

Life Without Interscholastic Activities Would Be Tragic

BY C.W. "BUTCH" POWELL

In today's economic climate, school systems across the country continue to look at the reduction of interscholastic activities as an effective way to make budget cuts. The results of reducing or eliminating education-based activities would be tragic.

School sports programs and other interscholastic activities are about providing an opportunity to participate – they are not about winning a state championship or college scholarship. If state titles or scholarships come to pass, they add to the experience, but they should not be the measure of success or failure.

According to a *USA Today* survey, 95 percent of Fortune 500 company chief executives have one thing in common: participation in education-based activity programs while in high school. Education-based activity programs provide an opportunity to learn valuable lessons that cannot be obtained in a classroom setting alone. Teamwork, sportsmanship, winning and losing while handling competitive situations, sacrifice and dedication are not the only lessons associated with participation.

School systems looking for a dropout prevention program need to look no further than activity programs, including the athletic fields of competition. One survey recently discovered that 96 percent of high school dropouts did not participate in activity programs. Participation is often a predictor of later success in college or when entering the job market. Studies have shown that benefits of activities include higher grade-point averages, better attendance records, lower dropout rates and fewer discipline problems than the general student population.

County Boards of Education looking for a drug and teen pregnancy prevention program need to explore education-based activities. According to the United States Department of Education No

Child Left Behind: "The Facts about 21st Century Learning" in 2002, students who spend no time in activity programs are 49 percent more likely to use drugs, and 37 percent are more likely to become teen parents than those who spend one to four hours per week in activities. After-school hours of unsupervised time for youth can lead to one or more life-altering events.

Scholastic achievement can also be linked to participation in education-based activities.

The College Entrance Examination Board indicated music students scored about 11 percent higher than non-music students on SAT exams. In an issue of "Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise," it was noted that students who took part in vigorous sports did approximately 10 percent better in math, science, English and social studies. Student participants also learn important lessons in time management as a result of their participation. The juggling of practice, games, travel and scholastic achievement will be invaluable as they enter adulthood.

County Boards of Education generally spend only between one and three percent of their total operating budget on sports and other activity programs. Oftentimes, expenses to operate programs are generated by booster clubs, gate receipts and the business community. Decreasing the number of activities will cause irreversible harm to the development of our youth today. Community support for bonds and levies to build new schools, textbooks and teacher salaries would be adversely affected if activities are reduced or eliminated. Activities are the other half of education and participation should be strongly encouraged for all students. ☉

C.W. "Butch" Powell is assistant executive director of the West Virginia Secondary School Activities Commission in Parkersburg, West Virginia.

