

**THE EFFECT OF ATHLETICS ON ACADEMICS IN SECONDARY
EDUCATION: HOW TO BEST USE ATHLETICS TO HELP ACADEMICS**

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Abstract

The Effect of Athletics on Academics in Secondary Education: How to Best Use Athletics to Help Academics

Do athletics help or hinder academic success? Research shows that athletics helps academic success, but how then do athletic programs, specifically athletic directors and coaches, best use athletics to help student-athletes optimally achieve academically and athletically? Using a historical method, I interviewed three athletic directors and three coaches, with various levels of expertise and experience, from local public and private schools of varying sizes. I asked eleven questions, paying particular attention to the methods and requirements they use to promote academic achievement in their respective athletic programs. I typed the responses in summary form to capture the essentials of their answers. The resulting answers allowed me to generalize that athletics indeed have a positive effect on academics, and if academic programs focus on high academic standards and expectations of excellence, work on good communication with all those involved, and be consistent in attitudes and implementation, then they will help their student-athletes optimally achieve academically and athletically.

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Literature Review	2
Research Question	12
Methodology	12
Data	14
Analysis	24
Recommendations/Implications	28
Conclusion	29
References	31
Appendices	33

Introduction

Sports are a large part of our American culture, and many people enjoy and play them in almost every stage of life. For many, the enjoyment of sports begins with participation during their elementary and secondary school years. Student athletics are a valuable part of a student's maturation and growth process, but are not necessary for a student to do well in the classroom. On the other hand, student athletics could be a valuable supplement and compliment to the academic success of student athletes. In one study, student "athletes scored significantly higher on quizzes, tests and overall class scores. Athletes also did significantly more homework, watched less television and played less video games" (Levitt, 2001, abstract).

Imagine an athletic program and teachers working side-by-side for the overall success of each student where the program's priorities focus on the classroom success of the students while incorporating successful athletic programs. Many schools or school districts are not working for overall success of each student, both academically and athletically; many tend to be skewed one way or the other. The debate between academics and athletics is often heated. The role of athletics is also treated differently from state to state and school district to school district, but athletics tend to be accused of "wanting to water down the requirements—at the expense of the student's education—in order to achieve winning teams" (Paulsen, 1989, p. 67). This is not always true, but currently, many schools' athletic programs are not utilized as effectively as they could be to positively impact student success in the classroom. If athletic directors and coaches worked together and communicated more effectively with administrators, teachers, and parents for the sole purpose of the success of each student athlete, then we might have

greater academic success among student athletes and even greater success in sports. In this project, I will study this relationship between academics and athletics to better understand how coaches and athletic directors can help their student-athletes optimally achieve academically and athletically.

Literature Review

In searching the literature focused upon the topic of academics and athletics, I found a limited amount of scholarly research available, especially concerning secondary education. Higher education seems to be the main focus of research on academics and athletics. Because of this, I investigated scholarly peer-reviewed research, reviews, personal essays, and various other articles arguing for or against certain policies. The research focuses on different studies, their data collection, and findings. The research reviews report on a variety of scholarly research. The personal essays relate the authors' thoughts and experiences in academics and athletics. The last group – the articles arguing for or against specific policies – use specific research findings for their arguments but are biased in a particular direction. This blend of research reflects a broad spectrum of the discussion of the interplay between athletics and academics.

I begin this Literature Review by discussing articles at the intersection of athletics and academics. Guest and Schneider (2003) studied adolescents' participation in extracurricular activities, which include, but are not limited to, sports. They found that extracurricular activities are “often associated with positive behavioral outcomes” (2003, p. 89). They also said “researchers have found positive associations between extracurricular participation and academic achievement, social adjustment, and high

school completion” (2003, p. 89). They also found that these positive outcomes are mediated by each student’s social context (2003, p. 89). For instance, “in lower-class communities, high achievers are predisposed to participate in sports and to have an athletic identity, while in upper-class communities, low achievers are predisposed to participate in sports and to have an athletic identity” (2003, p. 104).

While the above article dealt with adolescents’ participation in extracurricular activities including sports, a second article by Stephens and Schauben narrows the research to focus on “the effects of interscholastic sports participation on academic achievement of middle level schools students” (2000, p. 34). Stephens and Schauben found that as interscholastic sports participation increased for eighth graders, grade point averages improved (2002, p. 34, 36). They also found that athletes, male and female, had “significantly higher GPAs than non-athletes” and more specifically, “female athletes had significantly higher GPAs than male athletes” (2002, p. 37). They conclude that interscholastic sports do not harm students’ academic performance, but actually enhance their performance (2002, p. 37, 38).

While these articles show that athletics have a positive impact upon students’ academic success, a third paper by Daley and Ryan states that, “overall, no significant correlations were found” between student athletics and academic achievement (2000, p. 531). This is based on their research of “232 boys and girls for Years 8-11 (ages 13-16)” in England, who were “randomly selected” (2000, p. 531). And the students’ “academic performance was assessed on previous examination scores in English, Mathematics, and Science” (2000, p. 531). They concluded that there is “no significant associations of

academic ability with physical activity” and because of this, “no generalizations can be made” (p. 534).

In a fourth article researching the relationship between extracurricular activities and high school dropout rates, Ralph B. McNeal, Jr. finds that “students who participated in athletics were an estimated 1.7 times less likely to drop out than those who did not participate” (1995, p. 68). He also went on to say that athletic participation reduced the probability of a prototypical person dropping out by 40%. In contrast to Daley and Ryan, this research shows the positive effect of athletics in lessening the high school dropout rate.

In another article discussing the influence of participation in junior high athletics on student’s attitudes and grades, Charles E. Byrd and Steven M. Ross studied two junior high schools in a rural community and found “few disadvantages that would encourage the elimination of inter-school sports at the junior high level” (1991, p. 5). Their study revealed no statistically significant differences in academic performance between the athlete and non-athlete, and athletes tended to be absent less than non-athletes. It also uncovered little difference between athletes and non-athletes in their attitude toward school, but athletes seemed to have a more positive outlook towards “getting work done on time, doing their share of the work as part of a group, going to school, and accepting jobs that give responsibility” (1991, p. 174). They also surveyed some principals, teachers, and coaches, and they believed that the advantages gained by both student and school participation in athletics programs far outweighed any disadvantages.

In a sixth article about athletics, aspirations, and attainments, Luther B. Otto and Duane F. Alwin researched, over fifteen years, the effect that participation in high school

athletics has on educational and occupational aspirations and the level of educational attainment. They found that participation in athletics has a positive effect on educational aspirations and a salutary effect on occupational aspirations. Similarly, they found a positive effect on the level of education attainment and on their income fifteen years later. Overall, as with Byrd and Ross, their research shows athletics having a positive impact.

As we have seen, some research seems to indicate little correlation between academics and athletics, but the majority shows that athletics can correlate positively with academic success. In J. W. Smith Jr.'s overview of research, he affirms "interscholastic athletic programs result in reduced discipline problems, increased academic achievement, and higher graduation rates" (1994, p. 93). Smith recorded this overview to inform policy makers that even though "major national policy statements driving the school reform movement ignore the potential of athletic programs for improving public education," it is "important ... to explore the issue of athletics and the inherent value of participation to student development and the purposes of the public school" (1994, p. 94). Finally, he concludes, based on the available research, "the expansion of high school athletic programs, particularly in urban public school systems" would increase academic achievement, decrease school discipline problems, cause a rise in high school graduation rates and self-esteem, and educational aspirations would be more apparent (1994, p. 97).

Another review of research by Gary L. Peltier and Rita Laden (1999) discusses whether high school student-athletes succeed in college. They found that the validity of claiming that athletes can use sports ability to get a college education must be questioned;

it may open doors to college for athletes but does not guarantee they will get a degree. Furthermore, they discovered that “an athlete that is deficient in academic skills in high school is likely to gain those academic skills at college” (1999, p. 234). But they also point out that “there is hope” for the athletes that have solid educational credentials in high school and participate in college athletic programs that do not take all their time and commitment (1999, p. 234).

In an autobiographical essay of his own life titled “The Making of a Scholar-Athlete,” James Axtell focuses not just on the relationship between students and athletics, but he looks at the relationship between scholars and athletics. Axtell states scholar-athletes “are a somewhat rare hybrid” and attributes this “paucity” to the “limitations of the 24-hour day, human energy, and our educational institutions. Training to excel in a sport and learning to master a scholarly discipline both require copious quantities of time, effort, focus, and motivation” (1991, p. 71). He later remarks, the making of scholar-athlete begins in junior and early high school, “when a *student*-athlete first becomes conscious of his somewhat unusual combination of talents and determines to cultivate them against all odds” (1991, p. 75). After they have become a scholar-athlete a whole set of pressures occur; they will have to balance the workload of sports and academics. If they truly excel at both sports and academics, they will have the added pressure of what college to choose; one that has a successful athletic program or one that is academically superior. Axtell also mentions during his time in college, “most of the best athletes were among the best students” (1991, p. 80).

Another important revelation in Axtell’s essay is the “number of ways in which scholarship and sports mutually fed and reinforced each other, rather than pulling [him]

in contrary directions” (1991, p. 82). The first thing that “the student and the scholar lent to the athlete” is “research,” that led to inspiration and preparation. He “threw himself into research on the foul shot and fakes and later the broad jump as wholeheartedly as I did for a social studies or English paper” (1991, p. 82). Secondly, because he focused more in the scholarly direction he looked for coaches that were “excellent teachers” (1991, p. 82). Thirdly, the scholar helped the athlete with “the efficient management of time” (1991, p. 83). The last addition that his pursuit of scholarship added to his pursuit of athletics was “a saving dose of perspective: the conviction that while sports, especially team sports, were important parts of life and learning, they were not the alpha and omega of becoming an adult” (1991, p. 85).

Axtell not only mentions the benefits of scholarship to athletics, but the benefit of sports to academics. The first benefit involves “teamwork, the pulling together and subordination of self for the good of the whole” (1991, p. 85). Second, “the need” to face “a variety of superior opponents” to help them acquire a “gift for rationalization, particularly of failure ... one of the thinking man’s biggest assets” (1991, p. 86). Thirdly, it gave him an opportunity for “observing the behavior of people under pressure, handling success and failure on a regular basis, and having to motivate themselves day after day to train hard, suffer a certain amount of pain in the process, and neglect a whole raft of alternative ways to spend their time” (1991, p. 88). In other words, he learned perseverance. Finally, “the most important legacy [he] received from athletics was a basic reservoir of confidence” (1991, p. 89).

In another essay, E. M. Swift describes his experience at a private boarding school and his “first exposure to the interrelationships between sports and academics” (1991, p.

426). He believes sports are “worthwhile, and can be important, less for what they teach you than for what they allow you to discover about yourself” (1991, p. 426). He points out that sports can be a “young person’s first exposure to rejection,” but “one can grow through failure just as easily as one can become stunted by success” (1991, p. 426). Swift states that playing sports competitively can teach a person character, but is best at revealing character. Sports also offered both clarity and focus and four simple tenets or truths about high school sports: “The rules of the game were unassailable. The purpose of the game was to win. My teammates were people who depended on me. My coach was a man I could trust” (1991, p. 427). Sports taught him important lessons such as the importance of having the right attitude and pursuing excellence in everything.

In Robin L. Cunningham’s essay, she reasons, “the skills and methods used to excel in a sport are very similar to those used to excel in the classroom” (1995, p. 78). The skills she refers to are first preparation and practice, which allow the student to work on weaknesses both in the classroom and on the field. The second is the individual session/coach time in sports and its equivalent in the classroom, academic tutoring, which are again another way to work on weaknesses. Thirdly, working out the body and mind are both vital to athletics and academics. She continues by mentioning a fourth similarity, even where you sit is important. If an athlete sits closer to the coach and establishes eye contact he has a better opportunity to learn and play, and the same thing is true in the classroom; students who sit in the front and middle of the classroom do better than others. A fifth area she shares involves the fact that the “same skills that allow young people to develop success and confidence in athletics can assist them in achieving success in the classroom” (1995, p. 79). Just as coaches encourage their players to excel

above average, so they “should be forceful about challenging the players to be more than ‘average’ students” (1995, p. 79). The last similarity is visualization and self-talk. Just as a player should visualize the next play or shot and talk to themselves in order to help stay focused and prepared, so should a student do the same with academic tasks.

Cunningham’s research shows a positive correlation between athletics and academics. She strongly believes that if “high school coaches would convince their athletes that they have the skill to succeed in the classroom, their athletes would go on to college with the confidence and self-esteem needed to excel in the both academics and athletics” (1995, p. 79).

These essays all reflect a positive impact of athletics upon academics. In his article, Robert Griffin (1992) argues in favor of a program instituted by the American Sports Institute in Mill Valley, California called Promoting Achievement in School through Sports (PASS). He claims the PASS program “helps athletes attain greater academic success and at the same time improve their performance on the field” (1992, p. 69). This is done through teachers adapting some of the same “successful methods of learning ‘on the field’ to the classroom” (1992, p. 69). Griffin reports that the results of the PASS program show “PASS students’ grades and attendance have improved. Parents note greater confidence, personal initiative, and self-discipline in their children” (1992, p. 69). Griffin’s article shows specific programs that can and have used athletics appropriately as a tool to help students achieve academic success.

In another article, Robin L. Paulsen (1989), a track coach, proposes an alternative rule to the Los Angeles based “C Average, No Fail” rule that is similar to the Texas “No Pass, No Play” rule. The former states that a student athlete is eligible to participate in

athletics if they have a C grade average and are not failing any classes. The latter states that a student-athlete must pass all classes, without regard for grade average, in order to participate in athletics. These rules are meant to motivate athletes to academic success or risk the result of ineligibility. Paulsen proposes an alternative because “the ‘No Fail’ provision has been strongly opposed by all segments of the educational community” in Los Angeles (1989, p. 66). She states that “the ‘C’ average is acceptable; the ‘No Fail’ provision is not” mainly because of “the many students worthy of exception” (1989, p. 66). She argues that the rule does not recognize the important lessons learned from overcoming failure, and students who work harder to achieve the grade standard and then fall short can lose motivation when they become ineligible. Paulsen suggests a “modification of the ‘C Average, No Fail’ rule to ‘C Average, No More than One Fail’ because it is “a compassionate, reasonable adjustment” (1989, p. 76). Paulsen says this adjustment would answer most of the objections to the ‘No Fail’ rule.

In another essay, Douglas Lederman reasons for “the need for tough requirements for athletes” (1992, p. A39). Lederman reports on a seminar where the chairman of the National Collegiate Athletic Association, Lorna M. Straus, recommended a set of tougher academic standards. Lederman writes that the chairman “hoped the NCAA’s new rules would improve the odds that athletes will come to college better prepared and leave with a degree, both by prodding high-school athletes to perform better now and by holding college athletes more accountable” (1992, p. A40). The chairman reminds student athletes enrolling into college thinking that this is their ticket to professional sports that “fewer than 2 percent of college football and men’s basketball players move on to a professional playing career” (1992, p. A40). Straus continues, arguing that it is “our

obligation to set things up so they're more likely to get a degree, more likely to get an education, and therefore be able to do something with their lives" (1992, p. A40).

Lederman's article, even though it is a discussion of NCAA policies and not secondary education policies, points out that we are dealing with students' futures, and if we are not seeking to do what is best for our students academically and athletically, we are failing and limiting their future.

In another article, in comparison to the previous positive outlooks toward athletic influence on academics, Congressman Tom McMillen "criticizes the emphasis at all levels of schooling of sports over academics" (1991, p. 489). He believes there is an imbalance between athletics and academics in favor of athletics. He emphatically states, "Schools in every city and state in America have their 'prized' team and will make sacrifices in the classroom to have their students score touchdowns on the field" (1991, p. 489). He continues, asserting that, "the United States is more concerned about young people's BRAWN power than it is their BRAIN power" (1991, p. 489, 490). He suggests that the only way to fix this imbalance is to address the problem at every age group. He acknowledges the importance of athletics, but firmly states that students are in school to learn and that all students should meet minimum pass-to-play standards. He concludes his argument by strongly asserting, "When we sacrifice our educational principles on the altar of competitive sports, we do more than ruin the life of a young man or woman; we send a signal to all young people that thinking skills are less important than athletic skills" (1991, p. 490).

In summary, the prevailing consensus from the above reviewed literature is that athletics has a positive impact on academics, but is highly dependent on the context of

each school district, school, athletic program, team, and individual. The context of each situation can create very positive outcomes, or it can produce inconsistent outcomes with wide variations. The variety, multiplicity of variables, and the uniqueness of the context of each piece of research highlights the difficulty of generalizing the best approach to helping each student-athlete optimally achieve success in both the academics and athletics. As Swift reminds us in his essay, we need to pursue excellence in both arenas, and each student-athlete should try to be the best they can be. Knowing that there is a positive correlation between athletics and academics, I am still left with the question of how athletic programs can bring about the best success for their student-athletes in academics and athletics.

Research Question

My original question upon the beginning of this research was, do athletics help or hinder the student athlete's academic achievement? Since most of the literature just reviewed states that there is a positive correlation between athletics and the student athlete's academic achievement, I am left with the driving question, how can athletic directors and coaches *best* help their student-athletes optimally achieve academically and athletically? How do current athletic programs in various schools within Snohomish County of Washington State influence and help the academic achievement of their student athletes?

Methodology

Method and Rationale

For this project, I will focus historically on the relationship between academics and athletics, seeking to address my main and secondary research questions. I will

interview long-term athletic directors and coaches of various athletic programs within Snohomish County, and I want to record their experiences and changes over time as they have dealt with student athletes and helped them achieve success in both the athletic and academic arenas. Viewing athletics and academics over time through the eyes of these coaches and athletic directors, I can gain better understanding of the interrelationship between athletics and academics in the past and use this information to look for best practices, or alternatives and improvements that may be better than the current practice. This methodology will also help me to better understand how to put my findings into action in the future. As my literature review points out, the context of each school, athletic program, team, and individual is most important to answering my research question. Interviewing coaches and athletic directors will help to generalize my conclusion and bring validity to the study because they are in different/similar contexts and have unique perspectives, differing degrees of expertise, various lengths of experience, and work with academic and athletic policies that directly impact the success of their student-athletes.

Sample

My sample will consist of three athletic directors and three coaches from various high schools within Snohomish County, Washington, including the athletic director and head boy's basketball and soccer coaches at a small private school, the athletic director and head basketball coach at a large public school, and another athletic director at another large public school. Each has many years of experience ranging from six years to 30 plus years. Many of the athletic directors have also had coaching experience, and many of the coaches have coached and played sports at different levels, ranging from high school to

semi-pro. This mix of athletic directors and coaches with varying levels of experience, different athletic programs, school sizes, districts, and whether they are private or public will give me a credible sample to make an educated hypothesis/conclusion. I will be conducting interviews of each athletic director and coach.

Instrumentation

I will interview (see Appendix A) the three athletic directors and three coaches, paying particular attention to the methods and requirements they use to promote academic achievement in their respective athletic programs. I typed the responses to the interviews as each interviewee answered, and as such, the answers are in summary form as I tried to capture the essentials of their answers. The various responses to these interviews allow me to gain a holistic and historical perspective of each individual's approach towards promoting student athletes' academic achievement. This will also help me to apply this information to make my own adjustments to my possible future coaching and teaching positions. The interviews were completed in June 2008.

Procedures

As I analyze my data, I will look for similarities between the answers given by the different coaches and the athletic directors. I will also look for major differences, but the similarities will be the most helpful for generalization and future application. I will sort the data by each interview question and the respective answers of each interviewee. Each interviewee will be kept confidential and will be denoted by the size and type of school and title. If their titles or school sizes are similar, then I will designate each one by a number, i.e. Large Public School Athletic Director 1 or LPS AD 1. Sorting the data in this manner will allow me to compare and contrast each individual's answers and make a

conclusion as to what the *best* practices seem to be for optimally helping the academic and athletic achievement of student-athletes.

Data

Collected Answers from Interviews

The interview questions are attached in Appendix A, but here they are presented with the answers from my sample sources, with the completed interviews attached in Appendix B. The interviews of the Large Public School Athletic Director 1 and Large Public School Boy's Basketball Coach were abbreviated due to the limited time of the interviewee. Again, as stated before, I summarized all answers as they were recorded during the interview to capture the essentials of my samples' answers.

Question 1: *Do you know the state's standards for academic eligibility to play in sports and where to find them?*

- Small Private School Athletic Director: yes
- Large Public School Athletic Director 1: was not asked this question due to the abbreviation of the interview
- Large Public School Athletic Director 2: yes
- Small Private School Soccer Coach: yes, every year we go through a mandatory coaching clinic that runs through the basic WIAA rules and the last two years were online.
- Small Private School Boy's Basketball Coach: knew where to find them and do not know exactly but can ask the AD
- Large Public School Boy's Basketball Coach: the state's standards have changed and districts

Question 2: *What are the state's standards for academic eligibility to play in sports?*

- SPS AD: concerned more with number of classes and passing six or more classes in a seven period day, and this just changed (according to the WIAA handbook) to make it more consistent with what other schools were already doing
- LPS AD 1: was not asked this question due to the abbreviation of the interview
- LPS AD 2: four out of six classes must be passing
- SPS Soccer Coach: 2.0 GPA maintained, class attendance minimum and be in school more than half a day on game day/practice day
- SPS Boy's BB Coach: GPA and/or number of courses that an athlete must be passing; not as aware as if he were teaching, and his school's standards are higher
- LPS Boy's BB Coach: passing five out of six classes, on a contract and striving to meet that standard

Question 3: *Do your athletic programs set a different standard? How?*

- SPS AD: Yes – eligibility is determined at quarter break and a student-athlete can't be getting more than two D's and zero F's and in-between quarter checks; we check to see if they are in compliance with WIAA standards
- LPS AD 1: yes, passing all classes with a C or better
- LPS AD 2: passing every class at all times, with a grade check every three or four weeks
- SPS Soccer Coach: nothing different than the school, which is higher than the WIAA standard
- SPS Boy's BB Coach: school standard only that is higher than the state standard
- LPS Boy's BB Coach: go with the school's standard, depends heavily on the teacher

Question 4: *How do you enforce those standards?*

- SPS AD: personally as the AD, but it rarely happens
- LPS AD 1: students who do not meet the school standard are put on a contract—it is behavior based and not grade based because behavior effects the rest of their behavior; they must show improvement and be meeting the stipulations of the contract
- LPS AD 2: if you have a D or a F in any class you must attend a one hour study time/table, and if you do not go, you are ineligible to play next week. Teachers are there to help, and the student-athlete has to wait until next grade check or note from their teacher to become eligible

- SPS Soccer Coach: gets the D/F reports from registrar and for fall sports looks at grades a month in. If a student-athlete is on the list the AD puts them on probation; brings report to practice and tells kids and makes them aware of that in advanced; if they are on the list he will be more lenient with practices (to get their work done at practices); if it gets too far they will have to miss practices or leave the team for a time
- SPS Boy's BB Coach: in a broad sense they don't play or sit out until they get themselves caught up, but then could be behind in practice; he will talk to the player and sometimes the whole team together
- LPS Boy's BB Coach: let a kid go to get help or make-up assignments — make sure you let them know they let the team down; pretty black and white and they know what is going on

Question 5: *Are they enforced the same for all student-athletes, or do you take into account each student-athlete's situation and context? Explain.*

- SPS AD: usually take into context but make sure to keep within state's standards, sometimes put on a probation period to get the grades up
- LPS AD 1: was not asked this question due abbreviation of interview
- LPS AD 2: depends on misplaced student and the teacher's okay
- SPS Soccer Coach: the rules are enforced the same, and the AD looks on a case-by-case basis because of higher standard than WIAA. We try to be consistent with each student, and we are willing to allow them to take time off to get homework done - doesn't think they have a choice when it comes to

school work or family needs; enforce this if you are going to skip practice and do it for what you said you were going to do or bring it to practice

- SPS Boy's BB Coach: not necessarily always and sometimes you have things that you can't adjust on, and at a small school you may not have enough players to play so you have to work with them—in the past it depends on cultural context and how a kid was raised
- LPS Boy's BB Coach: individual team and occasionally talk to teachers to help

Question 6: *How do you work with coaches/athletic directors/teachers to enforce those standards?*

- SPS AD: ensure teachers post to the D/F report weekly, and communicate with coaches so there are no surprises and sometimes give them a copy of the D/F report; coaches are a great resource in this
- LPS AD 1: grades for all athletes, list, and write contracts and give them to coaches. Then give them to kids to be signed by teachers as satisfactory or unsatisfactory
- LPS AD 2: same as five; the coach can lose their job and games and this never happens. The coaches want standards; the D/F list is given to the coaches every Friday or as fast as they can
- SPS Soccer Coach: doesn't work with teachers and after he has notified the students it is their responsibility; conflict of interest to talk with teachers to get them to change the grade; with the AD he informs him of students who won't be able to play and can see it coming for the most part

- SPS Boy's BB Coach: with the AD and informs (sometimes delayed) them of the students who are not able to play and sometimes tells teachers that this person is not doing their work, keep the communication open
- LPS Boy's BB Coach: skipped do to abbreviated interview

Question 7: *What role do athletics play in the academic lives of your student-athletes? What role do you play?*

- SPS AD: sometimes athletics serve as a motivator, as an effective "carrot," and other times, it is a detractor and can actually hinder because athletics are always subordinated to academics, like doing school work while participating in sports; athletics can sometimes help in the classroom; philosophically they are great for teaching character and much more personal. (Part 2) He makes it happen, and the hardest part is telling them they cannot play, and ironically it is a hole that they dug and communicating with the parents the reasons
- LPS AD 1: positive effect, forces time organization and management; to meet deadlines; work cooperatively with teammates and classmates; self-confidence; (Part 2) Stewards of the athletic/academic policy, enforce and monitor for district through district
- LPS AD 2: students who participate in extra-curricular activities do better – they are a motivational tool, and kids must do well in school to be in sports; positively, makes them better people, gives them a standard of behavior (the reputation an athlete has and how they represent the school)
- SPS Soccer Coach: no real direct correlation; balanced approach to education, not just book work and classroom setting stuff; kind of field work exercises; a

different arena to educate, especially a team sport even if they are not very talented at sports; balance between academics and athletics; life principals do correlate, perseverance (telling your mind to work through what your body wants you to do); they can use this in the classroom to help them excel in a lot of things, and pushing through challenges

- SPS Boy's BB Coach: good athletes are better students, generally, as it shows they can handle more than one thing and still get the job done; sometimes motivation to come to school; physically stronger; enhances their academic lives with parents and priorities; (Part 2) students do not want to disappoint coaches/teams/roles models; responsible to their commitments to keep grades up
- LPS Boy's BB Coach: if the students want to be there and get it done, they will do it, and some need to be talked to; there is motivation through the contract

Question 8: *Which do you think is more important, the athletic or academic success of your student-athletes? Would your student-athletes' teachers believe you?*

- SPS AD: academic, as when the body breaks down the mind still needs to work and believes the teachers would agree
- LPS AD 1: academic, but personally, athletics was the conduit to get a degree and needed athletics to this point; yes and some do not because of foundationless argument, but majority, like 95%

- LPS AD 2: we are here to educate and achieve academic success, but you only get half an education without an extracurricular activity; most of them, a vast majority
- SPS Soccer Coach: honestly academic, though both are stepping stones to the next level, and most do not go pro in sports; not so important to the exclusion of the other; always going to be learning academically; would think so that they would agree and have no reason to disagree
- SPS Boy's BB Coach: it's all important, depends on the person, and should not be mutually exclusive; depends on what answer he gives
- LPS Boy's BB Coach: academics, when they have an issue and finals maybe let off a little; yes

Question 9: *How do you promote academic achievement among your student-athletes? How do you work with the student-athletes' teachers and parents to promote this?*

- SPS AD: by not allowing them to play, a consequence, and making sure parents and teachers understand this; student-athletes are not treated different than the others; setting a high standard and following through
- LPS AD 1: contract basis
- LPS AD 2: study table, higher standard/expectations and excellence in your roles/classes, transfer concepts from one arena to the other; coaches have a parent meeting, at least one at the beginning of the season; big parent meeting every year and talk about expectations, attended by 30% of parents

- SPS Soccer Coach: verbally, make it clear with parents and students that they can do both, and they can work with the coach to help them, once they know what is going on; give them his example from his years in school, that it can be done; does not really work with teachers because it is not really his place, go through the AD, and with parents communicate to them, like end-of-the-year meeting, using it as preventative maintenance
- SPS Boy's BB Coach: the school does it and he does not have to do it; do it or do not play; communication
- LPS Boy's BB Coach: if the student does not want to pass (answer was cut short)

Question 10: *How has your method/philosophy changed throughout your professional career?*

- SPS AD: has not changed much - become more convinced of the importance of consistency and communication; being able to respect a consistent policy that you stick with and the same with discipline issues; become more aware of handbook rules to understand the spirit/intent of the rules to help execute the rules, helps to inform the methodology; asks fewer questions than used to, and a greater role in helping first year Ads
- LPS AD 1: a little more conservative in athletic arena and err more to academic, not a huge swing; foundationally stayed the same
- LPS AD 2: coached some 20 years; emphasis on academics has increased and decreased in athletics

- SPS Soccer Coach: I have become more understanding. The first few years after college, where I played and did school at the same time, I was more upset when students would not do both; became more lenient to work with students; work more with them to help them get through situations
- SPS Boy's BB Coach: not as black and white as it used to be; some dumbing down has crept in because of the society; different culturally
- LPS Boy's BB Coach: does not think he has really changed; responsible to be a support, a help guy, for the guidelines and sometimes enforce or develop them

Question 11: *What do you think is the best approach to helping your student-athletes optimally achieve academically and athletically?*

- SPS AD: comes back to the people in place, teachers and coaches who understand the philosophy, coaches who are not all about wins/losses but also about teaching character; it's about helping students "buy-in" to a coach's philosophy and putting aside what they think is best; philosophically—have consistency; academically—the same as others and meet the minimum standard; if a coach is doing their job the student should reap rewards with the classroom because of the work ethic and discipline
- LPS AD 1: parental involvement and/or other adult influences
- LPS AD 2: the world is changing; global thinking should increase student readiness; an outlet that is not work oriented/physical well being; we are a reason why a number of students are here, and in time they will learn the need for academics

- SPS Soccer Coach: giving the students opportunities to be athletes (small school ability); communicating early with the standards and letting them know that he is willing to work together to meet those standards; telling students to stick to commitments and as a coach following through with what you said you were actually going to do; carry out consequences and consistency and follow through; unity of what coaches believe in and what school standards are and communicating with the AD, and not being willing to bend the rules, integrity; (added comments) students wish they were more balanced between sports and academics; taking the opportunities to participate in sports and they are all stepping stones
- SPS Boy's BB Coach: anything is possible ideal; put your time into things; get them to believe in themselves; faith and get rid of doubt and unbelief; encourage them and accountability, check up on them; (additional comments) grades are important but not the end all; readiness theory
- LPS Boy's BB Coach: when the kid knows I am interested and know about his issues; accountability and interest (more this side), showing that he cares about him and is doing this for him and the team

Analysis

This present study was conducted to better understand how coaches and athletic directors could use the positive effects of athletics to help their student-athletes optimally achieve in academics and athletics. Asking about the academic policies of the various sports programs helps us understand what kind of expectations each school has and their priorities. Every athletic director and coach interviewed has an understanding of

Washington State's standard of eligibility,¹ some had more details, and the coaches relied on their ADs for the details, but they all had access to the handbook delineating the standards. Even though they know the State's standards, they are not as concerned with them because all three schools have higher standards.² It seems that each school involved places a high priority on the academic achievement of their student-athletes.

Their focus on promoting academic achievement among their student-athletes is demonstrated not only by having higher standards, but also by how they enforce those standards. The SPS uses a probation period for the student-athlete, who does not meet their standards, to bring up their grades. LPS 1 uses a contract system and LPS 2 uses a mandatory study time/table until they meet the standard. Each of the schools enforce their standards the same for each student, but because of having standards higher than the State's they are able and willing to work with their student-athletes to get them back within the standard. However, if a student-athlete is not willing to do what it takes to get within the parameters, or falls below the State's standards, then the school enforces the consequences they earned. The athletic directors and coaches stated that communication between each other is the key to working together to enforce the standards.

Looking at an athletic program's standards is one way to reveal the priority they have for the academic success of their student-athletes. Looking at their perception of the

¹ They are based on the number of classes during the day and the student-athlete must be passing all but one class during the day, must have 2.0 grade point average, and must attend at least half the day's classes in order to participate in practice or the game. As noted by one AD, a coach can lose their job or forfeit games, if they play an ineligible student-athlete.

² SPS AD stated that his school's policy is that a student-athlete cannot have more than two D's and zero F's at quarter breaks and in between he makes sure they are in compliance with state standards. LPS AD 1 stated that all student-athletes must be passing all classes with a C or better, and if they are not, they are put on a contract that is behavior based not grade based because the behavior affects the rest. The contract is set up in such a way that the student must show improvement and be meeting the stipulations of the contract. LPS AD 2 state that their school's standards are also different than the State's; each student has to pass every class at all times and a grade check is done every three or four weeks.

role athletics play in the academic lives of their student-athletes and how they use it to promote academic achievement is another. In this study, the majority of the interviewees see it as a motivational tool and effective “carrot,” and for some a reason to come to school. Sometimes it can be a detractor or a hindrance when a student-athlete is trying to finish their schoolwork and play sports, but athletics can be used to help in the classroom. It is great for teaching character, and because of this, it brings a balance to education. Athletics serve as a different arena to educate by providing “field work exercise,” like teaching a student-athlete to be responsible to commitments. It teaches them perseverance - that they can handle more than one thing at a time and still get the job done. It forces them to prioritize, organize, manage their time, meet deadlines, work cooperatively with their teammates and classmates, and it can give them self-confidence. It can also help them be better people, by giving them a standard of behavior and a reputation that represents their school/program.

As we can see, these programs can be very positive for the development of their student-athletes, and the interviewees said that their roles are to be stewards of the academic program/policy, be responsible for enforcement and monitoring of the standards, help the student-athletes, and act as motivators. The roles that athletics, athletic directors, and coaches play in the academic lives of student-athletes are very positive and useful to helping student-athletes achieve optimally in academics and athletics.

As far as their thoughts on whether academics or athletics was more important to the success of their student-athletes, both groups thought academics and athletics are important, but academics are more important. The SPS AD pointed out that when your

body breaks down, your mind still needs to work because you will always be learning. Their job is to educate, but not to the exclusion of one or the other. As LS AD 1 said, athletics was a conduit for him to get a degree, which is an example of its use as a stepping-stone to the next level. Most of the teachers they work with would believe their answers, with the exception of a very few, and that might depend on what answer was given.

Both the athletic directors and the coaches agree the academics is more important, but not to the exclusion of the other, and they promote the academic achievement of their students by not allowing student-athletes to play if they do not meet the academic standards. They set high the standards and follow through with the consequences; one uses a contract system, another study time/table to help those who have fallen behind. In addition, they all agreed that communication is the main key; communicating with each other, teachers, the student-athletes, and parents; informing them of the standards, the consequences, and that they are there to help them succeed. They suggest that holding student-athletes to higher standards/expectations and excellence in their roles/classes and having good communication are what promote academic achievement.

When asked if their methods have changed over the years, all said they have not changed much, but they have become more conservative in athletics and placed a greater importance on academics. They have become more aware of the need for consistency and communication, more aware of the State's rules and standards, and more understanding and willing to help. Society around them seems to have changed more than they have, but their most notable change is the shift towards academics.

The final question I asked my sample was my main research question, “What do you think is the best approach to helping your student-athletes optimally achieve academically and athletically?” Their answers were alluded to throughout the interview, but they stressed that it is about the people in place: the teachers, the coaches, athletic directors, parents, and other adult influences. A successful program must have people involved who understand the philosophy of what the schools are doing and why they do it, and who believe in the school’s standards and have the integrity to abide by them, not bend them, and carry them out. It is also essential to have people who are not just focused on wins/losses, but on teaching character, like sticking to commitments, getting student-athletes to “buy into” the coach’s philosophy, and put aside what they think is best. Coaches and athletic directors must get their student-athletes to believe in themselves and to have an “anything is possible” ideal; they must encourage their students, hold them accountable, show that they care, and want the best for them and the team. They also stressed consistency, treating student-athletes the same, making sure they meet the minimum standards, and carrying out the consequences. Communication was also an important component, especially early and often.

Some other things mentioned are getting students ready for the changing, more global world, and giving students an opportunity to be athletes and have an outlet outside of school or work. Coaches and athletes must have a balanced approach to academics and athletics, and then put their time into them. Some students only come to school to be in athletics, and if a coach is doing their job, then the student-athlete will reap rewards in the classroom because of the discipline and work ethic learned, and maybe later they will learn the value of academics. Overwhelmingly, the athletic-directors and coaches

interviewed said the best approach to helping their student-athletes optimally achieve academically and athletically centers on the people involved and their philosophies, communication ability, and consistency.

Recommendations/Implications

As we have seen through the research literature, athletics has a positive effect on academics, but is highly dependent on the context of each situation. In this present study, we learned that in the contexts of the athletic directors and coaches interviewed, athletics again has a very positive effect on academics. And we looked further to find the best approach to helping student-athletes optimally achieve academically and athletically, we found that schools and their athletic programs need to have high academic standards and expectations of excellence, while communicating clearly those standards, the consequences, and that they are there to help their student-athletes succeed. However, none of this will work if the people in place do not make it happen. It comes down to individual people working together in a particular context for the academic success of their student-athletes.

The context of each athletic program and school is very important, but the principals discovered in this study traverse the boundaries of all contexts, especially having high academic standards and expectations of excellence for their student-athletes, good communication between the people involved, and consistency in attitude and implementation. Both athletics and academics are important, and there should be a balance between them, but the priority should be on the academic success of their students-athletes. Nevertheless, athletics can make a positive difference, and if the

principles discovered through this study are used, student-athletes will optimally achieve academic and athletic success.

Conclusion

In some school contexts, athletics and academics do not seem to work as an efficient unit and are at odds with one another. The goal of helping each student-athlete achieve their highest potential, both academically and athletically, seems to get lost in the disagreement between athletic programs and teachers over which should take priority. The current research states that athletics helps the academic achievement of students, and my research upholds these findings, but also finds a better, if not best, way to help each athletic program and teacher utilize athletics to promote academic success among their students. Athletic programs with high academic standards, good communication between all the people involved, and consistency will promote academic success among their student-athletes.

Further research that could be done to further solidify and triangulate the results of this research study would be to look quantitatively at the grade point averages, standardized testing results, graduation rates, and success at the college level of the student-athletes that have gone through my sample's programs over the years. This present research could have been broadened to include more schools and athletic programs from different contexts, like inner-city schools, schools from different states, and just more schools in general. In addition, a philosophical look at what academic and athletic success means, and the specific coaching/teaching methods to achieve this success would have brought greater understanding to this study. In the end, athletics help the success of student-athletes in academics and through high standards/expectations,

good communication, and consistency, athletic programs will help them optimally achieve academic and athletic success. After all, is not the overall success of our student-athletes – academically, personally, and athletically – the goal?

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Appendix A:

Interview Questions for my sample:

1. Do you know the state's standards for academic eligibility to play in sports and where to find them?
2. What are the state's standards for academic eligibility to play in sports?
3. Do your athletic programs set a different standard? How?
4. How do you enforce those standards?
5. Are they enforced the same for all student-athletes, or do you take into account each student's situation and context? Explain.
6. How do you work with coaches/athletic directors/teachers to enforce those standards?
7. What role do athletics play in the academic lives of your student-athletes? What role do you play?
8. Which do you think is more important, the athletic or academic success of your student-athletes? Would your student-athletes' teachers believe you?
9. How do you promote academic achievement among your student-athletes? How do you work with the student-athletes' teachers and parents to promote this?
10. How has your methods/philosophy changed throughout your professional career?
11. What do you think is the best approach to helping your student-athletes optimally achieve academically and athletically?

Appendix B:

Complete Interview Answers:

Small Private School Athletic Director

1. Yes
 2. concerned more with number of classes and passing six or more classes in a seven period day and this just changed (according to WIAA handbook) to make it more consistent with other schools were already doing
 3. Yes – determined at quarter break and can't be getting more than too D's and zero F's and in between quarter checks, check to see if they are in compliance with WIAA standards
 4. personally as AD but rarely happens
 5. usually take into context but make sure to keep with state's standards, sometime put on a probation period to get the grades up
 6. ensure teachers to post D/F report weekly, and communicate with coaches so there is no surprises and sometimes give them a copy of D/F, coaches are great resource in this
 7. sometimes serves as a motivator, serves as an effective "carrot" and other times it is a detractor and can actually hinder b/c athletics are always subordinated to academics, doing school work while participating in sports, athletics can sometimes help in the classroom, philosophically great for teaching character much more personal he makes it happen and hardest part is telling them they can't play and ironically it is a hole that they dug, communicating with parents the reasons
 8. academic when body breaks down the mind still needs to and believes the teachers would agree
 9. by not allowing them to play if they don't, a negative consequences and making sure parents and teachers understand this, student-athletes are not treated any different the others, setting a high standard and following through
 10. have not changed much and have become more convinced of the importance of consistency and communication, being a able to respect a consistent policy that you stick with and same with discipline issues; become more aware of handbook rules to understand the spirit/intent of the rule to help execute the rules, helps to inform the methodology and ask fewer questions than used to, and a greater role in helping first year Ads
 11. comes back to people in place – teachers and coaches who understand the philosophy, coaches who are not all about wins/losses but also about teaching character, it is about helping students "buy-in" to coaches philosophy and putting aside what they think is best
- Philosophically – have consistency
- academically, the same as others and meet the minimum standard
if a coach is doing their job the student reap rewards within the classroom because of the work ethic and discipline

Large Public School Athletic Director 1

Passing all classes with a C or better

- put on a contract – behavior base not grade based b/c it effects the rest of their behavior, show improvement and meeting stipulation of contract
6. grades for all athletes and list and write contracts to coaches then to kids and signed by teacher sat of unsat
 7. positive effect, forces time org. and management; meet deadlines; work cooperative w/ teammates and classmates; self-confidence
 - stewards of athletic/academic policy, enforce and monitor for the district through district
 8. Academic – personally, athletics was the conduit to get a degree and needed athletics to get you to this point
 - yes and some do not b/c have foundation less argument, but majority 95%
 9. contract basis
 10. a little more conservative in athletic arena and err more to academic and not a huge swing, foundationally stayed
 11. parental involvement! and/or other adult influences

Large Public School Athletic Director 2

1. Yes
2. 4 out 6 classes must be passing
3. pass every class at all times, grade check every three or four weeks
4. if you have a D or an F in any class a one hour study time/table and if you do no go you are ineligible to play next week, teachers are their to help, wait until next grade check or note from their teacher
5. depends on misplaced student and the teacher's okay
6. same as answer five; the coach can lose their job and games and this never happens, the coaches want standards; the D/F list is given to the coaches every Friday or as fast as they can
7. students who participate in extra-curricular activities do better, motivational tool, kids who do well in school to be in sports, positively, makes them better people, standard of behavior (reputation athlete has and how they represent the school)
8. we are here to educate, academic success but you only get half an education w/out an extracurricular
- most of them, vast majority
9. study table, higher standard expectations and excellence in your roles/classes, transfer concepts from one arena to the other
- coaches have a parent meeting, at least one beginning of the season; big parent meeting Aug. 29th every year and talk about expectations attended by 30% of parents
10. coach some 20 years; emphasis on academics has increased and decreased in athletics, don't think
11. world is changing and global thinking, increase student readiness, outlet that is not work oriented/physical well being, we are a reason why a number of students are here and in time they will learn the need for academics

Small Private School Soccer Coach

1. Yes, every year we go through a mandatory coaching clinic that runs through the basic WIAA rules and the last two years were online.

2. 2.0 GPA maintained, class attendance minimum and be in school more than half a day on game day/practice day,
 3. nothing different than the school which is higher than the WIAA standard
 4. getting reports from registrar and for fall sports look at grades a month in and if on list the AD puts them on probation; brings report to practice and tells kids and makes them aware of that in advanced; if they are on the list will be more lenient w/ practices to get their work done at practices; if it gets too far they will have to miss practices or leave the team for a time
 5. the rules are enforced the same and the AD looks on a case by case basis b/c of higher standard than WIAA, consistent with each student and willing to allow them to take time off to get homework done, doesn't think they have a choice when it comes to school work or family needs; enforce this if you are going to skip practice and do it for what you said you were going to do or bring it to practice
 6. doesn't work with the teachers and after he has notified the students it is their responsibilities; conflict of interest to talk with teachers to get them to change the grade; with the AD he informs him of students who won't be able to play; can see it coming for the most part
 7. no real direct correlation; balanced approach to education, not just book work and classroom setting stuff; kind of field work exercises; different arena to educate; especially a team sport even if they are not very talented at sports; balance btwn academics and athletics; life principals do correlate; perseverance (telling your mind to work through what your body wants you to do-use this in the classroom-to help them to excel in a lot of things; pushing through
 8. honestly academic, both are stepping stones to the next level, and most don't go pro in sports; not so import to the exclusion of the other; always going to be learning academic would think so that they would agree and have no reason to disagree
 9. verbally, make it clear with the parents and students that they can do both and work with the coach to help them once they know what is going on; giving his example from his years of school, that it can be done
don't work really with teachers b/c it is not really his place go through AD; with parents communicate to them, like at the end of the year meeting, using it as preventive maintenance
 10. I have become more understanding; first few years after college where he played and did school at the same time and more upset when students wouldn't do both; become more lenient to work with the students; work more with them to help them get through situations;
 11. giving the students opportunities to be athletes (small school ability); communicating early with the standards and letting them know that he is willing to work together to meet those standards; telling students to stick to commitments and as a coach following through with what you said you were actually going to do; carry out consequences and consistency and follow through; unity of coaches believe in what school standards are and communicating with the AD; not being willing to bend rules, integrity
- *added comments
students wish they were more balanced btwn sports and academics; taking the opportunities to do participate in sports and they are all stepping stones

Small Private School Boy's Basketball Coach

1. Where to find them and don't know exactly but can ask the AD
 2. GPA and or number of courses that have to passing, not as aware as if he were teaching and his school's standards are higher
 3. school standard only that is higher than the state standard
 4. broad sense don't play or sit out until they get themselves caught up but then could be behind; talk to the player and sometimes with the whole team together
example last minute getting stuff done, no priorities
 5. not necessarily always and sometimes you things that you can't adjust on and at a small school you may not have enough players to play so you have to work with them – in the past depends on cultural context and how a kid was raised
 6. with the AD and informs (sometimes delayed) them of the students who are not able to play and sometimes with teachers will tell them that this person is not doing their work, keep the communication open
 7. good athletes are better students generally, shows they can handle more than one thing and still get the job done; sometimes motivation to come to school; physically be stronger, enhances their academic lives with parents and prioritized students do not want to disappoint coaches/teams/role models; responsible to their commitments to keep grades up
 8. it's all important; depends on the person; and shouldn't be mutually exclusive depends what answer he gives
 9. the school does it and he doesn't have to do it; do it or don't' play
communication
 10. not as black and white as it used to be; some dumbing down has crept in b/c of the society; different cultural
 11. anything is possible ideal; put your time into things; get them to believe in themselves; faith and get rid of doubt and unbelief; encourage them and accountability – check up on them
- * grades are important but not the end all; readiness theory

Large Public School Boy's Basketball Coach

1. the states standards have changed and districts have
2. passing for classes 5 out of 6, on a contract and striving to meet that
3. go with school
a lot to do with the teacher
4. let a kid go to get help or make-up stuff – make sure you let them know they let the team down; pretty black and white and they know what is going on
5. individual team and occasional talk to teachers to help and
7. if the students want to be their and get it done then they will do and some need to be talked to; motivation through the contract
8. academics, when they have an issue and finals maybe let off a little – yes
9. if the student don't want to pass the
10. doesn't think has really changed – responsible to be a support, help guy, for the guidelines and sometimes enforce them or develop

11. when the kid knows I am interested and knows about his issues; accountability and interest (more this side), showing that he cares about him doing this for himself and the team