

STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOL SPONSORED EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AT THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LEVEL

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ABSTRACT

Getting students involved in their day to day educational processes is often challenging and, in some schools, systems appear almost unrealistic. Students in school do not often see the value of or make the connection with the importance of education. Students see movie stars such as Jennifer Lawrence drop out of school at fourteen, singers, rappers and others in the entertainment industry who are successful and make millions without an education. The potential of a YouTube posting, turning someone into a star looms in their imaginations and they think it could happen to them. Students today are even more enticed by technology and the possibilities. In communities throughout the United States, school does not offer a sense of belonging, of personal expression or of freedom to experiment with acceptance. Competing with so much external stimuli, schools face an uphill battle with improving student engagement. In some communities throughout the United States, students feel that the schools do not provide for them a sense of belonging, the opportunity for personal expression or the freedom to experiment with self-proclaimed ideas or preparation for future goals. Getting students engaged early in their educational careers could possibly make all the difference as they navigate middle and high school. Appleton, 2009, noted that student engagement involves both observable and internal engagement. Observable engagement involves things one sees in the academic setting in the classroom such as participating in the class, identified as academic functioning, and behavioral engagement such as attendance and behavior. Internal engagement encompasses both the cognitive and the affective. The cognitive engagement includes the relevance of school work and personal goals; the affective engagement identifies the students' sense of belonging and school connectedness. Positive student engagement could change the trajectory of a student's outlook on school, on education and on life.

Keyword: *Behaviour engagement, Self-proclaimed Ideas, Student engagement*

1. INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem in today's society with non-educational leaders' and government's involvement in the school system, the main focus has been on accountability for teaching students what they need to know in order to be successful in today's world. Unfortunately, for many bureaucrats and policymakers with no educational background, the only measure for accountability has been to increase high stakes testing in the school environment. With high stakes testing comes many changes within the school walls, most importantly stifling of teacher's autonomy and creativity. For many students and teachers, learning has become unfulfilling; the goal post is the major PARCC- Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers assessment that is given annually. To make sure

teachers and students are on pace with meeting the end of the year goal, there are more assessments given such as progress monitoring and quarterly benchmark assessments. With the added pressure of teachers' jobs being on the line, many of our students develop high levels of anxiety and worries that should not be shouldered at such a young age. A study by the Council of the Great City Schools, which represents urban education, found in a 2015 study that the average student between pre-kindergarten to twelfth grade takes an average of 112 mandated standardized tests. Students are not enjoying their educational processes and are not feeling motivated or fulfilled. Sarason (1996) noted that students, both in the urban and the suburban communities, although bright, have been turned off by school. Outside the school walls students

are observed being engaged, active and motivated but not so inside

This has led them to become increasingly more and more disengaged with the academic school setting. Students are not feeling motivated or fulfilled and have become increasingly more and more disengaged with the academic school setting. To put it simply, school is not fun or relevant to them anymore. Students today do not appreciate the adult pressures they face on a daily basis, having no reprieve of school related pleasures such as hands on projects and activities. School systems begin at an early age to instill “Stepford” like qualities beginning in kindergarten, where students are no longer having naps or enjoying the pleasures of exploration and creativity while they learn. The school day schedule is paced out to the minute, which does not allow for much deviation in curriculum. Because more and more students being turned off by school, they are not doing their best academically and are exerting only the minimal amount of effort. Students feel teachers do not understand them or support them, which is understandable due to the duties that are mandated by the school systems.

2. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to determine whether or not a school sponsored, extracurricular after school activity is related to improvements in student engagement; the hope is that such improvements will lead to positive changes in the classroom setting, in academics and in increases in students’ sense of belonging. Positive student engagement increases the student’s sense of self as a stakeholder, not only in his or her academic journey, but also in school environment. Through school sponsored, extra-curricular after school activities, particularly those that are team efforts, students develop greater skills in the areas of persistence, perseverance and resiliency through their daily practices. STUDENT ENGAGEMENT 4 As team mates, they learn how to work together, encourage each other, practice and take constructive criticism as they cheer or display empathy toward each other. All these skills are transferrable to the classroom setting as they learn patience to apply skills while learning.

3. STUDENT ENGAGEMENT EARLY PREVENTION APPROACH

Much of the research done on student engagement has been completed at the college and high school levels. Armanbault (2009) confirmed the importance of having students engaged in a study on high school dropouts. Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lasko and Fernandez (1989), identified a sense of belonging with peers and adults, which they called “membership” as one component in their dropout prevention model. Student engagement has been identified as a positive approach to reduce dropout rates in high schools as well as to reduce juvenile delinquency rates. Although there are many factors that influence students to drop out, one realizes that students do not automatically enroll in high school and decide to quit. School dropout is a slow, ongoing process that gradually unfolds, beginning with the student’s participation in elementary school. All the research on student engagement has driven intervention towards at-risk students in high school. This study is important because it identifies student engagement as a preventative approach, beginning at the elementary school level. The ability to be able to get students engaged and involved in school at the elementary level has the potential to have lasting and, possibly, carry- over effects. Student engagement not only builds resilience and improve academics, but it also builds interpersonal relationships with a connectedness, not only with the school, but with peers and teachers as well. Today’s schools are faced with enormous challenges and obstacles, besides limited resources. School populations and classrooms are larger, more diverse, ethnically as well as in student abilities, academically, and in motivation for learning. Schools additionally face the challenge of high numbers of students with mental health problems, along with student who lack the social, emotional competencies to learn successfully without being disruptive (Greenberg, 2003). Increasing student engagement throughout elementary school is potentially one way of increasing students’ continued participation and involvement in their educational setting throughout their school careers, thus reducing negative aspects mentioned previously, along with reducing delinquency and residual effects that dropouts may face, such as underemployment.

4. MOTIVATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Many teachers have fostered a sense of community, rewarding students extrinsically for getting involved in their class work and school community. Based on B.F. Skinner's research, Pink (2009), Motivation 2.0, hypothesizes the theory of rewarding students for engagement one wants to see and providing negative reinforcement for behaviors one does not want to see. Although extrinsic rewards appear to work immediately, they do not have the lasting influence or effect one needs to assist with building on students' educational knowledge or capacities. As students matriculate through school, beginning in pre-school, many teachers hope that the extrinsic motivators will suddenly turn into intrinsic motivation to get students engaged and involved in their own educational learning and process. Unfortunately, for many students intrinsic motivation is really never learned or mastered and student engagement is never fully achieved. A study revealed that students were actually less likely to be interested or engaged in an activity they previously enjoyed when they knew they were going to be rewarded for participating, versus those students who had received no reward for participating. They continued to be fully engaged, interested and participative at the same level in the same activity. Getting students motivated is a huge part of student engagement. Many teachers and staff do not realize the power they possess with getting their students engaged in the school community. Although there are many constraints placed upon teachers regarding curriculum and instruction, both Pink (2009) and Appleton (2008), identified the idea of allowing students to be autonomous in how they completed the tasks given, not only improves motivation but engagement as well. One may dare add, allowing students to complete tasks with a sense of autonomy, in their own way also allows for resiliency, problem solving and flexibility; they are motivated to complete tasks that may present with setbacks as they use skills to problem solve towards success. For a student to be engaged, he or she has to be motivated to do so.

Benefits of Team Sports Children throughout the United States participate in team sports activities. Parents see neighbourhood team opportunities provided by schools, recreational centers, churches and organizations as a way of getting their children extra physical activity,

opportunities to meet others in the community and a chance for their children to learn sportsmanship. Being a part of a team provides opportunities for children to develop social skills, develop empathy and work as a team for a common purpose or goal. It is through practice that children develop the understanding of hard work, repetition, patience and drills which lead to a better player and ultimately a better team. But being part of a team also has health benefits, both physically and mentally. Because depression and anxiety has risen in children, participation in sports has been identified as one way of reducing symptoms has identified exercise as a catalyst in reducing anxiety. Both children and teens display signs of social anxiety by avoiding social situations. Participating in sports and being part of a team offer students a chance to practice their social skills, thereby reducing any social anxiety they may face. noted that children also get to participate in character education through sports; learning is done through rules, modeling from peers and from adults while they play. Participating in a sport provides valuable life skills that can be used on the field, but can also transfer over into everyday life such as interacting with others, following and respecting rules, cooperating with others and understanding one's own strengths and limitations (Smith, 2003). Participating and being part of a team has added benefits beyond the physical and the building of character. At the elementary school level, noted participation on team sports activities increased students' self-esteem. McGee et al. (2006), found an association between students who participate in sports and having greater attachments to peers, parents and school. Eccles and Barber (2003), identified several benefits associated to extra-curricular activities, but with team sports in particular; there were positive educational outcomes such as liking school, better grades and future college attendance. Relevance of Study Positive student engagement has been linked with many positive outcomes for students of all ages in the academic setting. Most research has been done at the middle, high school and college level; however, the assumption of this author is that the same positive effects would impact students at the elementary level. Appleton's (2009) model of student engagement comprises these four constructs: academic, behavioral, affective and cognitive; competence in all of these areas are skills that a student needs to be successful and to remain in school. Focusing on student engagement

earlier in their school careers is not only necessary but also essential. As children develop and navigate through early childhood, elementary, middle and high school, student engagement is an important aspect, a requisite, so that the student may learn the skills necessary to be successful throughout their educational journey. The link between developmental tasks and student engagement is significant because both are needed assist the child to become competent. As children transition through the three developmental stages: early childhood, middle childhood and adolescences, becoming competent and skillful in developmental, academic, socio-emotional and engagement tasks associated with the various stages, school sponsored afterschool and extra-curricular activities is an area where students can be comfortable, become more engaged and part of the school community. Through afterschool programs and school sponsored extra-curricular activities students are able, not only to be exposed to new opportunities, but also to learn and practice skills that are essential in becoming good citizens. Through afterschool programs and extra-curricular activities, students learn how to improve interpersonal skills, critical thinking skills, use their imaginations, receive critical feed-back, listen to differing viewpoints and become a tight community where they can express themselves. One study noted that students who participate in quality afterschool programs reduced the number of misconducts, and aggressive and behavioral problems among disadvantaged students. This study is important because it identifies student engagement as a preventative approach, beginning at the elementary school level. The ability to be able to get students engaged and involved in school at the elementary level has the potential to have lasting and possibly carry over effects. Getting students involved in school sponsored extra-curricular activities earlier has the ability to get students engaged and involved in a positive manner. Student engagement not only builds resilience and improve academics, but it also builds interpersonal relationships with a connectedness not only with the school but peers and teachers as well. Today's schools are faced with enormous challenges and obstacles, including having limited resources. School populations and classrooms are larger, more diverse ethnically, as well as in academic abilities and motivation for learning. Schools additionally face the challenge of high number of students with

mental health problems and student who lack the social, emotional competencies to learn successfully without being disruptive (Greenberg, 2003). Increasing student engagement throughout elementary school is potentially one way of addressing these challenges mentioned previously. Increasing student involvement in extra-curricular activities also increases continued participation and involvement in their educational setting throughout their school careers, reducing not only delinquency but also all of the other negative aspects that drops outs face, such as underemployment. As with many things, early prevention is often the best and most efficient way of dealing with a potential barrier. Getting students engaged in the school community earlier increases the likelihood that they not only attend more frequently, but also that they participate and perform at a higher level academically. Engaged students tend to be more persistent, put forth effort, challenge themselves, enjoy learning and are able to self-regulate their behavior towards their goals. Therefore, it is critical that students become involved in afterschool and school sponsored extra-curricular activities at the elementary school level in order to foster a sense of connectedness not only with the school but also with adults and peers. Participating in a school sponsored extra-curricular activity provides students the opportunity to participate in something they enjoy while they strengthen a sense of self, of belonging and enjoyment in the school community. Therefore, the current study is designed to identify the importance of getting students involved and engaged in school at an earlier age through participation in afterschool and school sponsored extra-curricular activities, which in turn will have a greater impact on students' academics, on a behavioral, cognitive and affective level. Positive student engagement through extra-curricular activities has the potential to have lasting effects observed in the classroom, school environment and beyond

5. SUMMARY

Too many students tend to reject school at an early age. Students find it difficult to relate or to identify with the teachers, curriculum or subject matter. With the additional stress of having to undergo multiple series of testing, many students do not consider coming to school an enjoyable experience. This study hopes to find other avenues to get students actively involved in their learning

by fulfilling a need that is often overlooked in the school setting. By engaging students in their interests through extra- STUDENT ENGAGEMENT 38 curricular afterschool activities, the passion and enjoyment of the activities will carry over to other aspects of their lives. By getting students engaged through a team activity, the discipline, focus and interpersonal skills involved in the activity will carry over into the classroom setting. Using Appleton's model of student engagement, students will display both internal engagement and observable engagement. They will become intrinsically motivated to pursue success in other areas of their lives such as behavior, academics, school connectedness and a sense of belong.

6. CONCLUSION

This study relied on teachers and staff observations and perceptions of students who participate in school sponsored extra-curricular basketball and its impact on student engagement. Through their responses one was able to determine that there was a positive effect, observable in the classroom setting, on students engaging in and participating in extra-curricular activities. This was also determined in the individual students as they exhibited more self-confidence in the way they participated in the classroom, interacted with peers and engaged throughout the environment. The positive perception goes a long way, not only for the students in the classroom environment, but also for the teachers as they seek to continue to make interpersonal connections as students become more reflective and able to verbalize their feelings in an appropriate manner. Student engagement builds on relationships within the school setting with teachers, peers and others providing a continued sense of belonging and accomplishment. It is suggested that research continue in the field of student engagement because it continues to reveal positive potential in all areas for both students, staff and academics.

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