

The Role of Extracurricular Activities at Saint Thomas Aquinas Catholic Secondary School

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to the required standards

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The Role of Extracurricular Activities at Saint Thomas Aquinas Catholic Secondary School
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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between participation in extracurricular activities and various components of students' lives at St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic secondary school in Tottenham, Ontario for the 2001/2002 academic year. Two hundred and twenty-one students were randomly selected to complete a questionnaire in order to gather data pertaining to the extracurricular activities at this school. Data analysis revealed that there was a statistically significant relationship (@ 0.05) between extracurricular participation level and school satisfaction but a statistically significant relationship could not be found for participation level and academic achievement, discipline problems, grade level or gender. It was concluded that the extracurricular program is meeting the needs of the students but a broader range of activities is suggested.

Chapter 1

Introduction

The life of a student should be enjoyable, filled with many positive experiences and encounters to remember. The memories a person has of school ought to consist of positive learning experiences inside and outside of the classroom. Umphrey (2000) suggested that for many students, co-curricular activities will be the most fondly remembered part of their high school experience. The primary responsibility of a school is to provide a sound academic education for each and every student in order to prepare the students to be successful in their future endeavours. Educators also have an obligation to develop socially responsible individuals. The success of the academic aspect of a person's education is measured by the grades one receives, but the development of the whole individual is not as easily evaluated. This feature of a student's education may not be formed inside the walls of an actual classroom, but by the total school experience.

A common expression is that the high school days are "the best days" of a person's life. It should be a goal of an educational institution to provide a sound academic experience while at the same time fostering an environment that enables students to pursue their individual interests in a meaningful manner. The existence of various extracurricular organizations within a school allows students to organize themselves into groups of people that have similar interests while being connected to the school. Wegner (1980) defined extracurricular activities as any student activity that a student enters into voluntarily and for which there is no credit offered.

The school motto from my high school in P.E.I., Non Scholae Sed Vitae, (Not For School But For Life), has served as the teaching philosophy that I have carried with me throughout my career. I firmly believe that educators must prepare students for every aspect of their lives. It is my opinion that educating the whole person can best be accomplished by having a strong extracurricular program that complements the academic aspect of school. The many benefits of participating in extracurricular activities are well documented. Umphrey (2000) concluded that highly active students tend to perform better academically, have fewer discipline problems, and have a more satisfying school experience when compared to students who do not participate in these activities. I am a teacher at Saint Thomas Aquinas Catholic Secondary School, in Tottenham, Ontario (80 kilometres North of Toronto) and it is my intention to examine the relationships between participation level of students and various aspects of student life at this school.

General Problem Statement

The goal of this study is to examine the relationship between extracurricular activities as they relate to academic performance, school satisfaction, gender, grade level, and discipline problems at Saint Thomas Aquinas Catholic Secondary School. In particular, the study will explore the relationship between the level of extracurricular participation and academic achievement, school satisfaction, and discipline problems. Last, this study will examine extracurricular involvement as it pertains to gender and grade level.

Definition of Terms

The definition and understanding of terminology are of utmost importance for any study. Unfortunately, researchers themselves have trouble agreeing on a term to describe student activities that are not required by the curriculum. The terms extracurricular, co-curricular, and student activities all refer to various groups and activities that are associated with school. These terms will be used interchangeably throughout the literature review and all will be defined as any school activity in which a student voluntarily participates in that is not associated with curricular components of the school.

Levels of participation will be defined by the number of activities the student participated in during the 2001/2002 academic year. Participation in more than two activities will be classified as high participation, participation in one or two activities will be classified as low participation and participation in no activities will be classified as a nonparticipant. Academic achievement will be defined as the average of marks obtained in the 2001/2002 year of study, as reported by the students.

Specific Research Questions

The following outline the specific research questions.

1) Is there a significant relationship between students' participation in extracurricular activities and academic achievement?

Ho: There is no significant relationship between students' participation level and academic achievement.

Ha: There is a significant relationship between students' participation level and academic

achievement.

2) Is there a significant relationship between students' participation and level of satisfaction with their school experience?

Ho: There is no significant relationship between students' participation and level of satisfaction with their school experience.

Ha: There is a significant relationship between students' participation and level of satisfaction with their school experience.

3) Is there a significant relationship between students' participation and gender?

Ho: There is no significant relationship between students' participation and gender.

Ha: There is a significant relationship between students' participation and gender.

4) Is there a significant relationship between students' participation and grade level?

Ho: There is no significant relationship between students' participation and grade level.

Ha: There is a significant relationship between students' participation and grade level.

5) Is there a significant relationship between student participation level and discipline problems?

Ho: There is no significant relationship between students' participation and discipline problems.

Ha: There is a significant relationship between students' participation and discipline problems.

Importance of the Study

This study will make a contribution to the literature by exploring the relationship between selected academic and demographic variables. More specifically it is hoped that this study will help shed light on the importance of extracurricular activities within a school and inform students, parents, teachers, administrators, and board members about their value. In particular the role extracurricular activities play in educating the whole person and establishing a good school climate will be explored. Informing groups that have a vested interest in the educational process can only help to strengthen educational programming.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Background of Extracurricular Activities

The range of extracurricular activities available to a student varies from school to school, but most schools will offer several activities for students outside the realm of the classroom.

Mahoney and Cairns, (1997) explained that extracurricular activities differ from standard courses in school because they are optional, ungraded, and usually conducted outside the school day in school facilities. It is the student's responsibility to decide if he or she wants to become part of any organization. Haensly, Lupkowski, and Edlind, (1986) called extracurricular activities the third curriculum, the first being the required courses and the second electives. The term extracurricular activities may imply that these activities may not be necessary for the total school experience so the term co-curricular activities has also been used to describe these programs. These activities provide the opportunity for a student to associate with peers in a safe environment to develop various skills.

The shortage of funds is one of the major problems facing school boards today. Although anything adversely affected due to the shortage of resources is regrettable, it is understandable that "extra" curricular programs are often the first to suffer. However, school boards must be informed about the crucial role extracurricular activities have in the development of today's adolescents. The school should provide a sound academic education for students, but the

intangible benefits from extra learning experiences at school should not be dismissed. The total school curriculum is composed of the academic program working in harmony with the extracurricular activities. The classroom is the medium where the transfer of knowledge and skills may occur while the extracurricular activities program is the avenue that will help students learn who they are and to develop numerous attributes that will help them emerge into a complete person.

The interests, abilities, aspirations, and skills that are present within a school's population are as varied as the individuals that compose that population. A large selection of extracurricular activities may help provide the various students with a group of individuals with similar interests and needs. These needs may best be filled by a combination of academic courses and the programs offered outside the curriculum. For example, Gholson and Buser, (1983) indicated that the leisure, recreational, social, and emotional needs of all students may best be met by the extra-class activity program.

Extracurricular programs are safe places for students to bridge the gap from the class setting to real life situations and to use the tools that they have already obtained, while at the same time learning new skills. Klesse (1994) has found that student activities offer young people a place to try out their academic skills in an eclectic, community - like environment. Silliker and Quirk (1997) also indicated that extracurricular participation enables students to master new skills and explore different roles outside the classroom setting. It seems that co-curricular participation can serve as a liaison between the world of academia and the individual world of each student. Suzuki (1998) noted that student activities should give students an opportunity to combine the various aspects of their academic learning into personal action.

Extracurricular activities are supervised, but it is the students themselves that will gain the most from organizing and participating in them. An important reason for the existence of these activities is to give the students an opportunity for personal growth. For example, Marano (1985) suggested that the opportunities for students to organize and plan, assume leadership roles, gain recognition and identity, experience self-governance, and mature socially, comes to a significant degree from student activities programs.

Educators must entice students to be life long learners and to impress upon them that learning occurs not only inside the classroom but in every aspect of life. Students need to be engaged in challenging problem solving situations in order to help them build the essential life skills that will help them survive in real life situations. Suzuki (1998) concluded that:

extracurriculars – in comparison to all other school activities are the most consistent source of interest and flow for students. If for no other reason then, such activities are crucial for alerting teenagers to the fact that important work isn't always aversive and alienating, and those activities that are exciting and involving needn't be devoid of challenge. (p. 5)

Well-designed programs increase the potential benefits to students. Certain factions of the student body may have many positive experiences with extracurricular activities that would not be possible if it were not for these activities. McNeal (2001) suggested that extracurricular activities are places where groups of students such as racial/ethnic minorities and girls can enhance their cultural capital and increase their life chances. Miller (2001) reported that growing evidence suggests that after school program participation is associated with higher grades and test scores, especially for low-income students. If the students from a minority group or a low-income family can reap academic and social benefits from extracurricular participation then this involvement for these students should be encouraged.

Extracurricular activities benefit both the individual and the school itself. Klesse (1994) suggested that co-curricular activities play a vital role on campus because they improve school climate, teach valuable leadership lessons, and provide a creative outlet that cannot be attained inside the classroom. It is also clear that many schools see the value of extracurricular activities and place a high priority on these activities. Marano (1985) wrote that student activities have become a part of the regular school program because of their relationship to academics and also because of their value in supplementing academics with leadership skills. It seems that the extracurricular program helps to create the leaders of tomorrow while at the same time providing a means for individuals and groups to function together in a respectful manner; thus enhancing school climate.

Much of the research on extracurricular participation focuses on the development of certain traits by the participants. It should not be dismissed that the involvement in extracurricular activities may also deter the involvement in undesirable behaviours. Cassel, Chow, Demoulin, and Reiger (2000) contended that more often than not, when high school students begin involvement in the use of alcohol and drugs, it is because they are not heavily involved in other acceptable and satisfying pursuits. The involvement in extracurricular activities does not guarantee that students will not get involved with alcohol, drugs or other at risk behaviours, but this involvement can help reduce the likelihood of the students succumbing to peer pressure associated with various negative behaviours. Miller (2001) commented on extracurricular activities by stating that:

programs can serve other important prevention and developmental functions; for example educators know that antisocial behaviours and social rejection can interfere with school achievement. The most impressive research on the results of

after-school programs links participation to significantly lower involvement in risky behaviours, including a lower incidence of drinking, smoking, using drugs, having sex, and becoming involved in violence as well as increased positive behaviours - such as better social and behavioural adjustments, better relations with peers, and more effective conflict resolution strategies (p. 8).

Many students, teachers, and parents view extracurricular activities as a vital aspect of a school and the learning experience. The decision to participate stems primarily from the student having an interest in the activity. This participation is voluntary and students cannot be forced to participate; they can, however, be encouraged. Many researchers point out the benefits of participating in extracurricular activities, but questions remain as to the identity of the participants, the nature of the benefits, and the participants' perceptions of these activities. There is a legitimate concern about the students who do not participate and who do not have the opportunity to develop in the same way as their peers who are active in extracurricular activities. Schools should strive to offer a wide range of activities in order to provide an area of interest to as many students as possible. McNeal (1998) stated

there should be a greater concentration on access to extracurricular activities, followed by a more general movement toward studying how those activities are used by schools, teachers, and students to actually construct their social worlds and how involvement in a range of activities affects various student behaviours and development outcomes. (p. 9)

Overall the research has shown that student involvement in extracurricular activities has a positive influence on academic performance and school attitude, as well as a potentially vital role in adolescent development (Suzuki, 1998; Wegner, 1980). The many positive effects that extracurricular activities have may be hard to determine, but Harvancik and Golsan (1986) declared that discontinued extracurricular activities tend to have an overall negative effect on

students. Therefore, a vibrant extracurricular program can only strengthen and enhance the school climate and experiences for students.

Benefits of Participating in Extracurricular Activities

The associated benefits of extracurricular participation have been well documented in educational research. The most compelling research states that there is a direct correlation between extracurricular activity level and academic success (Gerber, 1986; Holloway, 2000; Mahoney & Cairns, 1997). Researchers have also shown that extracurricular participants enjoy their school experience, feel better about themselves and engage in fewer at risk endeavours than the non participants (Klesse, 1994 ; McNeel, 1999). Schools are institutions of learning that measure the successes of students by various grading systems. Most educators want to see students succeed academically and welcome any and all situations that will help the students reach their goals. One avenue that may help students academically is involvement in the school's extracurricular program. Numerous researchers have been able to link extracurricular involvement with a higher grade point average (Harvancik & Golson 1986; D'Onofrio & Klesse, 2001; and Marano1985).

High school students lead busy lives and may not allocate a significant amount of time to schoolwork. Therefore, a legitimate concern for the academic success of students is the number of hours spent on other activities. Camp (1990) stated that rather than being detrimental to academic achievement, participation in student activities has a positive relationship to grades. Saphier and King (1985) argued that the more extensive a student's participation - in terms of

number of hours, number of activities, or number of types of activities - the more time was devoted to homework and the higher the student's GPA. These activities will provide the participants with the opportunity to learn how to properly budget their time so that they can meet their school commitments while enjoying the extracurricular program. Holloway (2000) stated that participation in extracurricular activities leads to an increased commitment to school and school values which indirectly leads to increased academic success.

The extracurricular program fosters an appreciation for school and what a sound education can do for a person. O'Brien and Rollefson (1995) concluded that a strong association exists between participation in extracurricular activities and student engagement in school. Klesse (1994) contended that participants in co-curricular activities are more engaged in school, put forth more effort into their studies, get better grades and expect to go farther in school than non participants. Students will be able to accomplish more in school when enjoyment is associated with attending the institution and participating in extracurricular activities is a positive experience.

Adolescents face many issues, problems and stressful situations as they make their way through their high school years. One of the biggest obstacles to overcome is being accepted by a peer group. The social barriers surrounding a peer group may be broken down by participating in an extracurricular activity. Mahoney and Cairns (1997) explained that extracurricular activities can provide a gateway into the conventional social network while simultaneously promoting individual achievement and goals.

A characteristic of academically successful, socially accepted students is a positive self image. These students will posses the skills to have confidence in themselves to tackle any

problem that they may face. Miller (1987) concluded that students' self confidence, social poise and interpersonal skills are developed in extracurricular activities. Baker (1993) explained that student activities are vehicles that help young people develop their self concept as well as their interpersonal, organizational and life skills. These extracurricular activities will help a student feel better about themselves because they will be associating with people that accept them and have a shared interest. An improved self image will only help a student out in every aspect of life, including academics and social acceptance.

The teenage years will be a time in a person's life when many attributes, skills, and interests are fostered while a person's identity and self concept are being developed. These characteristics may be challenging to accomplish within the realm of curriculum guidelines so the extracurricular program serves as a good medium to acquire these traits. Otto (1976) suggested that extracurricular activities provide participants with status and prestige as well as facilitating the development of skills and attitudes that serve as resources in students' quest for future success. Lannert (2000) also indicated that co-curricular pursuits can support the goal of teaching students to be responsible and fulfilled human beings, providing them with the opportunities that develop character, critical thinking, sociability, and specific skills.

The activities in high school that people are involved with will help develop the personnel characteristics that will influence the opportunities afforded to them after they complete their high school years. D'Onofrio and Klesse (2000) suggested that extracurricular activities encourage cooperation and team work, personal sacrifice for group goals, and empathy. These are some of the qualities that may benefit young people in their studies, their jobs, and their personal lives as well as help them become responsible and successful adults. The

development of these life skills during the adolescent years may help a person gain employment later in life. Klesse (1994) cited a survey of 113 corporate recruiters who ranked grades near the bottom of the list of skills they consider most important in their final hiring decisions. Employers are interested in interpersonal skills, problem solving abilities, communication skills, technical knowledge, high energy levels and good judgement - the very skills activities foster in students.

D'Onofrio and Klesse (2000) concluded that:

participation in high school activities is often a predictor of later success in college, in the workforce, and in society. Consider what any industry wants from its new employees, besides positive attendance records and high academic averages in core courses: The list always includes people skills, the ability to accept responsibility and follow directions, poise, and high personal ideals. These are marketable skills - and skills that are cultivated through co-curricular participation. (p.6)

Participation in extracurricular activities may help the academically successful students with their future studies. Numerous universities look at extracurricular involvement of students in their selection of scholarship recipients, acceptance of students or even a reduction in tuition. For example, William Woods University is offering a tuition reduction to students who were involved in extracurricular activities (Miller, 2001).

The decision to participate in extracurricular activities is most often a voluntary decision that students make. The level of participation as well as the benefits received may vary from student to student. Therefore, educators should encourage all students to have some form of participation in an extracurricular activity in an effort to tap into the available benefits that are associated with these school sponsored endeavours.

At Risk Students and Extracurricular Participation

There are far fewer students of the current generation dropping out of high school than in previous generations. This is an encouraging situation but there are still some students who quit school or are at risk of dropping out of high school. Researchers have found that at risk students do not have positive perceptions of school or learning and until they do they will not feel a sense of connectedness to the school (Klesse, 1994; Mahoney and Cairns, 1997). Several studies claim that the involvement in extracurricular activities is linked to a decrease in dropout rates (Klesse, 1994; Haensley et al, 1986, and Mahoney & Cairns, 1997). Therefore, extracurricular involvement could shift the balance in the direction of heightened school engagement for children who are marginal or at risk in their school adaptations.

The involvement in extracurricular activities may provide a ‘hook’ to keep students in school. A meaningful experience in a school-based activity may make the difference between a dropout and a high school graduate. Klesse (1994) reported that the lack of participation in school activities was a significant characteristic of the high school dropout. Mahoney and Cairns (1997) indicated that extracurricular involvement, particularly for potential drop out students, could help shift the balance toward greater engagement in school. Schools can offer these students a pleasant experience associated with ‘school life’ through extracurricular activities. The students who may not be adequately successful academically could gain the most from extracurricular involvement in terms of satisfaction with their school experience. D’Onofrio and

Klesse (2000) concluded that co-curricular activities appear to provide all students, at-risk and gifted students alike, an academic safety net.

School Climate

The schools of the 21st century are faced with many serious, challenging and complicated problems. Many school jurisdictions are faced with budgetary cutbacks, staffing shortages, deteriorating buildings, and overhauling of various curricula. In addition, there are many social problems that individual schools handle every day. The public is well aware of the tragic school shootings that have occurred in North America over the past number of years. These shootings seem so foreign to most people because they think that such a catastrophe could not happen at their school or in their community. One can only hope that these thoughts will hold true and nothing of that magnitude will happen again. Many of the reports about the school shootings mention the unfortunate situation of school bullying or racism and the disdain some students have about attending school. Not surprisingly, D'Onofrio and Klesse (2000) found that as overt acts of racism and the number of school-based hate groups climb such activities as team sports create bonds that cut across racial lines. Savard (2001) concluded:

In an age when schools are waging war against gangs and taking over some of the responsibilities that in the past have been met by the family, students must have a place to belong, an adult they can talk to and a place where they can feel important and begin to learn the values they may not be getting at home. A strong student activities program can help meet these needs and more - they can also teach leadership and develop character. (p.1)

These disturbing and unfortunate facts about school violence are associated with the climate inside the walls of individual schools. Each school is unique and will create its own

internal culture or environment. McNeal (1999) indicated that schools' internal cultures are typically contingent upon student-based groups, which are partially defined by individual student involvement in specific activities. Positive individual and group experiences associated with the school create a pleasant school climate. More positive experiences will help create a school culture that students can appreciate. Marano (2000) stated his belief that in light of recent incidents of school violence student activities can play an important role in creating a school climate in which students feel involved and favourable toward school, teachers and administrators.

Educators should never lose sight of the fact that their main responsibility is to provide a thorough education for their students. Academics provide a sound education and teachers should strive to make every student successful in the academic realm. Saphier and King (1985) suggested that meaningful learning takes place in schools that have a positive school culture. Meaningful learning should not only include successes inside the classroom but also the development of a person socially, emotionally, mentally, and physically. A safe, enjoyable, and stable school climate is an important element in providing the meaningful education of the whole person that schools are attempting to do.

In order to have a positive school climate where students can be successful, both academically and personally, an active extra-curriculum is essential. The success stories from extracurricular activities have the potential to cross barriers (eg. peer pressure, social acceptance) that some students face. Extracurricular activities have the potential for providing opportunities for students to be productive in a school setting. These positive opportunities will allow students to feel better about themselves, interact with peers, relate school with a positive experience and

develop numerous skills. Extracurricular activities will benefit individual students but they may also help to create a school climate that allows for a safe and enjoyable education for everyone.

Participants vs Nonparticipants

The participants in extracurricular activities will benefit from their involvement but the nonparticipants may be missing these potential benefits. Given this, future educators may want to expand the number of students that are participating in these activities. A larger proportion of the student body participating in extracurricular activities will provide more opportunities for the student population to reap the rewards of extracurricular activities. Total participation of the student body in extracurricular activities is a worthy goal but may not be attainable. Jacobs and Chase (1989) reported that approximately one - fourth of high school students were involved in school activities, and the more active they were in school activities, the higher the GPA's they earned, and the more they liked school. The question educators should ask themselves is why more students do not get involved in extracurricular activities. The reasons for lack of involvement are diverse, but they could be as simple as there is not an activity that interests students or they have little previous involvement in these groups/activities.

Educators should be realistic about the varying degrees of extracurricular participation by students within their schools and understand that certain students are going to be more active than others. McNeal (1998) commented on the level of student participation by stating that extracurricular activities are not equitably participated in by various subgroups of the high school population. In a perfect world all students would benefit equitably from extracurricular participation but a wide range of benefits gained does exist within the student body. Students

from a higher socioeconomic status are significantly more likely to participate in each category of extracurricular activity except vocational activities.

Explanations as to the varying levels of participation may be unique to each student.

Klesse (1994) commented on different variables that have been shown to interact with participation and outcome measures. These include family, socioeconomic status, community values, student ability, school size, nature of co-curricular activity, self-esteem, self-perceived peer status, and significant other influences. Researchers have also found that the students who participate in extracurricular activities are more academically prepared than those students who do not participate (Klesse, 1994 and McNeal, 1998). Students involved in extracurricular activities may be exposed to a richer and fuller experience than their peers who do not participate.

Summary

Extracurricular activities will not succeed if the school administration does not see the value in these activities. Silliker and Quirk (1997) alluded to the importance of providing education policy makers and administrators with accurate information about the value of extracurricular participation. In order to continue vibrant extracurricular programs, administrators must know how advantageous these programs are to individual students, entire schools, and the community. Marsh (1992) suggested that policy makers should actively promote student participation in extracurricular activities because of the probable positive benefits across a wide variety of educationally relevant outcomes for students from diverse backgrounds. Gholson (1985) recommended that:

Educational leaders at all levels must seriously reconsider the relationship between student participation in the co-curriculum areas of the schools and levels of achievement, which result because of that involvement. There is a positive correlation between student involvement in co-curricular activities and success in non academic pursuits following high school and college. (p. 19)

Administrators also need to be reminded that participation in extracurricular activities can have a big impact on university scholarships and admissions. Gholson (1985) made the claim that colleges should begin a process that carefully incorporates those non classroom academic skills and talents which secondary school students bring to the university admissions office but are almost never considered.

Today's society suggests that people must be lifelong learners and therefore they should engage in activities that will enhance this lifelong learning. Baker (1993) suggested that education goes beyond the classroom, that student activities are no longer extras, and that they fill an educational void left by the academic program that recognizes only the cognitive needs of students. Further, Umphrey (2001) stated that:

Effective schools seek to engage as many students as possible in co-curricular activities, following a philosophy that students will miss a valuable part of their education if they do not participate. The co-curricular program, therefore, should offer sufficient variety to appeal to a wide range of student interests. (P.1)

Decisions that impact on education will always draw the attention of the general public. These decisions are usually made with consultation of the people involved, but having informed individuals involved with this process is imperative. D'Onofrio and Klesse (2001) contended that co-curricular activities are an extension of, not a diversion from, a good educational program and support the academic mission of the school. Lannert (2000) stated that activities working hand-in-hand with academics helps all students realize their potential. Educators need to search

for ways to connect schooling with activities that make sense to young people. A curriculum that integrates student activities is part of the solution.

Chapter 3

Design and Methods

Participants

The participants in this study are the 639 students of Saint Thomas Aquinas Catholic Secondary School for the 2001-2002 academic year. A sample of 221 students was employed for this study, 113 males and 108 females. The sample consisted of 54 grade nine students, 63 grade 10 students, 61 grade eleven students, 41 grade twelve students and 2 OAC (grade 13) students. Participants from eleven first period classes were randomly selected to compose the sample.

These participants were placed into one of three categories (High Participation, Low Participation, or No Participation) based on the number of activities in which the individual participated. Students who participated in more than two activities were placed in the high participation category, one or two activities placed in the low participation category, and no activities placed in the no participation category. The students for one academic year were used in order to include all extracurricular participation in an attempt to get a complete picture about the extracurricular program at Saint Thomas Aquinas Catholic Secondary School.

The students that attend Saint Thomas Aquinas Catholic Secondary School live in numerous communities in the South Western portion of the Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board. Saint Thomas Aquinas Catholic Secondary School is located in Tottenham,

Ontario which is approximately eighty kilometres north of Toronto. The students that attend Saint Thomas Aquinas Catholic Secondary School live in the surrounding communities of Adjala, Alliston, Beeton, Cookstown, and Tottenham. A list of extracurricular activities that Saint Thomas Aquinas Catholic Secondary School offers was compiled and includes the following organizations: Basketball, Volleyball, Golf, Track and Field, Cross Country, Tennis and Soccer teams as well as Art Club, Yearbook, Student Council, Percussion Club, Choir, Concert Band, Grade Nine Band, Drama Club, Art/Photography Club, OSAID (Ontario Students Against Impaired Driving), Social Justice Club, Prom Committee, Circle of Friends, Public Speaking Club, Grad Committee, and Woodworking Club. The administration and the teaching staff reviewed this list to ensure that all of the activities that Saint Thomas Aquinas offered were considered.

Data Collection

To obtain data on the extracurricular program at Saint Thomas Aquinas Catholic Secondary School a survey was designed (Appendix A) by looking at similar surveys and consulting with the co-curricular chair, coaches and advisors at the school. To test the survey for validity a copy of the specific research questions and a copy of the survey were given to the administration and department heads of the school. They were asked to comment on the extent to which they thought the instrument would yield results for the intended questions. All of the responses indicated that the survey would garner information on the specific research questions, therefore establishing validity. To test the survey for reliability a pilot run of 50 students, who were not part of the sample, were randomly selected to complete the survey and then Cronbach's

Alpha was calculated at 0.76 which showed the survey to be reliable. In order to get a representative sample of the student body eleven period one classes participated in this study. This sample was obtained by random cluster sampling and no effort was made to establish either equal numbers of males or females or equal numbers from the different grade levels. The teachers of these classes were asked to administer the survey on a specific day. The teachers were also asked to keep track of any students who were absent on that day in an attempt to get as many completed surveys as possible.

Procedure

Submission of a research proposal was made to the University Research Ethics Board and approval was received. The pilot run of the survey was conducted using fifty students not in the randomly selected classes that are part of the study. Permission to conduct the survey was secured in writing from the Superintendent of the Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board and the administration of Saint Thomas Aquinas Catholic Secondary School. Permission forms (Appendix E) accompanied a letter of information (Appendix D) that was sent to the parent/guardian of every student in the randomly selected classes. These forms had to be returned before the survey could be completed.

Data collection required staff involvement. The staff was informed about the nature of this study at a staff meeting and a date was established to administer the survey at a time suitable for the involved classes. Two weeks prior to the survey date, the letters of information and permission forms were sent home. The teacher of each participating class collected the permission forms one week before the survey was to be conducted. The day of the survey, the teacher was given an envelope that contained a class list and copies of the survey. The teacher

was asked to administer the survey during the period and to track any students who were absent that day in order to get the absent students to complete the survey when they returned to school. The teacher then returned the completed surveys to the principle researcher in a sealed envelope.

Data Analysis

The data in this study were analysed using SPSS 9.0 and included appropriate inferential statistics for the population and the subgroups of high participation, low participation and no participation. Initially, the data were analysed by crosstabulation tables and figures to see if there were any differences among the three groups (nonparticipant, low participant, and high participant) in terms of academic achievement, school satisfaction, gender, grade level, and discipline problems. To determine if there were statistical significant differences between the participation groups and the categories the Pearson Chi Square values and Contingency Coefficients were calculated.

Chapter 4

Results

The data collected for this study represented the student population of 639 students at Saint Thomas Aquinas Catholic Secondary School for the 2001-2002 academic school year based on a sample of 221 students. These students completed a questionnaire and were placed into categories of no participation, low participation or high participation. Table 1 shows the number of students from the sample that were classified into the three categories. 120 (54.30 %) students reported not being involved in any extracurricular activities, 78 (35.29 %) students reported low participation and 23 (10.41 %) students reported high participation. It should be noted that 101 (45.7 %) students reported being involved in some form of extracurricular activities. Figure 1 illustrates the various participation categories based on the percentages obtained from the sample.

Table 1

Groups of Students by Participation Level

<u>Participation Level</u>	<u>Number of Students</u>	<u>Percent of Students</u>
No Participation	120	54.30
Low Participation	78	35.29
High Participation	23	10.41

Totals	221	100
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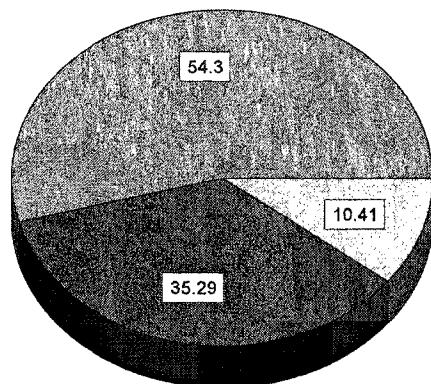


Figure 1

*Percent of Students in Different
Participation Categories*

- No Participation
- Low participation
- High Participation

Participation Level versus Academic Achievement

To test the first hypothesis proposed in this study that there is no significant relationship between students' participation level and academic achievement a crosstabulation was

performed. This represents the number of students from the participation categories (no, low, or high) that had an academic average in a specific range [(90-100 %), (80-89 %), (70-79 %), (60-69 %), (50-59 %), (below 50%)]. These different categories are listed in Table 2. The percentage of each participation category within the academic category is in parentheses.

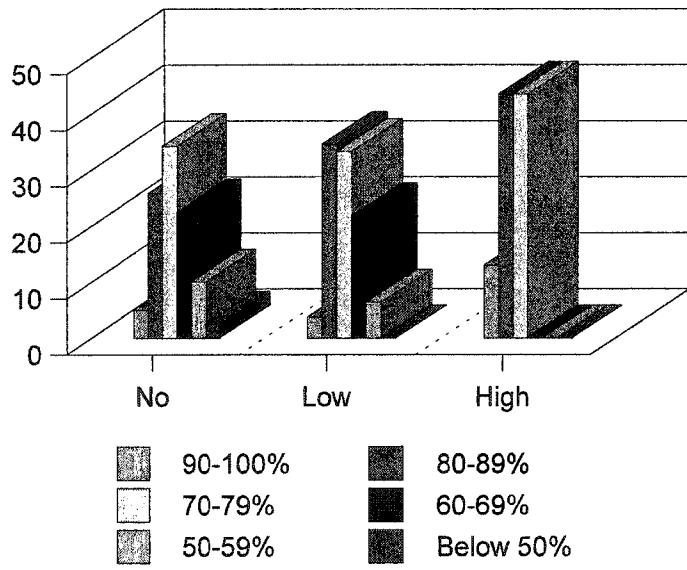
Table 2

<u>Academic Average</u>	<u>No Participation</u>	<u>Low Participation</u>	<u>High participation</u>
90-100 %	6 (5%)	3 (3.8%)	3 (13%)
80-89 %	31 (25.8%)	27 (34.6 %)	10 (43.5 %)
70-79 %	41 (34.2 %)	26 (33.3 %)	10 (43.5 %)
60-69 %	27 (22.5 %)	17 (21.8 %)	0 (0%)
50-59 %	12 (10%)	5 (6.4 %)	0 (0%)
Below 50%	3 (2.5 %)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Figure 2

Percentage of Participation Categories in Academic Average Ranges

Figure 2 gives a visual representation of the percent of the different participation categories that had an average in each of



the academic ranges. The data represented here shows that all of the students in the highly active group have an average above 70%; of these highly active students, 56% had an academic average above 80%. It is interesting to note that 35% of the students in the No Participation category had an average

below 70%. In order to determine if there was a significant relationship between the two

variables the Pearson Chi-Square Test was performed and the Contingency Coefficient was calculated. Table 3 reports the values for these calculations. No significant relation for participation level and academic achievement was found, $\chi^2(10) = 16.36, ns.$

Table 3

Values for Pearson Chi Square and Contingency Coefficient for Participation level and Academic Achievement

<u>Test</u>	<u>Value</u>	<u>Degrees of Freedom</u>	<u>Critical Value @ 0.05</u>
Pearson Chi Square	16.363	10	18.307
Contingency Coefficient	0.263		

Although there is no significant relationship between the participation level and academic achievement, the contingency coefficient having a value of 0.263 indicates a small to moderate relationship between the variables.

Participation Level versus School Satisfaction

To test the second hypothesis proposed in this study, there is no relationship between students' participation level and level of satisfaction with their school experience a crosstabulation table was constructed. The Pearson Chi-Square and the Contingency Coefficient were then calculated. Table 4 reports the number of respondents that were placed in the

participation categories (no, low, or high) that responded to the level of satisfaction, as being very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied. The percentage of each participation category for each satisfaction category is in parentheses.

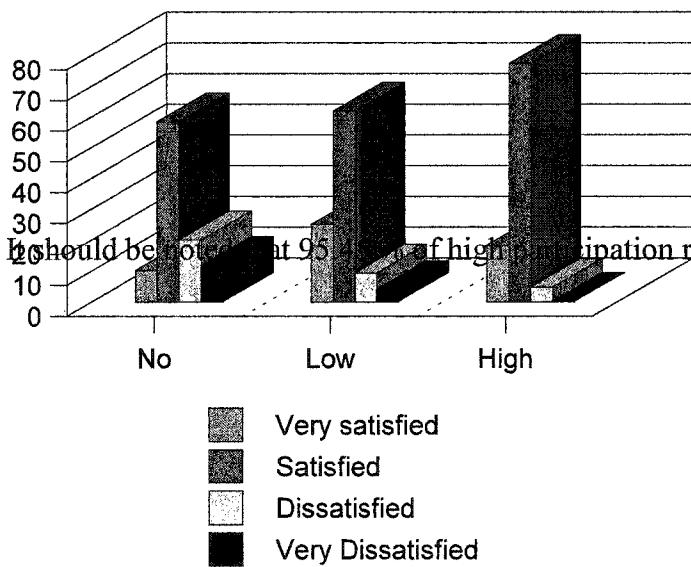
Table 4

<u>Satisfaction Level</u>	<u>No Participation</u>	<u>Low Participation</u>	<u>High participation</u>
Very Satisfied	12 (10%)	19 (25%)	4 (18.18 %)
Satisfied	70 (58.33 %)	47 (61.84 %)	17 (77.27 %)
Dissatisfied	24 (20%)	7 (9.21 %)	1 (4.55 %)
Very Dissatisfied	14 (11.67 %)	3 (3.95 %)	0 (0%)

Figure 3 gives a visual representation of the percent of the different participation levels that had responded to the appropriate satisfaction categories.

Figure 3

Percentage of Participation Categories and School Satisfaction



If school should be not important 95 % of high participation respondents were either satisfied or very satisfied with their school experience and only 4.55 % reported being dissatisfied. There were no respondents in this group

that were very dissatisfied. In the no participation level, 68% were either satisfied or very satisfied with their school experience and 32% of these respondents reported being either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their school experience.

In order to determine if there was a significant relationship between the two variables, the Pearson Chi-Square Test was performed and the Contingency Coefficient was calculated. Table 5 reports the values for these calculations. A significant relationship between participation level and school satisfaction was found, $\chi^2 (6) = 18.543$. The strength of the relationship is low to moderate with a Contingency Coefficient of 0.280. Although there is significant relationship

between the variables the Contingency Coefficient having a value of 0.280 indicates a low to moderate relationship between the variables.

Table 5

Values for Pearson Chi Square and Contingency Coefficient for Participation Level and School Satisfaction

Test	Value	Degrees of Freedom	Critical Value @ 0.05
Pearson Chi Square	18.543	6	12.592
Contingency Coefficient	0.280		

Participation Level versus Gender

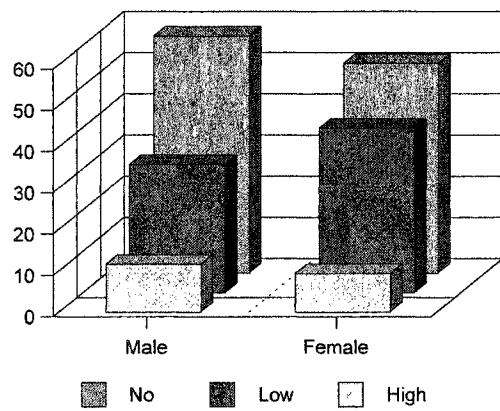
To test the third hypothesis proposed in this study, that there is no significant difference of the participation rates and the two genders, a crosstabulation table was constructed and then the Pearson Chi-Square and Contingency Coefficient were calculated. Table 6 reports the number of male and female respondents that were placed in the participation categories (no, low, or high). The percentage of each gender category is shown in parentheses. Figure 4 illustrates the participation levels between the two genders.

Table 6

<u>Gender</u>	<u>No Participation</u>	<u>Low Participation</u>	<u>High Participation</u>
Male	65 (57.52 %)	35 (30.97 %)	13 (11.50 %)
Female	55 (50.93 %)	43 (39.81 %)	10 (9.26 %)

Figure 4

Percentage of Males and Females in the Participation Categories



In order to determine if there was a

significant relationship between the two

variables, the Pearson Chi-Square Test was performed and the Contingency Coefficient was calculated. Table 7 reports the values for these calculations. No statistical significant relationship between gender and participation level was found, $\chi^2 (2) = 1.570$, ns. Although there is no significant relationship between the variables, the Contingency Coefficient having a value of 0.084 indicates a very low relationship between the variables.

Table 7

<u>Test</u>	<u>Value</u>	<u>Degrees of Freedom</u>	<u>Critical Value @ 0.05</u>
Pearson Chi Square	1.570	2	5.991
Contingency Coefficient	0.084		

Participation Level versus Grade Level

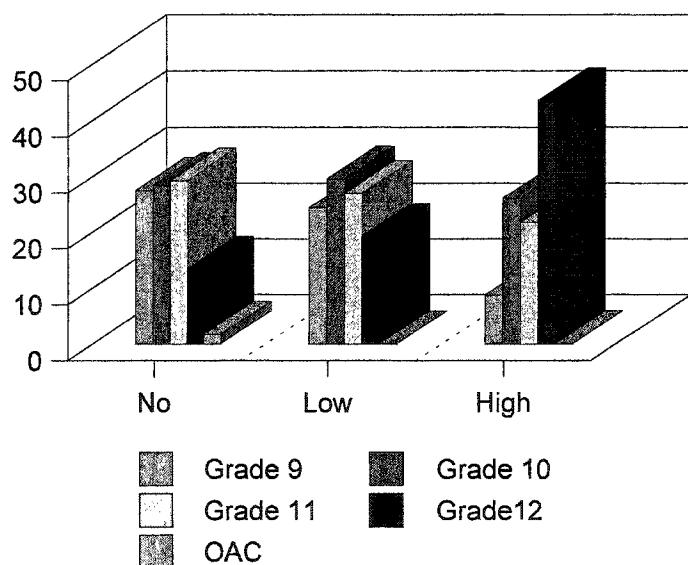
To test the fourth hypothesis proposed in this study that there is no significant difference between the different grade levels and participation rates a crosstabulation table was constructed and then the Pearson Chi-Square and Contingency Coefficient values were calculated. Table 8 reports the number of respondents that were placed in the participation categories (no, low, or high) that responded to being in grade 9, 10, 11, 12, or 13 (OAC). The percentages of each participation category for each grade level are in parentheses. Figure 5 illustrates the participation levels between the different grade levels.

Table 8

Grade Level	No Participation	Low Participation	High Participation
Grade 9	33 (27.50 %)	19 (24.36 %)	2 (8.7 %)
Grade 10	34 (28.33 %)	23 (29.49 %)	6 (26.08 %)
Grade 11	35 (29.17 %)	21 (26.92 %)	5 (21.74 %)
Grade 12	16 (13.33 %)	15 (19.23 %)	10 (43.47 %)
OAC	2 (1.67 %)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Figure 5

Percentage of the Participation Categories in the Different Grade Levels



In order to determine if there was a significant relationship between the two variables, the Pearson Chi-Square Test was performed and the Contingency Coefficient was calculated. Table 9 reports the values for these calculations. These tests prove that there is no statistically significant relationship between grade level and participation level, $\chi^2 (8) = 14.569$, ns. However, because the Pearson Chi-Square value is close to the critical value this relationship is approaching significance. The Contingency Coefficient having a value of 0.248 indicate a low to moderate relationship between the two variables.

Table 9

Values for Pearson Chi-Square and Contingency Coefficient for Participation Level and Grade

Test	Value	Degrees of Freedom	Critical Value @ 0.05
Pearson Chi Square	14.596	8	15.507
Contingency Coefficient	0.248		

Participation Level versus Discipline Problems

To test the fifth hypothesis proposed in this study, that there is no significant relationship between students' participation and discipline problems a crosstabulation table was constructed and then the Pearson Chi-Square and the Contingency Coefficient were calculated. Table 10 reports the number of respondents that were placed in the participation categories (no, low, or high) that responded to being a discipline problem frequently, regularly, occasionally, or never.

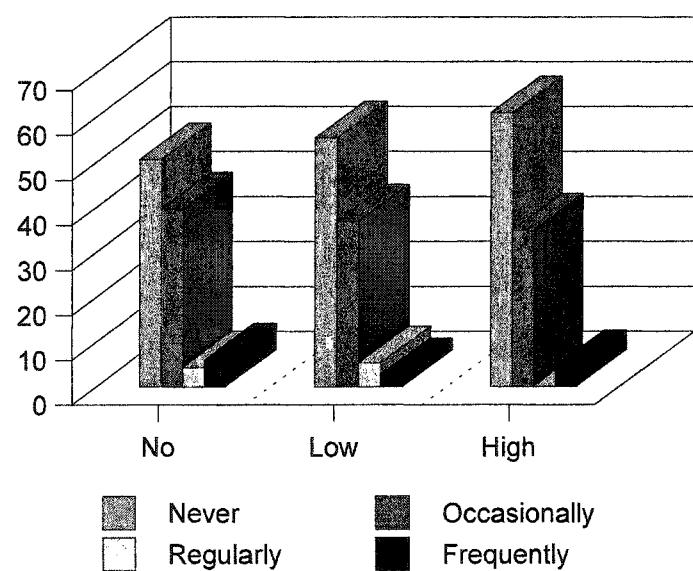
The percentages of each participation category for each level of discipline problems are in parentheses. Figure 6 illustrates the participation levels between the different levels of discipline problems.

Table 10

Discipline Problem	No Participation	Low Participation	High Participation
Never	60 (50.42 %)	42 (55.26 %)	14 (60.87 %)
Occasionally	47 (39.50 %)	28 (36.84 %)	8 (34.78 %)
Regularly	5 (4.20 %)	4 (5.26 %)	0 (0%)
Frequently	7 (5.88 %)	2 (2.63 %)	1 (4.35 %)

Figure 6

Percentage of the Participation Categories with Discipline Problem Frequency



These data show a general trend that the number of respondents that are never a discipline problem increases when the participation level increases from no participation (50.42 %), to low participation (55.26 %), to high participation (60.87 %). A trend is also shown for the respondents who reported that they are regularly or frequently a discipline problem. The number of respondents that answered they were regularly or frequently a discipline problem increases when the level of participation decreases from no participation (10.08 %), to low participation (7.89 %) to high participation (4.35 %). These numbers are insufficient to determine if there is a significant relationship between the level of participation and the frequency of discipline problems. The Pearson Chi Square value shows no significant relationship for participation level and discipline problem frequency, $\chi^2 (6) = 2.907$, ns. The Contingency Coefficient having a value of 0.115 indicates a very weak relationship between these two variables. Table 11 reports the results of the Pearson Chi-Square Test and the Correlation Coefficient for these variables.

Table 11

Values for Pearson Chi Square and Contingency Coefficient for Participation Level and Discipline Problem Frequency

Test	Value	Degrees of Freedom	Critical Value @ 0.05
Pearson Chi Square	2.907	6	12.592
Contingency Coefficient	0.115		

Chapter 5Discussion

This study set out to examine the relationships between extracurricular participation and several variables for the students of 2001/2002 at Saint Thomas Aquinas Catholic Secondary School in Tottenham, Ontario. A literature review was conducted to develop specific research questions that would aid in the analysis of these relationships. This study looked at five aspects of the program to determine if there was a relationship between these components and the participation level in extracurricular activities. Relationships between student participation in extracurricular activities and academic achievement, school satisfaction, and discipline problems were explored. Further, differences between extracurricular activity participation and gender as well as grade levels were also examined. The questions were as follows.

1. Is there a relationship between students' participation in extracurricular activities and academic achievement?
2. Is there a relationship between students' participation in extracurricular activities and school satisfaction?
3. Is there a relationship between students' participation in extracurricular activities and gender?
4. Is there a relationship between students' participation in extracurricular activities and grade level?
5. Is there a relationship between students' participation in extracurricular activities and discipline problems?

Participation Level versus Academic Achievement

A significant relationship was not found between participation level and academic achievement, however it is interesting to note that all of the respondents that had an academic average below 70% were either from the No Participation or Low Participation categories, while each of the respondents from the High Participation group had an average over 70%. The highest academic range (90-100 %) had 13% of the High Participation Category, 3.8 % of the Low Participation Category, and 5% of the No Participation Category.

These preliminary numbers lead one to believe that there may be a relationship between academics and extracurricular participation but a more sophisticated statistical approach is required to determine if there is a significant relationship between academics and extracurricular participation. Due to the fact that the calculated Pearson Chi Square value was less than the critical value at 0.05 the conclusion must be made that there is no statistically significant relationship between academic achievement and extracurricular participation. There is a relationship between the two variables, albeit a small to moderate one, because the Contingency Coefficient is 0.263. This finding is inconsistent with past research in that other researchers have found that students who participated in extracurricular activities have higher grade point averages than nonparticipants (Marano, 1985; D'Onofrio & Klesse, 2001), or perform better academically than their peers who did not participate (Gholson, 1985; Haensly et al., 1986; Mahoney & Cairns, 1997).

The result of the present study at Saint Thomas Aquinas may vary from other research for at least three reasons. First, Saint Thomas Aquinas is a relatively small school and it is a common occurrence to see the same students being involved in a majority of the activities. The random

sample of 221 students only included 23 students (10.1% of the sample) who were classified as highly active. This small percentage of highly active students at this school may have affected the strength of the relationship between academics and extracurricular participation. Due to the small numbers of respondents in this category a few low averages could affect the relationship between participation level and academic achievement. The second reason may be the self-reporting of academic averages by students. In order to ensure anonymity the school had asked that the students be allowed to self-report their own academic standing as opposed to having these calculations provided. This method of reporting the academic standing of the students was unavoidable and it may have led to the reporting of inaccurate averages. Third, and perhaps most importantly, the school may not be offering enough extracurricular activities that appeal to the students. Stevens and Peltier (1994) recommended that administrators should monitor the number of students participating in various activities and establish more options for those that are interested in participating. Saint Thomas Aquinas may want to expand the activities offered in an attempt to increase the number of people participating and being exposed to the potential benefits of this participation

Participation Level versus School Satisfaction

A significant relationship was found between the participation level and school satisfaction in the present study, although it should be noted that the strength of the relationship was low to moderate. It is a compliment to the school that 169 (76.47 %) of the respondents reported being satisfied or very satisfied with school. A trend that developed when the responses of the three participation categories were analysed was that the more active a student was the

more satisfied he or she was with school and vice-versa. The percentages of students that were either satisfied or very satisfied versus students that were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied, for 'No Participation' were 68.33% vs. 31.67%, for 'Low Participation' were 86.84% vs. 13.16% and for 'High Participation' were 95.45% vs. 4.55%.

This relationship between participation in extracurricular activities and school satisfaction is consistent with other research in this field. For example, Haensly et al. (1986) concluded that involvement in school activities is positively related to satisfaction with school in general. In addition, O'Brien and Rollefson (1995) stated that there is a strong association between participation in extracurricular activities and student engagement in school. Gillman (2001) reported that students who took part in a greater number of extracurricular activities had a significantly higher level of school satisfaction than those with minimal or no participation.

Students at risk of dropping out of school may be susceptible to feelings of alienation, failure and general dissatisfaction with their school experiences. As suggested by the findings of this study, participation in extracurricular activities may provide an avenue that helps lessen negative feelings toward school and enable individuals to have a more positive attitude regarding their education. An improvement in satisfaction level toward school may help limit the number of students who drop out of school before graduating. For example, Huling (1980) found that highly active students have a low degree of alienation and that a highly alienated student is not likely to be very active in co-curricular activities. Klesse (1994) suggested that student activities can be a change agent within the school to decrease the sense of alienation that students feel and reported that students who leave school prior to graduation are students who were unlikely to participate in student activities. Participation in extracurricular activities might be one of the

reasons many students stay in school and find personal meaning for this time in their lives.

It is encouraging to see that there is a significant relationship between the participation levels and school satisfaction at Saint Thomas Aquinas. The relatively high overall satisfaction level (76.47 %) with school experience by the student body at Saint Thomas Aquinas accounts for the low to moderate strength of the relationship between extracurricular participation and school satisfaction. Approximately three out of four students stated that they were either satisfied or very satisfied with their school experience.

Participation Level versus Gender

There was no significant relationship found between participation level and gender, this is an encouraging situation because both genders have the opportunity to participate at an equitable level. I am not surprised at the results generated from the analysis of gender versus participation level because Saint Thomas Aquinas does not offer any sport that is gender specific and the rest of the extracurricular activities should appeal to both genders equitably. This study found 52% of males and 49% of females participated in at least one activity while McCarthy (2000), reported that 39% of males and 46% of females participated in extracurricular activities. The Saint Thomas Aquinas extracurricular program is reaching a higher percentage of males and females than other jurisdictions but should strive for even higher participation rates.

Participation Level versus Grade Level

There was no significant relationship found between participation level and grade level. Although, further analysis reveals a small to moderate relationship between participation and

grade level. The raw data leads one to the conclusion that there may be a relationship between grade level and participation rate because the analysis of the highly active group shows 43.47 % were from grade 12 and only 8.7 % were from grade nine. The Pearson Chi Square value, 14.596, is close to the critical value, 15.507, but does not exceed it. This means that the relationship between these two variables is approaching significance. The strength of this relationship is low to moderate because the Contingency Coefficient is 0.248.

This discrepancy of the participation levels between students in grade nine and in grade twelve is not surprising and is supported by other researchers. Dean and Gifford (1990) reported an interesting finding in that ninth grade students in junior high schools participated in more extracurricular activities than did those in senior high schools. Savard (1993) reported that seniors were more likely to participate in three or more activities (highly active) than were sophomores. One explanation for this discrepancy might be that students in grade nine, at a senior high school, are not fully aware of all extracurricular activities that the school offers whereas students in grade twelve have known about the activities that the school offers for four years. When people get to the senior level in school, they may feel more comfortable in the social hierarchy of the school and understand their individual interests. The senior students may recognize that this is their last year of high school and their last opportunity to join the activities that they did not participate in their previous years.

Participation Level versus Discipline Problems

The results of this study allow us to conclude that there is no statistically significant relationship between these two variables as the Pearson Chi Square value (2.907) is well below the critical value (12.592) at 0.05 significance. There is a relationship between these two variables but it is weak because the Contingency Coefficient is 0.115. However, analysis of the raw data establishes a trend between the level of participation and lack of discipline problems; the more active the student is in extracurricular activities the less often they are a discipline problem. The percentages of the participation groups that reported they were never a discipline problem were 60.87 % for the High Participation group, 55.26 % for the Low Participation group, and 50.42 %, for the No Participation group.

This trend is supported by other researchers. McNeal (1999) stated that participation in extracurricular activities is associated with a host of positive educational, social, and developmental outcomes such as improved interpersonal skills, reduced levels of delinquency, a reduced likelihood of dropping out of school, and improved self esteem. D'Onofrio and Klesse (2000) noted that students who participate in activity programs have fewer discipline problems than students who don't participate. Savard (1993) concluded that the group of students that reported having had disciplinary problems had significantly higher proportions of inactive students and significantly lower proportions of highly active students.

Conclusion

This study has posed five important questions that relate to the students and the extracurricular program at Saint Thomas Aquinas. There is evidence for the following.

1. Is there a relationship between student participation in extracurricular activities and academic achievement?

The results of this study show that the null hypothesis cannot be rejected since there is no statistical significant relationship between the different participation levels and academic achievement. However, a trend was found by analysing the raw data. The more active students reported having better academic averages than the less active students. This was the relationship being explored and even though there was no significant relationship between these two variables it is encouraging, and not surprising, to see this pattern exist between academic achievement and extracurricular participation.

2. Is there a relationship between student participation in extracurricular activities and school satisfaction?

The results of this study show that the null hypothesis can be rejected since the analysis indicates that there is a statistically significant relationship between participation level and school satisfaction. This should give the school a sense of accomplishment in meeting the needs of the students. An interesting statistic is the 76.47 % of respondents stated that they were either satisfied or very satisfied with the school. This high satisfaction level for the entire student body is a testament to the school but a stronger testament is the statistically significant relationship between extracurricular participation and school satisfaction. This finding should help solidify

the importance these activities have in the eyes of the educational decision makers.

3. Is there a relationship between students' participation in extracurricular activities and gender?

The results of this study show that the null hypothesis cannot be rejected since there is no statistical significant relationship between gender and participation level. The fact that both males and females participate at approximately the same rate is certainly a positive characteristic of the program at Saint Thomas Aquinas.

4. Is there a relationship between students' participation in extracurricular activities and grade level?

The results of this study show that the null hypothesis cannot be rejected since there is no statistical significant relationship between grade level and participation level. An interesting finding is the 43.47 % of the highly active group was composed of grade twelves. A possible explanation for this finding may be that the senior students may have had a positive experience with a variety of activities during their high school years and wanted to have as many positive experience in their final year, leading to a high participation rate.

5. Is there a relationship between the extracurricular participation level and discipline problems?

The results of this study show that the null hypothesis cannot be rejected since there is no statistical relationship between the extracurricular participation level and discipline problems.

The timing of the survey may have had an impact on this relationship. The survey was completed in June and many of the students who were discipline problems may have dropped out of school by this time in the school year.

Implications

This study was conducted to examine the relationships between extracurricular participation and various aspects of students' lives at Saint Thomas Aquinas Catholic Secondary School. Based on the results of this study it is my conclusion that the extracurricular program at Saint Thomas Aquinas needs to be expanded in order to allow for more students to be involved and possibly benefit from extracurricular participation. Hopefully, an increase in extracurricular activities will allow Saint Thomas Aquinas to become more consistent with the research as it pertains to relationships between extracurricular participation and academic achievement and extracurricular participation and discipline problems.

The relatively high percentage of the student population that reported being involved in an extracurricular activity at Saint Thomas Aquinas suggests that a large number of students participate but not a majority. The 45.40 % of the student body of Saint Thomas Aquinas that did participate is a higher percentage of participation than in some other schools. Huling (1980) reported that only 32% of students in schools with more than 600 students participate in one or more activities. The participation rate of students at Saint Thomas Aquinas is commendable and may be attributed to staff involvement, reputation of activities, the 'small school' feeling and the lack of a strict eligibility requirement policy. Holloway (2000), Jacobs and Chase (1989), McNeal (1998), and Joekel (1985) warn about the negative effects of strict exclusionary policies

for extracurricular activities. A majority of exclusionary policies require a minimum grade requirement in order for a student to participate. I do agree with the research that limiting the membership in extracurricular activities to the academically successful students may harm the students who need these activities the most.

This study has also indicated that the participants in extracurricular activities are more satisfied with Saint Thomas Aquinas than their peers who do not participate. However, the study did not establish a relationship between academic achievement, discipline problems, and level of extracurricular participation. This finding is inconsistent with other research that found there is often a relationship between academic achievement and participation level, as well as the lack of behaviour problems by the more active students. A possible reason for the lack of a relationship between academic success and participation level may be due to the fact that the number of activities that this school is offering in its extracurricular program may be too limiting. In order to increase the number of students participating, and having exposure to potential benefits from extracurricular activities, Saint Thomas Aquinas should establish a method of determining the types of new extracurricular activities the students want. This would be consistent with past research as Gillman (2001) advised school leaders to establish strategies and policies that will encourage students' participation in extracurricular programs. Graham (1966) stated that an extracurricular program cannot perform its valuable function unless it meets the interests of as many students as possible.

This study showed that there is a relatively large discrepancy between the number of grade nines and the number of grade twelves in the highly active group. The highly active group consisted of 43% grade twelves while only 9% were from grade nine. Saint Thomas Aquinas

should try to develop or encourage more participation in extracurricular activities at the grade nine level. It would be a huge challenge for a school to have 100% of its students active in the extracurricular program, but that does not mean the school should accept the status quo in relation to the level of participation. The participation level at Saint Thomas Aquinas is an acceptable level but it is not exceptional when compared with results from other studies. Jacobs and Chase (1989) stated that only about one fourth (25%) of students in a high school participate in extracurricular activities, while Nwa (1994) reported that 60% of students participate in extracurricular activities. There seems to be a strong desire amongst the student body to have a wider range of sports teams in particular football, rugby, hockey, and badminton. There is also a void in the number of activities offered at Saint Thomas Aquinas that will help serve the community. An activity that could help out the surrounding areas while at the same time appeal to every student, regardless of athletic or musical talent, should be considered for Saint Thomas Aquinas. This activity could be similar to the Santa's Anonymous organizations found in other jurisdictions throughout the country. Santa's Anonymous helps families in need at Christmas time. Students do a majority of the fund raising to provide needy families with a turkey dinner and presents for the children.

Limitations of Research Design

This research study was able to determine if correlational relationships between variables existed, but it was not able to determine causal relationships between variables. This study indicated that there was a relationship between school satisfaction and level of extracurricular participation, but it was unable to determine if the involvement in extracurricular activities was

the cause for the increased satisfaction level.

The school administration wanted to ensure student anonymity and as such, the self reporting of student averages was required. This type of reporting may have had an impact on the academic range in which students placed themselves. This method of reporting the students' marks may also have limited the nature of the data that were collected. Originally, the students would have been told their exact academic average and then this data could have been used in more precise statistical tests to determine significance. In order to be granted permission from the administration the reported method of data collection was used instead of the preferred method. Further, the survey was done at the end of the school year and the students who may have had the most discipline problems may have been suspended, expelled or dropped out. This may have affected the results about the relationship between the participation level and discipline problems.

In terms of further research this study has sparked the interest in the role of the extracurricular activities at Saint Thomas Aquinas Secondary school for the 2001-2002 academic year. This study is a snapshot of the extracurricular program at this specific school for that specific school year. The 2002-2003 academic year started with labour difficulties between the teachers and the school board. The teachers began the year volunteering their time with the various extracurricular activities but soon withdrew these services because of a work to rule campaign imposed by the union. This bargaining tactic did not work and a full-blown strike was the next step taken by the union. It would be beneficial to conduct this survey in an academic year that had the extracurricular program suspended due to labour negotiations to determine if the results would be similar to those found in this study.

It is unfortunate that the extracurricular program suffered due to negotiations between the teachers and their employer during the 2002-2003 school year. The attitudes of staff and students toward these activities changed after this labour unrest. Staff members had feelings of resentment toward the board and were not as eager to volunteer their time for these activities. Back to work legislation was introduced forcing the teachers back into the classroom, but the teachers did not volunteer for any extracurricular activities for the duration of the school year. It would be informative to study the extracurricular activities during a strike year and the following years to see if there are the same number of activities offered and participation levels as compared to the year before the strike.

It would also be valuable to survey other schools within the same district. This would allow for comparisons between senior high schools to analyse the participation levels and evaluate the various extracurricular programs. This would also allow for analysis of the extracurricular programs of the feeder schools, which could lead to recommendations to these schools about their programs. Improved extracurricular programs at the junior high school will help strengthen the extracurricular activities at the senior high school level. It would also be informative to analyse why some students choose not to participate in any extracurricular activities that this school offers.

It is hoped that the results of this survey will help strengthen the commitment to extracurricular activities at Saint Thomas Aquinas Secondary School. Superintendents, trustees, administrators, teachers, parents, and students should be made aware of the potential benefits that can be reaped from participating in extracurricular activities. The timing of this study is important to reiterate the value of an extracurricular program. School board officials must be

reminded about the benefits associated with these activities. Teachers need to realize that these activities are important to the school climate and are appreciated by the students. Parents and students need to realize that they are fortunate to have extracurricular activities in order to tap into the various tangible and intangible benefits. This study set out to analyse the role of the extracurricular program at Saint Thomas Aquinas Secondary School. The extracurricular program for the 2001-2002 academic year at Saint Thomas Aquinas Secondary School was viewed as successful but it should expand the number of activities offered in an attempt to appeal to more students and to become more consistent with other studies on extracurricular participation.

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Appendices

Appendix A - Student Survey

Survey

Please circle the appropriate response for each question.

1) What is your gender?

A) Male B) Female

2) What grade are you in?

A) 9 B) 10 C) 11 D) 12 E) OAC

3) Into what range does the average of your marks fit?

A) 90-100 B) 80-89 C) 70-79 D) 60-69 E) 50-59 F) Below 50

4) What are your plans following high school?

A) University B) Trade School C) Work Force D) No plans

5) How many hours a week do you spend on homework?

A) None B) 1-3 C) 4-6 D) 7-9 E) More than 9

6) Did you participate in the following school activities this year? If so, how often?

		# of Weeks	Average hrs/week
A) Basketball Team	No	Yes	
B) Volleyball Team	No	Yes	
C) Golf Team	No	Yes	
D) Track and Field Team	No	Yes	
E) Cross Country Team	No	Yes	
F) Tennis Team	No	Yes	
G) Soccer Team	No	Yes	
H) Ski Team	No	Yes	
I) Art Club	No	Yes	
J) Yearbook	No	Yes	
K) Student Council	No	Yes	
L) Percussion Club	No	Yes	
M) Choir	No	Yes	
N) Concert Band	No	Yes	
O) Grade Nine Band	No	Yes	
P) Drama Club	No	Yes	
Q) Art/PhotoFigurey Club	No	Yes	
R) OSAID	No	Yes	
S) Social Justice Club	No	Yes	
T) Prom Committee	No	Yes	
U) Circle of Friends	No	Yes	
V) Public Speaking Club	No	Yes	
W) Grad Committee	No	Yes	
X) Woodworking Club	No	Yes	

7) How often do you attend an extracurricular activity as a spectator?

A) Most Activities B) Frequently C) Seldom D) Never

8) How satisfied are you with the extracurricular activities in which you participate?

	A)	B)	C)	D)	E)
A) Basketball Team	A	B	C	D	E
B) Volleyball Team	A	B	C	D	E
C) Golf Team	A	B	C	D	E
D) Track and Field Team	A	B	C	D	E
E) Cross Country Team	A	B	C	D	E
F) Tennis Team	A	B	C	D	E
G) Soccer Team	A	B	C	D	E
H) Ski Team	A	B	C	D	E
I) Art Club	A	B	C	D	E
J) Yearbook	A	B	C	D	E
K) Student Council	A	B	C	D	E
L) Percussion Club	A	B	C	D	E
M) Choir	A	B	C	D	E
N) Concert Band	A	B	C	D	E
O) Grade Nine Band	A	B	C	D	E
P) Drama Club	A	B	C	D	E
Q) Art/PhotoFigurey Club	A	B	C	D	E
R) OSAID	A	B	C	D	E
S) Social Justice Club	A	B	C	D	E
T) Prom Committee	A	B	C	D	E
U) Circle of Friends	A	B	C	D	E
V) Public Speaking Club	A	B	C	D	E
W) Grad Committee	A	B	C	D	E
X) Woodworking Club	A	B	C	D	E

8) How satisfied are you with the variety of extracurricular activities that your school offers?

A) Very Satisfied B) Satisfied C) Dissatisfied D) Very Dissatisfied

9) How would you rate the overall quality of the extracurricular program at your school?

A) Excellent B) Good C) Fair D) Poor

10) How important are the following reasons in explaining why some students don't belong to the various school activities?

A) Very Important	B) Somewhat Important	C) Not Very Important	D) Not At All Important
A) Lack of time	A	B	C
B) Cost	A	B	C
C) Activities not related to student interests	A	B	C
D) To difficult to find transportation for the activities	A	B	C
E) Activities dominated by certain students or teachers.	A	B	D

11) How important are the following reasons in explaining why people participate in various school activities?

A) Very Important	B) Somewhat Important	C) Not Very Important	D) Not At All Important
A) Gain status and prestige within the school	A	B	C
B) Improve physical fitness	A	B	C
C) Have fun	A	B	C
D) Enhance learning	A	B	C
E) Great way to make friends	A	B	D

12) How would you rank the quality of discipline at your school?

A) Excellent B) Good C) Fair D) Poor

13) How would you rank the fairness of discipline at your school?

A) Excellent B) Good C) Fair D) Poor

14) How often do you cut classes?

A) Never B) Occasionally C) Regularly D) Frequently

15) How often are you a discipline problem in class?

A) Never B) Occasionally C) Regularly D) Frequently

16) Have you ever been suspended or expelled from school?

A) Yes B) No

17) How do you rate the quality of education that you are receiving at your school?

A) Excellent B) Good C) Fair D) Poor

18) How do you rate school spirit?

A) Excellent B) Good C) Fair D) Poor

19) What do you think the school's reputation is in the community?

A) Excellent B) Good C) Fair D) Poor

20) How satisfied are you with your total high school experience?

A) Very Satisfied B) Satisfied C) Dissatisfied D) Very Dissatisfied

Thank you for your participation in this survey to gather information on the extracurricular activities at Saint Thomas Aquinas Catholic Secondary School. The results of this survey will be made available to you in students' services and the main office once data analysis has been completed.

Darrell Bradley

Appendix B - Superintendent Letter of Permission

May 20, 2002

oard

I am a new teacher at Saint Thomas Aquinas Catholic Secondary School in Tottenham. I have had the opportunity to teach in Prince Edward Island, Alberta, and now in Ontario. I have always been an active member of the extracurricular activities at the schools where I have been working. It is my belief that students who participate in these activities benefit greatly from this participation.

My involvement in extracurricular activities prompted me to do some research on these activities and the participants. I am asking your permission to conduct a student survey on. This research will be part of my thesis for my Masters in Educational Leadership from the University of Prince Edward Island.

The survey is anonymous so there will be no means of identifying any students based on the responses. I hope to be able to conduct this research in the spring of 2002, which will enable me to analyze the data during the summer vacation. I have attached a copy of my thesis proposal as well as the survey that I wish to use. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Darrell Bradley

Appendix C - principal Letter of Information

May 10, 2002

chool

I am an active member of the extracurricular program that is offered at Saint Thomas Aquinas and I enjoy the time that I am able to spend with the students in this capacity. It is my belief that those students who do participate in extracurricular activities have a more fulfilling high school experience than those who do not participate.

My involvement in extracurricular activities prompted me to do some research on these activities and the participants. I am asking your permission to conduct a student survey on. This research will be part of my thesis for my Masters in Educational Leadership from the University of Prince Edward Island.

The survey is anonymous so there will be no means of identifying any students based on the responses. I hope to be able to conduct this research in the spring of 2002, which will enable me to analyze the data during the summer vacation. I have attached a copy of my thesis proposal as well as the survey that I wish to use. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Darrell Bradley

Appendix D - Parent/Guardian Letter of Information

Letter of Information

Dear Parent or Guardian,

I am conducting a research project in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Master's of Educational Leadership program at the University of Prince Edward Island. The title of this study is. The goal of this study is to examine the feelings and perceptions students have of the extracurricular program at the school. This research study will describe and analyse the extent of student participation in and their attitudes towards these activities. This study will also help to determine the ways in which the school's extracurricular program is meeting the needs of its students and identify any elements needing review.

To obtain data on the extracurricular program at Saint Thomas Aquinas a survey instrument has been constructed by looking at similar survey instruments and consulting with the co-curricular chair at Saint Thomas Aquinas. The nature of the survey ensures participant anonymity so there is no risk of identifying participants and their responses. The survey will be distributed to randomly selected classes to obtain a sufficient sample of the population to make conclusions about the extracurricular program. This data will be analysed by using a computerised statistical program called SPSS to calculate appropriate inferential statistics for the population.

The specific research questions that will be analysed are:

- 1) Is there a significant relationship between student participation in extracurricular activities and academic achievement?
- 2) Is there a significant relationship between student participation in extracurricular activities and school satisfaction?
- 3) Is there a significant relationship between student participation in extracurricular activities and gender?
- 4) Is there a significant relationship between student participation in extracurricular activities and grade level?
- 5) Is there a significant relationship between student participation in extracurricular activities and discipline problems?

The data collection will happen during the spring semester of the 2001-2002 school year and then the data analysis will begin immediately after. I intend on defending my thesis during the summer of 2002 at the University of Prince Edward Island. Copies of my completed thesis will be made available to the school board, administration and student services. I thank you for reading this letter of information.

Sincerely

Darrell Bradley

Appendix E - Informed consent Form

My son/daughter has been invited to participate in a research project about the role of the extracurricular program at Saint Thomas Aquinas Catholic Secondary School. The participation of my son/daughter will consist of completing a survey. I am aware that anonymity of my son/daughter will be kept during this research process.

I understand that only the primary researcher for the completion of requirements will use the data collected from this survey for a Master's of Education Degree from the University of Prince Edward Island. The finished thesis will be presented at the University of Prince Edward Island and the results will be published in hard copy that will be available at the Robertson Library at the University of Prince Edward Island as well as at Saint Thomas Aquinas and at the school board office.

I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form. My signature indicates that I have read and understood the written document and my son/daughter is willing to participate at this time.

(Signed) Parent/guardian (student under 16) _____

Student _____

Date _____