

THE ADVOCATE



Make the Time

SkillsUSA gains valuable resources by building relationships in business and industry.

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Take It to the Bank

Activities Offer a Guaranteed Return on Investment

BY KATHLEEN WILSON SHRYOCK

The research validates what we already know. Participation in student activities improves academic performance, serves as a springboard to college and career success, develops social and emotional skills, and lowers or even eliminates the chances a student will drop out of high school.¹ When we consider these benefits, it's easy to make the case for student activities, no matter the expense. But would you be surprised to know that most school districts spend only one to three percent of their total budget to support student activities?² If this isn't enough to convince you that activities programs are an exceptional bargain, take a look at these dollars and not so common cents.

From a strictly financial perspective, the effects of the dropout crisis are staggering. The National Dropout Prevention Center reports that 82% of this country's prisoners are high school dropouts. The average cost of incarcerating one dropout is \$31,000 per year.³ Statisticians estimate that the United States would save \$300 billion if the number of students who drop out in just one year were converted into graduates. Researchers at Northeastern University in Boston, MA, recently theorized that the fiscal burden of supporting dropouts and their families is no longer sustainable given current economic trends.⁴

While dropouts put a strain on the federal budget, high school graduates contribute to fiscal health. Over a lifetime, a high school graduate yields a public benefit of more than \$200,000 in lower government spending and higher tax revenue compared to a dropout.⁵ Schools and communities also benefit when more students graduate. Every student who stays in school increases the school's revenue by an average of \$11,000 per year.⁶ Considering the fact that millions of teens drop out of high school each year, the financial implications are astounding. ➔



Activity Connection

Student activities empower students to create lasting social change.

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Be a Champion

Teachers find sources of project funding through easy-to-use Web sites.

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Duck for a Buck Race

Fortunately, there is an affordable solution to this economic dilemma. Student activities can reduce the dropout trend and transform expenditures into revenue. While statistics show that as many as three out of every ten teens drop out of high school, the numbers improve dramatically with student activities on the scene. In a study by J.L. Mahoney and R.B. Cairns, only 4.5% of at-risk students dropped out when they were involved in one activity. When students were involved in more than one activity, the risk was eliminated entirely.⁷ The math is easy. Student activities increase the graduation rate. This leads to increased income for schools and communities, higher tax revenues, a reduced chance of incarceration, and lower government expenditures. For school districts, local and federal governments, and individual taxpayers, this is a wealth of good news.

“It’s easy to look at arts, athletics, and activities programs as an unnecessary, extra expense when budgets are tight,” said Bob Tryanski, director of advocacy for the Alliance for Student Activities. “Schools are forced to make tough choices, but too much bottom-line thinking can actually undermine student success. Activities are essential components of the instructional mission of schools; they offer exceptional returns for a minimal financial investment, and research and experience shows that those returns are guaranteed.”

RETURN ON INVESTMENT

A review of student activities initiatives from across the country further demonstrates that a small investment reaps big returns. Karen Daniel, vice president of engagement at Youth Service America (YSA), explains that student service projects can provide substantial financial benefits in three ways: directly by raising money or goods, indirectly by providing volunteer service that would otherwise cost money, or by raising an awareness that results in a long-term financial impact.

YSA’s list from 2012, “The 25 Most Powerful and Influential Young People in the World,” supports the premise that student-led initiatives are worth the investment. Daniel Kent and Dylan Mahalingham are two YSA honorees whose student-powered service initiatives are valued in the millions of dollars:

- Kent is the founder and executive director of Net Literacy. He became passionate about teaching Internet skills to others back in middle school when he was a library volunteer. Today, the student-led organization which promotes service learning donates \$1.4 million in digital literacy training services each year.

- Teen activist Mahalingham founded Lil’MDGs, an organization that leverages the power of the Internet to educate, inspire, and empower youth. He has mobilized students and student groups to raise \$780,000 for tsunami relief and more than \$10 million for hurricane relief.

With a focus on agricultural education and a motto that inspires students to “live to serve,” the National FFA Organization’s Food For All campaign is changing lives and raising substantial dollars. The FFA is one of nine National Career and Technical Student Organizations that encourages students to apply the skills they are learning in the classroom to relevant, real-world projects. Their current Food For All initiative challenges students to develop year-long service-learning projects that address hunger needs in their own communities.

A look at the numbers demonstrates the significant contribution that Food For All projects are having on local communities. In 2012, more than 10,000 FFA members served a total of 139,050 hours. At the national volunteer rate of \$21.79 per hour, the value of their service topped \$3 million. FFA Chapters collected \$605,320 in cash and in-kind donations and served 49,532 community members. Through their projects, students and their supporters donated 147,725 pounds of produce, 10,961 pounds of meat and fish, and 9,360 eggs.

For Terry Hamm, director of the Texas Association of Student Councils, the huge financial return that student activities provide to communities and charitable organizations is no surprise. In 2013, 307 middle school and high school councils in Texas tracked their activities and reported the value of donated goods, cash donations, and community service hours contributed throughout the year. Using minimum wage as the hourly rate for community service, the total contributions of cash, goods, and volunteer work generated over \$21 million in support for local and national charities.

Educators at the Missouri Association of Student Councils (MASC) harness the power of student activities to support a variety of service-oriented initiatives including blood drives, community clean-up projects, and fundraisers. “Many times, student activities are the driving force behind service projects in a community. Hundreds of thousands of dollars are returned to communities through these events,” said Terri Johnson, executive director of MASC. “At that level of contribution, everyone should realize that student activities are not just about dances and poster making.”

Johnson explains that MASC educators believe that true leadership comes through service. MASC’s 20-year relationship with

SOURCES OF FUNDING RESOURCES

a4sa.org/resources



CROWDRISE

Crowdrise is an online fundraising site. The simple process allows users to set up a personalized fundraising page, choose a goal, and contact supporters through email and social networks.



DONORS CHOOSE

Donors Choose is an online charity that makes it easy to help fund projects in classrooms throughout the United States. Public school teachers post project requests on the site, and donors select the project and the dollar amount of their choice.



eBAY GIVING WORKS

This program, integrated into eBay’s familiar buying and selling platform, allows people to support important causes. Sellers can donate a portion of their sales, and buyers can shop while supporting their favorite nonprofit organizations.



NATIONAL ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

This volunteer organization provides information and professional services to education personnel. The site also includes information on grants and other funding resources including getedfunding.com and grants.gov.



UNITED FEDERATION OF TEACHERS’ FUNDING PROJECTS PAGE

This page lists an array of grants and other resources for teachers looking for help in finding money to pay for classroom projects.



YOUTH SERVICE AMERICA GRANTS

YSA grants provide students and educators with funding for service and service-learning projects.

Special Olympics of Missouri (SOMO) provides a shining example of service-oriented dedication. In June of 2013, MASC was officially named a SOMO partner, a title reserved for organizations that contribute more than \$50,000 a year. Each year, student councils across the state participate in a variety of activities aimed at supporting SOMO.

The Polar Plunge is an annual Special Olympics' fundraiser that requires brave supporters to take a plunge into the frigid winter waters of Missouri. In the 2012-2013 school year, Missouri councils raised \$124,000 through plunges across the state. At Park Hill South High School (Kansas City, Missouri) and William Chrisman High School (Independence, MO) students have raised thousands of dollars to send a special athlete from each of their schools to the 2014 Special Olympics USA Games this summer. In addition, MASC's summer leadership workshop is home to an annual Duck for a Buck race. For a one dollar donation, students and staff can purchase a rubber duck to race across a pond. Each summer, the race nets \$1,800 to \$3,000 for SOMO.

In January of 2014, MASC will be receiving the 2013 Award of Excellence presented by the SOMO board of directors. "The award would not be possible without the student council advisers and members who have used student activities as an outlet to provide hours of service and thousands of dollars in contributions," said Johnson. "It's an incredible honor and very humbling. We did not set out to win an award. We do these events because we believe in service."

CREATIVE FUNDING

The research shows that student activities improve educational outcomes and provide students with skills that apply to 21st century employment and citizenship. And, it can be easily demonstrated that student activities return millions of dollars to communities and organizations, both locally and globally. Still, school budget cuts are a prominent sign of the times, and student activities are often first on the chopping block. For districts and schools that lack an activities budget, there are ways to seek resources that can help maintain a vibrant activities program.

Grants are a source of funding for educators and students who are willing to do the research and complete the required applications. Every year, YSA awards grants ranging from \$500 to \$5,000 to schools, young people, and educators. The approximately \$1 million that YSA invests in student service project grants each year is money well spent. For every dollar that YSA gives away in grants, the organization generates about \$74 in volunteer time. The projects extend to about 1.2 million direct beneficiaries. Overall, it 'costs' just under a dollar for a YSA-sponsored young person to reach someone through service.

FFA also provides grants to fund community service and service-learning projects. In 2012, they reported a \$14.79 return on investment



for each dollar in grant money attributed to the Food For All program.

While student council groups in Missouri actively seek grant funding for projects, Johnson also advises educators and their students to make the most of sponsorships or partnerships with area businesses and organizations. "Create a brochure or letter highlighting what your group does for the community. Prepare a well-developed presentation," she said. "Public speaking and asking for donations are difficult, so practice with your students. Keep the request for support short and to the point."

Daniel also recommends surveying local businesses for resources. "Local outposts of national chains, like Home Depot, often have more latitude in regards to making contributions than people realize, especially in-kind donations," she said. "Even when business owners can't offer money or supplies, they can often help in other ways by providing people power, event promotion, advertising, or mentoring. Don't forget to think beyond financial support when asking for assistance."

Because YSA understands the value of community connections, they have recently partnered with Causetown, a Web site that helps nonprofit organizations in the United States increase funds by connecting with local businesses. Causetown enables any local business to instantly launch promotions with a specified group receiving a percentage of purchases. Beyond giving nonprofits a new way to rally supporters and raise funds, it connects small business owners to the important work being completed by local students.

We know that student activities improve educational outcomes, prepare students for the future, and generate substantial financial support for communities and organizations. With positive attributes like these, it would be easy to assume that student activities are expensive. But they're not. At less than three percent of the total budget in most school districts, student activities are an affordable solution to any education equation. ●

CHECK OUT what the FFA's 2013 Food For All chapters are doing to fight hunger by visiting the Community Walk Map at communitywalk.com/FFAFoodForAll.

LEARN MORE about MASC's partnership with Missouri Special Olympics at a4sa.org/masc-somo.

READ ABOUT YSA's 25 most influential young people at a4sa.org/YSA-25.

FIND SOURCES for creative funding at:
Afterschool Alliance at a4sa.org/AA-funding
Causetown at causetown.org
FFA grants at a4sa.org/FFA-grants
YSA grants at ysa.org/grants

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5. Henry Levin et al, "The Costs and Benefits of an Excellent Education for All of America's Children," Columbia University, 2007.
6. Stephen Q. Cornman, "Revenues and Expenditures for Public Elementary and Secondary Education (Fiscal Year 2011)," National Center for Education Statistics, July 2013, nces.ed.gov/pubs2013/2013342.pdf.
7. J.L. Mahoney and R.B. Cairns.

Make the Time for Partnerships For SkillsUSA, Business Relationships are a Source of Support

SKILLSUSA is a national nonprofit organization that serves students who are preparing for careers in trade, technical, and skilled service occupations. Eric Gearhart, direct of research and foundation relations for SkillsUSA, explains that industry partnerships are a key source of support for the organization and its 300,000 student members. He provides advice on making the most of these valuable relationships.

How can educators and students build relationships and gain support from organizations and businesses?

The first rule for anyone seeking to fund raise is to “Know Thyself.” What is the need to be addressed, and what resources will it require? What outcomes will those resources produce, and what is reportable to your donor? Soft, amorphous asks that only say, “We hope you’ll support our worthy cause,” will almost always be met with disappointment.

Business partnerships are a negotiation best conducted face-to-face. We live in an age of strategic corporate philanthropy, meaning your prospect will be looking for some direct or indirect benefit to their business interests. So, don’t waste time chasing prospects that have no relationship to your mission, unless you have some inside link to the decision maker. There’s lots of public information available on the Web about companies’ giving guidelines and histories.

Both in the cultivation and stewardship phases, find ways to engage your partners in the delivery of your mission. The more your partners rub elbows with your staff and the people your organization serves, the more you’ll fuse the emotional reason for giving to the business logic of giving.

What are some ways that leaders in business and industry provide support for SkillsUSA programs?

The local chapters of SkillsUSA often need financial support for materials, service projects, and to send students to SkillsUSA leadership training and competition conferences. Volunteers from business and industry are needed to serve on program advisory boards, to mentor students, and to serve as competition designers, managers, and judges. In-kind support includes donations and loans of up-to-date equipment. Another important engagement is for local business representatives to speak to school boards and civic organizations about the importance of Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs in their locality when school budgets are being considered. CTE students tend to work in the communities they were raised and educated, thus contributing to the profitability of local companies and to the community tax base.



How are relationships between SkillsUSA and its partners mutually beneficial?

SkillsUSA students want jobs in the skilled workforce; SkillsUSA partner companies need to hire prepared graduates who will bring both technical skills and employability skills to the job site. One of the chief distinctions of SkillsUSA is the integration of industrial know-how with the pedagogy of the SkillsUSA classroom and lab accomplished through our business partnerships, activities, and competitions. In a time when the United States faces a skills gap and global competition for workforce talent, there has never been a better time to be young and skilled.



In 2013, more than 16,000 teachers and school administrators served as professional SkillsUSA members and advisors. More than 1,100 business, industry, and labor sponsors actively support SkillsUSA at the national level through financial aid, in-kind contributions, and involvement of their people in SkillsUSA activities. Many more work directly with state associations and local chapters. View *A Partnership that Pays Off* from SkillsUSA at a4sa.org/SkillsUSA-Partners.

FIND MORE fundraising tips and resources at a4sa.org/SkillsFundraising. ●

Online Sites Offer Creative Financial Solutions

Donors Choose

When Marissa Wicklund, eighth-grade art teacher at KIPP Endeavor Academy in Kansas City, MO, needed additional supplies for her students, she turned to Donors Choose (donorschoose.org), an online charity that helps public school teachers find funding for worthwhile projects. Wicklund explains that Donors Choose is a great way for teachers and donors to support arts and other activities in a time of challenging budget constraints.

“When the budget is tight, supplies are scarce,” said Wicklund. “Donors Choose allows caring individuals to give to a project that could directly change a classroom, putting students on a different life path because someone cared enough to make sure they had greater opportunities.” Wicklund’s current goal is to provide art portfolios for her students. The portfolios would allow students to present their work to a high-performing fine arts high school. “The arts are often seen as an ‘elective,’ but I want students to be able to display their work proudly and explain how they were able to apply critical thinking skills in art class,” she said. “I couldn’t provide this opportunity without Donors Choose.” Wicklund believes that the portfolios are a first step in allowing her students to pursue an engaging high school experience that utilizes their talents.

Donors Choose is free for teachers to use and is a 501(c)3 charity. Teachers post project requests online. Donors search for projects by subject or location and contribute any dollar amount to projects of their choice. When a project reaches its goal, the organization sends the materials to the school. Donors receive photos of the project, a letter from the teacher, and insight into how every dollar was spent.

eBay Giving Works

eBay Giving Works (givingworks.ebay.com), part of eBay’s traditional buying and selling platform, makes it easy for people to support important causes. Any organization that wishes to be a part of eBay Giving Works is fully screened. Once a nonprofit organization is approved, there are three ways for donors to contribute: Sellers can sell products on behalf of a selected charity, donors can donate cash directly to charities by using a PayPal account, or supporters can shop a variety of goods included in the organization’s online store.

Marin High School of the Arts in Novato, CA, uses an eBay Giving Works account to gain funding for the school’s art, music, and theater programs. Not only can supporters make financial donations through the site, but they can also shop an eclectic mix of jewelry, housewares, and other goods. ●



Donors Choose.org
Teachers ask. You choose.



Social Entrepreneurs: Creating Change through Activities

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS identify a problem and then work hard to create and implement scalable, replicable solutions. Their successes can provide significant value to communities, the economy, the social climate, and the environment. By channeling the efforts of enthusiastic young people, student activities are a perfect forum for inspiring the next generation of social entrepreneurs. Here’s what can happen when students are encouraged to solve a real problem:

Restoring an Ecosystem

In Orange County, California, decades of overfishing, harsh weather, and poor water quality had destroyed important ecosystems along the coastline. In 2002, marine biologist Nancy Caruso enlisted the aid of students to solve this critical issue. As the director of Get Inspired, Inc. (getinspiredinc.org), Caruso works with teachers to engage students in hands-on learning as they study important ecosystems. Saltwater tanks are brought directly into classrooms. Then, through innovative instruction and cocurricular activities, students are empowered to care for wildlife, communicate with the Department of Fish and Wildlife, and release living creatures into the ocean. In the last decade, more than 7,000 students from 27 schools have joined forces to restore giant kelp forests to areas that had been barren for more than 20 years. The project has been so successful that student groups are now working on the restoration of white sea bass and green abalone, two species that are vital to the region’s health. Caruso’s programs are inspiring students to develop an awareness of issues affecting their world and the skills to cultivate solutions.

Feeding the Hungry

At Elsa England Elementary School in Round Rock, TX, third-grade teacher Rachael Brunson invited her students to become social entrepreneurs while addressing a local issue. One out of every four children in Texas doesn’t know where his or her next meal is coming from. Brunson’s “hunger warriors” reviewed hunger maps, calculated food-related expenses, and created a community awareness brochure. Students also researched Senate Bill 376, a “breakfast bill” targeting childhood hunger. They wrote persuasive letters to lawmakers and rallied on the steps of the state capitol to show support for the bill. In May of 2013, the bill was signed into law. Brunson’s students also raised more than \$7,000 for a local food bank.

TO LEARN MORE about social entrepreneurship and organizations that support it, see these resources:

Skoll Foundation at skollfoundation.org.

The New Heroes from PBS at a4sa.org/PBSHeroes.

Heifer International’s Resources for Schools at a4sa.org/Heifer-in-School. ●

Advocates Defend the Case for High School Sports

THE ATLANTIC recently published two articles presenting alternate sides of the same coin. In the first commentary, the author argues that high school sports can have a negative impact on academics. The authors of the second article maintain that sports actually improve classroom performance.



In “**The Case Against High School Sports**,” author Amanda Ripley’s argument is based on the premise that—unlike most countries worldwide—the United States spends more tax dollars per high school athlete than per math student. Studies also indicate that American students spend more time playing sports than students almost anywhere else in the world. In countries where students do play sports, it is often on teams with no ties to their schools. The author surmises that it’s no surprise that the United States lags behind many other countries in international education rankings. Ripley acknowledges that many principals defend the benefits of high school sports, but she theorizes that difficulties arise when sports become a distraction for the school community as a whole.

In “**High School Sports Aren’t Killing Academics**,” authors Daniel H. Bowen and Collin Hitt, respond to Ripley’s article. Their research indicates that school-sponsored sports provide benefits that increase academic success. Bowen and Hitt also report that schools with winning football teams do not deemphasize academics. Instead, studies by the University of Arkansas’s Bowen and Jay P. Greene find the opposite by indicating that a school’s commitment to athletics positively relates to lower dropout rates as well as higher test scores.

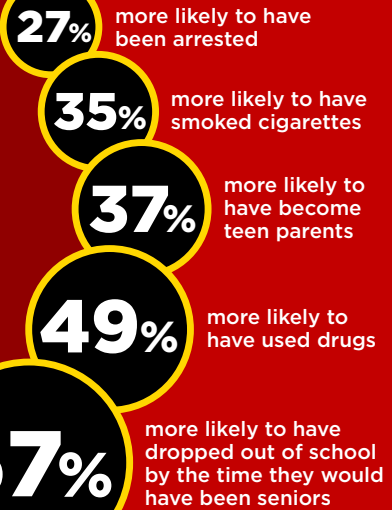
READ “The Case Against High School Sports” at a4sa.org/CaseAgainstSports

READ “High School Sports Aren’t Killing Academics” at a4sa.org/SportsPositiveImpact

PROMOTE THE VALUE

making better choices

Compared with students who spent **1-4 hours per week** involved in **co-curricular activities**, students who spent **no time** involved in **co-curricular activities** were:



source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Students who participate in the arts **9 hours or more** each week for at least a year are **4x more likely** to:

They’re also **3x more likely** to:



be recognized for academic achievement



win a school attendance award



participate in a science and math fair



win an award for writing



be elected to class office

source: National Governors Association Center for Best Practices



Promote the Value. Alliance for Student Activities

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THE ADVOCATE

The Advocate is published ten times a year by the Alliance for Student Activities, a nonprofit corporation whose mission is to promote the value of student activities through advocacy, training, resources, and networking.

a4sa.org

Submissions of student activities research and other inquiries are welcome. Contact advocate@a4sa.org

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