

Kids in activities do better academically

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

Thursday, 16 January 2014 17:46 -



Seth Ryker gathers statistical evidence based on GHS seniors

Teachers and staff at Gothenburg High School encourage involvement of students in extracurricular activities.

For good reason.

While tracking grade point averages of seniors and the number of school-sponsored activities in which they are involved, athletic director Seth Ryker discovered that GHS seniors in more than one competitive activity have higher grade point averages than students not involved at all (see infobox).

Even students involved in only one activity showed a higher GPA.

National research supports Ryker's findings.

For the study, he looked at only competitive activities such as sports, speech, play production and cheerleading.

Ryker gave several reasons for the correlations between high marks and activities.

"The skills required in competition to be successful and in the classroom are similar," Ryker said. "Both are about goal setting and deferred rewards."

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Often, what is required in the short-term is not rewarding such as conditioning in the weight room, practicing before speech coaches and studying for a test, he explained.



“Then you take the test and get results just like performing in front of a crowd or a judge,” Ryker said.

Kids involved in activities also learn how to work with others, how to set group goals and develop a work ethic.

Ryker said competition is also brutally honest.

“All of us have experienced disappointment and the lessons that go with it and the goal to win,” he said. “We can all work hard to be the best we can be.”

Using an example from speech, Ryker said it’s quite difficult to be the best each week so students learn to improve each meet.

Research shows that kids become involved in extracurricular activities because they’re fun and it’s something they can do with peers, he said.

Encouragement from parents is also important, not necessarily based on results, Ryker said.

“Parents need to tell their children they are proud of their efforts regardless of the outcome,” he said.

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GHS guidance counselor Jerry Wiggins said students involved in extracurricular activities also seem to have meaningful part-time jobs.

“Cooperation, teamwork, self-discipline, how to follow direction and accept constructive criticism, responsibility and accountability are all skills and concepts they are learning while being a part of something,” he said.

Although Wiggins doesn't specifically track the extracurricular activities of kids in college, he said most work part-time while others join sororities or fraternities or are part of band and/or choir.

Wiggins said a few become involved in a club or student government and very few compete in athletics.

Still, Ryker said he hopes GHS students develop a life-long sense of competition and physical fitness from high school activities that they continue after high school through intramurals, recreational runs and in other ways.

He added that Gothenburg Public Schools offer all kinds of different extracurricular activities including those that are non competitive and also beneficial.

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