

Activities at Expense of Program?

*Should we look again
at the activity calendar?*

IN looking at the school activities calendar of a modern high school, one is immediately struck with the great variety and the immense complexity of activities in which senior high pupils and teachers are engaged. During the past few years much criticism has been leveled at the academic program offered by the senior high school. The activity schedule should, of course, come in for its share of scrutiny and careful evaluation.

There has long been a disagreement within the school between subject centered faculty ideas and student centered activity ideas. More and more educators, however, have recognized the drawing power of extracurricular activities and have tried to capitalize on these to improve interest in subject matter rather than ignore or condemn the activity. In other words, educators have come to accept these activities as part of life—as an integrated part of the school offerings.

Many administrators are not interested in running a three ring circus or side show, or in furnishing entertainment for

students as a substitute for educational fundamentals; yet very often they are caught on a merry-go-round of activities stemming from needs exhibited by various sources in or close to the school.

Administrators have always asked: (a) Are we engaged in too many activities? (b) Do these activities threaten the academic program of studies? (c) What is the proper balance between so called co- or extracurricular activities and the curricular offerings of the school?

Exactly what activities do the present critics have in mind? Generally criticism falls upon those activities that take students out of the scheduled academic classes for nonacademic purposes or upon those activities that require many hours away from home or school that might be put to academic pursuits.

One could not logically argue that well-planned and well-supervised activities carry no educational value, since all experiences are educational in some measure. However, the critics may have a point when they say there are too many things planned during the school hours that take valuable class time, valuable teacher time and preparation, and require more hours of student time for review and make-up. Some of the ac-

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tivities causing adverse comment are: auditorium or lyceum programs, plays, marching band practice, athletic team trips and contests, testing programs, music festivals, debate or forensic participation, and many others—all of which educators agree have merit if scheduled in reasonable, measured quantities.

Some critics would have us curtail or drop interschool sports—but at the same time would have us add more music or debate. Some would have us eliminate or cut down on the forensic schedule and still advocate that we participate in more football games. Obviously some middle ground is desirable and apparently it is possible to get overengaged in co- or extracurricular programs. This is particularly true if, in addition to the regular commitments connected with a standard schedule, we permit ourselves the luxury of accepting the generous offers of political parties, church organizations, business concerns, patriotic groups or community organizations to have a day or an hour to present their products, beliefs, philosophies, and needs to our students and faculties.

To conduct a test, to run a contest, or to write a paper for some group may take many teacher and student hours. College Days, Career Days, class elections, annual distributions, periods of lyceums, periods for study halls, periods for library use, periods or days for field trips, periods for movies, periods to watch campaign speeches on TV—all take class time. Frequently the announcements merely to advertise the activity program for the day may take ten minutes in large schools even though they are printed and distributed to teachers to read to classes when convenient. Small wonder we receive criticism if we do not adequately explain the ties of these activities to the curricular program.

Do these days and these periods, used as they are, constitute a threat to our academic program? They do if they are not scheduled properly, if they are not an extension of the class procedures, and if the value gained is not equal to the time taken from the classroom.

Most of us would agree that we are endeavoring to educate the pupil to the limit of his capacity and extending this educational advantage to all the children of all the people. The whole child in this sense needs recreation, physical activity, social interaction, cultural experiences, competition and a challenging academic program alive with varied experiences. If the co- or extracurricular activities are integrated into the schedule, if they are well-planned, if they are cooperatively derived, and if they are properly managed, it would appear they then become part of our total educational program. The danger in “too much” and what “too much” stands for, in large part, once again depends on the community itself with its sociological, economic and cultural patterns.

Suggestions for Balance

Experiencing criticism is not new to school people. The following suggestions have been made that are now being tried to help balance the curricular and the co- or extracurricular offerings in the high school program.

1. Relative to requests from colleges or their representatives to meet all seniors or candidates:

College representatives can be assigned a room where they may talk to interested students after school hours. A message can be transmitted to interested students during the daily news or announcement broadcast. Interested stu-

dents may use their own initiative to meet the college representatives. No school time would be used, no special days or assemblies would be taken from classroom activity.

2. Do we use valuable time to give tests for outside organizations?

Since most colleges now have their own type of advanced placement or entry exams, high schools could give, on school time, only those tests for their own guidance purposes. All college tests, scholarship tests, Merit Examinations, or College Boards, could be given on Saturdays or during evening sessions.

3. Do athletic activities make a serious cut in school time and take too much time away from lesson preparations?

In an effort to avoid losing class time and in an effort to keep peace between the home and the school in regard to home study time, overfatigue, and to give adequate class preparation time, it is suggested:

a. We endeavor to limit interschool contests to Friday evenings or Saturday afternoons.

b. We limit practice sessions to maximum one and one-half hours.

c. We permit no practices during school hours; e.g., no excuses from gym or study hall to practice a special sport or practice plays or debate.

d. We limit athletes to one team sport a season. Explanation: many schools permit students to play on "A" and "B" teams each week. These students lose twice as many class hours. Some schools permit a student to be on the track team and on the baseball team at the same time.

e. Since other schools are involved, we could embark on a program of educating them to the problems and try to gain their cooperation in scheduling.

f. Whenever we are to be hosts to a music festival, debate tourney, student congress, an athletic contest, or general teachers' meeting, offer facilities on Friday evenings or Saturday. The explanation is that we do not feel justified in dismissing an entire school or disrupting the regular program for a few people or one activity—even if it is a desirable activity for the few people involved.

4. Do we use lyceum programs to entertain? Are they a waste of time?

Students need experience in large groups as well as small. Furthermore, they need the cultural experiences such programs present. If such programs are carefully screened by a representative group such as the student council and advisor of the musical department for the educational benefits derived it would appear few frivolous programs could penetrate the schedule. Oftentimes we neglect the talent of our own dramatics department, orchestra, band, choir or science people to purchase a lyceum of low interest. The low interest program then is criticized as a waste of time.

5. Are too many days lost to activity scheduling?

Perhaps there is more such scheduling now than some years ago. However, the school year has been lengthened in many communities and can be further extended. The subject matter demands are heavier in course content but they need enrichment and varied experiences through visits and activities to supplement the classwork. Some schools have lengthened their day to give an hour to activities—this is an old practice showing that the value of activities has long been recognized in the school program. A reminder is given to program planners that the North Central Association advocates that activities (sports, etc.) be

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planned so they will not cut into the academic program.

6. What about curriculum revision as an answer to critics?

Continuous curriculum revision and cooperative planning to offer the best program possible help to offset criticism about the activity schedule. If a student's time out of the classroom is spent in profitable experiences, the teacher in the classroom can use these experiences to enrich the subject matter taught; then revising the activity schedule will be an understandable problem and the teachers will give wholehearted cooperation.

7. Business Education Days?

Move Business Education Day to the preschool workshop week—thus students

would not have to miss school while teachers are visiting or vice versa. Businessmen can also use time in school to become acquainted with materials and problems rather than the methods employed by teachers in actual class situations.

8. Career Days?

We could use cooperative student, parent, teacher and business planning on Career Days. This helps to open the door to understanding on field trips, visitations, use of community resources, and school problems regarding various other activities.

9. Class time used to prepare for an activity?

Why use school time in preparing for or decorating for plays or dances? Is it fair to ask the woodshop to drop its planned instruction program to build a stage set? Is it fair to ask the art department to stop oil painting to work on back drops? In large measure the answer lies within the program being offered the students by the various departments requested to do this type of work. In many cases working on plays, dances, or floats for parades may be a valuable educational experience for the youngster. However, in many cases these projects are extracurricular and should have enough student interest to get the work done outside of school hours—without interfering with planned instructional programs.

10. Overloaded schedule?

It is possible that some of the things we do are better done entirely outside of school. It is possible we have too many games and can cut down our athletic schedules. It is possible we are infringing on our academic program with "too much" activity. Let us take another and more critical look at the activity calendar.

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