent of athletics for students who are at risk, especially. It was a big thing for me when I was at a different high school. It was an inner-city school and there was a lot of poverty. I advocated for my students and with the coaches and I

worked closely with them. I strongly wanted them to play anything, any kind of sport because, in my opinion, it kept them more engaged in the school and anything that kept them engaged in the school, in my opinion, gave them a better chance to come back the next day and that was what I cared about at those at-risk schools. I just wanted them to show up the next day because I figured hopefully something would stick, they'd pass their classes and get their diplomas. I felt that if it was football that got them in, fine; if it was track & field, great. I didn't care what it was as long as it was something that would keep them engaged in school (Counselor 2).

Obviously, having high graduation rates can be attributed to a number of factors within a school district. Counselor 4 believed that coaches play a role in holding kids accountable and focused, which ultimately leads to them graduating on time. When responding to the interview question related to student-athletes graduating at a higher rate than their non-participating classmates, Counselor 4 stated:

I haven't tracked the numbers, so it would just be my guess is the kids that are involved do better. They graduate probably on time, especially when a coach holds them accountable (Counselor 4).

**Student-Athletes and College Aspirations:** Research studies by Holland and Andre (1987) and Eccles and Barber(1999) support the theory that student athletes aspire to attend college in greater numbers than non-participating students. Interview participants highlighted the aspects of interscholastic participation which aides in a student's desire to attend college.

Athletic Director 1 discussed the confidence a student receives from participation: I think the kids that participate they get so much more out of it than the kids that don't. They're learning to work with a team, how to be leaders, how to communicate, work with different types of people. I think that ultimately prepares them and almost gives them a little confidence when they're going to go off because they know they're going to college whether it's down the road at Siena or out in Buffalo. They might not be around their parents, they might not be in familiar surroundings, but I think participating in athletics, that prepares them because they have to come out of their shell sometimes. They can't always be just their normal self. They have to come out of their shell, they have to be part of the team and I think that prepares them to go off to college (Athletic Director 1).

An often-cited benefit created by athletic participation is a student athlete's desire to be in school on a regular basis. Regular attendance increases a student's likelihood to attend college. Athletic Director 2 provided the following insight when asked if participation impacts a student's educational aspirations:

I think they go hand-in-hand. When you have student athletes who want to be in school, they tend to do well in school so their college or post high school options are a lot greater than those who struggle through or may not see schooling as important as someone who is driven to be here. I think there is a strong correlation for the student athlete. Plus, I feel like student athletes want to be a part of their school culture and I think that also transfers to the college level. Obviously, the overwhelming number of high school athletes doesn't transition to become college

athletes, but they may transition to other areas of leadership – student government, being highly involved in activities that match their career aspirations. So, yeah, I think it’s definitely a strong tie (Athletic Director 2).

An interesting set of responses related to educational aspirations originated from the four counselors who were interviewed for this study. When asked about the educational aspirations of students, neither the principals nor any of the athletic directors discussed a student’s desire to play athletics at the college level; however, all four counselors mentioned a student’s desire to play collegiate athletics as being tied to their educational aspirations.

Counselor 1 discussed two students who had the athletic talents to play at the next level and had experiences that are often common for students preparing to graduate and enter the next phase of their academic career. From Counselor 1’s response, it is evident the counselor has worked with many students who aspire to participate after high school:

I think that when you’re first talking to any kid who is a freshman, they see themselves as that blue-chip athlete that’s going to get the full ride but as they mature I think they see it as a vehicle for education. I had a student last year who got a full Division I Basketball Scholarship. The interesting thing is the school she went to the coach that recruited her lost his job. I asked if the coaching changed change her mind and she said – “no.” She’s going there for the academics and this is a good basketball player. I think the kids typically take it much more seriously knowing that sports are in the future especially with the NCAA standards. I have a current senior who wants to play college soccer and is being heavily recruited by a

Division I school, but all through Junior year didn't really do what she needed to do and that's hitting her hard right now so that's the negative piece of it. The positive piece is she's really working harder, and she gets it now (Counselor 1).

Counselor 2 questioned whether students play so they can attend college or if they participate so they can have the opportunity to "play" collegiately:

I don't know if it's about the education, though. I think for a lot of them that get really into it, it's more about the pleasure of playing collegiate level sports. I don't know if it's the fact that they really necessarily care about getting a college degree. But, again, I don't care; if that's what gets them the college degree, wonderful; that's fine with me (Counselor 2).

Counselor 3 brought attention to the amount of time spent talking about the necessary requirements to play college athletics as being a driving force behind students' wanting to do well academically:

Yeah, yeah because I do think especially . . . I do think there is that competitive edge especially for your most elite athletes to make it to the highest levels in the collegiate athletics. Division I, Division II levels you need certain qualifications in order to qualify for the NCAA clearinghouse. Those talks start early in 9th and 10th grade lead to them doing a little bit more in the building and then increasing their chances of getting into a more prestigious universities and colleges. I think, again, that stems from 9th grade meetings with counselor, parents and coaches about the reality of the importance of education in order to play at the next level. I think that increases their likelihood to go to college versus a non-athlete. I do think that it's



talked about more so maybe that increases awareness of the amount of different opportunities that they would have. It also may give the realization that college athletics might not be the reason to go to school. Listen, I'm playing varsity sports but I'm not really the guy or the girl. I got to think about my academics and think about my future that way (Counselor 3).

A follow up question was asked related to Counselor 3's mention that "it is talked about more." Counselor 3 responded to the follow-up question by saying:

I think that our Athletic Department we do try to increase awareness early enough about the importance and the needs in order to play in college. We try to get our student athletes whether it's a female soccer player or to a male soccer player, it doesn't matter what the sport is. In order to play in college, you have to meet qualifications. We try to have those meetings early with our student athletes in the end of the year, 9th grade, prior to when they come up to the building if we know they're an athlete to kind of put that out there so there is no surprises for parents and that the aspirations are there for the student athletes. We don't want to have Juniors that come down and say – oh, yeah, I'm going to play this sport in college and it's like you weren't taking the right courses or you have to take the SATs or your SAT scores are low. It's really just trying to eliminate surprises (Counselor 3).

Finally, Counselor 4 mentioned the unlikeliness of students playing at the college level, when asked about a student's educational aspirations:

Kids that are athletes, especially if they want to play at the next level and obviously college in the United States that tends to be the pathway up. Whether or not it's a

realistic thing, they still like that. Sometimes they're disillusioned as to what the level of play is going to be and as to whether or not they actually have a shot at playing in even a Division III program. It's still something they aspire to which I think is good (Counselor 4).

**Sub-question 2:** *What skills do students receive from participating in interscholastic athletics?*

Responses to the skills students received from participating varied among the research participants; however, all skills were positive and beneficial for the student-athletes. Responses ranged from leadership skills, how to deal with adversity, effective communication, the ability to self-evaluate, and time management skills.

An unexpected response to sub-question #2 related to a student's ability to self-evaluate as an important skill learned through participation. According to Principal 2, student-athletes have a distinct advantage over non-participating students because student-athletes learn to self-evaluate and self-review their performance, which translates to a skill they are able to use later on in life:

I think a lot of times, and this is where I talked about earlier about kids being more savvy today, through film study now, we're constantly asking our kids to evaluate and self-assess. I think we're modeling that skill through athletics for kids that now transition into their life. A lot of times kids are not just thinking about their performance in practice or a game, they may be looking at how they did on a test. The kids here are very interested in, both athletes and non-athletes, in getting that feedback right away. I think that whole mind set of reviewing your performance has

really been stressed hard on our athletes. I don't see that as much from the non-athletes. Although I do for the real high achieving academic kids, obviously, but even those kids I don't think understand, unless they're athletes, the same connection on, you know, what do you do with film study and how you re-evaluate the next move and the next practice and the next game or the next opponent. I don't think those kids because typically what you do in academics is you're tested on it and you move on. You might see it again in a final assessment or exam but it's not like you're going every week with the same skill or the same set of skills so a little different but those kids who participate in athletics have that advantage of constant self-assessment (Principal 2).

Principal 3 had a similar observation as Principal 2 regarding student-athletes learning how to interpret and deal with feedback:

They have conversations with their coaches, they have conversations with their teammates and sometimes they're tough conversations and if the athletic program is doing it right, the kid is not happy about something, they're going to have a candid conversation with their coach. The parent isn't going to call and say my kid is not playing; the kid is going to have that conversation. Not easy for the kid to do and then they're going to take feedback. I think our kids in athletics, they get feedback that you're not going to get every day here. The feedback you get here is – "you got an 80"; "o.k." First of all, what does an 80 mean? That's a whole other issue. They're getting feedback in practice like – listen, you missed a slide, you didn't box out. They're getting that feedback instantly and they have to process that and

improve. I think on many levels things they're not even noticing but unfortunately a lot of high school kids who don't participate in athletics are never getting that kind of feedback. Other than a piece of paper, they're not getting that immediate feedback which is an education problem but in sports they're getting that (Principal 3).

Learning how to become a leader and how to manage one's time are often skills attributed to participation in an interscholastic athletic program. Athletic Director 3 linked participation to leadership and organizational skills, while recalling his own high school participation experience and questioned how student-athletes complete their homework:

I would say leadership; just the organizational skills. We talk about that all the time. We just had a "Meet the Coaches Night" a couple of weeks ago. I was just looking back to the Fall season and our football team. Just the amount of time they put in. I don't know how they get their homework done. When I went to high school, I went to a school that didn't have football, so I didn't play football so coming here was my first experience with high school football. They're here until 7:00 at night, they have to go home and have dinner and then they have to sleep so the organizational skills – huge (Athletic Director 1).

Athletic Director 3 discussed leadership while describing a recent experience at an end of the season soccer banquet. Athletic Director 3 also referenced the many "life" skills students learn through participation experience:

We just had a banquet last night, I went to a soccer banquet and its good when you get to hear the captains talk, kind of hear them and how they reflect. The one thing

they all mention in their speech was leadership that their coach taught them how to be a leader. I think that's a big piece. Now when you go from leadership, that's like the overarching skill that a lot of these kids get from the coaches, but how to communicate better, how to problem solve, how to really deal with adversity. One of our football coaches talked about that at the banquet last week. That was something that he teaches the kids – dealing with the adversity that's going to be coming your way. Those are all the things that you deal with in life. The communication piece is huge, the interaction with their teammates, the trust that they learn and build upon each other. Those are just a few but there's so many skills that kids are learning through athletics. I think the best part about it is it's a lot of things they don't even realize is happening. Its things that just happen throughout their sport that make them better people and when they go to the next chapter of their life, they start to realize that these are things I learned from my sports participation that I can really translate into what I'm doing now (Athletic Director 3).

Counselor 3 elaborated on Athletic Director 3's response related to life skills by discussing the future benefits of having a "team experience":

Kids don't realize how much you depend on your co-workers and that kind of stuff when you're older. Having that team experience I feel really translates to post education, being in the workplace, having bosses and people to look up to similar to your coaches and goals, that kind of stuff; goal setting, kind of all athletic based kind of translates into the workforce. The same thing with accountability and just having those deadlines due with things like that. Even in college having assignments due

and deadlines, you have a game coming up and you have to prepare. All of that stuff translates perfectly from athletics (Counselor 3).

Counselor 4 and Principal 4 discussed how participation in an interscholastic athletic program can prepare students to handle adversity. Principal 4 said:

I think organization for sure, time management, resiliency to deal with adversity. Something I talk to my kids about when things don't go well in practice or games, you have to be able to bounce back. I think just an overall mental toughness that is built through athletics and team sports. Maybe you didn't have your best day and you got scored on but you've got to be able to bounce back tomorrow. It helped me, anyway, throughout my career but I think it does help our kids to be a little more resilient (Principal 4).

Principal 2, who is a former high school varsity lacrosse coach, discussed how students learn perseverance through their athletic participation:

I think our athletes know how to persevere. I tell the kids all the time that athletics is the best reality check for life because if you're inches short of the first down, they don't say you were really close and it was a great effort and we're going to give it to you. It's a turnover and you give the ball to the other team. If you lose the State Championship game by one point, you still lose. Its o.k., you competed, you want to win but I think it's a good way to learn how to persevere, a good way to learn how to overcome setbacks (Principal 2).

**Sub-question 3:** *What is the greatest benefit a student receives from participating in interscholastic athletics?*

Several participants' responses to Sub-question 3 revolved around a student being part of a team and having a sense of belonging. *"Having a core group of people that you can count on that identify and hopefully hold the same values you have"* is how Athletic Director 3 responded to this sub-question. Athletic Director 4 also cited the greatest benefit of participation as being a part of a group and having a sense of belonging:

I think it's that sense of belonging, that sense of being accepted by a group, being a part of a group. There's nothing worse for a kid, in my opinion, than being a part of a large high school and not really fitting in and not really having a core group or friends you know, you go into the cafeteria and you see kids sitting by themselves; that sucks to see. As an educator, it breaks my heart when I see that. And then you got your special kids that kind of go out of their way to get that kid involved..... I think athletics gives you that natural fit; you go in and there are my teammates. I think that, more than anything, is a benefit for being involved in athletics (Athletic Director 4).

Principal 1's comments aligned with Athletic Director 3 and Athletic Director 4 on the concept of belonging. Principal 1 also discussed how being a part of a team *"builds the capacity within someone to not be willing to give up so easily, to persevere."* Principal 1 said:

I would say self-awareness, that being part of a team, being part of something bigger than them is extremely humbling and can be the most rewarding thing that they can

do if they achieve something collectively...When you're part of an organization or a group or a team and you set a goal and you overcome obstacles and you accomplish that, I think that builds the capacity within someone to not be willing to give up so easily, to persevere, perseverance if I had to drill it down to a word. You can do anything you want if you work hard enough and no one should stand in your way of that. I don't know if you can get that just by being in a classroom constantly – teachers work hard, study and you have to do well on this test. Maybe there are some kids out there who can do it that way, but to be on a field or court, on a track and accomplish something with so many obstacles; whether its opponents or physical conditions or mental conditions at times, you're kind of down on yourself, a slump you're trying to get out of. Perseverance, I think, is probably the greatest gift that one can give themselves by committing and seeing things through (Principal 1). Principal 2 associated being a part of a team and knowing your role as an important life lesson:

I think being part of the team, the team aspect of things and all that entails.

Knowing that everyone has a role, has a job to do. I think that translates into later on in life that whole team aspect where you might not be the star but you play an important role and the team really doesn't have a shot at winning unless everybody is working together and functioning. You might not be the one who scores all the goals but you're the one who gets him the ball (Principal 4).

Other responses to the greatest benefit a student receives from participation involved learning life skills and lessons. Counselor 1, who is also a coach, discussed the



outcome of a mid-season survey he conducted with his team. The results concluded that the greatest benefit of participating was learning how to work with others:

Just knowing how to work with other people. Understanding. I did a mid-season survey with my kids and one of the questions I asked them - what is your role on the team? And that was a really tough question for them to answer. But I think asking the question kind of helps them determine what their role is in the classroom. Am I the hard-working student? Am I the kid that needs extra help? Just being able to work with other people. I tell parents I'm a teacher first and a coach second. We win games based on your kids' work ethic and whether they're willing to learn. If the kids come every day on time to practice, show up every day to practice. Those lessons they can carry with them forever. The number of kids that are going to be Division I athletes are few and far between but the number of kids that can be good students . . . I always say you have a much better chance of getting a full ride academically than you do athletically. So, the lessons you learn about being punctual, having that 100% work ethic, going above and beyond, those are life lessons that you can take with you forever (Counselor 1).

Athletic Director 1 and Athletic Director 3 both believed the skills learned while participating in interscholastic athletics are skills future employers are seeking:

I would think the greatest benefits are those life-long skills that you receive from participating. Obviously, the kids right now, the basketball game tomorrow night, they're not thinking about those skills. They want to go beat South Glens Falls and then they want to win the championship or tournament on Saturday, but I think

those skills that you get because you read all those articles about what employers are looking for and all the skills employers are looking for are skills that you learn from high school athletics. So, I think that's definitely the most important part (Athletic Director 1).

Athletic Director 3 had a similar response related to the work force that student athletes will eventually become a part of:

I would say one of the biggest benefits is knowing what it takes to be a member of a team, knowing what your role is on that team, knowing what's expected of you. I think that is something that they translate and when they go into the work force that is something that is really important. Everyone has a specific job; everyone has a specific responsibility to help the team accomplish a goal. I talk about that at my Meet the Team Nights about not everyone is going to be the best player, not everyone is going to be the star player, not everyone is going to score all the goals but you need to know what your role is and I think you learn that in athletics and you learn how important your role can be for the betterment of achieving the goals for the team (Athletic Director 3).

**Sub-question 4:** *How would education in a school district change if interscholastic athletics were to be eliminated?*

Nearly all of the participants felt students, schools and their communities would be negatively impacted if interscholastic athletics were to be eliminated from a school district. Thoughts and opinions included concerns of a noticeable decrease in students' grades, an increase in discipline issues and a decrease in attendance rates, along with losing a sense of

community and school pride, and a declining school culture. Counselor 3 said a loss of athletics would be *“detrimental.”* In a similar response, Principal 1 said if athletics were to be eliminated, *“that would be a tremendous blow to the functioning of this entire community. That would be tough. I can’t even fathom that.”*

Seeing a decrease in grades, attendance rates and an increase in discipline issues were the most talked about and discussed perceived impacts if a school district were to eliminate their interscholastic athletic program. Principal 4 explained how devastating it would be for a school district to lose their athletic program and how a loss of motivation would affect students’ grades:

I think we would see a pretty big impact in loss of motivation. I think sports are a motivating factor for a lot of kids who wouldn’t necessarily be giving it their all in the classroom. They know that if I want to stay on this team I have to keep my grades up, I’m going to put the extras in with my teachers or else I’m not going to play. I think we would see a big drop in even attendance, I think we would see a drop in academics and just really the culture of the school. I think athletics is engrained in our school culture; it’s a point of pride. Without that, I think we would definitely lose some of our identity.

Overall the majority of the participants discussed their belief that school culture is impacted in a positive manner when teams win (Principal 4).

Counselor 2’s opinion also revolved around a decrease in academics, an increase in discipline issues, along with students disengaging from the school overall:

Strongly negative, strongly negative. I think you would see a drop in academics because you'd see a lot of kids disengage. Definitely, discipline would be impacted because I think for a lot of kids athletics is something that motivates them, keeps them out of trouble, keeps them focused on something. There are other things that students can find like music or the arts or something, but I think the kids need something besides just school work to keep them motivated and I think athletics is one of those things (Counselor 2).

Principal 3 said *"There would be no buzz in the building. I can't imagine being in a school without sports or drama or clubs or whatever but I can't imagine what the feel would be. I think we would lose a number of kids."* In a similar response, Athletic Director 3 had an interesting thought on athletics being eliminated by saying a loss of athletics would be *"chaos."* Athletic Director 3 went on to explain how a school and the community would be impacted if there were no athletic programs:

Our kids here perform well academically. I think if they didn't have their sport, they would still perform well but there are some schools and there are some kids, and I'm sure we do have some of them here, that if they didn't have their sports they wouldn't do well in the classroom. Some kids need that carrot. They need to know that if you don't perform in the classroom, you might get your sport taken away. We have a small percentage of that. I know other schools without sports you'd have kids that wouldn't be coming to school. I think losing sports you have an identity in your school, you have a sense of pride when you put on your uniform. We always talk about Spartan pride; pride in wearing your colors and the kids really buy into

that. Everyone is walking through the halls wearing their jerseys, wearing their school colors, there's a lot of pride and a lot of culture within the building. You take that away and you lose a lot of that (Athletic Director 3).

Athletic Director 1 could not fathom how a school and its community would be affected if programming were to be done away with, by saying *"I can't imagine."* Athletic Director 1 continued with:

People talk about the role that club sports play and travel teams, and it seems every year there are more and more of them, more kids are playing those, coaches have more influence, and will high school sports ever go. I couldn't imagine that. I just think the benefits of educational-based athletics and what kids get out of them. I think there will be more discipline issues. I think grades would suffer. I was just talking with the nurses the other day, just like teen pregnancy. Kids go home after school, they're not on the field, they're going to find something else to do and it's not going to be something good. I just think the community would suffer a great deal if there were no high school athletics (Athletic Director 1).

Along with grades, attendance and discipline suffering, several research participants explained how the community would be impacted without interscholastic athletic teams playing. Athletic Director 2 said athletics are the *"identity of a school district"* and the *"central piece that give pride to the students that are here."* Athletic Director 3 provided a description of what the community would lose without interscholastic athletics:

Like I talked about the culture - if you come here on a Friday night, the whole community is out for the game. The high school is the focal point of the community.

The athletics, the arts, the music but the athletics is so important here. We have such a high participation rate, we have so many kids that are involved in athletics, it's really important to the culture of the school. We're a smaller school in a big school league but we compete against a lot of the big schools. Because of how driven our kids are and how they have this relentless attitude and they have a never-ending work ethic and, again, I think that goes back to that culture that is created in this community, but athletics is really a focal point and the high school as the center piece of the community. It's important here (Athletic Director 3).

Principal 4 reiterated Athletic Director 3's comments about the importance of the interscholastic athletic program to the surrounding community. Principal 4 said:

It's very important here. It's a sense of community for everybody, a sense of pride; a lot of people turn out for the games. There has definitely been a decline even since I was in school with specialization, with three and two sport athletes. I'm always trying to encourage kids to play more sports. Even when I was coaching, kids wanted to specialize. I was like, guys, no, just don't play one all year long. We do have a handful of kids that play multiple sports which is nice. I think seeing the kids in the hallways it is definitely a point of pride for the school and the community. A lot of the community members come out to football games but also soccer games, the front fields if there's a game, girl's lacrosse, everyone kind of comes out and there is usually pretty good crowds (Principal 4).

As the research participants described how detrimental it would be to have athletics eliminated, another interview question touching upon how important it is for school culture

and climate to have teams that win. Athletic Director 4 discussed how a school's athletic program having success can positively impact the school climate:

I think success does impact school climate. I know it's a lot more fun being the AD when you're 9 and 1 in football versus 3 and 6. I'm going to say that right now.

There shouldn't be that much of an impact but there is. I think students rally around successful teams. Like I said, it's a source of tremendous pride (Athletic Director 4).

Principal 1's comments supported Athletic Director 4's thoughts, when discussing how winning helps to get the school year off to a great start. Principal 1 explained the impact upon school culture when the football team starts the year with success:

It helps. It really does, especially football. You get off to a good start in football, for some reason, it just settles people in. It's a large population of testosterone-driven boys who are committed to something. We started out, I think, 4 and 0 this year, which is fantastic. We haven't had a start like that in a while. It does change the pride factor. You get more kids going out to the games, you get more kids going to the homecoming dance. There's meaning behind it. It's not just a formality that our team is winning, students feel like they are talented, and we have to go to that. It all kind of ties itself together (Principal 1).

**Sub-question 5:** *Do students who participate in interscholastic athletics have an advantage over those students who do not participate?*

Overwhelmingly the participants viewed student-athletes as having an advantage over their non-participating classmates. Participation in organized activities offers valuable opportunities for youth development and student growth (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Holland

& Andre, 1987; Larson, 2000). As explained in previous sub-questions, students are positively impacted from their choice to participate in their school's athletic program. Sub-question #5 explored the specific advantages students gain from participation.

When asked about the specific advantages, three of the Principal participants discussed lessons student-athletes learn that are simply not possible, or extremely difficult, to duplicate in a traditional classroom setting. Principal 2 said:

Again, I think you learn a lot of life lessons along the way that you don't necessarily learn anywhere else. I mean maybe later in life or maybe in different experiences but some of the life lessons that you learn from sports you can't replicate them anywhere else along the way. The relationships that you form in pursuit of those goals, again, it's possible to replicate that in other phases but difficult; it's not easy to do (Principal 2).

Principal 3 said "*dealing with that adversity is stuff kids who don't participate might not get all the time*" while responding to sub-question #5. Principal 3 explained how students who do not participate are almost at a disadvantage because they are not exposed to dealing with adversity early in life through their participation opportunities:

Yeah, I mean, unfortunately those kids who don't participate sometimes don't get to see how hard work pays off. We say kids learn just as much in the hallways as they do in the classroom. Well, some kids will learn just as much on a bus traveling to events as they will on the field. How you conduct yourself, how you conduct yourself when you walk into a visiting opponent's gym. How you react to failure, adversity. If students are not participating, sometimes the adversity they're dealing



with is heavy duty stuff. They have a parent who passed away . . . there's no training for that. But if you start dealing with adversity while there's a loss, we put everything into it and we were not successful, or it just didn't work out or I'm no longer a starter. Dealing with that adversity is stuff kids who don't participate might not get all the time. Going back to that failure, kids learn how to lose in sports unless you're on the basketball team here three years ago, or whenever it was, you're going to lose and you're going to learn how to lose and then you're going to learn how to bounce back and be ready to play again. You're going to lose tonight but you're going to play again on Thursday. Those are the things kids can learn or they have a harder time learning or the stakes are much higher when they learn it outside the sports realm (Principal 3).

In agreement with Principal 2 and Principal 3, Principal 1 discussed an interesting concept of hidden and written curriculum. Obviously, participation in interscholastic athletics is part of the "hidden" curriculum which benefits student-athletes by providing valuable learning opportunities:

There's no way to not get certain social advantages just by some of the characteristics we talked about earlier. Talk about the written curriculum versus the hidden curriculum and obviously I can go through this with objectives that you're supposed to learn in English class and Social Studies but there is no list of objectives when you go out and participate in sports; I guess the Coach may have some objectives at practice but the things that you benefit and gain from aren't written out for you. You're not going to learn life lessons because someone is teaching you

life lessons you need to practice. Those just happen tacitly. You're consenting to play a sport and you're going to get a bunch of life lessons thrown at you. You may not pick up on them until five years down the road (Principal 1).

Another common response to sub-question #5 revolved around a student's social network, social status and core group of friends within the high school setting. Athletic Director 3 & Athletic Director 4 brought attention to their perception that student-athletes are looked at differently by their peers. Athletic Director 4 discussed his honest observation of how students are treated and recognized for their accomplishments:

We want to treat all students the same and recognize the accomplishments of all our students equally but, I'll be honest with you, our high school quarterback this year got a lot more exposure than the kid who got recognition in the band. It's just the reality. The majority of our students can name who our high school quarterback is but can't tell you who the first chair is in the jazz ensemble. It's just reality. They might be equally as talented but in the world of social media and the exposure that our student athletes are getting. I remember growing up, the newspapers. If you scored a few points or had a good meet, you picked up that paper hoping you were in there. I don't think kids look at the newspaper anymore. It's all about Twitter and things like that. I do think there are some advantages. I think from the rest of the school community, I think athletes are held in pretty high regard when they attain success (Athletic Director 4).

Counselor 3 commented on this topic related to student-athletes having a guaranteed group of friends and the advantage this provides compared to non-participating students:

Again, I think it comes back to the guarantee of having a group of friends. I think being a part of a team is just something you can't replace. From my experience as a coach, both males and females, there is that sense of comradery within a team. You have your group of guys after school, in school; you're with them 24/7 for a big portion of the year. I think that piece is important and then you have your own friends within the school, too. Not everyone hangs out with the team when they're in school so just gives them a separate spot and a safe place. I think that having those couple hours of practice and those games and having an adult they can look up to I think that's a guarantee when you're on a sports team where within a high school sometimes it's a little bit more difficult to seek out (Counselor 3).

Although the participants described several positive and noteworthy advantages a student experiences when they participate in athletics, the research participants also brought attention to some of the perceived disadvantages participation brings. While higher standards and expectations are viewed as advantages by Counselor 1 and Athletic Director 3, higher expectations were also referenced by Athletic Director 2 and Athletic Director 4 as a negative aspect of participation.

Athletic Director 2 provided an interesting example of how student-athletes are actually treated differently, from an expectation standpoint, simply because of their participation on a school based athletic team:

From the student athlete's standpoint, they may think so. Like it or not, they are held to a higher level, they are. The expectations are greater on a student athlete than they are for your average student, the expectations that they will represent themselves, their community, the program with respect, with dignity, with class. If one of my athletes showed up at a St. Patrick's Day Parade and is intoxicated or started fights, I'm going to know about it. Even if that athlete doesn't have the name of our school on his shirt, I'll be told about it pretty quickly versus your common 11th grader who is doing the exact same behavior and not involved in athletics. They can be involved in music, in drama, Art Club it won't matter but if they're an athlete, they're held to a higher level (Athletic Director 2).

Having served as a high school athletic director for nearly 20 years, Athletic Director 4 bluntly stated that adolescents "*screw up.*" Athletic Director 4 provided a unique perspective related to the expectations and higher standards student-athletes are subjected to because of their participation choices:

The thing about 16 and 17-year olds, they screw up. I think the 16 or 17-year-old who is a non-student athlete who screws up falls below the radar. The 16 or 17-year-old athlete who screws up, it becomes a big discussion - How can the school allow this kid to participate? From that standpoint, the expectations are a little bit higher. I think sometimes the level of scrutiny on student athletes can sometimes be a little more extreme than on regular students. Is that negative? Sometimes I see it as a negative. Like I said, 16 and 17-year olds screw up, they do dumb things. It's just the nature of the beast. We had a situation a couple of years back where we

had a 17-year-old kid who made a really stupid choice and it turned out to be newspaper worthy. It never would have made the newspaper if it wasn't one of the best athletes in Section II. Of course, it was all scrutinized – Should he be able to play? Should he not be able to play? I've always been of the belief that athletics is the best spot for the kid. If you've got a 17-year-old screwing up, the best spot for him is to be with his teammates, his coaches (Athletic Director 4).

References to Coleman's (1961) Zero-Sum Model were recalled when Counselor 2 stated *"There are people that feel that maybe the negative would be it's detracting from their grades because that could be time spent studying."* Coleman's Zero-Sum Model (1961; also see Marsh, 1992; Otto & Alwin, 1977) argued school activities, outside of the traditional classroom setting, only took students away from their academic studies and actually have a negative impact on student achievement. Essentially, Coleman believed athletics and academics compete for a student's time, and an increase in one (i.e. athletic participation) leads to a decrease in the other (i.e. academics).

Finally, Principal 3 and Principal 4 referenced athletics becoming too much of the student's focus. Principal 3 said:

That could become their whole life. That could become the one and only. That could become the reason for everything they do. Nothing should be the sole reason we do stuff. But I can definitely see that happening or, it's kind of hard to say, we want full investment but maybe they're overinvested or the whole world rides on this one game. I think their highs could be too high or their lows could be too low and that's an extension of the coach. Teams are an extension of their coach

typically. If they have the right mentors, that's less likely to happen. They could be adversely affected without a doubt. I don't know if there is anything positive in this world that can't also have an adverse effect if you really dig into it (Principal 3).

Principal 4 added perspective on burnout when athletes and their parents make athletics too much of their focus:

I think sometimes the students and their parents can get caught up in - this is our ticket, or this is how we're going to be successful. I've heard parents make comments like - oh, that's my retirement. Do you know what the statistics say with a kid, especially like baseball, a fourth grader, well, that's my retirement; the kid is in fourth grade, let him have fun. I think those parents are the ones where their kids burn out. They specialize way too early; they don't play any other sports, they play just baseball or just football or just lacrosse. They get to college and they're like I'm done, I'm burnt, I don't want to play anymore and that's kind of what happens. I think maybe the pressure from home or unrealistic goals I guess. Ideally you don't want to play sports because that's your ticket to your paycheck. If it happens, great, you're one of the very, very lucky ones but you play sports to do a lot of other things (Principal 4).

**Sub-question 6:** Why is it important for students to have the opportunity to interact with adults (i.e. coaches)?

Outside of the traditional classroom, athletic programs are often one of the few opportunities students have to interact with adults other than their relatives. From the perspective of the research participants, interview question #16 seemed like an easy

question to answer: of all individuals on a high school campus coaches were viewed as having the greatest influence on students. Principal 3 said *“I think they have the greatest impact out of anyone in the building.”* Counselor 2 provided a similar response: *“The coach can be the single biggest influence on students at the school.”* Principal 1 said:

Coaches have a great impact. For all intents and purposes, they are the most impactful educators that each individual student athlete is going to come across. Probably the person they want to disappoint the least whether it be someone who spends many years with the same coach or just a different set of coaches each year. That’s your motivator. That’s the person who is trying to make that connection between school and sports and your life.

Several other participants agreed with Principal 1, Principal 3 and Counselor 2’s assessments of the impact and influence of a coach. Some of the adjectives used to describe the influence of a coach included *“Tremendous”* (Athletic Director 1, Athletic Director 4 and Counselor 1), as well as *“Immense”* (Athletic Director 2).

Counselor 3 provided a perspective from the unique role of a school counselor and an interscholastic coach:

I think coaches can have the biggest impact on students in high schools. Again, I’ll speak for myself; we have the unique ability to see them more than any other adult in the building. Besides their parents, we probably see them the most on any given school year. Your small pep talks and this and that really make a difference based on the individual coach. For me, my counseling background comes up constantly as a head coach. I’ve served as a varsity coach, a freshman boys coach and a varsity

assistant for multiple years with a dynamic high school coach who ran his high school program at the highest level almost like a college. As an assistant, I was kind of the guy who worked individually with the kids to kind of keep them on a straight path and make sure they understood coach is pushing you for a reason. I had a unique role there and now as a head coach of the JV girls' team, it's a completely different ballgame coaching girls vs guys. But, like I said, as a school counselor first, it really gives me more of that time to get that one-on-one with them and prepare them to be young adults. My goal is not always to make them the best athlete; it's to make them the best person. I think we have that relationship. We can really go at them a little more I guess I would say, a little bit more personal with our...I don't want to say attacks but at times you can really go at a student and they listen to you sometimes better than they would if they were just sitting in my counseling office. We care about our athletes. That's something that I really try to make sure that they know. You got to gain their trust, gain their rapport. We have that and then sometimes you can hit them at a different level. I think coaches have a really unique chance to really make an impact.

Athletic Director 1 provided some personal insight pertaining to his own high school coaches and the impact and influence they had:

I couldn't tell you who my high school Biology teacher was, but I can tell you who every one of my coaches were. Some of them I still talk to, to this day. And I'm sure many of our student athletes when you see them come back from college. I would say 95% of the kids that I see come back after they're at college for a couple of



years, our student athletes, they're coming back to see their coaches. They're going to stop and see their teachers, too, but usually you don't have kids come back just to see their teachers. It's more so coming to see those coaches. They're people you remember for the rest of your life just for the influence they had on you, those life-long skills that they taught you – right from wrong and just being there (Athletic Director 1).

**Sub-question 7:** Does participation in interscholastic athletics inhibit/ encourage certain types of behavior?

The behavior trait of “respect” became apparent when the research participants responded to sub-question #7. Respect can be defined as a feeling of admiring someone or something that is good, valuable, and important, or a feeling or understanding that someone or something is important and should be treated in an appropriate way (Merriam-Webster, 2004). Several research participants included respect in their response to this sub-question.

When responding to this sub-question, Athletic Director 1 described how student-athletes tend to be respectful and how they obtain this important characteristic:

I would think respect. I think that's one of the major things. 99% of the student athletes walking around the hallways are respectful to other students. I think that comes from when you participate in athletics, you're working with different kids and, just like being in the hallways at school, you're with different types of kids. You're more tolerant of other opinions and things like that (Athletic Director 1).

Counselor 4 discussed different types of “respect” that student-athletes learn through their participation opportunities and how this benefits them:

I’ve been saying it over and over and over again... respect, self-respect, respect for others, respect for the coaches, respect for the referees. I think understanding of strategy, seeing bigger picture, seeing their role in a bigger thing as far as how they fit into the whole it’s a team, it’s not just one person. There may be some kids who are the star of the team but you can’t act in isolation necessarily in most sports, team sports versus some of the individual sports. Being able to do that is just really a valuable trait for later on.

Athletic Director 4 combined respectfulness with leadership when describing the behavior traits student-athletes learn when they participate on a high school athletic team:

I want to see that youngster who is respectful, who is hard working and who is willing to go in there and take on that leadership responsibility and that leadership role and accept the challenges that come with that opportunity. Hard working, pushing others to do more than they would if that individual wasn’t there, the captain. I think those are probably the behavior traits that I like to see (Athletic Director 4).

According to Principal 3 student-athletes gain confidence by participating, and several benefits are generated from a student’s decision to play interscholastic athletics and represent their school:

Yeah, they have a confidence about them. I don’t want to call it arrogance, although some might, but they have a confidence about them; I’m sure you’ve interviewed

people. You interview people and they walk into a room, you can tell how they walk in. A lot of times it's not fake, I mean, people usually say 30 seconds, it's usually like 5 seconds, like this person doesn't have a chance or they have a shot. I think some of that quiet confidence our athletes have is important. We got to make sure it doesn't teeter on arrogance, but I don't know that you see that in other kids. When kids are playing well, you see that in that kid. You see that environment, so they have that distinct advantage. They have the advantage of being looked up to which is a great responsibility to being a leader and other kids looking up to them and that's something we try to hammer home. Other kids don't have that. If you're just going to school, other than maybe you're the Valedictorian and the kids are looking up to you for whatever reason, those athletes are on display. A lot of the other kids don't stand on a field in front of 5,000 people and kids know their name. Especially a big school like this; they know who they are. So, we have boys hoop tonight, there is going to be hundreds of people there watching these kids. Most of them don't have that (Principal 3).

### **Section Three: Themes, Findings & Interpretations**

When interviewing the 12 research participants, four major themes developed across the 17 interview questions: (a) Students receive the most benefit from participation during their season, (b) Athletic programs provide a sense of belonging and involvement for students, (c) Athletic programs are part of the community, and (d) Students who participate gain valuable life skills and lessons. Interestingly, these four themes appeared across

several interview questions and were developed throughout the interview and data collection process.

**Theme 1: Students benefit most during the season.**

When students are participating on a team they are considered to be in-season. Students tend to do better academically and have fewer discipline issues while in-season, according to the research participants in this study. All three groups of participants (Principals, Athletic Directors, and Counselors) discussed the benefits students receive while they are in-season when responding to three of the 17 interview questions; the three questions dealt with grades, student discipline and the skills student-athletes gain through their participation opportunities.

The most discussed aspect of students doing better while “in-season” occurred on the interview question related to student discipline. Counselor 1 said *“Very seldom do I see my athletes, or athletes in general, that are involved in discipline. They don’t have time to get into trouble.”* Being in-season keeps kids busy and they are more organized and cognizant of their time management according to Counselor 4’s response to the interview question related to student discipline. Counselor 4 described the benefits of being “in-season” by saying:

You always see this and I’m certainly not the only one to see this, when kids are busy, their grades improve. I see it with my own kids as well. When their team is in season and they’re going to practice for some reason they find a way to get everything done and then when practice is over, and they have all this free time, they’re not as organized with their time management. They have a little bit more

flexibility and we tend to see things fall apart a little bit sometimes. A lot of times, yeah, there's nobody holding them accountable necessarily and some of it is just the structure of their time. They have too much free time, things slide. Sometimes behavior it's just more time to get into trouble or whatever. When they're in a structured environment and somebody, whether it's the coach looking after them or keeping track of them, they're really motivated to do better (Counselor 4).

Athletic Director 3's response to the interview question related to student discipline is in agreement with Counselor 1 and Counselor 4's responses. Athletic Director 3 said:

When you're involved in something, you're passionate about it, you don't want to lose it and you have to be disciplined because of all the other things that are on your plate. The kids who have more time to do whatever they want tend to be the kids that get in a little bit more trouble and are dealing with the discipline (Athletic Director 3).

Counselor 3 felt student-athletes know they *"can't really mess up because there is that microscope that is on you."* Counselor 3 began his response to the student discipline interview question by responding:

But to answer your question directly, I do think that athletes... again, they know that if they do get caught there is a repercussion; they could miss a game. Any extracurricular activities have those little weights on your shoulder. You know you have to go above the extra mile to not get in trouble, so I do think there is that little bit of extra, if you're participating in extracurriculars (Counselor 3).

Athletic Director 3 believes students who are in-season have more to lose than their non-participating classmates. This realization leads to more appropriate behavior when student athletes are actively participating and representing their school and community.

Athletic Director 3 said in response to student discipline:

You're held to a higher standard and you have a lot more to lose. The kid that gets in a fight in the hallway that's not involved in basketball or not involved in the Chess Club, all right they're going to get suspended from school, but their life goes on other than that. But if you're involved on the football team, on the track team and you get into a fight, a lot of those things are going to be taken away from you for a little bit, so I think those kids know I need to be on my best behavior all the time and it shows in the hallways. I think our teachers and our community sees that as well that our student athletes are well behaved (Athletic Director 1).

The interview question related to students' grades and academic performance also supports the theme that students fair better while they are in-season. Athletic Director 4 associated the strict time schedule student-athletes must maintain to balance participation in their desired sport while completing their school work. Athletic Director 4 brought great attention to the idea of in-season versus out-of-season performance:

The one thing I hear, and again I don't have any data to support it, but the one thing I hear often and I'm going to come at it from kids in-season versus out-of-season because so many times the kids say, when they're in-season they're just much more focused, their time management skills are much more honed in because they know they really have no choice. When I get home, its 7:30, I haven't eaten dinner yet, I

know I have to get home; I have to start my homework because by 10:00 I want to be ready for bed. That is a common discussion among student athletes. They are just so much more focused on getting things done in a timely manner when they're in-season versus being out-of-season (Athletic Director 4)

Principal 2 also mentioned that because student athletes have less free time they develop a more focused approach to time management. The outcome is better grades:

I think student athletes overall as a sub-group tend to be a little more goal oriented but, again, I don't know if that's by design or just by how they operate. I think that transfers a little bit into their academics. I've noticed that kids historically have done better while they're in season. I don't know if that's because they have less free time and they have to be more focused or if it's just because they're more into routine and studying is part of the routine so the routine of practice and training transitions to the routine of studying. I think that overall, and it is a little personal bias because of my personal background being a high school athlete, I think that participating in athletics makes your educational experience more complete (Principal 2).

Finally, in support of the theme related to in-season participation benefiting student-athletes, Principal 3 provided a perspective related to in-season performance and the *"trusted influence in their life"*:

Anecdotally I can tell you, without a doubt, I've had kids before that they are a soccer player and they're eligible and they're passing and then soccer season ends and we're struggling and we're bringing them in for additional assistance. Time and

time again and I can tell you what happened. And a social worker or myself or a counselor will say, the season ended and now the kids tanking. A lot of times it relates to attendance and that trusted influence in their life. It might be a little different at a large school because sports tend to be more 365 but at a small school, the kid plays a sport and now that coach is not as involved with the kid so the coach can't lean on him, he can't say hey, I'm going to talk to Coach whoever. I've definitely seen that impact where sports are a positive impact on the kids in season (Principal 3).

**Theme 2: Athletic programs provide students with a sense of belonging and involvement.**

Being on an interscholastic athletic team provides students with a sense of belonging and involvement. The connection students form through their passion for sports and the amount of time spent together at practice, games and on trips strengthens the bond that often leads to friendships long after high school graduation (Chen, 2017). Spady (1970) discussed the impact of participation to include increased perceived social status and popularity.

School connectedness is described as the psychological state of belonging in which individual students perceive they are well taken care of, trusted and appreciated by a group of adults (Whitlock, 2006). Brown and Evans (2002) and Dotterer et al. (2007) found that students who participated in extracurricular activities associated with their school, felt more connected and had an enhanced sense of belonging. More recent research in 2015 (Kamau,



Rintaugu, Muniu, Amusa) stressed the importance of competitive sport participation to promote school connectedness.

When responding to interview question #3 (Comparing students who participate and those who do not participate, can you identify any differences in regard to grades and their school work), Counselor 3 said *“kids do best when they feel like they belong to something.”* This opinion became a prominent theme throughout this research study. Nine of the twelve research participants mentioned a student’s “sense of belonging” or “being part of a team” as a benefit of interscholastic athletic participation.

When answering interview question #4 (What is the greatest benefit a student receives from participation in a high school athletic program), Principal 2 discussed team comradery and how an interscholastic athletic program provides incredible learning opportunities that cannot be replicated in other phases of a student’s education:

I think the comradery of being part of a team even if it’s like an individual sport, even if it’s like wrestling or something. I still think when you’re part of that team and you go through that training together, there’s really nothing that replaces that. I suppose it would be similar if you were in a high-level AP Physics class and you had study groups that met every week. I think you would get a similar experience but it’s really hard to replicate that team concept in any other phase of your educational experience. When you train together in season, off season, when you compete together, in team sports when you’re working together on something and you’re achieving it together or you’re dealing with setbacks together, that experience is

really, to me, is probably the most valuable experience an athlete is going to get (Principal 2).

Using “comradery” to describe team membership and the greatest benefit a student receives, Counselor 3 described the “*ups and downs of being on a team*” and how this is associated with learning how to deal with failure:

I think it is just that being on a team, feeling that comradery and the ups and downs of being on a team and being able to deal with failure. Not enough students, I don’t think, experience failure especially if you are a great student in the building, you do well and you have a 90s average, good SAT score, you get accepted into school and then all of a sudden you get to college and you’re with everyone that’s like that and sometimes your grades slip, you shut down. I think sometimes, not every school, not every athlete is going to experience failure, but the majority do and being able to feel that loss and being able to bring up your teammates and work together to come through it and hopefully overcome the next year, the next season. I think that experience is a big thing in high school. I really do (Counselor 3).

Principal 1 discussed the value of being part of a team and the lessons it teaches student-athletes about perseverance:

I would say self-awareness, that being part of a team, being part of something bigger than them is extremely humbling and can be the most rewarding thing that they can do if they achieve something collectively... When you’re part of an organization or a group or a team and you set a goal and you overcome obstacles and you accomplish that, I think that builds the capacity within someone to not be willing to give up so

easily, to persevere, perseverance if I had to drill it down to a word. You can do anything you want if you work hard enough and no one should stand in your way of that. I don't know if you can get that just by being in a classroom constantly – teachers work hard, study and you have to do well on this test. Maybe there are some kids out there who can do it that way, but to be on a field or court, on a track and accomplish something with so many obstacles; whether its opponents or physical conditions or mental conditions at times, you're kind of down on yourself, a slump you're trying to get out of. Perseverance, I think, is probably the greatest gift that one can give themselves by committing and seeing things through (Principal 1).

Athletic Director 2 and Athletic 4 described the value of being on a team from a social perspective and the impact it has upon students. Athletic Director 2 said *“Being a part of a team, I think the greatest piece is being able to have a cluster of individuals, some are like you, some are not like you but share in common core fundamental values.”* He went on to say:

Having a core group of people that you can count on that identify and hopefully hold the same values you have. I think young people today want to be social. I remember, even though it was a long time ago, as a high school student there are cliques and I think we would be naive and fooling ourselves if we think clicks don't exist; they do exist. Walk into any high school cafeteria and you'll see exactly what everybody is. But I think, at the end of the day, while you don't need to be best friends with every member of your team, there is a respect and I think that's

something that is really lacking in society – people don't respect each other as much as they should be and maybe as much as they use to (Athletic Director 2).

In a similar response, Athletic Director 4 described the sense of belonging and acceptance by a group and the manner by which kids are impacted from this social experience:

I think it's that sense of belonging, that sense of being accepted by a group, being a part of a group. There's nothing worse for a kid, in my opinion, than being a part of a large high school and not really fitting in and not really having a core group or friends you know, you go into the cafeteria and you see kids sitting by themselves; that sucks to see. As an educator, it breaks my heart when I see that. And then you got your special kids that kind of go out of their way to get that kid involved... I think athletics gives you that natural fit; you go in and there are my teammates. I think that, more than anything, is a benefit for being involved in athletics (Athletic Director 4).

When responding to the interview questions related to student discipline, Counselor 1 shared an interesting perspective on why non-participating students-exhibit more discipline issues than student athletes - "*they have no sense of belonging*":

Do I find kids that aren't associated with a sport or an activity to be disciplined more? Yeah. They have no sense of belonging. They're not connected to anything that exists within this building. They either come here because they have to or they're just programmed to wake up and go to school. They're miserable and they don't build positive relationships with anybody; they don't find the need to. Again,

without getting into any data I don't have available to me right now, probably would say our student athletes probably find themselves with less disciplinary issues than non-student athletes (Principal 1).

**Theme 3: Interscholastic athletics are part of the community.**

Interscholastic athletic programs being engrained into the fabric of a community quickly appeared as a theme during data collection program. Nearly all research participants discussed the "community" in their responses to a number of interview questions. When responding to interview question #9 (How important is the high school athletic program to your school?), Principal 1 said *"It's a significant part of our community. I think sports are a huge part of most school communities."*

Principal 4 reinforced Principal 1's thoughts related to the athletic program being important to the community. Principal 4 discussed the sense of community and the sense of pride it brings to a school setting:

It's very important here. It's a sense of community for everybody, a sense of pride; a lot of people turn out for the games. I think seeing the kids in the hallways it is definitely a point of pride for the school and the community. A lot of the community members come out to football games but also soccer games, the front fields if there's a game, girl's lacrosse, everyone kind of comes out and there is usually pretty good crowds (Principal 4).

As Principal 4 referenced, the athletic program of a high school brings people from the community and students together. *"That's the weekend thing to do is go to an athletic event"*, Counselor 1 said of the importance of an interscholastic athletic program. Athletic

Director 3 said, *“You have so many kids that come to games that aren’t necessarily there to watch the games, they are there to socialize. I think for kids that aren’t involved in sports, it’s another opportunity to get together with their friends and be a part of the school.”*

When responding to another interview question, Athletic Director 3 added:

If you come here on a Friday night, the whole community is out for the game. The high school is the focal point of the community. The athletics, the arts, the music but the athletics is so important here. We have such a high participation rate, we have so many kids that are involved in athletics, it’s really important to the culture of the school. We’re a smaller school in a big school league but we compete against a lot of the big schools. Because of how driven our kids are and how they have this relentless attitude and they have a never-ending work ethic and, again, I think that goes back to that culture that is created in this community, but athletics is really a focal point and the high school as the center piece of the community. It’s important here (Athletic Director 3).

Principal 3 explained how the athletic program at a school positively impacts school pride and public perception of the school:

I think it’s vital in camaraderie, school spirit. You see kids walk around this building ... between the two buildings we have 3,200 kids. On any given day, 1,000 of them might have something that says our school name. On homecoming day, there are 3,199 that have something school related; we sold over 2,000 homecoming shirts and they’re all wearing them that day. I think that kind of brings kids together... I think involvement is important in all aspects. I think it’s important for the public’s

perception. Most of the time people see our kids, they don't see them taking a Physics test, they see them in uniform. We pride ourselves, I know Chris does, on making sure our kids look good, their uniforms are new because that's when people see you, that's when you're in the newspaper. I think we use that with our kids to say – listen, you have to represent us with pride because there's a lot riding on how you represent the school and, here, just kind of bring kids together, they have something to rally around. (Principal 3).

Athletic Director 2 provided an interesting perspective on the athletic program being on “display” for the entire community:

I dare you to find any other area of a school that has their product on display a dozen times a day; it doesn't happen. What brings thousands of people over the course of a season to see your community?

Interview question #10 asked the research participants to describe how their school would be impacted if all athletic programs were eliminated. The research question did not mention “community” nor was it insinuated within the interview question; however, it became a common theme. Counselor 1 said, *“I think in any district the athletic program is kind of a community piece that you can't lose. I think kids would be lost.”* This was certainly one of the more interesting interview questions, which brought attention to the many ways a community would be impacted if the athletic program were to be eliminated.

Athletic Director 1 said, *“I couldn't imagine that”* when responding to interview question #10. Athletic Director 1, who has been an athletic director for nearly a decade, went on to say:

I just think the benefits of educational-based athletics and what kids get out of them. I think there will be more discipline issues. I think grades would suffer. I was just talking with the nurses the other day, just like teen pregnancy. Kids go home after school, they're not on the field, they're going to find something else to do and it's not going to be something good. I just think the community would suffer a great deal if there were no high school athletics (Athletic Director 1).

In response to interview question #10, Principal 1 said, *"That would be a tremendous blow to the functioning of this entire community."* In agreement with Principal 1, Principal 2 discussed a community revolt if the high school athletic program were to ever be reduced or canceled:

We would be doing our taxpayers a major disservice, our community a major disservice. I think our taxpayers would revolt if we ever proposed cutting any sports or cancelling any sports here (Principal 2).

In a similar response, Athletic Director 2 mentioned taxpayers push back because of the strong bond between the athletic program and the community:

It's a strong bond between our community. I think you'd see taxpayer push back and I think you would absolutely see a morale issue with our students which I absolutely know would lead to larger numbers of referrals, behavior problems. I wouldn't be surprised lower academic performance. All the things that we've talked about that are huge positives I think you'd get the reverse. I think over time it will get worse and worse and worse (Athletic Director 2).



With insight spanning almost twenty years in the educational field, Principal 3 provided a bleak description of how the school and community would be impacted if the athletic program were to be eliminated:

It would change the whole culture of the school. It would change the whole fabric of the school, the feel of the school, which is hard to quantify but it would change the feel of the school. There would be no buzz in the building. I can't imagine being in a school without sports or drama or clubs or whatever, but I can't imagine what the feel would be. I think we would lose a number of kids. When I say, "lose them", I don't mean that every athlete is not going to graduate but I think we would lose their engagement and that's a key thing. Again, something to look forward to; something to be part of (Principal 3).

**Theme 4: Students who participate gain life skills / life lessons.**

Learning life skills and life lessons through interscholastic athletic participation materialized into a major theme while the data was analyzed for this research study. The benefit and impact of learning life skills via participation was discussed by a majority of the research participants when responding to six different interview questions. This theme is divided into three "sub-themes": (a) Students learn life skills that cannot be duplicated in a traditional classroom setting, (b) students learn about adversity and the value of failure by participating, and (c) students gain skills that will be utilized as they enter the work force.

When discussing the advantages students receive from participation, Principal 1 discussed the concept of written and hidden curriculums and the difference between classroom learning and learning through athletic participation:

Talk about the written curriculum versus the hidden curriculum and obviously I can go through this with objectives that you're supposed to learn in English class and Social Studies but there is no list of objectives when you go out and participate in sports; I guess the coach may have some objectives at practice but the things that you benefit and gain from aren't written out for you. You're not going to learn life lessons because someone is teaching you life lessons you need to practice. Those just happen tacitly. You're consenting to play a sport and you're going to get a bunch of life lessons thrown at you. You may not pick up on them until five years down the road (Principal 1).

Principal 2 also supported the idea of learning life lessons via athletic participation.

Many of these lessons cannot be learned anywhere else:

Again, I think you learn a lot of life lessons along the way that you don't necessarily learn anywhere else. I mean maybe later in life or maybe in different experiences but some of the life lessons that you learn from sports you can't replicate them anywhere else along the way. The relationships that you form in pursuit of those goals, again, it's possible to replicate that in other phases but difficult; it's not easy to do (Principal 2).

When discussing the importance of coaches, Athletic Director 1 also brought attention to specific life skills learned while participating, that cannot be duplicated in other educational settings. Athletic Director 1 made a point of the tremendous influence a coach has by identifying the coaches students typically come back to see after they graduate:

I would say 95% of the kids that I see come back after they're at college for a couple of years, our student athletes, they're coming back to see their coaches. They're going to stop and see their teachers, too, but usually you don't have kids come back just to see their teachers. It's more so coming to see those coaches. They're people you remember for the rest of your life just for the influence they had on you, those life-long skills that they taught you – right from wrong and just being there (Athletic Director 1).

Learning to deal with and handle adversity is certainly a life skill students learn through their interscholastic athletic participation experiences. Principal 4 said, *“When things don't go well in practice or games, you have to be able to bounce back. I think just an overall mental toughness that is built through athletics and team sports.”* In agreement with Principal 4, Principal 2 discussed perseverance and the way athletics helps students learn how to deal with and manage adversity:

I think our athletes know how to persevere. I tell the kids all the time that athletics is the best reality check for life because if you're inches short of the first down, they don't say you were really close and it was a great effort and we're going to give it to you. It's a turnover and you give the ball to the other team. If you lose the State Championship game by one point, you still lose. Its o.k., you competed, you want to win but I think it's a good way to learn how to persevere, a good way to learn how to overcome setbacks (Principal 2).

Athletic Director 3 mentioned several life skills and lessons students learn and better understand because of their athletic participation. Athletic Director 3 highlighted a speech the football coach gave at a recent banquet and the effect it had on the students:

One of our football coaches talked about that at the banquet last week. That was something that he teaches the kids – dealing with the adversity that’s going to be coming your way. Those are all the things that you deal with in life. The communication piece is huge, the interaction with their teammates, the trust that they learn and build upon each other. Those are just a few but there’s so many skills that kids are learning through athletics. I think the best part about it is it’s a lot of things they don’t even realize is happening. Its things that just happen throughout their sport that make them better people and when they go to the next chapter of their life, they start to realize that these are things I learned from my sports participation that I can really translate into what I’m doing now (Athletic Director 3).

Students will eventually enter the work force and the research participants provided examples of how students who participate are better prepared for the next level of their lives because of the skills they have learned through their participation experiences.

Counselor 4 discussed the hierarchical structure of a team and how it resembles a company or an organization:

I think they’re used to working for somebody, the coach. They’re used to working with other people. They’re hopefully used to a structured environment, a routine which is going to work afterwards for a company or organization. Having those skills is pretty directly transferable. You have to be at practice at this time or there’s a

consequence. That kind of stuff and this is something they're motivated to do just like you're motivated to get that paycheck at the end. We could say school is the same way but they may not be seeing the grades as a positive consequence as we would like them to at that level where their participation on a team is something some of these kids really enjoy and that's their life so they really understand that they have to do this and that's a lot more of a predictor for work as well (Counselor 4).

Gaining the skills necessary to be employed later in life was a concept discussed by several of the research participants. Athletic Director 3 responded to the greatest benefit a student receives from participation:

I would say one of the biggest benefits is knowing what it takes to be a member of a team, knowing what your role is on that team, knowing what's expected of you. I think that is something that they translate and when they go into the work force that is something that is really important.

As a coach and a counselor, Counselor 1 used the experiences encompassed in athletics as a metaphor for joining the work force. Students who have retained the skills learned while participating will assimilate with ease into chosen careers:

I tell parents I'm a teacher first and a coach second. We win games based on your kids' worth ethic and whether they're willing to learn. If the kids come every day on time to practice, show up every day to practice. Those lessons they can carry with them forever. The number of kids that are going to be Division I athletes are few and far between but the number of kids that can be good students... I always say you

have a much better chance of getting a full ride academically than you do athletically. So, the lessons you learn about being punctual, having that 100% work ethic, going above and beyond, those are life lessons that you can take with you forever (Counselor 1).

Athletic Director 2 presented an interesting perspective related to the skills student-athletes learn that are highly sought after by Fortune 500 companies:

Every year we have a college athletics recruiting information night where we invite local colleges, coaches, administrators and one particular individual comes every year for us. The first thing he talks about before he ever gets anywhere close to the athletic skill piece and videos and camps and all that stuff is we are looking for students; one of the great things that comes out of participating in interscholastic athletics, you know, fortune 500 companies pay a ton of money to find those young men and young women and really they're silly because all they have to do is look into finding former athletes. They don't have to be Division I athletes, you know, high school athletes, Division III athletes. It doesn't matter because those traits are engrained in them to make sacrifice, put the organization before themselves, all those great things that come out of it (Athletic Director 2).

## Chapter V – Discussion

### Purpose of Study

This study was designed to examine the impact interscholastic sports participation has on students from the perspective of the high school principals, athletic directors and counselors. Additionally, the study was constructed to provide information to school administrators to assist in making well-informed and sound decisions related to interscholastic athletic programs. Since school budgets are constantly being scrutinized, the impact participation has on students may justify the funding, or lack of funding, for future participation opportunities. Providing information for school leaders to rationalize greater emphasis on and more funding for athletic programs would certainly benefit the landscape of interscholastic athletics throughout the country.

### Background and Scientific Rationale

The impact of interscholastic sports participation has been researched and examined for over a century. Research has certainly brought attention to the positive benefits students receive when given the opportunity to participate. It is evident high school sports participation enhances academic performance while promoting realistic life skills and lessons. Those who support interscholastic sport participation value the opportunities for character development, while critics often cite the costs and potential distractions from academics as reasons to keep sports out of schools.

Stearns and Glennie (2010) reported “extracurricular activities are seen both to supplement existing academic curricula and to allow students the opportunity to build non-academic, civic and political skills such as teamwork” (p. 296). In general, former student-

athletes are expected to have higher levels of leadership, more self-confidence and greater self-respect than people who did not participate in athletics. Several researchers have brought attention to participation in organized activities that offer valuable opportunities for positive youth development and growth (Cooper et al., 1999; Davalos et al., 1999; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Holland & Andre, 1987; Larson, 2000; Mahoney, 2000; Mahoney & Cairns, 1997; Marsh 1992; Osgood et al., 1998; Quiroz et al., 1996).

Past research has found participation in athletics is related to positive academic outcomes including higher grade point averages, fewer disciplinary referrals, lower absentee rates, and decreased dropout rates (Darling, Cadwell & Smith, 2005; Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Morrissey, 2005; Otto, 1982; Otto & Alwin, 1977; Reeves, 2008). “Overall, high school students who are involved in one or more activities report more positive attitudes about school, higher aspirations for academic achievement, and better grades than their uninvolved peers (Knifsend & Graham, 2011, p. 380). Spady (1970) discussed the impact of participation to include increased perceived social status and popularity. Lumpkin and Favor (2002) found clear differences between athletes and non-athletes in graduation rates, dropout rates, grade point averages and performance on ACT and Kansas State Assessments.

With the amount of positive research findings related to the impact of interscholastic sport participation, there are also studies which question the value of participation. Prior to 1900, school-based sport participation was often criticized (Burnett, 2000; Coleman, 1959, 1961; Gerber, 1996) because non-academic activities were viewed as a distraction and detrimental to academic success. Coleman (1961) has most assuredly



been the reference point for study on this topic since the 1960s. He has led the research focusing on the negative relationships between participation and academic achievement for the last sixty years; other research has attempted to confirm or dismiss Coleman's claims. Melnick and his colleagues conducted numerous longitudinal studies on sports and education; their findings suggested participation in sports is not correlated to education achievement (Melnick, Sabo, & VanFossen, 1992a, 1992b; Melnick, VanFossen, & Sabo, 1988; Sabo, Melnick, & VanFossen, 1993).

### **Summary of Findings**

Data collection and examination uncovered several noteworthy and significant findings related to the perceived impact interscholastic athletic participation has upon students. These findings not only support but add to the body of research in this field. In some cases, this research discredits past research (Burnett, 2000; Coleman, 1959, 1961; Gerber, 1996) which criticized athletic participation because non-academic activities were viewed as a distraction and detrimental to academic success.

Through the review of literature, three theoretical frameworks became evident: (a) *Zero-Sum Model*, (b) *Development Model*, and (c) *Identification/ Commitment Model*. These frameworks were the basis for this qualitative design and the goal was to disclose whether the individuals most responsible for the sports programs at a high school discussed the characteristics and aspects within these frameworks. The findings of this research study provided support for the theoretical frameworks.

Coleman's Zero-Sum Model (1961; also see Marsh, 1992; Otto & Alwin, 1977) argued school activities, outside of the traditional classroom setting, only took students

away from their academic studies and actually have a negative impact on student achievement. Essentially, Coleman believed athletics and academics compete for a student's time and an increase in one (i.e. athletic participation) leads to a decrease in the other (i.e. academics). This theoretical framework was utilized not in support of the model, but in opposition and reaction to the model. The research participants discussed the benefits students received in relation to academics, attendance and educational aspirations while they are participating. Research participants provided valuable insight into perceptions that students do best while in season, which is certainly in conflict with Coleman's theory.

In contrast to Coleman's Zero-Sum Model (1961), Holland and Andre (1987) proposed the developmental model in which extracurricular school activities are seen as "experiences that further the total development of the individual students" (p. 438). The developmental model asserts sport participation promotes some narrowly focused academic outcomes and many non-academic outcomes such as character building. This research supports Holland and Andre's findings. The 12 research participants all brought attention to the life skills students gain through their participation opportunities. The participants cited time management skills, organization, communication and leadership skills as those students learn when participating.

In his Identification/ Commitment Model, Marsh (1993) contends athletic participation fosters identification with the school and other school-related values. Furthermore, Marsh affirms participation enhances school commitment, involvement and school identification in a way that promotes more specific academic outcomes in addition

to nonacademic outcomes. The aspect of a school's interscholastic athletic program being the focal point of a community strengthens Marsh's Identification/ Commitment Model. Overwhelmingly the research participants in this study expressed concern for the students and community if a school's athletic program were to be eliminated. Through this research it is evident that athletics are certainly connected to and entrenched within a community.

Four major themes developed from this research, highlighting the benefits students receive from their participation, while supporting a wealth of past research. The four developed themes are discussed below.

**Theme 1: Students benefit most during the season.**

The research participants discussed the positive impact being "in-season" has upon participating students. This research provided the perception of educational leaders that student-athletes tend to be more focused and goal oriented during their sports season; resulting in better grades and fewer discipline issues. The research participants attributed increased student performance during the season to the fact that students simply have less time to get into trouble and must focus on their academics to remain eligible for their high school sports team.

**Theme 2: Athletic programs provide students with a sense of belonging and involvement.**

Having a sense of belonging and being part of a team provides students with a core group of friends they can rely on. This research shows principals, athletic directors and counselors overwhelmingly believe students who are connected to their school do better academically and behaviorally. According to the research participants, students get the

privilege to learn from influential coaches who care about their well-being and future.

Although Students who participate in interscholastic athletic teams may experience failure and adversity as a member of a team; these experiences will yield positive objectives and life lessons that will enhance future learning opportunities.

**Theme 3: Interscholastic athletics are part of the community.**

The high school athletic program is the focal point of many communities. From the perception of the research participants, a school's athletic program is constantly being showcased to the community. Athletic events are often perceived as social events that bring communities together in a positive forum. If eliminated, the research participants expressed concern the school culture and climate would be negatively impacted and the community would revolt.

**Theme 4: Students who participate gain life skills / life lessons.**

Although students often do not realize it while they are participating in high school athletics, the skills they learn are perceived to benefit them long after their interscholastic athletic career has ended. The perception of the research participants in this study provided evidence that student-athletes are learning life lessons as a result of their participation experiences. Students learn how to handle adversity and failure as well as gain valuable leadership and communication skills.

**Limitations**

There are clearly limitations in this research study. In researching the perceived impact of interscholastic athletic participation, I have treated all sports as equal, even though different sports require different levels of commitment and skill development.

Differentiating between the “types” of sport may be beneficial for future research. Various athletics have varying requirements for participation.

There were no gender-based, student grade level or age-related questions asked within this research study. The gender of the athlete and coach, as well as the age of both groups, may play a role in the perceived impact a student receives from participating. Furthermore, the gender and age of the research participants may influence their perception of the impact students may receive from participating in a high school athletic program.

Finally, the population of the school could factor into the true impact interscholastic athletics has upon the students who participate. The size of the school could ultimately play a role in the number of available sport offerings as well as the degree of interest for various sports (i.e. softball, football, swimming, etc.). School size would also be related to the size of the community, which could gauge the impact on the type of education and experience a student would receive from a school’s athletic program.

### **Recommendations to the Field**

School districts must find creative and innovative ways to continue creating participation opportunities for students to participate in athletic programs. This research supports the idea students who are involved in extracurricular activities do better in school, receive fewer discipline referrals, have greater levels of attendance, have increased educational aspirations, and graduate at a higher rate when compared to those students who do not participate.

It has been widely reported interscholastic athletic programs cost less than 2% of a school district's overall budget. If school districts were presented with a brand-new program, that was statistically valid, and assured student success for less than 2% of a school's overall annual budget, it would be prudent for the district to implement that program. These "programs" already exist in every school district throughout the country; unfortunately, interscholastic athletic programs are often the first line item threatened when the school district's annual budget is re-examined.

School districts must maintain positive relationships with members of the community. This research brings attention to how important high school athletic programs are to the communities they serve. Community support can call for increased funding which would lead to the implementation of additional programs to benefit students. In order to maintain community support for athletic programs it is recommended school districts create incentives for community members to attend events (i.e. booster clubs, preferred seating, promotional events, etc.).

Since this research provides evidence that students do better – behaviorally and academically - while in-season, it is recommended that high school lengthen each sport's season or provide additional opportunities for students to work with the school's coaching staff. This could be accomplished by offering off-season conditioning workouts, intramural leagues, summer camps and clinics; anything to provide time for students to interact with their coaches and be surrounded by their teammates. Although this recommendation could have budgetary implications since coaches would need to be compensated with an

additional stipend, a minimal increase in coaching stipend to further benefit students would be money well spent.

In support of past research, this study shows students are gaining valuable life lessons through participation in high school sports. According to this study's research participants, these life lessons are challenging to teach in a traditional classroom setting. Skills such as leadership, effective communication, dealing with adversity, learning to be a role model and so many more are effectively taught on playing fields and courts every afternoon after the final school bell rings. School districts should find ways to encourage more students to become involved in after school programs. Increasing the variety of interscholastic sports, such as track & field, tennis, field hockey, golf, wrestling, would allow more students to be involved and reap the benefits of participation in the athletic program.

### **Future Research**

Future research studies should examine specific sports by interviewing sport specific coaches as well as students and their parents. This sports specific qualitative approach would provide additional insight into the perceived impact of participation from those directly overseeing the participation (i.e. coaches) and those impacted by participation (i.e. students and their parents).

Additional research should also examine the impact of local youth sport programs being offered within a community by interviewing program organizers and those participating. Studying the impact of youth sport programs, prior to high school participation, may provide valuable insight into the type of student who ultimately decides to participate at the high school level. Furthermore, research in this area has the ability to

identify reasons why students stop participating or are limited in their participation opportunities.

There are a number of other beneficial and positive extracurricular activities offered by a school district (i.e. band, choir, theater, student government, etc.) which deserve attention and research. Sports obviously cater to students who are competitive and enjoy physical training, while other activities – drama, theater, choir, band - focus more on the arts and require a different set of unique skills. It is reasonable to believe participation in any extracurricular activities will correlate to positive student behavior and academic achievement, as well as engender positive outcomes beyond the school setting.

Finally, a quantitative research approach, focused on the impact of participation could provide additional evidence and support for interscholastic athletic programs. A quantitative study, with a sample size of adequate power, would be generalized to a large population of students and may have a greater impact upon funding and program implementation decisions at the local school district level.

### **Conclusion**

As evidenced by the 12 interviews conducted for this research study, principals, athletic directors and counselors perceive students who participate in interscholastic athletic programs experience tremendous advantages and benefits compared to their non-participating classmates. These benefits help students develop a sense of belonging, develop lifelong skills, while also leading to improved grades and attendance rates, and decreased discipline issues; the positive impacts are most profound during the student's season. Interscholastic athletic participation continues to experience growth throughout



the United States. Research similar to this study must continue to bring attention to the incredible benefits students receive in an effort to ensure these programs only grow and flourish into the future.

## Appendices

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## Appendix A

### Recruitment e-mail to Potential Research Participant

High School Principal, Athletic Director, Guidance Counselor,

I am contacting you to solicit your support as I conduct an important research project on interscholastic athletic participation. As required for my doctoral dissertation in Physical Education at University of New Mexico, I am conducting research on the perceived impact of participation in interscholastic athletic programs on the students who participate.

I am hoping that you may consider allowing me to conduct a 60-minute in person interview with you at your school.

I am seeking research participants who meet the following criteria:

- Employed principal, athletic director or guidance counselor.
- Participant must be employed at a high school which belongs to the Suburban Council.- - Participant must be available for a 60-minute interview, at his/her school, in the next month.
- Participant must agree for the interview to be audio recorded.

Information regarding individuals selected for the study will be kept confidential with only minimal risk of confidentiality involved. The study will consist of audio recorded in person interview.

Please e-mail me no later than [date] at rzayas@nysphsaa.org to be considered for participation in this research study. On [date] 4 principals, 4 athletic directors and 4 guidance counselors will be randomly selected from the participation pool for inclusion in this research study.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Robert Zayas  
University of New Mexico, PhD Student

## Appendix B

### Interview Request e-mail to Research Participant

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you for submitting your name for consideration to participate in my research on interscholastic athletic participation. As required for my doctoral dissertation in Physical Education at University of New Mexico, I am conducting research on the perceived impact of participation in interscholastic athletic programs on the students who participate.

The purpose of the research is to examine the impact sports participation has upon students in interscholastic athletic programs from the perspective of the high school principal, athletic director and counselor. The goal is to provide information to school administrators to assist in making well-informed and sound decisions related to interscholastic athletic programs. You are being asked to participate in this study because you have been identified as a school principal, athletic director or guidance counselor at a high school in the Suburban Council.

I am very interested in scheduling a one-hour interview, audio recorded, with you at your school in the next two-weeks. I would ask that you secure a room or office that can be locked to ensure a quiet and uninterrupted setting for the interview to take place.

I have attached a consent form, with study information, for you to review and sign if you are still interested in participating in this research study.

Your information will be kept confidential with only minimal risk of confidentiality involved.

Please e-mail me no later than [date] at rzayas@nysphsaa.org to let me know when you may be available to schedule an interview.

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research study.

Sincerely,

Robert Zayas  
University of New Mexico, PhD Student

## Appendix C

### Research and Participant Interview Questions

#### Research Question:

What is the perceived impact of interscholastic athletic participation upon student-athletes from the perspective of the high school principal, athletic director and counselor?

#### Sub-Questions:

1. Do students who participate in interscholastic athletics do better in the classroom, experience fewer discipline issues, graduate at a greater rate, and attend college at a greater rate than their non-participating classmates?
2. What skills do students receive from participating in interscholastic athletics?
3. What is the greatest benefit a student receives from participating in interscholastic athletics?
4. How would education in a school district change if interscholastic athletics were to be eliminated?
5. Do students who participate in interscholastic athletics have an advantage over those students who do not participate?
6. Why is it important for students to have the opportunity to interact with adults (i.e. coaches)?
7. Does participation in interscholastic athletics inhibit/ encourage certain types of behavior?

#### Interview Questions:

- 1) Please tell me about your career in education?
- 2) What do you enjoy most about working in the educational field?
- 3) Comparing students who participate and those who do not participate, can you identify any differences in regard to grades and their school work?
- 4) Have you noticed any differences between those students who participate in athletics and those students who do not in regard to their behavior?
- 5) Can you describe any differences in regard to graduation rates between those students who participate in athletics and those students who do not?
- 6) What type of impact does participation in athletics have upon a student's educational aspirations (i.e. desire to go to college)?
- 7) From your experience of working with students, can you attribute any types of skills or behaviors that are a result of participation in athletics?
- 8) What is the greatest benefit a student receives from participation?

- 9) As the school (principal, athletic director, counselor) how important is a high school athletic program to your school?
- 10) Can you describe how your school would be impacted if all athletic programs were eliminated?
- 11) Does it matter if your athletic programs are successful in regards to school culture or climate?
- 12) Are non-participating students impacted by a school's athletic program? If so, how?
- 13) Can you describe the "ideal" high school student?
- 14) Are there specific advantages a student gains from participation over those students who do not participate?
- 15) Do you perceive any disadvantages or negative aspects participation in athletics has upon a student?
- 16) What impact or influence do coaches have upon the students they coach?
- 17) Please describe "behavior" characteristics that you would attribute to participation in an interscholastic athletic program.

## Appendix D

### Consent to Participate in Research

#### Examination of the impact interscholastic athletics has on participating student-athletes from the perspective of the high school principal, athletic director and school counselor

December 2017

#### **Purpose of the study:**

You are being asked to participate in a research study that is being done by Dr. Todd Seidler, the Principal Investigator and Robert Zayas, PhD student who will conduct the research, from the Health and Exercise Sport Sciences.

The purpose of this study is to examine the impacts interscholastic athletics has on participating student-athletes from the perspective of the high school principal, athletic director and school counselor. You are being asked to take part in this study because you have been identified as holding the position of high school principal, athletic director or guidance counselor at a high school in the Suburban Council.

This form will explain what to expect when joining the research, as well as the possible risks and benefits of participation. If you have any questions, please ask one of the study researchers.

#### **What you will do in the study:**

You will conduct an interview consisting of 17 questions. You will not be required to answer all of the questions; you can select to skip any questions that make you uncomfortable. You will also be able to stop the interview at any time and withdraw from the research study.

Participation in this study will take a total of 1 hour over a period of one interview.

#### **Risks:**

There are risks of stress, emotional distress, inconvenience and possible loss of privacy and confidentiality associated with participating in a research study. Confidentiality is the greatest potential risk of this research study. Efforts will certainly be taken to protect your identity during the study. Coding of all participant's identity and all audio recordings and transcript materials will be destroyed at the completion of the research and will not include your name or contact information.

#### **Benefits:**

There will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study. However, there is the potential to impact others by bringing attention to the impact of interscholastic athletic participation. This study has the potential of providing beneficial information for school

leaders to rationalize greater emphasis on and additional funding for interscholastic athletic programs. Furthermore, with a greater understanding of the impact of interscholastic participation, survey instruments and research can be conducted to attempt to provide for greater justification of the value of interscholastic athletic programs.

**Confidentiality of your information:**

The requested information in this research study is not considered to be of a sensitive nature. The researcher is interested in your opinions related to the perceived impact of interscholastic athletic participation on the students who participate. No personal information will be requested during the interviews.

The participant's privacy will be protected throughout the study. Once you agree to participate in the research, the researcher will not include your name on any data collection materials (audio recordings, transcripts, notes, etc.); you will only be referenced by title (principal, athletic or guidance counselor) and a number (1, 2, 3, 4).

You will only interact with the researcher during the interview. The researcher will conduct the interview in a locked room at your school to ensure confidentiality and avoid interruption during the interview.

Coding of your identity and all audio recordings and transcript materials will be destroyed at the completion of the research. All audio recordings and transcripts will be saved onto a password protected computer to minimize the possibility of loss of confidentiality.

We will take measures to protect the security of all your personal information, but we cannot guarantee confidentiality of all study data. The University of New Mexico Institutional Review Board (IRB) that oversees human subject research may be permitted to access your records. Your name will not be used in any published reports about this study.

**Payment:**

You will not be paid for participating in this study.

**Right to withdraw from the study:**

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have the right to choose not to participate or to withdraw your participation at any point in this study without penalty. If you do withdraw from the study, all audio recordings and transcripts will be destroyed immediately. The researcher sees no reason why a participant would have to be withdrawn from the study, however if the participant is not able to corroborate with the researcher, the participant would be withdrawn from the study.

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about the research study, please contact:



Robert Zayas, the lead researcher in this study, can be reached at any time by calling 518.925.6631 or by e-mail at [rzayas@nysphsaa.org](mailto:rzayas@nysphsaa.org).

If you would like to speak with someone other than the research team to obtain information or offer input or if you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact the IRB. The IRB is a group of people from UNM and the community who provide independent oversight of safety and ethical issues related to research involving people:

UNM Office of the IRB, (505) 277-2644, [irbmaincampus@unm.edu](mailto:irbmaincampus@unm.edu). Website: <http://irb.unm.edu/>

### CONSENT

You are making a decision whether to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that you have read this form (or the form was read to you) and that all questions have been answered to your satisfaction. By signing this consent form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights as a research participant. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you.

I agree to participate in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Adult Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Adult Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

### Researcher Signature (to be completed at time of informed consent)

I have explained the research to the participant and answered all of his/her questions. I believe that he/she understands the information described in this consent form and freely consents to participate.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Research Team Member

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Research Team Member

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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