MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES

REGARDING EXTRACURRICULAR TIME

A Review of Middle School Students Participation in
Extracurricular Activities, Reasons for Involvement,
Barriers to Participation, and Perceived Benefits of
Extracurricular Activities

by

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ABSTRACT

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A Review of Middle School Students Participation in Extracurricular Activities, Reasons for Involvement, Barriers to Participation, and Perceived Benefits of Extracurricular Activities

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The purpose of this study was to learn from middle school students the reasons they choose to participate or not participate in extracurricular activities, and also learn what benefits or problems they perceive from participation in organized extracurricular activities. Studies have shown a myriad of benefits from participation in extracurricular activities, and the reduction in risk taking behaviors for students involved in the community and school.

The questions addressed in this research project were: What are the differences between students who are involved in activities, that relate to grade level, gender, or ethnicity? Why don't some students participate in any activities? What are the barriers or challenges for students participating in organized extracurricular activities sponsored by the school or community organizations? What are the reasons middle school students participate in extracurricular activities? Was there an increased sense of connection to the school and peers, or was there a loss of connection with family and family activities because of busy schedules? What are some of the detrimental effects that they recognize occurring from involvement in extracurricular activities? What do they perceive as benefits of participating in extracurricular activities?

The results of this study can be utilized to help parents, the school, and the community gain a better understanding of how students perceive existing extracurricular activities. The study results can also be used to gauge the current programs, identify areas of need, and better address the needs of students in the future. The survey could also identify areas that inhibit involvement, and discover areas of interest to encourage involvement in activities, which may not presently be offered. Aside from the benefits to the school and the community, the study will benefit the University by providing information that could be useful for students studying to become teachers, school counselors, or administrators.

Information for the study was obtained through surveying over half of the middle school students at an area school. This occurred through the use of a confidential survey developed specifically for this study. This type of survey provided a review of the involvement of the students at the school and within the community.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Overscheduled; The Overwhelmed Child; Bring it On, Benefits of Active Schedules for Children; and *Take Back Your Family Time,* are the titles of recent articles in Time; Newsweek; Good Housekeeping; and Redbook magazines on the issue of children's high level of extracurricular activity. Children today have more opportunities and a wider variety of extracurricular activities to choose to be involved in outside of the school day, then children of any other generation. Parents want their children to experience many activities that they may not have had the opportunity to participate in, so their children are involved in multiple sports, arts, and community youth activities along with the demands of school, and social activities with friends and family.

A review of the Menomonie Middle School Handbook indicates that students have almost countless opportunities to participate in activities of every nature, from sports or arts, to community and school organizations offering the prospect of learning and leadership. Examples of the extracurricular activities offered at this middle school are clubs like: Future Farmers of America; Family, Career, and Community Leaders of America; Yearbook; Student Council; Natural Resources; and Multicultural Clubs. There are also many opportunities for competition and performing arts including Science Olympiad; Knowledge Master Open; Mathcounts; School Play or Drama; Forensics; Choir; Show Choir; Band; Jazz Band; and Orchestra. Sports are certainly some of the most visible of the extracurricular activities and some of the sports available to middle school students are: Basketball, Cross Country, Dance Team, Football, Gymnastics, Hockey, Soccer, Swimming, Tennis, Track, Volleyball, and Wrestling.

Aside from having these activities available at school, there are many activities present in the community. Several options are available in the performing arts arena, with children's or community theaters, piano, community bands or orchestras, and drama groups associated with youth programs such as 4-H or other groups. There are also learning and leadership groups that provide experiences in diverse fields of interest. Examples would be 4-H, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, Campfire, pre-college, summer school, YMCA, and library programs.

Recreation and sports programs that may not be associated with schools, but are available in the community include ice-skating, hockey, roller skating and rollerblading, bicycling, fishing, boating, canoeing, sailing, water skiing, downhill and cross country skiing, swimming, dancing, fitness and weight lifting, soccer, table tennis, basketball, baseball, billiards, curling, hunting, trap, skeet, paintball, and the list goes on. There are also opportunities to experience crafts and hobbies that can become the basis for careers or the development of lifelong interests and/or hobbies. There include: classes in cooking, woodworking, pottery, sewing, model trains, rockets, computing, nature and natural resources and more. Many of these opportunities may be available as part of community, religious, educational groups or organizations, or provided by individuals who have an interest in one of these areas. In almost every community, there are opportunities and a seemingly overwhelming number of activities to choose from.

Beyond all of these extracurricular activities, children in middle school are facing a growing diversity of course subject matter to choose from, and are asked to begin thinking about what career they may want to enter upon leaving school. Schoolwork and

grades continue to be important and may be increasingly important if they are considering going on to college.

With involvement in extracurricular activities in school and outside of school continuing to rise, changes begin to take place within the family's time structure, such as the loss of family meal times and flexibility in scheduling family vacations and/or activities and the result is a decrease in family activities as a result of scheduled extracurricular activities.

The Search Institute has conducted research into the factors that influence young people to make healthy choices about drugs, alcohol, and other risk taking behaviors. They have identified forty characteristics or "Developmental Assets" that are a foundation for young people growing up healthy, caring, and responsible (Search Institute, 2000). Of these assets, several relate to a child's involvement in activities outside of the home, such as involvement in creative activities like music, theater, and the arts, or youth programs such as sports clubs, organizations at school or in the community, and reading for pleasure; each activity consuming three or more hours per week. In addition, an asset regarding homework recommends at least an hour per day of homework and at least an hour involvement in religious institutions per week.

Extracurricular activities provide young people the opportunity for the development of skills, cooperation, teamwork, and fulfillment through the opportunity of achievement and participation outside the classroom. It is through participation in extracurricular activities that young people have the opportunity for social, physical, mental, and emotional enrichment. And through involvement in extracurricular activities, young people have the opportunity for interaction with adults who can become

more than coaches or advisors but also mentors, and a source of support for the young person outside of their family.

A review of academic literature regarding extracurricular activity lauds the involvement of young people in activities outside of the classroom. Participation in extracurricular activities increased academic achievement in students (Holloway, 2000), enhanced self esteem (Hill, 1999), increased academic self-concept (House, 2000), protected against early school dropout (Mahoney & Cairns, 1997), prevented delinquency and crime (Cassel, Chow, Demoulin, & Reiger, 2000), increased leadership ability (Dobosz & Beaty, 1999), affected popularity and peer status (Eder & Kinney, 1995), and acted as a moderator in anti-social patterns (Mahoney, 2000).

Studies have looked at many of the effects of being involved in extracurricular activities and what kind of involvement matters (Eccles & Barber, 1999), teachers' perceptions of youth involvement in extracurricular activity (Van Matre, Valentine, & Cooper, 2000), parental influence (Fletcher, Elder, & Mekos, 2000), parental perception of the role of athletics in the development of students (Wemette, 1992), family characteristics (Gager, Cooney, & Thiede, 2000), and students sense of belonging (Wilkes, 1995).

Research Question

Though there is a diverse array of organized activities and recreational opportunities available for young people and studies indicating a range of benefits from involvement in extracurricular activities, the one voice that is not prevalent is that of middle school students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of Menomonie Middle School students' perceptions of extracurricular activities.

The research questions for this study are:

1. Were there differences between students who are involved in activities that relate to grade, gender or ethnicity?
2. Why don't some students participate in any activities?
3. What are the barriers for students participating in organized extracurricular activities sponsored by the school or community organizations?
4. What are the reasons middle school students participate in extracurricular activities?
5. Was there an increased sense of connection to the school and peers, or was there a loss of connection with family and time for family activities because of busy schedules?
6. What are some of the detrimental effects that they recognize occurring from involvement in extracurricular activities?
7. What do they perceive as benefits of participating in extracurricular activities?

Information about the students' perceptions was obtained through a survey that students completed during the spring semester of 2002.

The results of this study can be utilized to help the parents, the school, and the community gain a better understanding of how students perceive existing extracurricular activities. It can also be used to gauge the attitudes and effectiveness of current programs, identify areas of need, and better address the needs of students in the future.

The research overwhelmingly supports student involvement in activities in the school and the community, as a means of providing protection against risk taking behavior, leading to success in academics, increasing self-concept, and having a sense of belonging. Further, the research indicated what some of the barriers are, reasons why some young people are not participating in activities, and what young people believe can be done to overcome these obstacles?

Assumptions

There are several assumptions made in this study. These are,

1. It is assumed students understand the terms used.
2. It is assumed the students in this study are representative of middle school students in the region.
3. It is assumed the students responded completely and honestly.

Limitations

There are several limitations in the research of this study. These are,

1. This study does not offer correlational data on the effectiveness of extracurricular activities in benefiting students, academically, socially, or emotionally.
2. This study only surveyed the students of one middle school who along with their parents agreed to participate in the study.
3. The survey instrument is limited by the students understanding of the terminology used and completeness of the student's response.

Chapter II

Review Of Literature

This chapter will be divided into two sections with the first being an overview of the topic and literature regarding extracurricular activities. This will be followed by a section examining some of the positive and negative aspects of young people's involvement in extracurricular activities. The research indicates many positive aspects as a result of participation in extracurricular activities, though little if any of the research has questioned students directly about their overall perceptions about involvement in extracurricular activities. In particular, little of the research has looked at why students do not participate in activities that are offered in the school or community.

Overview of Extracurricular Activities

There are a plethora of opportunities for children to participate in activities beginning at very early ages, with Doherty (2000) reporting about a recreation department in a Twin Cities Minnesota suburb having 14 activities for children who are three years old, and young people in grade school having planners to keep track of their carpool and activity schedules. As they enter adolescence, the quantity and variety of activities available for young people increases dramatically.

In a study on high school extracurricular activities, McNeal (1995) divided the activities available into seven categories. These were athletics, cheerleading, fine arts, service/student government, academic organizations, newspaper/yearbook, and vocational activities. These were comparable to the categories that Mahoney and Cairns (1997) developed in their study looking at the relationship of extracurricular activities to early school dropouts. This list consisted of the following nine categories: athletics, fine

arts, student government, press, vocational, academics, service, royalty, and assistants. There was some expansion of the activities in the Mahoney and Cairns categories and incorporation of some activities that were in the categories McNeal described. Mahoney and Cairns included cheerleading in the athletics category, re-labeled newspaper/yearbook into press and included a journalism and photography club. Mahoney and Cairns also added assistants, which included students who helped in the office, library, food service, and other areas of the school, and also added a category for royalty that included prom, homecoming, and school princess. Mahoney and Cairns also separated service from student government to include a Bible club, ecology council, health occupation students group, Students Against Drunk Drivers, and Youth Advisory Council. Both of these studies included the activities available in most middle schools and high schools, however, they categorized them somewhat differently, with the list at the end of the Mahoney and Cairns article being the most extensive of the articles that were reviewed.

The previous list of school activities were what Klesse and D'Onofrio (2000) referred to as co-curricular activities, stating that they were not extra, but complementing the educational program that the school provided. Whether they were individual or group activities, Klesse and D'Onofrio stated that these activities promoted positive attributes in the students and provided a constructive use of time, built loyalty toward the group and school, and gave the students the opportunity to be a part of something. Klesse and D'Onofrio asserted participation in co-curricular activities affected the students academically, emotionally, and socially, and changed their outlook on vocations.

Eccles and Barber (1999) expanded the view of activities that young people participate in to include activities outside of school. They divided the opportunities available to young people into five categories: pro-social, team sports, school involvement, performing arts, and academic clubs. The primary difference in how activities were categorized in this study was the inclusion of involvement in activities outside of school. The groupings were broader, with the category pro-social comprising of church and volunteer involvement. This study reviewed adolescents' use of time not spent in school, doing homework, working, or doing chores, and the social aspects of involvement in extracurricular activities on development.

A broad view on youth development is taken by The Search Institute in Minneapolis, MN, which Benson (2000) reported has identified traits, activities, and experiences that facilitate the healthy development of youth and work toward shielding them from risk-taking behaviors. There are 40 characteristics that the Search Institute has identified as Developmental Assets, with one subset of twenty assets expressed as internal to the person and also twenty assets that are external and a part of the community. These assets were identified after surveying over 100,000 young people in grades 6-12 in 210 different communities.

There are four categories of external assets: support, empowerment, boundaries, and constructive use of time. The constructive use of time category includes structured activities for youth being provided not only by the schools, but also community organizations and religious institutions. The four assets according to the Search Institute (2000) in the constructive use of time category are: creative activities, youth programs, religious community, and time at home. Creative activities involved spending three or

more hours per week practicing or attending lessons for music, drama, or other arts. Youth programs are when the young person spends three or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or organizations in school or in the community. Religious community is where the young person spends one or more hours per week involved in a religious institution. The time at home asset is described as the young person not spending unstructured time with friends away from home two or more nights per week.

Effects of Students' Extracurricular Activities

The opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities can be positive or negative, depending on the approach parents take toward the activities, according to Brooks and Goldstein (2001). Participation in activities helps young people to develop individual interests and abilities through trying different activities. Children learn what they are good at and enjoy. It is through this exploration and the development of skills and abilities that an individual's self-confidence and self-esteem are increased. Brooks also presented some of the negative aspects of participation. Some of the negative aspects included the issue of children being expected to do well in an activity because their siblings did, the parents' expectation of a child to perform at a high level, some parents' desire to vicariously experience an activity through their child's participation in the activity, and some parents' measuring their worth as a parent based on the level of their child's performance.

There are many reported benefits to a student's involvement in extracurricular activities which will be reviewed, including: reducing the dropout rate; increasing leadership ability; increasing a sense of belonging; raising academic and social skills; academic expectations; the student's popularity and peer status; reduction of delinquency

and crime; and a review of what type of involvement was the most influential in reducing risk-taking behaviors. Along with the benefits, there is some concern about pressures placed on young people and the increasing incidents of stress related symptoms and depression.

The studies by McNeal (1995) and Mahoney and Cairns (1997) have shown that participation in extracurricular activities, even during years prior to high school was a protective factor related to continuing in school and not dropping out prior to the student's senior year. A large variety of activities were found to be beneficial in order to permit participation based on interest and ability. One significant outcome of these studies showed that as activity levels increased for the students who would be at highest risk, there was a reduction in the drop-out rate. A detrimental area related to extracurricular activities is the process that would limit or preclude participation for some students because of grades or behavior. These excluded students may most need the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities as a positive experience and opportunity.

An increase in leadership ability among student athletes is an outcome reported in the study conducted by Dobosz and Beaty (1999). The sample in the study was 60 students from a suburban Chicago school district, thirty athletes and thirty non-athletes randomly selected from a student population of over 1,000. The results showed that the athletes had higher leadership ability than non-athletes. The unexpected results were that female athletes had higher leadership ability, as determined by the Leadership Ability Evaluation, than male athletes. This study shows the importance and effect of one type of extracurricular activity in the schools -- athletics.

In recognizing the importance and positive effects of being involved in extracurricular activities, Cassell, Chow, Demoulin, and Reiger (2000) suggested that a student-centered high school would focus on the person and extracurricular activities available to all students. They proposed that this would result in an increased sense of belongingness and an increase in honesty, prevention of drug and substance abuse, and a reduction in delinquency. The article did reference some studies that reported the qualities that students gain by being involved in extracurricular activities, but did not provide statistical information that supported their propositions.

Eder and Kinney (1995) reviewed the effects of different school activities on the popularity of students in middle school, and a comparison between small and larger schools. In this study participation in athletics was a key factor for male popularity and cheerleading was the primary factor related to female popularity. There were some differences between large and small schools, with one of the most significant being a higher percentage of students participating in extracurricular activities in smaller schools compared to larger schools. In the particular schools where the study occurred, basketball was the sport that had the largest influence on male popularity. For female students not involved in cheerleading, an avenue to increased popularity was "best friend" status with a cheerleader.

Self-perceptions regarding the desire to achieve and self-confidence in a student's ability are certainly large factors in student achievement. In the study of college freshman by House (2000), involvement in volunteer work and participation in extracurricular activities through clubs and groups during the previous year showed a positive relationship in students' desire to achieve and an increased confidence in their

academic abilities.

Eccles and Barber (1999) conducted a comprehensive study on participation in extracurricular activities and the effects. This was a correlational study comparing involvement in school and community activities and involvement in risk-taking behavior. The extracurricular activities were divided into five categories: pro-social activities, sports teams, performing arts, school involvement, and academic clubs. The risk-taking behaviors researched were drinking alcohol, skipping school, and using drugs. The outcome factors the study reviewed were the student liking school, high school grade point average, and attending college full-time at age 21. A comparison was done reviewing the category of activity the student was involved in and the risk factors and the outcome factors in order to learn what kind of extracurricular involvement mattered.

The Eccles and Barber (1999) study found that 31% of the students had not participated in any activities or clubs, and 45% had not been involved in athletics. Involvement in any of the categories of activities showed a significant difference for students in better academic performance and lower participation in risk-taking behaviors, except for drinking alcohol by students involved in athletics. Students involved in athletics had a higher rate of drinking alcohol regularly than students who did not participate in any activities and higher than students who were involved in any other category of activities. The only category, which appeared to reduce the likelihood the student would participate in risk-taking behavior, was involvement in pro-social activities.

The results of the Eccles and Barber (1999) study show that involvement in any extracurricular activity was related positively to academic achievement, a lower rate of

participation in risk-taking behavior, and a higher rate of friendship. Students tended to participate in activities based on interests and the peer group involved in the activity. A different culture and set of values was connected to groups involved in each type of activity. The study showed that most student were involved in at least one activity, though males tended to be involved in fewer activities than females, with athletics, music, and church being the activities of choice for most students. Though the study found results similar to other studies that indicated that involvement in athletics also led to a greater likelihood of drinking alcohol, it also reported that participation also leads to higher academic achievement and does not express great concern about the pattern of consuming alcohol.

In a study of eighth grade students by Richardson, Dwyer, McGuigan, Hansen, Dent, Johnson, Sussman, Brannon, & Flay (1989), participation in extracurricular activities was not a significant factor in reducing risk-taking behavior. The participation in risk-taking activity, such as drinking alcohol and smoking cigarettes and marijuana use was related to the amount of time children spend taking care of themselves.

With the wide array of activities available, the added expectation of responsibility on the adolescent from parents and the school, it is not surprising that middle school students report the primary stressor that they experience is the amount of things to do according to a study by de Anda and Bradley (1997). Though this study did not directly address extracurricular activities, in addressing stressors they recognize the stressors that adolescents face go beyond single events and include the stress created by the environment and repeated daily activities.

In a study by Armacost (1990), extracurricular activities were identified as a

stressor for high school students. In this study a quarter of the high school students reported that cliques prevented them from participating in activities that they would like to participate in. In addition one-fifth of the students reported it was difficult to get into school activities, though they did not specify why.

A review of the literature provides an abundance of information about the effects of participation in extracurricular activities, but little information related to the research questions. In particular, little information is available as to why adolescents choose to participate in the extracurricular activities available, and as importantly why some young people are not participating in these. Also little information is available regarding young peoples perceptions and also their thoughts about the activities offered those they participate in.

Chapter III

Methodology

Introduction

This chapter describes the subjects of the study, the survey instrument used, the procedure, the data collection process, and the limitations of the study.

Subjects

Menomonie Middle School is a school that consists of 822 sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students, in west central Wisconsin located about 60 miles east of the Minnesota Twin Cities metro area. The students are predominantly white, with the largest minority population in the community being the Hmong community.

Instrument

The researcher created the instrument SPARE (Student Perceptions and Attitudes Regarding Extracurricular) Time questionnaire (see Appendix #C) after consultation with Dr. Orv Nelson, at the University of Wisconsin-Stout, on how to determine questions and a method of response that would address the research questions. The items were developed based on information from the literature review, the interests of the principal from the participating school, and from the researcher‘s personal experience. The layout of the instrument was tried in several forms so the questionnaire would consist of two columns on both sides of one page. Chris Ness of the University Information and Operations Systems provided assistance on the layout and structure of the instrument.

The Student Perceptions and Attitudes Regarding Extracurricular Time questionnaire consists of eight general sections with 18 questions and 58 items.

The first section consisted of four questions used to obtain demographic

information, about the students: gender, grade, age, and ethnicity. Every effort was made to ensure personal identification was not obtained from the student.

In the second section, a listing of school and community activities is provided and the students will be asked to indicate which activities they have been involved in during the previous calendar year. The items for this section were obtained from a listing in the student handbook of activities and clubs sponsored at the school and also a listing of community sports and activities, not sponsored by the school, that the researcher was familiar with.

Those students who do not indicate involvement in any of these activities, will be asked in the third section, to indicate reasons for non-participation and asked what could have been done to encourage participation. These students will also be asked if they are interested in any of these activities.

The fourth section consists of a list of individual or family activities the students may be involved in. Along with this, the students are asked how many activities they have been involved in at a time and they will be asked to give an approximation of the number of hours per week they are active in organized or individual or family activities.

The fifth section was the single largest with a list of 23 items and the students will be asked to add additional items related to the reason for their participation, or reasons for not participating in activities. The students will be asked to rank each item associated to the selection of involvement in activities from 1 to 5 on a Likert scale. The rankings are: "Major reason why I chose not to participate," "Part of the reason why I chose not to participate," "Did not influence my choice to participate," "Part of the reason why I chose to participate," and "Major reason why I chose to participate".

The items in the sixth section are about the beneficial or detrimental effects students experience from participation in extracurricular activities. The students will be asked to rank eleven statements on a Likert scale from 1 to 5 if they: "Strongly disagree," "Disagree," "Not sure," "Agree," and "Strongly agree".

The students will be asked to respond to nine statements related to negative consequence regarding involvement in extracurricular activities in the eighth section. The students will be asked to respond to the statements on a Likert scale from 1 to 5 as: "Never," "Once in a while," "Sometimes," "Often," and "Always".

In addition question 18 will ask the students to add comments regarding what they perceive as the benefits they derive from participating in extracurricular activities.

The instrument was created specifically for this study and therefore no measures of validity or reliability are available.

Procedures

The first step in the process was the creation of the instrument, the SPARE Time questionnaire, which was discussed under instrumentation.

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Obtaining Approval For The Study Through The University. Approval will be obtained through the completion of the Protection of Human Subjects in Research Training, writing an abstract of the study, developing permission to participate forms, and presentation of the instrumentation to be used.

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Obtaining Approval For The Study From The Middle School Principal. Approval of the School Board will not be required; however as part of the approval

process, the principal will request copies of the abstract, permission forms, instrumentation, and a description of how the study would be conducted at the school prior to giving approval of the researcher conducting the study at the school.

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Parental Permission. Parental permission will need to be obtained for the students who will complete the questionnaire. The researcher will be present at the school on the two evenings during parent/teacher conferences and ask parents to complete the letter of consent to participate and in this manner obtain the majority of the parental permissions. The permission to participate will be sent home with students or mailed to the parents/guardians of the students for whom permission has not previously obtained. Students whose parents granted permission to complete the survey will be given the right to choose whether they wish to participate in the study.

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Administration of questionnaire. The questionnaires will be distributed to the TAP (Teacher Advisory Program) teachers along with a list of the students in their TAP class for whom parental permission has been obtained. The TAP teachers will proctor the survey to the students during their TAP period, during the week of March 25, 2002.

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Collection of questionnaire. The completed questionnaires will be collected by the researcher from the TAP teachers, or turned into a collection box in the office at the middle school.

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Preparing questionnaires for data analysis. The questionnaires will be sorted by

grade, gender, age, and ethnicity and then taken to the University Information and Operations Systems for data entry and analysis.

Data Analysis

The surveys will be collected and the data will be analyzed at the University Information and Operations Systems. The SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) was used for the analysis of the data collected. The data analysis will consist of a review of the frequencies of answers and taking a look at the percentage of students who participated in the survey who have been involved in various activities. T-Test scores will be used to look at relationships or differences related to gender, ethnicity, and between students who participate in activities and those who do not participate in organized activities. Due to the small number of minority students, rather than look at differences for each group, differences between white and all minority students will be looked at using T-Test scores. A one way Analysis of Variance will be used to look at the difference in the data and the different grades.

The comments provided by the students will be categorized and a summation of these comments will also be included in the final analysis. The results of the study will be shared with the middle school administration and personnel, the district administrators, and made available to the students and parents, along with community, recreation organizations, and groups who work with youth and are involved in prevention programs in the community.

Limitations

Significant efforts will be made to include the largest majority and cross section of the student population, the sample will likely be skewed by the fact that the permission

to participate was primarily obtained from student's whose parents attended the parent/teacher conferences. The limitation in the study is that the questionnaire will only distributed and completed by students at one school and therefore will have limited generalizability.

Chapter IV

Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of Menomonie Middle School students' perceptions of extracurricular activities, the benefits they perceive and problems they experience from participation. The Menomonie Middle School has 822 students, of which 407 are female and 415 are male. The student population consists of 718 white students, and 104 minority students making up 12.7% of the student body. The seventh grade has the largest number of students, 313 with the sixth and eighth grade populations being close in size with 246 and 263 students respectively.

Demographics of Sample

The data for the study was gathered with the SPARE (Student Perceptions and Attitudes Regarding Extracurricular) Time questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed by the researcher, upon consultation with Dr. Orv Nelson, at UW-Stout. The items featured on the questionnaire were the result of the review of the literature, activity information that is offered at the school and in the community, and from items based on the researchers experience. Parental permission was obtained for over 500 students, of these 470 completed the SPARE Time questionnaire on March 25 and 26, 2002. This was 57.18% of the school population with a slightly larger number of females (243) than males (227) completing the questionnaire.

The numbers by grade reflected the different sizes of the classes, with 131 sixth grade students, 201 seventh grade students, and 138 eighth grade students completing the questionnaire. The breakdown of students completing the questionnaire by ethnicity

indicated 385 of the students as white, with 54 students identifying themselves in one of the major ethnic groups, thirteen as other, and five as multiracial. With these students included in with the category of minority students, the sample consisted of 15.3% minority students. Thirteen of the students did not complete the ethnicity portion of the questionnaire. The responses of these students were not included in the analysis of the data based on the ethnicity of the student. The mean age for the students in the sample was 12.8 years.

Research Questions

8. Were there differences between students who are involved in activities that relate to grade, gender or ethnicity?
9. Why don't some students participate in any activities?
10. What are the barriers for students participating in organized extracurricular activities sponsored by the school or community organizations?
11. What are the reasons middle school students participate in extracurricular activities?
12. Was there an increased sense of connection to the school and peers, or was there a loss of connection with family and time for family activities because of busy schedules?
13. What are some of the detrimental effects that they recognize occurring from involvement in extracurricular activities?
14. What do they perceive as benefits of participating in extracurricular activities?

Participation in Organized Activities

The number of students participating in organized activities was 444, or 94.5% of the students in the sample. Only 26 students reported not being involved in any school or community organized activities. The average number of activities that students participated in was 3.47 and the median was 3. The largest number of students, 96, were involved in 2 activities and the most any student indicated being involved in was 14.

The activities that had the largest number of students indicating involvement were Basketball: 174, Band: Choir: 118, Religious instruction: 114, and Orchestra: 100. The following table, Table A – Student Involvement by Activity, is a complete listing and totals for indicated for participation in organized activities.

Table A **Student Involvement in Organized Extracurricular Activities**

Band	118	Multicultural Club	17	KMO	17
Choir	114	Baseball/softball	72	4-H	38
Show Choir	11	Basketball	174	Science Olympiad	41
Dance	32	Cross Country	22	Sharing our Resources	35
Jazz Band	24	Gymnastics	24	School Play/drama	27
Orchestra	100	Hockey	22	Scouts (Boy or Girl	
Forensics	28	Soccer	53	Scouts or similar)	55
MathCounts	28	Swimming	55	Religious instruction	114
FCCLA	40	Tennis	23	Football	35
FFA	52	Track	65	Other, please specify	54
Year Book	18	Volleyball	70		
Student Council	26	Wrestling	28		

The Menomonie Middle School does require all 6th grade students to participate in Band, Choir, Orchestra, or take general music, this would in part account for the higher rate of participation in these activities. The only sport that is offered at the school for all three grades is Basketball, which is reflected, in the high numbers for participation.

Individual and Family Activities

Students in the study reported being involved in more individual and family activities, with the average number of activities being 6.4 and the median being 6. Thirteen students indicated they were not involved in any of the activities listed, and 44 stated that they were in 11 or more activities, with one student marking 17 activities. Table B, Student Involvement in Individual or family Activities, contains a list of individual or family activities that a young person may be involved in with the number of students who indicated they were involved in that activity.

Table B **Student Involvement in Individual or family Activities**

Tennis	60	Go-carting	88	Table Tennis	73
Hunting	138	Golf	123	Snowmobiling/ATV	162
Fishing	236	Art/Crafts	148	Fitness/Weightlifting	134
Skiing	131	Bowling	182	Skateboard/Skating	148
Movies	370	Reading	173	Other	1
Hiking	110	Volunteering	73		
Biking	295	Computers	251		

Only one student reported they were not involved in any organized activities or participating in any individual and family activities. Students who were not involved in any organized activities reported spending a significantly higher amount of time, 17.9 hours per week on individual and family activities, compared to an average of about 10.24 hours for the students involved in organized activities.

Research Question 1, Differences by Gender, Grade Level, and Ethnicity

The first research question in this study was; Were There Differences Between Students Who are Involved in Activities, that Relate to Gender, Grade Level, or Ethnicity?

The first portion of this section will review the differences in the rate of participation that may exist based on gender, grade level, and ethnicity. The next portion

will look at differences in the reasons that the students indicated for participation based on gender, grade level, and ethnicity.

Differences in Participation Based on Gender

When using Pearson Chi-Square, significant statistical differences in participation were reported in some of the organized activities based on gender. The Table C, Differences in Participation Based on Gender, shows the number of participants in these activities based on gender, the Pearson Chi-Square Value, the degree of freedom in each case was one, and significance level.

Table C Differences in Participation Based on Gender

Activity	Male	Female	Value	Sig. Level
Choir	32	82	24.661	.000[1]
Show Choir	2	9	4.091	.043[3]
Dance	6	26	12.006	.001[1]
FCCLA	2	38	32.824	.000[1]
FFA	18	34	4.383	.036[3]
Gymnastics	2	22	16.177	.000[1]
Hockey	19	3	13.393	.000[1]
Volleyball	1	69	72.356	.000[1]
Wrestling	28	0	31.872	.000[1]
Sharing our resources	25	10	8.102	.004[2]
Scouts	38	17	10.785	.001[1]
Football	35	0	40.482	.000[1]
No activities	17	9		

[1] significant at .001, [2] significant at .01, [3]significant at .05

Several of the differences in participation by gender can be explained by the fact that some of the sports, volleyball, wrestling, and football are traditionally participated in by only males or females, though there are some females crossing those self limiting boundaries and becoming involved in wrestling and football. Some of the other differences relate to cultural differences that still exist indicating gender roles, like FCCLA (Family, Consumer, and Career Leaders of America) being the former the home

economics group, though the FFA, formerly Future Farmers of America, now has more females than males.

Differences in Participation by Grade Level

There were also some statistical differences indicated in participation based on the grade level of the student. The Table D, Differences in Participation by Grade Level, lists the activities where differences were reported, the number of students involved in the activity based on grade, the Pearson Chi-Square Value, the degree of freedom in each instance is 2, and significance level.

Table D **Differences in Participation by Grade Level**

Activity	6th	7th	8th	Value	df	Sig. Level.
Jazz Band	1	12	11	7.746	2	.021[3]
FCCLA	6	15	19	7.782	2	.020[3]
FFA	0	28	24	23.590	2	.000[1]
Cross Country	0	15	7	9.967	2	.007[1]
Gymnastics	2	16	6	7.006	2	.030[3]
Swimming	12	32	11	6.140	2	.046[3]
Track	0	32	33	33.535	2	.000[1]
Volleyball	5	36	29	18.203	2	.000[1]
4-H	11	22	5	5.927	2	.052[3]
Science Olympiad	24	10	7	21.010	2	.000[1]
Religious Instruction	21	64	29	11.908	2	.003[2]
Football	5	9	21	17.166	2	.000[1]
No activities	2	13	11			

[1] significant at .001, [2] significant at .01, [3]significant at .05,
[3]* close to significant at .05

A reason for some of the differences in participation by grade is that all of the activities are not offered for students in the sixth grade. The spike in the number of students involved in religious instruction in the seventh grade would be due to many churches holding confirmation classes for students at that level. And a decrease in involvement in some activities could be the result of the opportunity to participate in a wider variety of other activities.

Differences in Participation by Ethnicity

The Table E, Differences in Participation by Ethnicity, shows the differences for those activities where there is significance in participation of Caucasian and non-Caucasian students in organized activities. Because of the small number of students involved in some of the activities, rather than a Pearson Chi-Square, a continuity correction is indicated. The table includes the activity, ethnicity of the student as Caucasian or Minority, Value, df, and significance level.

Table E Differences in Participation by Ethnicity

Activity	Caucasian	Minority	Value	df	Sig.
Choir	76	32	20.512	1	.000[1]
Show choir	6	5	5.373	1	.020[3]*
Multicultural club	2	14	58.822	1	.000[1]*
Basketball	158	14	12.051	1	.001[1]
Soccer	38	13	4.099	1	.043[3]
Religious instruction	102	8	7.853	1	.005[2]
No activities	20	6			

[1] significant at .001, [2] significant at .01, [3]significant at .05
*Continuity correction because of low number of participants

The reported significance between Caucasian and minority students for several of the activities is due to a higher rate of participation indicated by the minority students than would be expected. The activities where this difference occurred were; choir, show choir, multicultural club, and soccer.

In addition to the differences in the rate of participation in the organized extracurricular activities, some, though fewer differences existed by gender, grade level, and ethnicity in why students were involved in activities. These differences will be reviewed in the following three tables with information from question 15 of the SPARE Time questionnaire.

On Question 15 of the SPARE Time questionnaire, the students were asked to rank each item associated to the selection of involvement in activities from 1 to 5 on a Likert scale. The rankings were: "Major reason why I chose not to participate," "Part of the reason why I chose not to participate," "Did not influence my choice to participate," "Part of the reason why I chose to participate," and "Major reason why I chose to participate".

Differences in Reasons for Participation by Gender

In Table F, Differences in Reason for Participation by Gender, differences in the factors for participation are reviewed. The table includes; the item identifier, a brief description of the item, the mean, standard deviation in parenthesis, gender, the F, and the level of significance in responses to these items. The significance is marked to indicate the significance of the responses in the item.

Table F Differences in Reason for Participation by Gender

SPARE Time Question 15	Mean	(SD)	Mean	(SD)	Sig. Level
Factors related to participation	Female		Male		Sig.
e. learn something new	3.73	(0.94)	3.48	(1.03)	.006[2]
f. coaches/activity advisors	3.33	(0.91)	3.11	(1.06)	.016[3]
g. amount of time to discuss signup	3.41	(0.95)	3.22	(1.11)	.045[3]
k. new experience	3.88	(.091)	3.62	(1.03)	.004[2]
m. activity sign up time/location	3.14	(.084)	2.94	(0.82)	.012[3]
q. chance to be a part of something	3.97	(0.93)	3.65	(1.00)	.000[1]
r. teacher encouragement	3.26	(0.87)	2.96	(0.97)	.000[1]
t. time for studying	3.11	(0.94)	2.90	(1.08)	.029[3]
u. nothing else to do	3.48	(1.01)	3.20	(1.10)	.005[2]
v. wanting to keep busy	3.68	(0.99)	3.30	(1.12)	.000[1]
w. I want to win	3.43	(1.15)	3.70	(1.12)	.011[3]

[1] significant at .001, [2] significant at .01, [3]significant at .05

With the exception of Item 15(w)- -I want to win, all the means for the females was higher than the means for males, though the mean was higher on this item for both genders than on many of the other items where significance was found. The opportunity to learn something new, have a new experience, and be a part of something were rated high by both males and females in the study. There were no reported significant

differences between females and males for the other items relating to the reasons the student chose to participate in the available organized activities.

Differences in Reasons for Participation by Grade Level

There were only two of the items on question 15 of the SPARE Time questionnaire where significant difference was reported based the grade level of the student. These were Item number 15 (b)- -parental encouragement, and also Item number 15 (s)- -emphasis on performing well. The reported difference in these items were opposite of one another. Parental encouragement was reported to be more important to students in the sixth and seventh grades than students in the eighth grade. Contrary to this the emphasis on performing well was more important to students in the seventh and eighth grade than to students in the sixth grade.

Differences in Reasons for Participation by Ethnicity

In Table G, Differences in Reason for Participation by Ethnicity, differences in the factors for participation are reviewed. The table includes; the item identifier, a brief description of the item, the mean, standard deviation in parenthesis, ethnicity as either Caucasian or Non-Caucasian, the F, and the level of significance in responses to these items. The significance is marked to indicate the significance attained to the responses in the item.

Table G Differences in Reason for Participation by Ethnicity

SPARE Time Question 15 Factors related to participation	Mean Caucasian	(SD)	Mean Non-Caucasian	(SD)	Sig. Level Sig.
d. time of practices	3.06	(0.99)	3.51	(1.04)	.001[1]
e. learn something new	3.57	(0.95)	3.88	(1.03)	.014[3]
i. amount of practice	3.17	(0.92)	3.47	(0.89)	.011[3]
j. conflicts with other activity	2.82	(1.03)	3.10	(1.06)	.035[3]
k. new experience	3.72	(0.97)	4.01	(0.93)	.018[3]
t. time for studying	2.95	(0.98)	3.35	(1.04)	.002[2]

[1] significant at .001, [2] significant at .01, [3] significant at .05

In each of the factors where a significant difference was reported the mean was

higher for the non-Caucasian students. Among the items where significance was indicated the non-Caucasian students rated, a new experience, and learning something new as reasons for choosing to be involved in the activities they participate in.

Research Questions 2 and 3, Barriers and Reasons for Non-participation

The second and third research questions are; Why Don't Some Students Participate in any Activities? What are the Barriers for Students Participating in Organized Extracurricular Activities Sponsored by the School or Community Organizations? These two research questions are related and in part answered by the students' comments from questions 7, 8, and 9 on the SPARE Time questionnaire.

Questions 7, 8, and 9 on the SPARE Time questionnaire were directed toward the students who did not respond to being involved in any of the organized activities listed in question 5 of the questionnaire. There were only 26 students who did not indicate involvement in any of the organized activities, but over 100 students provided responses to at least one of the questions 7, 8, and 9. Ten of the students, who were not involved in any of the activities, indicated that they were not interested in any of the organized activities. The following are the questions on the questionnaire and these students' responses and then a review of the rest of the responses, which will be summarized into general categories.

SPARE Time questionnaire, Question 7; *What could your parents, teachers, school, or you have done for you to participate in some of these organized activities?*

Responses of students who indicated they were not interested in participating in activities were: nothing, help with money, talk about them and more information, they just aren't interesting to me, I have better things to do, and get better activities.

Responses of students who indicated they were interested in the organized activities but did not participate were as follows: they could have picked me for it, don't feel like participating since I have to work at home, I could have made more time for it, I could not afford them, signed up for different activities, call and talk to the person running the activities, my parents could tell me to join, they couldn't have done anything because I just didn't feel like it, tell me how it's like so I can decide if I should join or not, ask about the activity, and they could encourage me to try out.

SPARE Time questionnaire, Question 8; *What is the main reason that you have not participated in any organized activities*?

Responses of students who indicated they were not interested in participating in activities were: I don't want to and I don't like them, didn't want to, I am not interested and too busy, I'm not interested in them, want to be with my brother at night, I came in the middle of the year, because I wouldn't be able to come to meetings and other things, because I don't want to take time out of my time. I just don't want to, because it's for preps.

Responses of students who indicated they were interested in the organized activities offered but did not participate were: none really interest me or you have to be in 7th (grade) to do them, have home duties, didn't have time for it, I could not afford them, we haven't had the time, I didn't feel like participating in any activities this year, I had to worry more about homework than sports or activities, because I've been having trouble doing my homework, never had the time with homework to do both, because I didn't know if it was fun enough for me just to enjoy the activity, not a lot of money and no time, confused about it, and because I really did not want to at that time.

SPARE Time questionnaire, Question 9; *If you have participated in activities in the past, why are you not now participating in activities?*

Responses of students who indicated they were not interested in participating in activities were: because I'm not a prep, it was boring in scouts (1st grade), don't want to, I got bored with them, I haven't because I don't want to, because I didn't want to, because I don't want to be, I never did.

Responses of students who indicated they were interested in the organized activities but did not participate offered: because I disliked them, because at home I want to be with my friends, went up in price, we haven't had the time, because I don't like them as much as I did, I had too much homework, because I have to go home and help my mom, because I don't have time, do not want to, and I never did.

Responses of the rest of the students who responded to these questions were generally similar and divided into the following themes; "nothing could be done to get them involved in activities", "parents could have helped me get into activities" or "someone could have encouraged me" or "motivated me to sign up" or "I could have signed up", "the cost of participating in activities", "having transportation to and from activities or performances", "having information sent out" or "provided more information about the activities and the sign up for activities", "staying out of trouble" or "getting better grades", "having activities available for all grades", "making the activities more interesting, fun ,or not boring", "not having practice every night", not participating because of "being new to the school or community", and "only having an interest in one activity like karate, football, or BMX biking".

Factors that Influence Participation or Non-participation

On Question 15 of the SPARE Time questionnaire, the students were asked to rank each item associated to the selection of involvement in activities from 1 to 5 on a Likert scale. The rankings were: "Major reason why I chose not to participate," "Part of the reason why I chose not to participate," "Did not influence my choice to participate," "Part of the reason why I chose to participate," and "Major reason why I chose to participate". Table H, Influencing Factors to Participation in Extracurricular Activities, compares the responses of students who are not involved in any organized activities, students who are involved in 1-3 activities, 4-6 activities, and 7 or more activities. The table includes; the item identifier, a brief description of the item, the mean, standard deviation in parenthesis, separated by the number of activities the student indicated being involved in, the F, and the level of significance in responses to these items. The significance level is marked to indicate at the level of significance the item attained.

Table H Influencing Factors to Participation in Extracurricular Activities

SPARE Time Question 15	Mean (SD)	Mean(SD)	Mean(SD)	Mean(SD)		Sig. Level
Factors related to participation	0	1 to 3	4 to 6	7 +	F	Sig.
a. cost of registration for activity	2.5 (1.21)	2.8(0.97)	2.94(0.72)	3.04(0.67)	3.025	.011[3]
b. parental encouragement	2.81(1.17)	3.39(1.06)	3.75(0.82)	3.93(0.86)	11.942	.029[3]
c. interest in activity	2.72(1.43)	4.28(1.18)	4.75(0.61)	4.78(0.81)	32.628	.000[1]
d. time of practices	2.27(1.15)	3.04(1.00)	3.28(0.97)	3.51(0.88)	11.133	.000[1]
e. learn something new	2.96(1.18)	3.51(1.02)	3.77(0.90)	3.93(0.79)	8.060	.000[1]
f. coaches/activity advisors	2.58(0.95)	3.09(0.99)	3.44(0.87)	3.53(1.07)	9.636	.000[1]
g. discuss being in activity with friends, parents, or others	2.46(1.24)	3.24(1.04)	3.5(0.93)	3.62(0.85)	10.078	.000[1]
h. transportation to/from activity	2.42(1.10)	2.88(1.08)	3.24(.085)	3.27(0.91)	8.129	.000[1]
i. amount of practice	2.68(1.18)	3.12(1.01)	3.35(0.74)	3.59(0.74)	7.758	.000[1]
j. conflicts with other activities	2.36(0.99)	2.96(1.01)	2.86(1.05)	2.75(1.08)	2.926	.033[3]
k. new experience	3.28(1.40)	3.70(0.97)	3.83(0.92)	4.02(0.87)	3.915	.009[2]
l. friends involved in activity	3.16(1.40)	4.03(0.94)	4.24(0.70)	4.31(0.74)	11.957	.000[1]
m. activity signup time/location	2.68(1.07)	2.99(0.89)	3.14(0.68)	3.20(0.79)	3.278	.021[3]
n. cost of equipment	2.20(1.08)	2.81(0.94)	2.98(0.82)	3.00(0.77)	6.085	.000[1]
o. consistency of a schedule	2.65(1.15)	3.05(0.97)	3.22(0.71)	3.40(0.83)	5.086	.002[2]
p. the challenge	3.28(1.24)	3.75(1.01)	4.02(0.93)	4.31(0.74)	9.128	.000[1]
q. be a part of something	3.32(1.22)	3.69(1.00)	3.92(0.88)	4.31(0.77)	9.118	.000[1]

r. teacher encouragement	2.76(1.05)	3.04(0.95)	3.23(0.84)	3.31(0.98)	3.336	.019[3]
s. performing well, or winning	3.16(1.21)	3.61(1.07)	3.99(0.88)	4.11(0.90)	9.543	.000[1]
t. time for studying	2.21(0.98)	3.02(1.08)	3.06(0.90)	3.15(0.89)	5.626	.001[1]
u. wanting to keep busy	3.04(1.34)	3.44(1.10)	3.57(0.89)	3.78(1.17)	3.294	.020[3]
v. I want to win	3.08(1.32)	3.49(1.14)	3.65(1.09)	3.84(1.15)	3.124	.024[3]

[1] significant at .001, [2] significant at .01, [3]significant at .05

There was only one item on the list where there was no significance reported, and that was item number 15(u) -- nothing else to do. There was no significance found between students who were not participating in any activities, and students involved in one to three activities for the following items. Item number 15(a) -- cost of registration for activity, Item number 15(r) -- teacher encouragement, and Item number 15(w) -- I want to win. On these items there was significance found between students involved in 7 or more activities and those in 0 or 1 –3 activities. Significance was found on every item between students who are not involved in activities, and those involved in 4-6, or 7 or more activities.

The primary reasons students indicated for not participating in, or the barriers to participating in organized activities are: 15(n) -- the cost of equipment, 15(t) -- time for studying, 15(d) -- time of practices, 15(j) -- conflicts with other activities, 15(h) -- transportation to and from activity, 15(g) -- having time to discuss participation in the activity with family, friends, or others, 15(a) -- the cost of registration for an activity, and 15(f) -- the coaches and/or activity advisors.

The comments students provided to questions 7, 8, and 9, along with the information from the items in question 15 on the SPARE Time questionnaire, provide a good amount of insight to the reasons why middle school students in the sample are not involved in extracurricular activities.

Research Question 4, Reasons for Participation

The fourth research question was; What are the Reasons Middle School Students Participate in Extracurricular Activities?

The information in Table F, Influencing Factors to Participation in Extracurricular Activities, can also address this research question. The item on the SPARE Time questionnaire that received the highest mean from all students who are participating in some organized activity was item 15(c) -- interest in the activity.

The following items were included in the next top five reasons for participating in organized activities; 15(l) -- friends involved in the activity, 15(p) -- the challenge, 15(k) -- new experience, 15(q) -- chance to be a part of something, 15(s) -- emphasis on performing well, or winning. Parental encouragement and wanting to learn something new were the next reasons given by students who have been involved in 4 or more activities during the previous year.

For all students participating in organized extracurricular activities, the mean or the responses to nearly all of the items on Question 15 of the SPARE Time was above three, meaning these items were part of the reason the student chose to participate in the offered activities. The items with a mean below three were; Item number 15. (a) - cost of registration for activity, Item number 15. (n) - cost of equipment, Item number 15. (h) - transportation to and from activity, and Item number 15. (i) - conflicts with other activities. When considering the deviation from the mean, most of the items are an important part of the process of deciding to participate in activities for some of the students in the sample.

Research Question 5, Connection to School or Loss of Connection with Family

The fifth research question was; Was There an Increased Sense of Connection to the School and Peers, or was There a Loss of Connection with Family and Time for Family Activities Because of Busy Schedules?

Several of the items in question 16 of the SPARE Time questionnaire relate to the issue of the student feeling connected with the school and friends. The students were asked to rank statements on a Likert scale from 1 to 5 if they: "Strongly disagree," "Disagree," "Not sure," "Agree," and "Strongly agree".

Table I, Sense of Connection by Level of Participation, shows the item number, statement summary, mean, standard deviation in parenthesis, separated by the number of activities the student indicated being involved in, the F, and the significance of the differences between groups.

Table I Sense of Connection by Level of Participation

SPARE Time Question 16 Statement Summary	Mean (SD) 0	Mean(SD) 1 to 3	Mean(SD) 4 to 6	Mean(SD) 7 +	F	Sig. Level Sig.
a. Believe coaches/advisors can be trusted.	3.21(1.14)	3.73(1.01)	3.99(0.7)	3.81(0.75)	5.854	.001[1]
b. Being in activities makes me feel a part of school.	3.29(1.37)	3.32(1.14)	3.85(0.92)	3.91(1.00)	9.679	.001[1]
d. In the past year I believe that I am a better student.	3.19(1.33)	3.64(1.23)	3.88(0.83)	3.78(1.03)	4.438	0.01[2]
e. I like school and do my best in school.	3.08(1.52)	3.44(1.18)	3.9(0.93)	3.95(1.06)	8.741	.000[1]
f. In the past year I have new friends.	3.81(1.20)	4.22(0.96)	4.46(0.72)	4.56(0.81)	6.355	.000[1]
g. I am a leader in my school.	2.27(1.31)	2.81(1.14)	3.27(1.13)	3.62(1.10)	13.907	.000[1]
h. The coaches/advisors care about me.	2.88(1.21)	3.44(0.98)	3.83(0.79)	3.76(1.00)	10.499	.000[1]
i. I am interested in completing high school.	4.12(1.24)	4.59(0.76)	4.83(0.53)	4.82(0.67)	9.253	.000[1]
k. I have learned to schedule my time better.	3.50(1.24)	3.44(1.01)	3.68(0.95)	3.84(0.96)	3.242	.022[3]

[1] significant at .001, [2] significant at .01, [3]significant at .05

Nearly all of these items showed a difference between students who are not involved in activities and those who are. The two items in question 16 that did not

show a significant relationship were, 16(c) -- I have not been able to socialize or do things with friends because of practices, competition, or performances. The responses of the students who are not involved in activities had the highest mean of all the groups, at 2.75, compared to an average of about 2.5 for students involved in organized activities. The other item was 16(j) -- I am more popular. The mean of the responses on this item were lower for the students who were not involved in any organized activities, than for students who were.

There was no significance reported to the items in Question 17 of the SPARE Time questionnaire, in the responses between the students who were or were not involved in activities. The items in this section asked about being away from their family, having their family change plans, or feeling overwhelmed or not having enough time for themselves because of involvement in activities.

Research Question 6, Detrimental Effects

Research question number six was; What are Some of the Detrimental Effects that They Recognize Occurring From Involvement in Extracurricular Activities?

There were several items on the questionnaire that ask about the students possible stress response from being involved in extracurricular activities. There was no significance reported in the responses from students who were or were not involved in activities except for two of the items. The students were asked to rank on a Likert scale from one to five based on the following scale; 1= Never, 2= Once in a While, 3= Sometimes, 4= Often, 5= Always. The two items where significance existed were; As a result of my schedule of extracurricular activities: 17. (a) - I have forgotten to do or hand in homework, and 17. (b) - I have missed practice or meetings because of two activities

scheduled at the same time.

Table J Difference in Detrimental Effects by Level of Participation

SPARE Time Question 17	Mean (SD)	Mean(SD)	Mean(SD)	Mean(SD)		Sig. Level
Statement Summary	0	1 to 3	4 to 6	7 +	F	Sig.
a. I have forgotten homework	2.58(1.10)	2.33(1.05)	1.99(0.94)	2.07(.094)	5.038	.002[2]
b. I have missed practice/meetings	1.56(0.96)	1.81(1.04)	2.40(1.06)	2.58(1.03)	16.446	.000[1]

[1] significant at .001, [2] significant at .01

The responses to the first item by the students who were not involved in activities had a higher mean for forgetting homework than the students who were involved in organized activities. The more activities that a student was involved in the higher the mean response for the item related to the student missing practice or meetings because of other activities.

Research Question 7, Benefits to Participation in Activities

The seventh and final research question was; What do They Perceive as Benefits of Participating in Extracurricular Activities?

The final item on the SPARE Time questionnaire asked the students to provide a narrative response to the question: *What do you feel is the biggest benefit you gain from being in extracurricular activities?* Over 400 students provided a response to this question, and the researcher categorized the responses into ten different categories.

The most frequent responses were;

- making new friends and socializing,
- having fun,
- learning something new,
- getting in shape and fitness,
- improved sense of self worth.

Many of the responses contained multiple benefits that the student perceived from participation in organized activities and were included in several different categories. A small number of the students gave answers similar to; “nothing”, “no clue”, or “don’t know”, but the majority provided several ways that they felt they benefited from participation in extracurricular activities.

The area with the most frequent type of response was classified as the social benefit. Nearly 200 students responses were meet new people, friends, and being in the activity with friends. A large number of these responses refer to “meeting new people”, and “making new friends” as a result of participation in activities. Many students included making new friends with one of the following two categories of responses.

The next most frequent answers were divided into two categories, the first being fun, and the second being learning something. Over one hundred students included; “having fun”, “enjoying what they are doing”, and “having a good time”, as a primary benefit that they receive from participation in activities. Many of the students also combined their responses of having fun and learning something. Nearly one hundred students indicated; “learn something new”, “learn a new sport or activity”, and “learning something about themselves” as the benefit they received from participation in activities.

The next two areas that students stated were the main benefits they gained from extracurricular activities are; fitness, and feeling good about themselves. Over sixty students wrote about “staying in shape”, “losing weight”, “physical fitness”, and “being more athletic” as the benefit they received from the activities they were involved in. Nearly half of the responses in this category were from the eighth grade students indicating that this was more of an issue for the older students than younger ones.

Related to the students' responses about physical fitness were responses about mental fitness, an increase in self-confidence, a better understanding of their strengths and weaknesses, and feeling important. There were over fifty responses of this nature. Also in this category there were several comments about the students developing autonomy and independence, with activities giving them the opportunity to be away from their parents, or siblings.

The remaining comments could be described by the following categories,

- being a part of something and having something to do,
- stay out of a trouble including staying away from alcohol and drugs,
- learning how to be a member of a team and teamwork,
- get in the yearbook more often and being more popular,
- learning about what they may want to do in the future.

Chapter V

Summary

The purpose of this study was to learn about how middle school students perceive their participation in extracurricular activities. In particular why students participate in the activities they do, and the benefits or problems they experience from their involvement in organized activities offered by the school and community. In addition the study looked for differences in participation based on gender, ethnicity, and the grade level of the student. Finally the study examined the differences that exist between students who are and are not involved in organized extracurricular activities.

The study showed not only that a high percentage of middle school students are involved in extracurricular activities, but that a high percentage of minority students are involved in many of the activities offered. There is little difference in the rate of participation between boys and girls, and the differences in participation by grade level are primarily the result of fewer activities being offered for sixth grade students.

Though the number of students who are not involved in organized activities was limited, these and other students provided some comments about why they were uninvolved in or don't participate in more extracurricular activities. Several of the reasons students gave included; the cost of activities, wanting more information about the activities before doing them, the need for someone to encourage them to sign up and participate, the need for transportation to or from the activities offered, the amount of practice required was an issue for some of the students, and several students wrote about not being interested in the activities offered. Not having enough time for the activities because of responsibilities at home was also cited.

The findings of the study show that most middle school students participate in the activities that they do because of an interest in the activity, and the involvement of friends in the activity. Students in the study indicated the other main reasons for their involvement were; the challenge of the activity, the chance to have a new experience, the prospect of being a part of something, and an emphasis on performing well or winning. Parental encouragement and wanting to learn something new were also big reasons for these students selecting and participating in the activities they were involved in.

The results of the study also reflect the results of other studies in that students who are involved in extracurricular activities have a higher desire to complete high school, want to do their best in school, have a greater sense of connection with the school, and an increased sense of an ability to be a leader in school and the community. There was little indication from the students' responses that participation led to a loss of connection with family. Some of the students indicated that the time spent on extracurricular activities afforded them the opportunity to be away from their family. This along with some of the responses indicated the growing independence of young people in this age group.

There was only one significant detrimental effect reported from participation in organized activities, and that was missing an activity because more than one was scheduled at the same time. Another detrimental effect that some of the students pointed out in their comments on the questionnaire about why they were not involved in some of the activities was not having enough time to spend with friends.

The students' responses regarding the benefit they gain from participation in extracurricular activities recognize the benefits described in the literature. These include

liking school and doing their best in school, doing better academically, having more and new friends, developing leadership ability, an increased connection with adults in the school and community and a sense there are adults other than the child's parents who care about them, improved self-concept, reduced likelihood of using alcohol or drugs, an enhanced interest in completing school, and an increase in popularity.

In addition there were three benefits that the students' recognized from participation in extracurricular activities that are not necessarily addressed in the literature. The first being that they have fun being in the activities they are involved in and they want the activities to be fun and not boring. The next benefit was the opportunity to learn something new. These students identified some of the ways they have learned about themselves and new skills like; speaking in front of others, confidence, courage, simply getting better at something, learning beyond what is taught in the classroom, and along with this many students recognized the importance of teamwork and how to work with others. The last benefit a large number of students' acknowledged was staying in shape, weight loss, and fitness. As students progressed into the higher grades, they seemed to become more aware of this benefit.

Though data was not obtained on family income, parental marital status, or parental educational level it is believed with the size of the sample being over 55% of the student population, that the sample is fairly representative of the whole student population. There may be variance in the results if the study were replicated in a similar size school and community.

Limitations

The results of the SPARE Time questionnaire appear to have measured and

gathered the information that was sought, however there are no measures of reliability or validity for the questionnaire. The researcher created the instrument, with consultation from Dr. Orv Nelson, and the questionnaire had not previously been tested or reviewed.

Though the sample for the study was quite large, another limitation of the study was that the sample might be biased because parents who attended the parent/teacher conferences completed the majority of the permission to participate forms. Without obtaining more information on the questionnaire, such as family income, parental education, and parental marital status, it is uncertain that the demographics of the sample represent the entire student population.

Another limitation of the study was the inadvertent omission of football on the list of organized activities. Football is a sport that is very popular and that a large number of young people play in the community, from flag football to tackle football at the high school, with the local high school football team winning several state championships. A number of students wrote football in under other on the list of activities, but the number could likely have been higher had football been included on the list. Including football in the list of activities may have reduced the number of students who were involved in no activities, or were in the different categories for the number of activities that a student was involved in.

The questionnaire was only distributed to students at one school in a community of about 15,000 people in the upper Midwest. The information from this study therefore may not be generalizable to other schools and communities.

Recommendations

The recommendations for future study in this area are the replication of this study, but including football in the list of organized activities on the SPARE Time questionnaire and see if there are any differences as a result. Possibly related to this would also be the inclusion of physical fitness as a reason for participation in activities and see if there is a difference based on the grade level or age of the students, as seemed to be indicated by the written comments of students regarding the benefit they gained from participation.

Another possible study could be a comparison of student involvement in organized extracurricular activities and involvement in individual or family activities. Is there a relationship between the type of individual or family activities a student is involved in and the organized activities they may be involved in. Also are there any differences in the rate of participation in individual and family activities based on gender, age, grade level, or ethnicity.

Related to this could be a study that looks at student grades and look to see if there is a connection between participation in organized extracurricular activities or individual and family activities and the students' grades. In addition, a study that looks at grades and extracurricular activities could look at the relationship of the number and type of activities a student is involved in and their grades. Is there a positive or negative relationship between involvement in extracurricular activities and the grades that students receive? Is there a difference in the type of activities, sports, music, or school and community organizations a student is participating in and the grades they receive?

Though this study did look at differences related to gender, ethnicity, and grade level, it did not obtain family information related to socio-economic status (SES). The

issue of cost of activities, and the cost of equipment for activities, along with the availability of transportation to and from practices or performances was an issue for some students. It could be beneficial to learn if involvement or lack of involvement in extracurricular activities is related to SES and parental marital status. It may be possible to further identify and isolate some of the barriers to participation in extracurricular by obtaining information regarding the parental marital status, parental educational level, and family income of a student. In addition to this a comparison study could be done in a school or community where there is not a fee for the activities, or fees are based on income level.

Students in this study identified parental encouragement as being a strong influencing factor for participation in extracurricular activities. A study that looks at how parents are involved in some of the activities the child participates in. Do the parents attend the students' practices or performances and have they been an advisor or coach for the child in the past. Does the child have extended family in the community or area that may provide transportation to and from practices and/or attend activity performances? Is there a difference in the number of activities or type of activities a student is involved in based on the amount of time or manner a parent is involved with the child?

This study found little significance in the rate of participation in extracurricular activities by students identified as ethnic minorities as compared to non-minority students. In many of the activities, the minority students' rate of participation was greater than would have been expected. One of these organized activities is the Multicultural Club at the Menomonie Middle School where the majority of the students are minorities. Only about a fifth of the minority students in the sample are involved in the Multicultural

Club. A future study could look at minority students' involvement in this activity and why more of the minority students are not a part of the Multicultural Club. One of the reasons may be the stigma of only being involved with other minority students when they are trying to blend in with the majority culture. Or are transportation to and from meetings and SES issues that create barriers to involvement?

Another possible study would be to carry out a study with the SPARE Time questionnaire at a school in another community, either a smaller or larger school and do a comparison with the results from this study. The questionnaire may need to be modified to list the activities that are offered within the school and community where the study was being conducted. A comparison of the percentage of students involved in activities between a smaller or larger school could be done, and also if there differences in the reasons for, or barriers to participation in extracurricular activities. Similarities could also be looked for in the perceived benefits the students receive from their involvement in extracurricular activities.

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Appendix A

Letter to School Principal Where Study was Conducted

Menomonie Middle School
Dr. Steve Kolden, Principal
920 21st Street South
Menomonie, WI 54751

February 22, 2002

Dear Dr. Kolden,

I am a graduate student in the School Guidance and Counseling program at the University of Wisconsin-Stout working on my Master's Degree. I must complete a research project as a requirement for my degree. I want to know how Middle School students perceive their participation in extracurricular activity programs, and look at the reasons they choose to participate or not participate in organized extracurricular activity programs. The schools provide many opportunities for participation in organized activities, and there are many organized activities available in the community, yet we know a large number of students are not participating in these programs. In addition there are many opportunities for recreation, arts, and activities for individuals and families that young people can be a part of.

Research on extracurricular activities has shown there are many benefits to students participating in these activities including, academic, social, improved self-concept and popularity, increased sense of belonging, and reduced risk taking behavior and delinquency.

Through this study, I want to learn the reasons young people choose to participate in the activities that are available and what they view as barriers to participation. I also hope to learn about activities that they may be interested in, but are not available as organized activities. With this information, the school and community can structure activities to better meet the needs of the students and involve more students in activities that can help them be a success and achieve to the best of their ability.

I would appreciate your assistance this study being conducted at the Menomonie Middle School and look forward to working with you and making this study successful for the students, school, and community.

Thank you,

Randall Richter

Hector Cruz,
Research Advisor

Appendix B

Letter of Consent to Participate

Letter of Consent to Participate

This letter is to inform you of a research project being done at your child's school. This research examines student's feelings, and perceptions about participation in extracurricular activities. The information for this project will be obtained through students completing a questionnaire. The questionnaire will ask about the students' involvement in organized extracurricular activities and also what other activities they may be involved in, and how they feel about being involved in these activities. Participation in this study is voluntary, but the more information that is obtained will make the study and information received more beneficial to the students, school, and community. Please sign below and return to your child's TAP teacher by March 25.

The student's identity will be strictly confidential with no information being obtained that will identify the person completing the questionnaire. There should be no risks to the students completing the questionnaire. The information obtained from the study will be shared with the school and community and available upon request at the completion of the study.

Students completing the survey <u>should NOT</u> put their names on the questionnaire.

Questions or concerns about the research study should be addressed to the researcher, Randy Richter at 235-4080, or the research advisor Hector Cruz at 232-2556. Questions about the rights of research subjects can be addressed to Sue Foxwell, Human Protections Administrator, UW-Stout Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research, 11 Harvey Hall, Menomonie, WI 54751, phone (715) 232-1126.

Students will be completing the questionnaire on March 25 or 26 during their TAP time. Please complete and sign the following request for your child to participate in the study, and have them return to their TAP teacher before March 25.

I have read the above information about the study on student participation in extracurricular activities. I understand that there are no risks to my child participating in this study and also that the information obtained from the study will benefit the students, school, and community gain an understanding of the extracurricular activities provided. Please sign and return to your child's TAP teacher by March 25.

☐ Yes, I agree to allow my child to participate in this study.

☐ No, I would request that my child not participate in this study.

Student's name (please print) _____

Student's Grade_____ Student's TAP Teacher_____

Parent/Guardian Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix C

SPARE Time Questionnaire

Extracurricular Activity Survey

As part of a research project on extracurricular activities, your responses to the following questions are needed. Please answer each question about the activities you are involved in, the reasons you do or do not participate in activities and the items about the benefits or problems that you have experienced from being a part of the activities you participate in. Your completion of the survey assumes your consent to participate in this study.

DO NOT WRITE YOUR NAME ON SURVEY.

1. I am a: _____ Girl _____ Boy

2. I am in the: _____ 6th Grade _____ 7th Grade _____ 8th Grade

3. My age is: _____ 11 _____ 12 _____ 13 _____ 14 _____ 15

4. I am: _____ Asian/Hmong American _____ African American _____ Hispanic American
_____ Native American _____ White/Caucasian _____ Other _____

5. I have been involved in the following activities during the past year.

_____Band	_____FFA	_____Soccer	_____Sharing our Resources
_____Choir	_____Year Book	_____Swimming	_____School Play/drama
_____Show Choir	_____Student Council	_____Tennis	_____Scouts (Boy or Girl Scouts
_____Dance	_____Multicultural Club	_____Track	or similar group)
_____Jazz Band	_____Baseball/softball	_____Volleyball	_____Religious instruction
_____Orchestra	_____Basketball	_____Wrestling	_____Other, please specify
_____Forensics	_____Cross Country	_____KMO	
_____MathCounts	_____Gymnastics	_____4-H	_____
_____FCCLA	_____Hockey	_____Science Olympiad	

If you checked **any** of the above activities, go to **question #10**.

6. If you were **not involved** in activities listed, were you interested in any of these activities? _____ Yes _____ No

7. What could your parents, teachers, school, or you have done for you to participate in some of these organized activities?

_____

_____

8. What is the main reason that you have not participated in any organized activities?_____

_____

9. If you have participated in activities in the past, why are you not now participating in activities?_____

_____ **Please answer the rest of the questions.**

10. How many activities have you been involved in at one time? _____ 1-3 _____ 4-6 _____ 7 or more.

11. Compared to a year ago, are you now involved in: ____ more activities ____ the same number ____ fewer activities.

12. Are you participating in any of the following individual or family activities?

_____tennis	_____hiking	_____bowling	_____snowmobiling/ATV
_____hunting	_____biking	_____reading	_____fitness/weightlifting
_____fishing	_____go-carting	_____volunteering	_____Skateboard/skating
_____skiing	_____golf	_____computers	_____other_____
_____movies	_____art/crafts	_____table tennis	_____

13. How many hours per week on average do you spend participating in organized activities? _____ hours

14. How many hours per week on average do you spend participating in individual or family activities? _____ hours

15. The factor that influenced my decision to participate or not participate in activities. **Mark all using the following scale.**

Major reason why I chose NOT to participate = 1
Part of the reason why I chose NOT to participate = 2
Did not influence my choice to participate = 3
Part of the reason why I chose to participate = 4
Major reason why I chose to participate = 5

a. cost of registration for activity	1	2	3	4	5
b. parental encouragement	1	2	3	4	5
c. interest in activity	1	2	3	4	5
d. time of practices	1	2	3	4	5
e. opportunity to learn something new	1	2	3	4	5
f. coaches/activity advisors	1	2	3	4	5
g. amount of time prior to signup to discuss being in activity with friends, parents, or others	1	2	3	4	5
h. transportation to and from activity	1	2	3	4	5

Over, continue on back

i. amount of practice	1	2	3	4	5
j. conflicts with other activities	1	2	3	4	5
k. new experience	1	2	3	4	5
l. friends involved in activity	1	2	3	4	5
m. activity signup time/ location	1	2	3	4	5
n. cost of equipment	1	2	3	4	5
o. consistency of a schedule	1	2	3	4	5
p. the challenge	1	2	3	4	5
q. chance to be a part of something	1	2	3	4	5
r. teacher encouragement	1	2	3	4	5
s. emphasis on performing well, or winning	1	2	3	4	5
t. time for studying	1	2	3	4	5
u. nothing else to do	1	2	3	4	5
v. wanting to keep busy	1	2	3	4	5
w. I want to win	1	2	3	4	5
x. Other, please specify _____	1	2	3	4	5

16. Circle the following number that best describes your response to the statements.
Strongly disagree = 1 Disagree= 2 Not sure = 3 Agree = 4 Strongly agree = 5

a. I believe that coaches/activity advisors are someone I can trust and rely on.	1	2	3	4	5
b. Being included in school activities has helped me feel more a part of the school and community.	1	2	3	4	5
c. I have not been able to socialize or do things with friends because of practices, competition, or performances.	1	2	3	4	5

During the past year . . .

d. I believe that I am a better student.	1	2	3	4	5
e. I like school and do my best in school.	1	2	3	4	5
f. I have new friends.	1	2	3	4	5
g. I am a leader in my school.	1	2	3	4	5
h. The leaders (coaches, advisors) care about me.	1	2	3	4	5
i. I am interested in completing high school.	1	2	3	4	5
j. I am more popular.	1	2	3	4	5
k. I have learned how to schedule my time better.	1	2	3	4	5

17. As a result of my schedule of extracurricular activities; (use the following to answer the statements).
Never = 1 Once in a while = 2 Sometimes = 3 Often = 4 Always = 5

a. I have forgotten to do or hand in homework.	1	2	3	4	5
b. I have missed a practice or meeting because of two activities scheduled at the same time.	1	2	3	4	5
c. There has been pressure on me from friends to use alcohol or drugs.	1	2	3	4	5
d. I have suffered from headaches, or stomach aches from stress.	1	2	3	4	5
e. I have had to travel without my family out-of-state or stay overnight alone.	1	2	3	4	5
f. I have felt overwhelmed, frustrated, or upset by my schedule and that I did not have enough time for myself.	1	2	3	4	5
g. My family has changed plans for vacations or other family events as a result of my extracurricular activity schedule.	1	2	3	4	5
h. I have missed school, been tired, or fallen asleep in school as a result of practices, rehearsals, performances or matches.	1	2	3	4	5
i. I have been in trouble at school or with the police during the past year.	1	2	3	4	5

18. What do you feel is the biggest benefit you gain from being in extracurricular activities?_____

_____

_____