

Student Activities and Turning Points 2000

Preliminary Findings of Direct and Significant Relationships

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Middle schools that support and maintain strong cocurricular student activity programs, and foster the participation of students in them possess an important tool in the quest to achieve the Turning Points 2000 vision. While there are indirect correlations that can be drawn within each of the seven Turning Point recommendations, six of the recommendations identified below hold direct and significant relationships with student activities and student leadership programs.

Teach a curriculum grounded in rigorous, public academic standards...and based on how students learn best

- Student activities provide avenues for the adaptation of concepts and content in ways that provide for assessable and relevant practices by students.
- In cocurricular activities, students learn by experiencing and applying their knowledge and comprehension of standards in ways that mimic real-world applications.
- Meaningful and well-planned student activities provide flexibility in the delivery of the standards and can ultimately foster lifelong learning.
- Student activities such as the National Junior Honor Society provide recognition and support for cross-discipline and life skills achievement in the areas of scholarship, character, citizenship, service, and leadership, which helps students develop the habits and momentum for continued achievement in high school and beyond.
- For student activities to provide optimal support to standards-based learning, they must be integrated into the curriculum and wholly supported and fostered by the school administration and staff.

Use instructional methods designed to prepare all students to achieve higher standards and become lifelong learners

- Student activities incorporate experiential learning and practical applications that increase student levels of standards comprehension and applications.
- Foundational leadership skills, problem-solving, communication, decision-making, goal setting, and consensus, when integrated throughout the learning environment enhance and expand student abilities to explore the standards of knowledge.
- Student activities integrated into the traditional learning environment result in an androgynous delivery of standards learning that both compliments and transforms the traditional pedagogy.

Staff middle grades schools with teachers who are experts at teaching young adolescents and engage teachers in ongoing, targeted professional development

- Professional development in student activities advisement gives middle grades teachers effective learning strategies and proven alternative delivery methodologies
- It is important that student activity advisers in the middle grades maintain programs that support the educational mission
- Activity advisers excel in their cocurricular assignments when they have a strong conceptual grasp of the their activity, and the knowledge and skills to integrate the standards in ways that students learn best
- Perspective activity advisers in the middle grades should participate in field experiences that provide them with opportunities to observe and interact with students that are engaged in leadership skills training.
- New activity advisers should be mentored
- Activity advisers in the middle grades should be afforded opportunities to engage in continuing professional development related to their activity assignment and general strategies that foster the enhancement of standards learning through participation in cocurricular activities.

Govern democratically, through direct or representative participation by all school staff members, the adults who know the students best

(In addition to staff, student council leaders can serve as an integral part of the leadership team in a democratically governed middle school.)

- Student council is the only democratically elected student organization found in schools and can serve to prepare students to serve on leadership teams and other school committees.
- “Student council provides a student-led forum similar in form and function to the leadership team. Student councils enable students to participate actively in the democratic process on a wide range of issues.” (Turning Points 2000, p.149)
- Student activities empower students to take active roles and have a stake in their educational environment.
- A cornerstone purpose of a middle school student council is to promote and advocate the educational mission of the school through its leadership training, projects, and activities.
- Through the student council, the shared vision for the school's expectations can be communicated in an age-appropriate manner to the student body.

Provide a safe and healthy school environment as part of improving academic performance and developing caring and ethical citizens

- Student activities encourage involvement by large groups of students.
- Through projects and activities, student councils provide opportunities for students to practice positive peer relationships and tolerance.
- Research has shown that students involved in school activities are less likely to engage in risky or delinquent behaviors (Klesse, 94).
- Student activities promote safe, healthy, and accessible projects that provide positive alternatives to students.
- Student activity advisers are/should be certified staff of the school.

Involve parents and communities in supporting student learning and healthy development

- Student leaders are the ambassadors of the school in the community and beyond.
- Student activities provide positive opportunities for parents and community leaders to volunteer and actively contribute.
- Activities such as student council and National Junior Honor Society involve students in service learning and other community related projects.
- Student activities provide opportunities for school staff and parents to positively interact in settings that are less intimidating than other, more traditional parent-teacher events.
- A student activity adviser serves as another positive role model and caring adult in the life of a child.