

2014

# High School Athletic Participation Effects From Teacher Perspectives

Chris W. Starostka  
*Walden University*

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Chris Starostka

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Dr. Mary Lou Morton, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer

Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

Walden University  
2014

Abstract

High School Athletic Participation Effects From Teacher Perspectives

by

Chris Starostka

MAT, Drake University, 2003

BA, Simpson College, 2001

Doctoral Study Submitted in Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

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## Abstract

Studies of the effects of students playing sports in high school vary but results are mostly positive. This qualitative case study examined the perceptions of 15 teachers at a small rural Iowa high school to assess how they viewed the effects of sports participation on student athletes in the classroom and why the setting experienced a decline in participation numbers. The framework that drove this study was based on Pajares's concept that teacher expectations may influence students and their academic performance and behaviors. The data included individual interviews from 15 teachers and teacher/coaches who had a minimum of 5 years teaching experience and had student athletes in their classrooms. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed for emergent themes. Findings revealed that increased academic performance, learned leadership traits, and teamwork were the perceived benefits to sports participation. Missed class time and stressful time requirements on student athletes were the perceived detriments. Findings also indicated that a need for more cohesiveness better and communication between teachers and teacher/coaches, and a need for higher eligibility standards for student athletes to participate in athletics. These findings were used to develop a policy recommendation project that will update and overhaul the district's current athletic eligibility policy. This project will enable more students to participate in athletics and remain eligible for sports participation and additional tutoring. Social change could result from increased participation in athletics, improved academic performance, and greater cohesion among teachers at the school.

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## Dedication

This work is dedicated to my amazing wife, Natalie, who continued to push me to reach my goals even when I lost sight of them. Thank you and I love you.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank all of the people who made this possible. There are way too many to name individually, but I would like to identify the following few: Dr. Mario Castro and the rest of my committee; my parents Ted and Kate and the rest of my family; all of my colleagues at the schools I have worked at; and the wonderful educators at Valley High School, Simpson College, Drake University, and especially Walden University who guided me to this point. This has been a long time coming and it was only possible through the efforts of all of these people. A sincere thank you from the bottom of my heart goes to all of you.

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## Section 1: The Problem

### **Introduction**

Many high school students participate in school sponsored sports. This participation may have an effect on their performance in the classroom. Teachers who monitor the classroom achievement of student athletes can be a rich resource for insights on the effects of high school participation in sports on student athletes' academic performance. Participation in high school sports may have numerous benefits in the classroom as well as negative effects. Some of these benefits and negative effects have been documented in numerous previous studies. McNeal (1995), Sitkowski (2008), and Spoor (2007) all concluded in separate studies that academic performance was aided by athletic participation for some persons. Spoor (2007) examined students who were wrestlers and found that participation lowered discipline referrals and elevated attendance while students were in season versus out of season. Additionally, in a dissertation, Sitkowski (2008) found that the relationship between academic performance and athletic participation, as measured by GPA, for in-season male athletes compared to when they were off season was significant. Furthermore, McNeal (1995) estimated that athletic participation lowered the probability of a student dropping out by approximately 40% when compared to the rate for the total school population. One positive aspect of playing sports is the health benefits that are gained by the participant, which benefits the student inside the classroom. The State of Iowa recently passed legislation, the Healthy Kids Act, mandating all students in Grades K-12 to meet physical activity requirements (Iowa Department of Education, 2012). By participating in sports through the school, students

can achieve some of the requirements. Other positive aspects of participating in sports are the characteristics that can be learned and transferred to the classroom such as teamwork, following of rules, and maximizing ability (Rosewater, 2009).

Other authors have expounded on the drawbacks of athletic participation. Lisha and Sussman (2012), through a review of 29 studies that examined the relationship between participation in sports and alcohol use, determined that 22 of the studies showed a positive correlation between the two variables. Based on the data Lisha and Sussman (2012) collected, the authors concluded that drinking rates were greater for students who played sports versus the drinking rates for students who did not participate in sports. They gave four possible factors that could contribute to the increased drinking rates for students who participate in sports. Those factors were the competitive nature of athletes, stress drinking, environmental influences, and the larger culture that promotes the association between sports and alcohol (Lisha & Sussman, 2012). Drinking could possibly inhibit students' classroom performance by adversely affecting how much time and how well they study, how much quality sleep they get at night, and their health, which could affect absences (Busseri et al, 2011) In another study that discussed negative aspects of playing sports, Eide and Ronan (2001) concluded that participation decreased the educational attainment of white males.

A case study was guided by the following research question: What effects on classroom outcomes do secondary teachers and teacher-coaches believe result from athletic participation? Through the information gained from this study, teachers, coaches, students, and administrators may use this information to learn why students are

participating less in sports. The findings from this study demonstrated that participants believe that more or all students should participate in extracurricular activities. This information could be used by schools to create programs or opportunities for students to become more active in school. The participants felt that student athletes are better students than nonathletes. This is more evidence to support increasing participation. There are many possible avenues to pursue using the data gathered in this study for the teachers and coaches who have the ability to shape the youth in high schools. By learning the perceptions of fellow teachers, leaders in the school system could employ what they learn through this study to put their students in the best position to be successful. The participants in the study could benefit by reflecting on their perceptions of participation in sports of their student athletes and possibly discovering new ways to teach and connect with their students.

### **Definition of the Problem**

The number of male high school students playing sports declined for the first time in 20 years in 2011 (National Federation of State High School Associations [NFSHSA], 2011). This fact is offset by the number of girls who participated in high school sports in 2011. Female participation is at an all-time high, and those female numbers have led to an increase for total, male and female, participation numbers (NFSHA, 2011). In the local setting, the national data that showed an increase in total participation numbers were contradicted by the local participation numbers, which are declining. The activities director in the focus school acknowledged that fewer student athletes of either sex are participating in school sponsored sports. The focus school had a

6% decrease in the number of participants in school sponsored sports (Activities Director, personal communication, April 1, 2010), thus losing out on possible benefits academically, socially, and personally. By investigating perceptions of teachers and their possible role in the process, the positive and negative aspects of participation in sports according to teachers and teacher/coaches can be examined. There have been many studies, such as Broh (2002), Holloway (1999), Zaugg (1998), Pate, Trost, Levin, and Douda (2000), and others conducted about the effects that participation in sports has on students. These studies have shown the benefits of participation in sports. Other studies, such as Lisha and Sussman (2012) and Eide and Ronan (2001), have discussed the negative effects of participation in sports, for example increased drinking rates and decreased educational attainment of white males. However, when students do not participate, they lose the opportunity to reap the positive aspects of participation in sports. There have not been many studies conducted on how secondary teachers perceive the role of sports in high school classroom achievement. Another area that is lacking is the comparison of perceptions of teachers and teacher/coaches. This is a vital aspect that was explored in this study.

This study examined the perceptions of high school teachers at a small rural Iowa high school that, according to the principal, serves 221 students, fields 17 athletic teams, and employs 27 teachers. Of the 27 teachers, 12 teachers are also coaches (Principal, personal communication, April 1, 2010). The high school is in a small district. However, it does have a high number of athletic options for its students with over 15 school-sponsored sports. With so many sports, there are many teachers and teacher/coaches who

have a direct impact on this issue. There are teachers who can help explain how they perceive the academic benefits and drawbacks of participation in sports on the student athletes they have in class. The teachers in the building instruct a large number of student athletes, giving them an insight into how participation affects students in academia and athletics. The population that was sampled to research the issue of sports, school, and teacher perceptions were the 27 teachers at the high school. They are the ones who see how student athletes are affected in the classroom by playing sports, so they are in a position to give insights on how the two areas interact. The goal of the study was to examine the problem of declining participation numbers through the perceptions of teachers and teacher/coaches and try to determine the possible gap in teacher practice contributing to this decline. The study also attempted to determine the role teachers and teacher/coaches may have in the problem. This study will further the body of knowledge by exploring the views of a single group of teachers at a small, rural high school to determine how they view athletic participation affecting the academic and classroom behavior of high school student athletes.

The school that was used for this study is unique because of the eligibility policy that it uses. The requirements the school asks of its students are higher than the state mandates. Students are checked twice per quarter to ensure they are meeting the eligibility standards of the school. This means that teachers and coaches have increased interaction when giving and getting updates on students. In the past, there have been some issues that have surfaced between the academic and athletic sides that have called into question the focus on student learning (Principal, personal communication, April 1,



2010). The aim of this study was to investigate why students are participating less and teacher perceptions of the possible role teachers and teacher/coaches may have in this problem.

## **Rationale**

### **Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level**

The issue of athletic participation at the high school is a concern for the administration, especially the declining number of participants. The focus school has seen a 6% drop in participation in a minimum of one sport over the previous 3 years (Principal, personal communication, April 1, 2010). The activities director is also concerned about the drop in participation numbers for males and females at the school and stated that the reality of cutting some sports that the school offers is a real possibility (Activities Director, personal communication, April 1, 2010). The perspective of teachers and teacher/coaches as it relates to athletic participation is lacking in the current body of knowledge.

The reason for studying the problem of the lower participation in athletics and the role teachers play in this school is that there are documented benefits of playing sports, and when students do not participate in athletics, they fail to reap those possible beneficial opportunities. It is known that fewer students at the focus school are participating in school sponsored athletics. This makes this school a perfect environment to study the problem. The administration has had to deal with a high number of student athletes who continually find themselves on the ineligible list. At times, the percentage of student athletes who were ineligible was as high as one quarter of the school (Principal,

personal communication, April 1, 2010). The districts' eligibility policy is very stringent. The state requires student athletes to be passing all classes at the end of each grading period, and this is usually a semester. The local policy requires that student athletes have no more than two C minuses at each grade check. The grade checks take place at midterm and at the end of each quarter. This is in addition to the state requirements. The state mandates two grade checks for eligibility; however, in the local setting there are eight checks (School Community School District, 2013). This may put teachers and teacher/coaches in a situation where they are interacting much more than at most schools in regards to student athletes and presents problems for the administration.

The perspective of teachers is vital because they interact with the students and the teacher/coaches from an academic-performance viewpoint. The teacher/coach perspective is crucial to examine because these stakeholders observe both the athletic and academic roles of the student athletes. The teacher/coach perspective is crucial to examine because these stakeholders observe both the athletic and academic roles of the student athletes. The teacher/coaches have to undertake a dual role of trying to win games and teach students, so discovering their views was important. By exploring these perspectives on issues at the school such as relationships between teachers and teacher/coaches, eligibility policies, and academic performance of student athletes, this study could give the administration and faculty information on how to increase eligibility, build cohesion amongst teachers and teacher/coaches, and improve academic performance of its students. In this study, how the two areas of athletics and academics coexist in the classroom was explored based on the perceptions of secondary teachers. These educators

can be a beneficial tool to elaborate on this issue because they interact with the student athletes on a daily basis and that gives them the ability to provide information that no one else can provide.

### **Evidence of the Problem From the Professional Literature**

This declining participation is not a localized problem. There are many states and districts around the country that are facing a similar issue as the focus school. One situation detailed a growing problem in Ohio, where around 10,000 less high school students played football in 2012 than participated in 2008 (Tan, 2013). Some reasons for this decline included threat of concussions, fees, and students playing one sport exclusively (Tan, 2013). Tan (2013) also reported that nationwide football participation was down by 25,000 students. In Montana, participation numbers have been on the decline for both boys and girls. (Mansch, 2014) All sports have seen drops, with girls track down 20%, the biggest decline. (Mansch, 2014) Nonschool club teams and more choices for students seem to be the main issues that have led to the decline, and the state association is concerned with the trend (Mansch, 2014).

Michigan is another state with participation number issues. In the 2011-12 school year, Michigan had the lowest number of students playing sports in its recent history (Chaney, 2012). Football participation dropped 6.9% alone (Chaney, 2012). Officials in the state cited safety issues and students specializing in one sport as the main causes for the declining numbers (Chaney, 2012). Moreover, citing hyper-competitiveness, time commitments, cost, and many other options, participation in Minnesota high school sports have dropped by over 50% in the last generation (Shaw, 2009).

The literature outlines various aspects of how athletics and academics are connected. They are tied together by both positive and negative reasons. In the literature review that accompanies this study, I examined five specific areas that demonstrate how sports and school are intertwined as well as how the perceptions of teachers fit into the equation. The first area that was studied was academic benefits of athletic participation. The literature showed that there is evidence that participation leads to improved performance (Holloway, 1999), higher GPA (Rosewater, 2009), increased test scores (Lipscomb, 2007), and other positive outcomes. The next area reviewed in the literature was behavioral benefits of athletic participation. Some of those benefits included decreased tardies (Zaugg, 1998) and a lower level of discipline referrals (Fejgin, 1994). The third aspect of the academic and athletic connection examined was social benefits of playing sports. Many sources, like Broh (2002), Fejgin (1994), Holloway (2002), Melnick (1992), and Rosewater (2009), have expounded on the effect that playing school sports increases social ties between student athletes, the school, and their peers. Another benefit was that participation builds a stronger bond to the school (Kennedy, 2008).

Negative aspects of participation were also examined. The main drawback to participating in school sports found in the literature was that drinking rates increased for some students who participate in team sports due to higher exposure to peers (Blomfield & Barber, 2010). Other groups have been shown to have higher level of drinking, specifically low socioeconomic females who participate in sports (Hoffman, 2006). Another negative to participation in sports is the relationship to violence. Contact sports have a strong relationship with violence. Males with friends who play football are more

likely to get into a fight (Kreager, 2007). Another negative issue of participation is injury, specifically concussions. Concussions can have a cognitive impact on participants up to 2 weeks after the incident (McClincy, Lovell, Pardini, Collins, & Spore, 2006).

Furthermore, recurrent injuries account for 10% of all sports injuries and are more responsible for causing participants to end their participation (Swenson, Yard, Fields, & Comstock, 2009).

The last area that was looked at was the perceptions of teachers. It was found through the sources that perceptions teachers have can influence student achievement (Rubie-Davies, 2010; Sokol-Katz, Braddock, & Basinger-Fleischman, 2003). Teachers can fall into a self-fulfilling prophecy that can lead to negative outcomes for students (Jussim, 1986). If teachers hold a negative view of participation in sports, it could lead student athletes to not reach their full academic potential. It has also been documented that students react based on teacher responses to them (Coleman & Jussim, 1983). Therefore, this can be a powerful tool for teachers to use in the proper way.

### **Definitions**

The following terms are used throughout this study and are defined here so that they can be better understood in the context of the study.

*Perception:* Perception is commonly referred to as the way a person thinks about or understands someone or something (Rubie-Davies, 2010). In this study, I am examining the perceptions of teachers to better understand how they regard, understand, and interpret athletic participation and its relationship with the classroom.

*Secondary school:* The school used in this study is a high school housing Grades 9-12, making it a *secondary school* (Focus School Community School District, 2012). That means the teachers in the building are secondary teachers and partially fit the criteria for the study.

*Self-fulfilling prophecy:* Jussim (1986) described a *self-fulfilling prophecy* as it relates to teachers as a three step process. The first step has teachers developing an expectation. Secondly, teachers treat students differently based on their expectations. The third and final step has students reacting in the expected way.

*Teacher/coaches:* In this study, teacher/coaches refer to participants who are employed by the focus school as both teachers and coaches. They are coaches of school-sponsored sports at the focus school.

### **Significance**

In this study, the perceived effects that participation in high school sports may have on high school students in the classroom according to perceptions of secondary teachers will be explored. It is important to discover how teachers view the role of sports in high school because there is a lack of scholarly research about teacher perceptions and how students and teachers could benefit from hearing what other teachers have to say about participation in sports. In the local setting, it is important to examine the perspective of teachers and teacher/coaches on participation in sports and classroom performance because the district has a much more stringent eligibility policy than the state requires. This means they are checking grades and gaining increased knowledge about how student athletes perform academically. It also means that these two groups,

teachers and teacher/coaches, are often in contact about the issue of the study. By delving into the perceptions of these groups, this study could lead to many positive outcomes for educators, student athletes, and the school. This study could provide administrators, teachers, and coaches the insight to help their schools and programs by taking the findings of this study and using the beneficial information to increase academic performance of student-athletes. If it is found that teachers have certain perceptions that are negative in nature, administrators could use professional development time to educate teachers on staying open minded and not stereotyping their students. If it is found that teachers believe students struggle with work in the classroom after long trips to games, coaches could implement a system where homework is done on the bus or during down-time. At the local setting, the study could allow the entire faculty to build goals that align all involved when it comes to student athletes and academic achievement. Without discovering the information to combat the trend of declining participation numbers, students may be prevented from enjoying possible positive outcomes related to participation.

### **Guiding/Research Question**

The problem at the focus school was a decrease in athletic participation numbers. That decrease was in contradiction to national participation numbers that continue to rise. Past research has demonstrated athletic participation can have positive benefits for student athletes in the classroom, socially, and in other areas. Therefore, student athletes at the focus school could be losing out on these benefits. To investigate the problem, the perceptions of teachers and teacher/coaches from the focus school were sought.

The research question that guided this study was as follows: What are the perceptions of secondary teachers and teacher/coaches on participation in sports and its effects on academic performance? Additionally, the subquestions for this study was as follows: What are the teachers' and teacher/coaches' roles in declining participation numbers, and what are the participants' views on the local eligibility policy?

### **Review of the Literature**

The review of the literature consisted of looking at previous research that has studied the classroom effects, both the positive and negative, of participation in sports at secondary levels. These effects can range from increased test scores and improved behavior to a greater sense of belonging in the school setting. By discovering how teachers view student athletes and participation in sports as it relates to academic performance in the classroom, how to merge the two areas into a successful high school experience can be discovered. The review includes numerous studies that tie being involved in sports and academic performance.

The literature review is organized into the following six areas of research:

1. Perceptions of teachers.
2. Academic benefits of high school sport participation.
3. Behavioral benefits of high school sport participation and their link to academic performance.
4. Other social benefits of high school sport participation and their link to academic performance.



5. Negatives of high school sport participation and their link to academic performance.
6. Difference in teachers and teacher/coaches.

### **Strategy for Searching the Literature**

A variety of search engines were used to conduct this literature review. The search engines EBSCO and ERIC were used through the Walden University library. Google Scholar was also used to find peer reviewed literature. The phrases used to look up the material were *benefits of sports, academic benefits of high school sports, athletes and academic success, perceptions of high school teachers, teacher/coach, classroom performance* and *perception of teachers, teacher perceptions of athletes, and negatives of athletic participation.*

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study was the perceptions and expectations of teachers and teacher/coaches. These two groups of educators have insights into many facets of the school setting. Their thoughts and beliefs can play a major role in discovering new information that can lead to social change.

The perceptions and expectations of teachers can have a big impact on the performance of students in the classroom. Pajares (1992) conducted a review of the literature to evaluate the idea that beliefs held by teachers can impact the performance and behavior of students and argued that this concept is validated. This idea was corroborated by Sokol-Katz et al. (2003) when they wrote that teacher perceptions are important for their potential influence on student achievement. In their review of previous

findings, the authors discovered that teachers may allow preconceived assumptions to influence their expectations of students (Sokol-Katz et al., 2003). That fact leads to these two outcomes: a self-fulfilling prophecy and the assignment of undeserved grades (Sokol-Katz et al., 2003). Moreover, Kolb and Jussim (1994) argued that there are three ways that teacher expectations relate to classroom performance. Those three ways are self-fulfilling prophecy, perceptual bias, and accuracy (Kolb & Jussim, 1994).

In an earlier study, Jussim (1986) discussed the self-fulfilling prophecy aspect of teacher expectations. In that study, Jussim outlined three steps that lead to the self-fulfilling prophecy coming to fruition. Step 1 was teachers developed their own expectations. These expectations can be formed through previous knowledge of the students, their hobbies, and various other factors. The expectations can be altered over time based on performance. The second step that leads to a self-fulfilling prophecy was teachers treating students differently based on their perceived expectations. In this step, teachers gave varying types of feedback to students who were thought to be high or low achieving. Jussim found that teachers were more emotionally supportive and allowed for more opportunities to high performing students. In Jussim's study, Step 3 that leads to a self-fulfilling prophecy was that students reacted to treatment based on the expectations placed upon them. Jussim's findings showed that students reacted to how teachers treated them, and those reactions affected behavior, effort, participation, cooperation, and attendance. Jussim demonstrated that students with high expectations placed on them from teachers performed at a higher level than did students who received low expectations. These three areas, self-fulfilling prophecy, perceptual bias, and accuracy,

all related to student athletes and this study. If teachers have preconceived notions about athletes in their classroom and how they will perform academically, they may be setting the students up to succeed or fail depending on the perceptions of the teachers.

There have been recent studies that also show how important teacher perceptions and expectations can be. Rubie-Davies (2010) revealed that teachers with high classroom expectations for individual students could enhance the academic performance of their students. It was also demonstrated that teacher expectations were strongly related to student aspirations (Jones, Miron, & Kelaher-Young, 2012).

The idea of students reacting to teacher response and how that affected their performance was explored in a more specific study by Coleman and Jussim (1983). In this study, the authors tested how students reacted to differing responses after completing a task from teachers. The study demonstrated that students who were given an emotional response to completing an assignment increased their effort and showed greater ability. More specifically, positive emotional responses dramatically increased effort. These findings led to the idea that teachers and their expectations of students can have a significant impact on the performance of those students. This study aimed to discover what some of the expectations and perceptions are that teachers have about student athletes.

### **Academic Benefits of High School Sport Participation**

Many studies support school sport participation. Studies have demonstrated that athletic participation has a positive relationship with academic performance. Broh (2002) analyzed survey data from over 24,000 students to determine if playing sports benefitted

the participants and found that achievement was positively affected by participation in sports. Furthermore, Holloway (1999) used a review of the literature to show that academic performance was enhanced and GPAs were strengthened through participation. Rasberry et al. (2011) reviewed 50 studies and determined that there is a positive relationship between physical activity and academic performance. Their review of the literature showed that in 12 out of 22 studies, physical activity positively affected GPA. These findings are aligned with another literature review by Singh, Uijtdewilligen, Trisk, van Mechelen, and Chinapaw (2012) who considered 14 studies and found that being physically active positively related to improved academic performance. Other studies like Zaugg (1998) demonstrated that student athletes in season received better grades than when they were out of season and not participating. In addition, Fejgin (1994) interpreted data from more than 26,000 students who took part in the Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 and established similar results stating that the more involved in school sports a student was, the higher their grades would be. Moreover, Eccles (2003) concluded that participation lead to higher educational outcomes based on data from the Michigan study of adolescent life transitions (MSALT) longitudinal study. The MSALT surveyed 900 students on a variety of topics including athletic participation. Eccles found that the 10<sup>th</sup> graders who took the survey and participated in athletics were more likely to have completed more years of school and were more likely to graduate from college than nonparticipants when comparing the former high school students when they were 24 years of age. Rosewater (2009) also reviewed literature that examined the effects of participation in organized sports, specifically youth sports, and found a consensus among

the authors that participation in high quality organized sports programs resulted in high achieving students in terms of grades.

In a similar vein, there are many studies that argue that participation can be beneficial to minority participants. A report authored by Sabo, the Women's Sports Foundation, and Northeastern University (1986) argued that Black and Hispanic student athletes achieved higher standardized tests scores than nonathletes. To reach this conclusion, information was analyzed from the high school and beyond and sampled 30,000 students over a 6-year period from their high school sophomore year to 4 years beyond high school. In another study, Fox, Barr-Anderson, Neumark-Sztainer, and Wall (2010) determined that for high school girls, being physically active, including team sport participation, led to higher GPAs. In the same study for boys, team participation was the only factor that led to increased GPA. In the Fox et al. study, the authors used data from more than 4,700 students to analyze variables of participation and physical activity or both. Furthermore, Hawkins and Mulkey (2005) concluded that for eighth grade African-American males, playing sports positively associated with enrolling in college-level courses in high school and increased the desire to attend postsecondary schools. The Hawkins and Mulkey study also linked participation and proacademic behaviors.

In another study that demonstrated how participation can impact academics, Lipscomb (2007) examined data from an economic point of view to determine if participation had an effect on academic performance. The author found that athletic participation raised test scores in math and science by 2%. It was also determined that

participation in athletics or school sponsored clubs resulted in a 5% increase in Bachelor degree expectations (Lipscomb, 2007).

Participation can lead to improved health and that can have other benefits as Wittberg, Northrup, and Cottrel (2009) found. They analyzed data from a combination of statewide standardized tests and FITNESSGRAM tests to compare academic achievement and health related measurements of 958 students. The authors found that, for fifth graders, the students who were healthier had higher test scores. They also argued that the more aerobically fit students were the better they performed academically.

In another study involving younger students, Judge and Jahns (2007) stated that overweight third grade girls had lower test scores than girls who were in the target weight range for girls their age. Their findings were based on data from teachers who worked with over 13,000 third graders who were part of the early childhood longitudinal study. The teachers made observations of the children when they took tests and reported those observations for the study.

Similarly to Wittburg et al. (2009), Bolm, Alvarez, Zhang, and Kolbo (2011) concluded that there was a significant positive correlation between fitness and test scores and also found a negative relationship between fitness and attendance. Moreover, it was determined that these relationships were not affected by race, gender, or socioeconomic status. These findings demonstrated that the more fit students are, the more likely they are to be in school and achieving at a high level. In this study, perceptions of teachers were examined to explore how those perceptions relate to increased academic benefits of athletic participation (Bolm et al., 2011).

### **Behavioral Benefits of High School Sport Participation**

There have been numerous studies showing positive behavioral effects of participation in high school sports. In a study of 134 students, 52 athletes and 82 nonathletes, at a rural Canadian high school, Zaugg (1998) found that participants in sports, over the course of 1 school year, were tardy less, missed significantly fewer class periods, and had fewer discipline issues than nonathletes. Athletes were also sent to the principal's office 6% less than nonathletes. Fejgin (1994) discovered the same outcome of fewer discipline referrals for student athletes.

There are other behavioral benefits from playing sports. Student athletes are motivated to participate in sports for a variety of reasons, according to a literature review conducted by Holloway (2002). This can lead to a vast number of positive outcomes. Some of the positive outcomes included increased peer interaction, cooperation, and connection to the school. Another study by Pate, Trost, Levin, and Douda (2000) demonstrated that sport participation was associated with numerous positive health behaviors. For example, Taliaferro, Rienzo, and Donovan (2010) found that athletes eat more fruits and vegetables. They also stated that increased activity by participants meant they were less likely to be overweight as children and are more likely to be active as adults (Taliaferro et al., 2010). Another study by Dohle and Wansink (2013) surveyed over 700 50 year olds and discovered that the single strongest predictor for later life physical activity was participation in varsity sports.

Additionally, there have been studies conducted to explore the relationship between fitness level and academic performance. Some of these were discussed earlier.

However, some of the same studies also addressed behavioral benefits of participation. Sabo et al. (1986) said minority athletes are more involved in their school and their community. These authors suggested that athletic participation lowered the dropout rate. Astin (1999) elaborated in his student involvement theory that the amount of learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program. The more involved a student can be with the school through athletics, the more likely they may be to stay engaged academically and be a positive member of the entire school community.

Many authors addressed the academic future of athletic participants in regards to college and goals. Hawkins and Mulkey (2005) discovered that participation in sports by Black eighth grade males led to goals of enrolling in academic or college preparatory programs with the desired outcome to complete high school and attend college. Another study by O'Bryan, Braddock, and Dawkins (2008) analyzed data from the educational longitudinal study in 2002 to determine that 10<sup>th</sup> graders who participated in varsity sports showed greater college bound behaviors as seniors. Along the same lines, Blomfield and Barber (2010) found that athletes associated participation with enrolling in more academically rigorous classes and university aspirations and school belonging. Similarly, Troutman and Dufur (2007) discovered that girls who participated in high school sports had better chances of completing college than nonparticipants. Furthermore, Marsh (1993) found that participation had only positive affects for every category studied. The categories ranged from homework to absenteeism. Hence, this study



attempted to discover how teachers perceived the behavioral benefits of athletic participation and how those benefits were seen in the classroom.

### **Other Social Benefits of High School Sport Participation**

Another possible benefit of participating in sports is social gains made by the athletes. Broh (2002)

found that participation in interscholastic sports creates and intensifies students' social ties, which can be advantageous to students' educational pursuits. The results further suggested that the link participation in extracurricular activities can forge between parents and a school is equally important. (p. 88)

The traits learned through participation in sports like work ethic and respect are consistent with the values of education and lead to student achievement (Miracle & Rees, 1994). In a review of the literature, Holloway (1999) argued and validated findings by Melnick (1992) that participation lowers the number of dropouts. Melnick used data from the High School and Beyond survey to analyze variables related to participation in sports such as dropout rates. In addition, Rosewater (2009) concluded through a literature review that a consensus of the authors showed that student athletes who participate in sports are more likely to attend college and obtain higher paying jobs with increased responsibility. Similar to this, the American College Testing Service, the distributor of the ACT test, implemented a study that found the only factor of the ones they investigated to predict success was achievement in extracurricular activities (as cited in Joekel, 1985). Success was defined in the Joekel (1985) study as self-satisfaction later in life. Success in extracurricular activities, especially athletic participation, can have a

major impact on how students view their time in high school and how they see themselves into the future. Participation helps build peer relationships and that positive peer pressure can be a catalyst for increased academic performance (Reeves, 2008). A review of the literature conducted by Holloway (2002) determined that participation allows students a chance to further their own interests, interact with peers, promote cooperation, provide structure and challenge, connect with the school, and build positive adult relationships. A study by Holt, Kingsley, Tink, and Scherer (2011) found similar outcomes. In 35 interviews with low income families, the authors found that social gains are made through participation. Athletes develop relationships with coaches, meet new friends, and foster social skills (Holt et al., 2011). On a personal level, participants had increased confidence, higher academic performance, and less weight issues than nonparticipants (Holt et al., 2011).

Extracurricular activities including sports give students a reason to want to come to school. They give them a higher self-concept, according to Fejgin (1994), and higher self-esteem, according to Lee (1996). Extracurricular activities bestow on students the desire to achieve more and get better grades, especially when in season. Activities also create positive peer pressure. Students may not want to let teammates, friends, and coaches down by failing or not showing up, and this could explain some of the reasons for participation in extracurricular activities aiding in academic performance (Reeves, 2008). Joekel (1985) also discussed how activities are an important component of a democratic education: They are an extension of the curriculum.

The social benefits reaped from participating in high school sports can impact student athletes later in life as well. Lopez and Moore (2006) suggested that participation in sports leads to a positive civic effect. They found that participants were more likely to volunteer, register to vote, vote, and watch the news. Staying up-to-date on world and local issues through the news can have an impact on students in the classroom.

Some social benefits can also have health and academic benefits simultaneously. Taliaferro, Rienzo, and Donovan (2010) said that marijuana use and smoking decreased for athletes. These findings are made more significant when looked at along with research such as Henry (2010) who found that drug use and student achievement were related in a negative way. The results from Henry showed that students whose academic achievement dropped also experienced an increase in drug use. The opposite was also true. Students whose academic achievement rose had a decrease in drug use. On the other hand, Rinn and Wininger (2007) stated that gifted students who participated in sports had a higher self-concept in physical abilities, physical appearance, and emotional stability than gifted students who did not participate in sports.

There are many arguments for the need for high school sports, and Kennedy (2008) pointed out a few by measuring teacher perceptions. He argued that teachers perceived that sports allow students to pursue their interests and find outlets that they can enjoy and reach levels of satisfaction not available elsewhere (Kennedy, 2008). He continued that teachers perceived sports can be an extension of the classroom that keeps children involved and connected to the school and community (Kennedy, 2008). Kennedy also found that teachers stressed the social ramifications of sports in how kids

learn to deal with all types of situations. They learned to communicate to respect people. Therefore, this study explored the viewpoint of the teachers and how they felt about the behavioral benefits of sport participation to determine what the teachers see as beneficial to playing sports.

### **Negatives of High School Sport Participation**

Not all aspects of playing high school sports have been found to be positive and worthwhile related to educational outcomes. Marsh (1992) conducted a study that used data from around 4,000 students who took part in the High School and Beyond survey. He used variables associated with participation and academic performance and concluded participation may have an effect on academic outcomes or *cause* positive results, but the strength of the connection was not strong enough to link the outcomes with a single factor like participation (Marsh, 1992). In another study, Rees and Sabia (2010) analyzed data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health and found little evidence that participation in sports positively influenced academic performance in a causal sense but did not rule out the possibility of other human capital related benefits of participation in sports. Using information from the same longitudinal study that incorporated 26,000 children, Mays, DePadilla, Thompson, Kushner, and Windle (2010) determined that students who were only involved in sports as an extracurricular activity had a higher growth in problem alcohol use later in life. Other studies have discovered that participation in some high school athletics can lead to higher drinking rates for the students involved (Blomfield & Barber, 2010; Eccles, 2003). In both of these studies, it

was determined that student-athletes who participated in team sports were more likely to show increased rates of alcohol use due to being exposed to more peers.

Other authors have shown that participation in sports can have a negative effect on behavior and attitudes. Gardner, Roth, and Brooks-Gunn (2011) used data from the longitudinal study project on human development in Chicago neighborhoods. That study surveyed 6,000 children. The authors found that urban boys who played sports had higher delinquency rates than nonathletes (Gardner et al., 2011). Other researchers, Kaye and Ward (2010), examined 78 student athletes and found that the more competitive the level of participation and the older the athlete, the more unsportsmanlike attitudes they held.

### **Differences in Teacher and Teacher/Coaches**

There are many differences between educators and educators who also coach athletics. These differences can lead to issues or problems between the two groups in the school setting. Figone (1994) discussed some of these issues and differences. Figone analyzed the literature and found that being a teacher and a coach can increase tension due to the dual roles that an individual must attend. Another aspect of being a teacher/coach that was different from being only a teacher was the time demands that are required of a coach. This idea was supported by Millslagle and Morley (2004) who found that a majority of teacher/coaches devote more time to coaching than teaching, especially inseason. Their findings suggest there is an emphasis on coaching rather than teaching for many who undertake both jobs. These differences can have an impact on how the two groups of educators perceive athletic participation and its effect on classroom performance.

Figone (1994) also addressed the issue of problems that can arise between teachers and teacher/coaches. The report alleged that there can be a subculture of coaches in the workplace. Individuals who coach will tend to relate to each other rather than the other members of the faculty. This also creates a subculture of academic-only faculty members, and that can lead to an antagonistic relationship (Figone, 1994). One other problem that takes place between the two groups is when coaches side with their players over teachers in matters of grades or eligibility. Figone suggested this can lead to hostility among colleagues and disrupt harmony in the workplace. In this study, both teachers and teacher/coaches were allowed to voice their opinions and perceptions through interviews on the topic of athletic participation and its effect on classroom performance of student athletes.

### **Implications**

There were numerous possible projects that emerged from this study. The project was developed from what was learned through the interviews with the teachers and was based on their perceptions. Other possible projects could have included staff development for building cohesion among all staff, a program to promote athletic participation in the school, or a time management seminar for student athletes.

There are implications for teachers, coaches, and schools across the nation in discovering how teachers feel about the role that athletics plays in high school classrooms. The information gained through this study could grant insights into helping schools and student-athletes increase academic performance. Specific to the local setting, a policy a revision to the eligibility rule would aid in helping student athletes achieve

academically and continue participating in athletics at the high school, thus gaining the benefits of participation that the teachers who were interviewed discussed.

### **Summary**

In Section 1, I detailed the problem of declining participation numbers in high school sports and the possible role that teachers may play in that decline. Teachers and teacher/coaches have direct contact with student athletes in the classroom and thus were the ideal groups to interview and explore their perspectives on athletic participation and classroom performance. There may be other issues that arise in the school from the two groups, teachers and teacher/coaches, which play a part in the high school setting. The findings of this study showed five themes that emerged from the interviews with teachers and teacher/coaches. The first theme was that balancing time is a concern for student athletes. Secondly, the interviewees stressed the importance of participating in athletics. The third theme was that there are many benefits to participation. Fourth, was that there are some issues between the two groups, teachers and teacher/coaches. And lastly, there were issues with the eligibility policy at the school.

The current literature was reviewed along six categories and demonstrated potential classroom effects of playing high school sports. In the literature review, I discussed the perceptions of teachers and the differences between teachers and teacher/coaches. In Section 2, I examine the methodologies of how the study was conducted. In Section 3, I discuss the project, and in Section 4, I analyze reflections and conclusions about the doctoral process.

## Section 2: The Methodology

### **Introduction**

A case study approach was chosen for this study because as Creswell (2007) outlined, “a case study involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system” (p.73). This study provides an in-depth look at how secondary teachers and teacher/coaches view the classroom effects of athletic participation. I investigated the issue of high school athletic participation and its decline at the local setting by interviewing teachers about their shared, lived experiences instructing student athletes. The design for this study is a qualitative case study to measure the perceptions of secondary teachers at a small Iowa high school about how athletic participation transfers to the classroom. The design fits the problem the best because I am exploring issues that relate to athletic participation from the teacher’s perspective, and a case study according to Creswell (2007) involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system. The use of individual interviews allowed the participants to relay their experiences and feelings about the issue of student athlete classroom participation in a concise and open manner.

### **Research and Design Approach**

The design for this study is a qualitative case study to investigate the perceptions of secondary teachers at a small Iowa high school about how athletic participation transfers to the classroom, why participation numbers are declining, and the possible role teachers may play in the decline.



There are other options for methodologies to complete this study, but as Hatch (2002) discussed, each of those other methodologies has a drawback that does not allow it to be the best option for this specific study. A narrative approach could possibly have been used, but that method is more of a story telling of an experience rather than an account of analysis of the reasons why. Grounded theory goes beyond, trying to elicit theory from the accounts, rather than just apply meaning to what is discovered (Hatch, 2002). Quantitative research usually uses an experiment to gain statistical data. The problem in this study lends itself to a more open-ended qualitative approach based on its goal of applying meaning to how teachers and teacher/coaches view participation in sports and gaining a better understanding of the situation.

### **Participants**

To obtain the participants for this study, I first contacted the district administration to make them aware of my intentions with the study and what it entailed. I gained the permission of the district and the school through a letter of cooperation. I contacted the high school principal to determine the possible pool of candidates and obtained contact information for the possible candidates. I then e-mailed possible candidates, both teachers and teacher/coaches, with a description of the study and a synopsis of what their participation would mean to them. The total number of participants was 15 teachers and teacher/coaches. This number was chosen because it represents around half of the staff and led to a complete picture of the issue. The number 15 was also the right number of participants because it allowed for an in-depth investigation into the problem while accounting for many perspectives on the issue. The teachers and

teacher/coaches who responded to my inquiry first were chosen for the study. Five teacher/coaches were interviewed. The number of noncoaching teachers who took part in the study was 10 participants. Their participation consisted of a 10 to 30 minute interview. Candidates met the following criteria:

1. They were a teacher in the building with over 5 years of experience.
2. They had student athletes in their classrooms.

Teachers had the option of accepting, declining, or asking questions for clarification and then deciding whether or not to participate in the study. All communication in regards to participation and scheduling of interviews and meeting times was conducted via e-mail between the candidates and me. The initial e-mail was a blind carbon copied e-mail with specific instructions to keep any communications between them and me confidential. The e-mail contained a date range for possible interview times and a detailed description of the study and its possible impact on the school to create an interest from the participants. Based on the responses from the participants, I developed the interview schedule and communicated meeting times to the individual participants. Through this communication, I also answered any questions or concerns the participants had about being a part of the study and the continued working participant-researcher relationship that was developed through the initial e-mail contact that contained the impact and importance of the problem. This timeframe for the completion of the interviews was over the span of 2 to 3 weeks to limit the number of trips I made to the school. All participants involved in the study had the option to cease their participation at any time prior to publication of the study. The participants were

given an informed consent document that outlined all the steps of the process and ensured that all information was confidential. Only the individual interviewee and I would know what information was shared. All participants' names and their personal information remained completely confidential and only known to me. All data collected were kept locked safe in a file folder inside a filing cabinet at my residence, and I was the only person with access to that locked cabinet. All information that was collected electronically was put into a file folder on my personal computer that is protected by a personal password and only known to me. Five years after the completion of the study, all digital data collected will be erased, and all handwritten notes and printed materials will be shredded. No names were used in the finished product to ensure the confidentiality of the participants. All participants were given pseudonyms from the outset of their participation, and I only referred to by those pseudonyms throughout the entire study.

Once I determined the subjects, chose the semiformal interview, and developed the questions, I picked a proper place to conduct the interview. I did this for convenience and for the familiarity for the participants. Using the high school allowed easy access to both the interviewees and me. There were a few possible locations for the interview. They took place in the conference room, the teachers' classroom, or another secure, confidential area. We picked a time and place that limited the possibility of confidentiality being compromised. The participants had the opportunity to member check the final findings of the study to validate that the information they gave was represented correctly in the study. This was done via an e-mailed summary document the

participants received for them to review. Any questions or clarifications that I needed to address, following the dissemination of the summary document, were handled in person to discuss what both parties meant and understood to be true.

### **Data Collection**

I elected to conduct interviews for this study because it allowed direct communication and interaction between the participants and me to develop an understanding of the study problem. The semiformal, one on one, interviews allowed me to ask follow up questions and get clarification on vague responses so that data collected were conveyed, received, and interpreted properly. Sessions took place on an announced date that was cleared with the participants. The interviews lasted between 20 and 30 minutes and were attended by the participant and me only. I audio recorded all of the interviews and transcribed them within the following week. I changed or deleted all names that were mentioned in the course of the interviews during transcription to ensure the participants' and any named persons' confidentiality. I gave all participants a pseudonym at the beginning of the interview such as MA or MB. The interview guide is included in the Appendix B and was the outline for the interview session.

Data collection followed steps as proposed by Hatch (2002) and Creswell (2007). The first step that Creswell (2007) suggested, after determining that a case study was the appropriate strategy to use, was determining who would be interviewed. Next in the data collection process was to develop an interview guide to assist in the interview. The guide was a way to record answers given by the interviewees and helped me stay focused on the main topic of the interview. The guide consisted of open ended questions that were clear,

of a familiar nature to the subjects, and were in line with the research goals of the study. The interview guide is in Appendix B. The next step outlined by both Creswell (2007) and Hatch (2002) was to properly record the respondents' answers. This was done by digitally audio recording the interview, and I wrote down notes on the interview guide as well.

The last step was for me to use my listening, questioning, and note taking skills to allow the interviewees the ability to talk and share their insights on the subject and to have a conversation on the topic that would reveal all relevant information. Once an interview was completed, I transcribed each digital recording of the interview onto a computer word document. Once each transcription was complete, I printed off the interview transcription and made notes and highlights to keep track of the data. Each individual interview transcription was placed into its own manila folder that was labeled with the pseudonym for the correct participant. After the completion of the interviews, the transcriptions were put into a three ringed binder and separated by tabs. This made it easier to analyze the data as a whole. This process allowed me to stay current with the interviews and distinguish between the individual participants.

I was once an employee of the focus school. The participants in this study all had a previous professional relationship with me, which may have added to their willingness to be a part of the study. It did not compromise their answers or the data that were gained. Throughout the interviews, I reminded the participants that all the answers they gave were confidential, and no one would know the identity of my informants. I am a teacher/coach who believes athletic participation is a positive part of the high school

setting; however, in no way did that bias have an effect on the data collection and analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

I analyzed the data following the techniques set out by Creswell (2007), Rubin and Rubin (2005), and Hatch (2002). The first step, according to Creswell (2007), is to create and organize files for the data to be entered into. After each interview, I read and highlighted the transcripts and wrote notes on the interview guide, using the computer, to interpret the interview data for emerging themes. I sorted passages based on their highlighted color to better understand the data, and initial codes emerged and were recorded. I then coded the interview questions for responses as Rubin and Rubin (2005) suggested so that distinct markers were put in place to analyze the data. I closely read the interview transcripts and flagged any instances of where the interviewee informed on perceptions of athletes and perceptions of athletic participation and academics coexisting. I formed codes using the identified themes discovered from the interviews. The following codes were developed to better understand the interviews:

1. Perceived effects of participation in sports as related to outcomes in the classroom.
2. Perceived personal traits of student-athletes that are encouraged through participation in sports.
3. Perceived academic challenges in the classroom that are associated with participation.
4. Perceived feelings about participation.

5. Perceived teacher and teacher/coach issues.
6. Perceived eligibility policy issues.

I assigned the codes colors to distinguish between the emerging themes. For example, the data that related to eligibility policy issues were colored yellow and data about teacher and teacher/coach issues were designated pink. The numbers presented above were used to distinguish the codes correlated to the themes in the data. I then described the case in its context. I generated themes based on the analysis, which was the next step that Hatch (2002) outlined. I then directly interpreted the data and assigned meaning to a single instance. By analyzing and interpreting in this manner, similarities and differences became apparent among the participants. I made generalizations from analyzing the data. These generalizations could lead to others learning from them or using them in ways that apply to their situation.

### **Evidence of Quality**

The interpretations I made were subjected to member checking by the participants to ensure validity of the findings. Member checking is when the participants of the study are allowed to view the conclusions made by the researcher and judge those findings to give them credibility in accordance with the information they provide to the researcher (Creswell, 2007). This was done through an overview outline of the study findings for them to read and either affirm or deny. The participants gave credibility to the interpretations I made in the study.

I made these findings available to the participants through an e-mail using the outline that is in Appendix C for them to member check the overall findings that were

drawn to voice their feelings about any outlying interpretations that they did not agree with, following the recommendations of Creswell (2007). No questions or oppositions were raised to refute the findings. There was no outlying or disconfirming data that the participants objected to related to the study problem.

The project was developed directly from the information and perceptions gained through the interviews with the participants. It was determined that the best way to address the problem of decreasing participation numbers was to create a policy recommendation to alter the current eligibility rule. Eligibility was a subject that all the participants viewed as something that needed addressing in some way. The project addresses those concerns of the rule itself and of attempting to help the participation numbers issue.

### **Discrepant Cases**

The procedure for dealing with discrepant cases was to allow all data gathered, including discrepant cases, to inform the findings of the study. Matching and discrepant cases were considered when creating the project for this case study. There were not many discrepant cases, but one example was regarding teachers and teacher/coaches relationship issues. The majority of participants responded that there were not any issues between the two groups. The discrepant cases evidenced that there were some minor issues between the two groups, and those cases were included but noted as discrepant cases in the findings.



## Findings

The findings that emerged from the data collection informed the project. The problem that was addressed was declining involvement in athletics, and the purpose of the study was to determine the perceptions held by teachers and teacher/coaches about athletic participation as possible influences in the problem of declining participation numbers at the school. Through the transcripts of the individual interviews themes emerged that were coded. The following six themes became apparent after reviewing the transcripts of the interviews:

1. Perceived effects of participation in sports.
2. Perceived personal traits gained through participation.
3. Negatives of participation.
4. Perceptions of athletic participation.
5. Perceived teacher and teacher/coach issues.
6. Perceptions of the eligibility policy.

All the participants who were interviewed discussed that the biggest challenge to being a high school student athlete was trying to balance time. They felt that managing all of the responsibilities that high school students must deal with like homework, practice, games, family, work, and friends was an extremely difficult task. The participants were in agreement that athletics are very important for a high school. They thought that the more students involved in athletics or extracurricular activities the better. Involvement promotes community, school spirit, and creates a sense of belonging. The findings also revealed that, according to the participants, participation in athletics increases scores and

grades, makes students try harder, build teamwork, and produces well rounded individuals.

Another theme that grew from the interviews was that there were some issues between teachers and teacher/coaches. They were relatively small issues and not ones that were detrimental to the workings of the school. The issues included a few teachers not liking teacher/coaches being able to conduct practice or leave for games during contract hours. Teacher/coaches talked about how teachers may not fully understand the requirements placed on teacher/coaches.

The final theme that was distinguished in the data was that the current eligibility policy at the school was a topic of contention. The Project will be developed from this theme. The data showed that there was a difference of opinion between teachers and teacher/coaches when it came to the policy. The teachers viewed the policy as too easy. When they did this they were referring to the standards of the policy that a student could have two D's and still be eligible. They were in favor of increasing the standards to requiring all C's to be eligible. The coaches who teach saw the policy as too strict. They, though, focused on the punishment rather than the standards. Coaches thought that the ineligible period was too long or there was not an intervention process in place to assist students who find themselves on the ineligible list. Each of these themes will be discussed thoroughly.

### **Perceived Effects of Participation in Sports**

The first code was perceived effects of participation in sports as related to outcomes in the classroom. The main theme that was seen was that the interviewees

perceived student athletes as having higher scores and performing better in class. A majority of the participants, 11 out of 15, said that athletes were better achievers in the classroom. Participant MN said, “When kids are involved, I think they do better academically.” This view was shared by several of the participants and summed up well by MV who stated, “I definitely see a correlation with the involvement in athletics and better scores...you definitely can see those students who are your better students getting involved and putting forth a lot on whatever the playing field.”

Another perception that was discovered was the importance of participation and its effect on student athletes during their season. Numerous participants noted that student athletes try harder and were better performers in the classroom when they were in-season. ML was quoted as saying, “During their sport, the student is typically a better student.” The reason why this is the case may be due to the eligibility requirements. “Eligibility to participate, that’s their motivation, said MO. MZ agreed with this idea stating, “They work hard to be eligible.”

The last major perception of the teachers and teacher/ coaches related to being involved in high school athletics was a positive effect on teamwork. Almost half of the interviewees specifically said the word *teamwork*, and others alluded to that concept as well. MP, MM, MQ, and others answered the question of what positive effects do you see in the classroom that result from athletic participation with the word *teamwork*.

There was not a difference in how teachers and teacher/coaches perceived the effects of athletic participation and classroom outcomes. Both groups stressed that athletes tend to be better students and high achievers and that they work well in groups.

The teacher/coaches did allude to one area that the teachers did not, and that was setting goals. Over half of the teacher/coaches talked about how student athletes are more likely to set goals and are more end-result driven.

### **Perceived Personal Traits Gained Through Participation**

The second code of perceived personal traits gained through participation included three main ideas that came to the forefront in the perceptions of the participants. Time management, teamwork, and leadership were the most common traits the participants mentioned that student athletes obtain through their participation in high school sports. MN talked about what non-athletes can learn from athletes, “I think non-athletes can learn about from the athletes balancing [time], going to practice and still doing their homework.” MN went on to say, “I think athletes are more conscious of when their grades are due and planning how they’re going to get their homework done.” This was a common perception held by the interviewees. The other two traits learned through participation in athletics go together in a lot of ways as MV discussed when asked about what student athletes learn through participation MV’s reply was, “Team player. By that I mean you’ll see them being the leader in group work.” MX was in agreement with this idea. “I think it does teach teamwork. The kids see themselves as a team and want to help each other be successful.”

Teachers and teacher/coaches who were interviewed had similar perceptions of student athletes when it came to their personal traits learned through athletic participation. Teachers were quick to use words like, motivation, dedication, and leadership when describing student athletes. The other area where teachers noticed a

difference between athletes and non-athletes was in time management. Many teachers discussed how student athletes are good at handling busy schedules. The teacher/coaches perceive female student athletes as the highest achieving group academically.

### **Negatives of Participation**

The next code dealt with negatives of participation or challenges of participation. The major themes that came up were that student athletes miss a lot of class time, especially in the spring when events are outdoors and have earlier start times which forces them to play catch up with their school work. The issue of time was the number one challenge in the view of the participants. Almost all of the interviewees (14/15 participants) thought balancing their time and juggling full schedules was the biggest challenge to high school student athletes. MM gave a good summary of the issue. "I would think just juggling everything practice, homework, and many of them have part time jobs, family commitments... making sure you have enough time for each...I think that's what stresses many of them out, just having enough time to do everything." This was an almost unanimous sentiment for the challenge that student athletes are faced with. MN said "The balancing of all the work related with the schoolwork, if they have a part time job outside plus practices. I think balancing all of that. It gets tricky." MP added "I think they struggle with trying to participate, hang out with friends, keep their grades up in school, like managing all their time between all the different activities." Even though the participants felt that athletics teaches students how to manage their time it is still difficult to put that skill into practice. The two groups were in accordance with their responses on this issue. Time management and juggling many activities is the number

one challenge for student athletes. MX said “Going from a full day of school to practice and I know the workouts are hard, I really do, and then try to get your homework done and if you want to be in another activity... I mean some of the kids I work with, they get here at seven in the morning and they go straight to nine at night.”

The other major negative that the participants viewed about athletic participation was the off-season. A majority, or 60% of the participants, thought that the off-season was an area of concern, because with no consequences or repercussions, student athletes often let their academic performance decline when their sport is not competing. “In the off-season sometimes they just forget about that kind of stuff [grades]. They don’t have the coaches after them as much or the parents, or they just think it’s not in-season so it doesn’t matter as much.” That was MM’s take on the issue. MM was not alone in that opinion. MP said, “You see more of a decline maybe not necessarily failing but not holding themselves as accountable as what it would be during their season. I’ve had kids say that it doesn’t matter if they’re eligible now or if they pass a class because there’s no consequences for them.” MR shared that opinion as well. “During the season they’ll barely scrape by to stay eligible, and during the off-season they just won’t bother. They will go from being C and D students when they’re in-season to be D and F students in the off season.” Another teacher, MX, added to the concern. “When it’s the off-season, and they don’t have to worry about it [eligibility] they don’t care.” Teachers and teacher/coaches agreed that the off season is a time of concern for student athletes in regards to maintaining grades.

### **Perceptions of Athletic Participation**

The next code dealt with perceived feelings about high school athletic participation. This was unanimous as 100% of the participants, both teachers and teacher/coaches saw participation as a positive. There were multiple reasons for why it is positive but all who were interviewed said that participation and involvement was a good thing. ML said, "I think it's great for them it keeps them involved." ML went on to say, "I think they need athletics because for some that's the only thing keeping them in school." MM said, "I think it's good because of the school spirit, the teamwork, and the skills it teaches." Another common perception was verbalized by MN. "I think it's good for all of them, to be involved in some way. I wish we had more kids that were involved." MO agreed. "I wish we had every student in something." MR gave a good response as to why athletics are a good thing. "It develops those essential skills. I think that's valuable, I think it's worth the investment."

### **Perceived Teacher and Teacher/Coach Issues**

The code on perceived teacher and teacher/coach issues was interesting. There were not many major issues that either group saw as alarming however, some small issues were mentioned. One concern was the fact that coaches leave before the contracted dismissal time to attend practice or games. This was an issue voiced by more than one teacher. One teacher said, "I think coaches should be here between 3:25 and 4 o'clock. They're on contract. I can't go home." Others expressed displeasure with pressure applied to them to about grades and eligibility. MM said, "You do feel pressure to go through and get a kid eligible." MV added, "Don't tell a colleague what to do to get a kid

eligible. Most teachers will bend over backwards to help the kids if the kids want it.”

Lack of communication was another issue between the two groups. MQ discussed the issue by stating, “I don’t think overall there’s great communication here. I don’t think the conversation’s ever been had. I think there’s two camps. The coach is trying to get the player on the field and doesn’t care about the grades, that’s the perception and the people who just teach they’re the real teachers and they’re the ones that care about them academically.” MR stated frustration as well by stating, “It’s difficult to not take it personally when you don’t feel that a teacher has done everything that they can do to help prevent a kid from being ineligible.” Another issue is the perception that coaches put coaching before being a teacher. “I think there’s a stereotype that coaches, teachers that are coaches are coaches first,” was said by teacher. That teacher did not agree with the stereotype but addressed that it was out there. This idea was reiterated by others. “I think some teachers feel that some coaches take priority to coaching versus teaching.” Another teacher offered this opinion: “I think there’s some coaches slash teachers who spend a lot of their class time preparing for their coaching. Because they’re here to coach and not for academics.” On the opposite side, from the coaches’ perspective, MU stated, “I don’t think that any teacher that has never coached or done any extracurricular activity has a full understanding of what coaches are trying to accomplish.”

### **Perceptions of the Eligibility Policy**

The last code and themes that emerged from it are what drove the project and its development. The code was perceived eligibility policy issues. The first thing that came up was that teachers focused on higher standards for participation. More than half of the



participants agreed that the standards to remain eligible should be higher. ML said, “I think a kid should pass every class before they play.” MO said, “I think they should have a C-.” MS added, “I think our eligibility requirements are pretty low. I would like to see kids have a C average to be able to play. At least a C in every class they’re taking.” The teacher/coaches focused on addressing the punishments for becoming ineligible. MY addressed to topic by stating, “We need a better work release program. It seems like we’re all about getting the kid ineligible and making sure he’s ineligible, but we’re not all about helping that kid not become ineligible. To become ineligible is fine. I don’t think there’s anything wrong with that but getting off the ineligibility list, lies our problem. There’s no form of working your way off the list or there’s not a big incentive. Encourage a kid and say okay, as soon as you get that grade pulled up you can get off the list as opposed to well you’re done for four weeks.” The second piece of information that was important was that there should be a plan or an intervention in place to support student athletes who become ineligible. MY’s above quote alludes to that idea, and it was shared by others. MR said, “Have a more formal intervention process that catches them earlier as opposed to the policy being more of a got you policy. I would like to see a provision where buyback time could be used to reduce the punishment.” Finally, all the participants agreed that student athletes need to be students first and accountable. MS expounded, “I’m glad we have the extracurriculars that we have. I think we’re fortunate. And I do hope that everyone in our building will put more emphasis on academics. Help our students realize that’s what they’re her for.”

### **Discussion and Interpretation of Findings**

The findings from this study demonstrate that athletic participation is an important aspect of the high school experience. Student athletes tend to be better students in the classroom and perform at a higher level than non-athletes. Athletes have a support system in place to help them academically. They learn values and characteristics such as leadership and teamwork that will serve them well in life. Participation can be a motivator to maintain grades and to achieve up to their ability. There are some drawbacks to participation like missing class time and the time requirements. Balancing time is a major obstacle for everyone, especially a high school student athlete who is involved in sports, school, work, and other commitments.

The eligibility policy at the focus school could be adjusted for a better achieving school academically and athletically. If the requirements to stay eligible are raised, students will adjust to meet those standards and performance of the school will increase. The policy could be more responsive to the student athletes. Currently, once a student is ineligible that student is unable to play for four weeks. A new policy that allows students to regain their eligibility once they have their grades at the required level could help students get their grades up and stay up. This could have the effect of keeping them out for a sport or going out for more. It would increase the accountability of the students, which is a good thing.

Teacher and teacher/coach issues at the focus school are very minimal. Many of the issues like lack of communication between the two groups or a conflict about a student athlete's grade could be eliminated with a new eligibility policy. Some of the

issues between the two groups may not be specific to the focus school. A coach who leaves for games or practice before the end of the contract day is common at schools and is a part of the requirements of the coach's responsibilities.

In conclusion, data revealed a belief that athletic participation is a vital part of high school. It creates opportunities for students, builds a sense of pride and community at the school, and teaches life lessons that can foster productive citizens.

### **Conclusion**

Section 2 outlined how the qualitative case study was conducted to explore the perceptions of teachers and teacher/coaches on their possible role in the declining participation numbers at their school and the effects of athletic participation on academics. Interviews were conducted with 15 participants that lasted between 20 and 30 minutes. Data gained through the interviews was analyzed to reach conclusions to the guiding research question. To interpret the data and reach those conclusions, the following six codes were developed: Perceived (1) classroom effects, (2) personal traits gained through playing sports, (3) academic challenges, (4) participation, (5) teacher and teacher/coach issues, and (6) eligibility issues.

The project emerged from the data gained thorough the interviews and the findings specifically on code six, eligibility policy issues. The findings showed that all the participants agreed that playing sports in high school is important for student athletes. They also concluded that time management is the biggest challenge facing student athletes. They felt that student athletes learn teamwork and leadership skills through sports. There were varying opinions on the eligibility policy. Some argued that it was too

strict and others argued that it was not strict enough. That contradiction is why the eligibility policy issue made for good direction on the type of project. A policy recommendation flowed straight out of the findings from the interviews. Section 3 will go into greater detail about the project.

### Section 3: The Project

#### **Introduction**

The project that was selected from the research for this study was a policy recommendation for the focus school to rework the existing local eligibility rule. This policy revision grew out of the findings and interviews with staff at the school who noted that a change in the current policy could be a good change for all involved. The recommendation for a new eligibility rule may address the problem of shrinking participation numbers at the school because it will allow more student athletes to stay eligible and receive additional academic support. In this section, I will elaborate further on the details and rationale behind the policy recommendation. I will review the literature that will give credence to the changes this project suggests and justify its selection.

#### **Description and Goals**

The project that was developed based on the data collected through the interviews was a policy recommendation for the focus school's local eligibility rule. The goal of the recommendation is to address the problem from Section 1 of declining participation numbers at the school. The new policy was built using information gained from the teachers and teacher/coaches in their interviews. It is designed to increase participation numbers, maintain eligibility for student athletes, and raise academic performance. The project increases participation by changing the current policy to one that is fair for student athletes. It creates opportunities to flourish in both academics and athletics as opposed to a system that is punitive and causes students to quit a sport if they became ineligible. The project maintains eligibility by establishing study tables and decreasing

the severity of the initial punishment for inadequate grades. Putting in place a watch list to help students realize they are in danger of losing their eligibility instead of becoming ineligible is a step to decrease the number of ineligible student athletes. The last goal is to raise academic performance. This will be accomplished through more grade checks, more opportunities for assistance with school work, and increased communication between student and teacher.

### **Rationale**

The project of a policy recommendation was chosen because it is something that is practical. The data led directly to altering the current policy into a more user friendly rule that addressed the issues raised by the teachers. Many teachers stressed the need for higher standards to be applied to student athletes. The new policy strives to meet that request by requiring all student athletes to keep all grades above a C-. That is an improvement from the current standard of being able to have two grades below a C.

Another area where teachers expressed concern was over the punishment aspect of the current rule. Many felt that there were issues with the punishment side of the rule. Some said that the time frame for eligibility was questionable and that the penalty for becoming ineligible was too harsh. The recommendation took those concerns into account and created a system that is better for the student athlete by lessening the punishment if the student athlete meets their academic requirements. The new policy also puts into place a support system to help struggling student athletes. Therefore, instead of just making a student athlete ineligible, now there is a support system to help them academically.

This project directly correlates with the findings from the data analysis in Section 2. Through the individual interviews that were conducted, it was determined that there was a perception held by high school teachers at the school that fall into the realm of this project. A perception that was evident was that the teachers felt that the current eligibility policy needed to be addressed in some way or another. It might be to strengthen the standards of the policy, to look at the administration of the policy, or to discuss the punitive nature of the policy. The bottom line was that something needed to be done with the current policy. Another perception in which all teachers were in agreement was that participation is good, and they wished more or all students would get involved in something at the school. The new policy would allow for more students to participate, maintain their participation, and increase their performance.

The genre for this project was selected because it is the most direct means of combating the problem. Even if just one more student has the opportunity to participate because of the new policy, it will be a positive step. There is also the added benefit of possibly increasing academic performance. That will be helpful to all parties involved.

### **Review of the Literature**

The review of the literature was the basis for the development of the project, a policy recommendation to amend the current eligibility policy at School X. The review examined recent research and current studies that dealt with the many topics addressed in the policy recommendation. Those topics include writing policy recommendations, implementing change, benefits of athletic participation, academic support for student athletes, and eligibility policies. The search engines EBSCO and ERIC were used through

the Walden University library. I used Google Scholar to find peer reviewed literature. The phrases used to look up the material were *benefits of sports, study tables, writing policy recommendations, academic support systems for student athletes, implementing change, academic benefits of high school sports, athletes, and academic success.*

### **Writing Policy Recommendations**

A policy recommendation is a written policy advice prepared for some group that has the authority to make decisions (Doyle, 2013). The goal of a policy recommendation is to inform people with research and evidence to help them reach an educated decision. The Centre for Ageing Research and Development in Ireland (CARDI, 2012). These two ideas fit with what the desired outcome of this project aims to accomplish. The goal of the project was to give decision makers at the school evidence based on research and opinions to create a better eligibility policy. This new policy would possibly lead to increased participation numbers at the school, higher academic achievement, and a decrease of students on the ineligible list.

CARDI (2012) outlined 10 steps for writing a policy recommendation. The first step of a good policy recommendation is to define the objective of the recommendation. For this project, the objective was to create an improved eligibility policy that benefits all stakeholders involved from students to teachers and the school. Secondly, when writing a policy recommendation, a target audience needs to be identified. In this project, the target audience was all of the stakeholders in the local community, which are the parents, students, administrators, teachers, teacher/coaches, and, most importantly, the school board members as they are the ones who ultimately decide if the current policy is



amended or not. It is also beneficial to have the support of the teachers, coaches, parents, and administrators of the school because they are the ones who are directly impacted by the policy change. The third step, according to CARDI, is to clearly explain the issue. It is vital to outline all aspects of the issue and to fully explain the need for change and why this problem is being addressed in the first place. This information needs to be tied to the research. As Doyle (2013) expressed, it is important to be concise and accurate. This is accomplished by using research and getting straight to the point. Stating the problem and how it is going to be solved is beneficial to the audience.

The next step for a quality policy recommendation is to give options. In this project, there was room to adjust certain areas of the policy to make it fit in line with the expectations of the school. Those areas were addressed in the recommendation. Examples of alternate routes would be to adjust the checkpoints, change the qualifying grades, or amend the punishments for not having met the standards. The fifth step that CARDI (2012) discussed is about the economic climate. That is not a big part of this particular project other than paying staff to monitor and help with study tables. Aligning with existing policies is the next step in the process. This project and recommendations align with the desired outcomes of the school because the goal of the project is to improve scores and participation that will only benefit the school and its students. Step 7 is to use examples. This will be done by showing policies at other schools in the area that use similar policies to deal with eligibility. This will be discussed later in this review. The next part of the process deals with the audience. It is important to keep who is being addressed in mind and to keep the writing simple and readable (Doyle, 2013). The target

audience for this policy recommendation is the school board at the focus school and the school's administration.

The last two steps are intertwined. They deal with showing impact and how important the recommendation is to the audience. In this part, it is necessary to stress how the change will benefit society or the school. The changes this project and its recommendations are meant to influence are benefits to the school, students, and community with higher functioning and involved students.

Another important aspect of writing policy is to evaluate previous policies that have been successful and implement parts of those successful policies in the policy being created. A successful policy that was implemented and researched for this project was a similar academic eligibility policy implementation in rural New York. Kozik, Cowles, and Sweet (2005) examined a pilot policy that changed the current academic policy in a rural New York high school. The school in the Kozik et al. study and this school are very similar. The demographics of the two schools are in line, the old policies have a lot in common, and the problems faced by both schools are shared. With so many similarities between the two schools, the work of Kozik et al. is beneficial to examine to gain insight into successful policy writing and implementation.

The ideas that were gained from Kozik et al. (2005) that relate to this project and its policy recommendation are that to be successful, a few aspects need to be present. The first is that faculty need to be invested in the policy and creating the change of culture at the school. Part of that investment includes time. No change can take place without putting in work. The next requirement for a successful implementation of eligibility

policy is that the coaches must be involved. Lastly, the new policy has to be efficient. When all of that happens, it is possible to change the culture and have a successful policy implementation. Failures were cut in half in the Kozik et al. study. Contact and relationships with teachers increased. Students became more accountable and had fewer attendance or referral issues (Kozik et al., 2005).

### **Implementing Change**

Implementing change can be a difficult process in a school setting. Tensions and oppositions are inevitable and play a central role in organizational change (Van de Ven & Sun, 2011). Van de Ven and Sun (2011) reached that conclusion by examining past research and determining that organizational change involves many factors that present issues for leaders such as internal and external forces that can cause change to be derailed. Spillane (2010) gave many reasons why change can be hard. Policies can be unclear or inconsistent. There can be agendas involved by the institution or the individuals making the change. Attitudes, resources, and time can adversely affect implementing change. Furthermore, Jerald (2006) discussed two sets of barriers to change: internal and external. Internal barriers included technical, cultural, and political. Technical is a lack of know how or an inability to grasp the new process. Cultural can be a conflict of views of the education system. Political stems from cultural issues that can result in resistance to the change. There are also external barriers that include lack of support, lack of money, and lack of ability to handle personnel. In another study, Rainer, Cropley, Jarvis, and Griffiths (2013) discussed challenges in implementing change in schools for school leaders. They found that issues include existing policies, in place

curriculum, and resources and finances (Rainer et al., 2013). They also said that there can be issues with the policy itself that is being implemented (Rainer et al., 2013).

There are variable means to implement change and have the change be effective. Battilana, Gilmartin, Sengul, Pache, and Alexander (2010) discussed how different types of leaders will implement change in different ways. Task oriented leaders will focus on evaluation of implementing change, and person oriented leaders will focus on the communication of implementing change (Battilana et al, 2010). Moreover, Sergiovanni (1998) outlined six change forces. The forces are bureaucratic, personal, market, professional, cultural, and democratic. Bureaucratic deals with rules, requirements, and timeframes of the change. Personal is associated with the leadership style of the agent responsible for the change. Market has to do with competition and incentives to foster the change. Professional refers to codes of conduct and workplace norms. Cultural relates to shared values and the goals of the institution. Finally, democratic works to a common good for those involved in the change (Sergiovanni, 1998).

According to Melville, Bartley, and Weinburgh (2012), to successfully implement change in a school setting, the three following of Sergiovanni's forces must be in action: professional, cultural, and democratic. The democratic change force is significant because the common good, student success, is the underlying motivation to change. Cultural refers to goals, and the goal of the change is to improve the school and student performance. Professional allows teachers to work for the change because it is something asked of them by a superior. There must be professional trust at the school that the change is in the best interest of the school. The principal is the one who shapes the

common good of the school and allows the teachers to do their work to implement the change.

Jerald (2006) argued that it is possible to overcome the barriers to change by preparing leaders to understand and overcome the obstacles that lead to the internal barriers. To deal with external barriers, he suggested that the relationship between the district and the school must change so that leaders have support, a say in budget concerns, and a hand in personnel decisions.

### **Benefits of Athletic Participation**

The literature review in Section 1 included details about this topic, but there is more insight that can be gained here in addition to the previous information. The Iowa High School Athletic Association (IHSAA, 2013) put together a brief presentation on this topic. They found in their research that participation leads to better health, flexibility, strength, and weight control (IHSAA, 2013). They also stated that participation reduced drug use, teen pregnancy, and cigarette smoking (IHSAA, 2013). Some of the aspects were also shown in Bergeron's (2007) report where he found that participation in youth sports aided in cardiorespiratory fitness, increased strength, endurance, and power, better body composition, and favorable cholesterol readings. The goal of his report was to analyze methods of maximizing those benefits children gain from participation in sports. Furthermore, Janssen and LeBlanc (2010) reviewed 86 studies on the topic of sports and health benefits. They found that there is a connection and they suggested that students be physically active for 60 minutes a day (Janssen & LeBlanc, 2010). They also said

physical activity helps with many issues specifically obesity and helping bone density (Janssen & LeBlanc, 2010).

Another report by Calbom and the U.S. Government Accountability Office (2012) made the case that it is in the interest of the government to see school-aged children benefit from physical activity. The report went on to say that schools play a pivotal role in increasing physical activity in school aged children and that opportunities to play sports are on the rise (Calbom & U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2012). The information in the report was gained through federal survey data, conducting interviews with schools, reviewing the current literature, and assessing laws and regulations. Physical activity as an adolescent can have benefits beyond childhood and into adulthood. According to Graham, Sivard, and Neumark-Sztainer (2011), who surveyed 1,900 middle and high school students, adolescents with a positive attitude towards sports, exercise, and fitness were 30 to 40% more likely to be engaged in physical activity 5 and 10 years later.

Other health benefits can be attributed to participation. In a study conducted by Adachi-Mejia, Gibson-Chambers, Li, and Sargent (2014) that surveyed 6,500 10 to 14 year olds, the researchers found that participation in sports lowered the likelihood of trying smoking. By decreasing the number children that are experimenting with smoking, participation can have an impact on the overall health of young adults.

According to the IHSAA (2013) participation results in higher GPAs, less missed school, fewer dropouts, and increased graduation rates. These issues are extremely important and issues that this project is hoping to impact at the school. Lumpkin and

Favor (2012) demonstrated that high school student athletes in Kansas have higher GPA's with 80% of athletes having a 3.0 compared to 70% of non-athletes. Athletes also had a 10% higher graduation rate than non-athletes. Athletes outperformed non-athletes on state assessments and were 15 times less likely to drop out of high school (Lumpkin & Favor, 2012). The research demonstrated that participating in high school athletics leads to highly desired outcomes academically (Lumpkin & Favor, 2012). Related research indicated that student athletes had higher grades than non-athletes and participation in athletics had a positive influence on academic outcomes (Muir & Education Partnership, 2005). Research on 1,100 gifted high school students and what they were involved in outside of school by Bucknavage and Worrell, (2005) also demonstrated that academically talented students had higher rates of participation in extracurricular activities.

Additional research illustrated that participation in extracurricular activities enhanced intellectual and social development of students while creating opportunities to also enhance academic performance. Rombokas, Heritage, and West (1995) concluded there was a positive link between academic achievement and involvement in activities beyond the school day in their survey of 292 college students to determine their level of high school participation in extracurricular activities. Likewise, a study by Dobosz and Beaty (1999) had 60 students complete a leadership ability evaluation and based on the scores of that evaluation the authors determined that student athletes were better leaders than non-athletes. The authors also determined that female athletes were better leaders than males (Dobosz and Beaty, 1999). Along with being leaders, students who participate

in school based extracurricular activities have higher levels of self-esteem concluded Kort-Butler and Hagenwen (2011) who utilized the National longitudinal study of adolescent health and information garnered from over 5400 students.

There are other benefits besides the physical ones to being physically active and participating in athletics. Jewett et al (2014) found that, for the 1,300 students they studied, the ones who played sports as young adults had less stress, lower depressive symptoms, and higher mental health. They concluded that all students in high school should be encouraged to participate in athletics (Jewett et al, 2014). Other authors have found similar outcomes. Eime, Young, Harvey, Charity, and Payne (2013) determined through a review of 30 relevant sources that team sports improved health outcomes, both psychological and psychosocial; Emotional aspects such as self-esteem and social interactions were elevated (Eime et al, 2013). Fredricks and Simpkins (2012) reviewed the literature and found that participation by ethnic minority youth in after-school activities during childhood and adolescence was associated with positive academic, psychological, and social adjustment. Carlson, Scott, Planty, and Thompson (2005) found that eight years after graduation from high school varsity athletes were more likely to have obtained a bachelor's degree, have a higher income, and were less likely to smoke than non-athletes. This project and its recommendations strive to increase participation, maintain eligibility, and increase classroom performance.

Not all outcomes of athletic participation are positive. There are many studies that have concluded participation can be related to negative outcomes, especially drinking issues. Dever et al. (2012) used data from a sample of over 36,000 students and found



that participation increased alcohol use among eighth and tenth graders. Ali, Amialchuk, and Pentin (2013) surveyed 3,400 overweight students who were part of the national longitudinal study of adolescent health and found that playing sports equated to a 12% gain in friends while drinking measured an 18% gain for overweight students. They stressed the importance of participation to combat those numbers. Mays et al. (2010) studied 378 Georgia high school athletes and found that varsity participation in sports was associated with more alcohol related behaviors. Sports can have numerous positive outcomes but it is not perfect and there can be negatives as well.

Modecki, Barber, and Eccles (2014) analyzed data from the youth activity participation study, which sampled 1,342 children, and concluded that organized sport involvement in eighth grade related to increased binge drinking risk. These findings were in accordance with a study authored by Busseri et al. (2011). In the Busseri et al. study the authors used information from 656 college students to determine that activity participation in high school was related to increased drinking factors. Another study that gathered data from 219 in-season high school athletes showed participation may lead to a risk of increased alcohol use (Zamboanga et al., 2012). These findings were aligned with the alcohol expectancy theory that states drinking will increase if subjects believe drinking will lead to positive outcomes like being more social or gaining new friends. These negative aspects of participation related to alcohol use or abuse can be countered by coaches and leaders who can address and teach their players about the consequences of their choices.

Drinking issues for athletes are not confined to high school aged students. Mastroleo, Marzell, Turrisi, and Borsari (2012) surveyed 476 college students, 362 of whom were high school athletes. Their findings demonstrated that their participants would drink more if their coach was fine with it. Similarly, Sonderlund et al. (2014) reviewed current literature that related to athletes at varying levels from high school to professional and found that participation lead to higher alcohol use and violence. Many of the negative aspects of participating in sports are related to alcohol and drinking related issues. These negative outcomes are offset by the numerous positive benefits gained from participation such as improved health, increased academic performance, and better emotional status.

### **Academic Support for Student Athletes**

Dr. Ruth Darling was quoted by Hamilton (2004) that summed up the idea of academic support for student athletes well, "I often use the metaphor of a three-legged stool or a pyramid to illustrate a model for student-athlete academic learning and support -- one of the strongest structures you can build. You need the coach; you need the academic adviser/faculty, and you need the student-athlete. If any one person fails to fulfill his/her responsibility and fails to be academically accountable, that stool is going to tip over, the pyramid will collapse." Studies have found that creating an academic support system for student athletes has beneficial results. According to a report by Muir et al. (2005) students who participated in a support system were more likely to improve their grades and were more likely to restore eligibility to participate in sports. The American Sports Institute agreed with the idea of a support system for student athletes to

succeed academically. In order to improve academic performance for student athletes, there needed to be an increased emphasis on the appropriate study and practice of sports (American Sports Inst., 1993). Gill and Farrington (2014) demonstrated that intensive academic support programs have a positive impact on GPA. They studied 22 college football players who were in a support program. After being in the program the average GPA went up .26 points (Gill & Farrington, 2014).

There are numerous ways to address the issue of academic support for student athletes. One proposed model consisted of the following five areas to aide student athletes:

1. Academic coordinators,
2. A link to future planning,
3. Mandated study time,
4. Study skills workshops, and
5. A tutoring program.

These five areas were adapted over time as the program evolved to best help student athletes progress academically, stay in school, and graduate on time (Smith & Herman, 1996). This system would give guidance to the new policy. There would be teachers involved to act as the coordinators. Study time or study tables would be required. The other parts of the model would be ideas to possibly implement in the future such as creating a study skills class or addressing plans for after high school graduation.

Dorman (2012) discussed ways to ease the transition from middle school to high school for students and what he said is applicable to student athletes. Three of his main

points were that academics must be closely monitored and support given when it is needed. His second point was to have high standards so that students will strive to achieve them. He also called for additional academic tutoring for those students who require extra help (Dorman, 2012).

The IHSAA outlined different strategies for supporting student athletes academically. The policy recommendation utilizes parts of two of the proposed strategies within the *Keeping Academics First* booklet (2013). The first strategy is to monitor student progress. This is done through checking grades at certain periods decided by the school. If a student is below a set standard then there is a repercussion or penalty. This is a major part of the eligibility policy. A second strategy the IHSAA discusses is to develop a study table system to support any student who wishes to be helped (IHSAA, 2013). This system could take on many different forms but most likely would be a before or after school period where extra help would be available. This is also a main aspect of the policy recommendation. The study table portion of the policy would be a new feature to the school eligibility policy. Similar forms have been adopted in other districts and shown to have positive results in increasing grades, attendance, and peer interaction (Manning, 1990). This program was set up on a trial basis to determine if it would be successful. After the trial period it was concluded that the positive effects it had on student athletes were justification to implement the program permanently.

### **Eligibility Policies**

Eligibility rules exist in all fifty states and the District of Columbia for the purposes of emphasizing academic performance over athletic performance and providing

motivation for academic excellence among high school athletes (Morton et.al., 1993). An important part of the process is the policy and its standards. How stringent and rigorous do they need to be is question that many schools must deal with. Bukowski (2010) argued that stronger standards produced higher performance. His study found that students adjusted to the standards once they were in place and low standards hurt schools because student athletes may only strive to meet what is required (Bukowski, 2010). His reasoning was based on data collected from 48 state athletic association and the different eligibility standards that each state implemented. This idea is important to understand when trying to recommend new policy because it demonstrates that performance can be increased through raising academic requirements. Using data from the National longitudinal study of youth 1979 and the 12,000 participants Vidal-Fernandez (2011) found that minimum academic requirements have a positive relationship with graduation rates and that athletes have a higher graduation rate than non-athletes.

Three schools close to the school were studied to compare their existing eligibility policies to determine how each school in a similar situation administers and handles their policy. They are explained below.

School A checked grades at midterm, quarter, and semester. A student must be passing all of their classes with a D- or above. If at midterm a student has an F they are ineligible until that grade is raised to passing. An F at quarter resulted in a 10 day ineligible period. If a student had an F at the semester the state rule was used and that student would be ineligible for 30 days (School A, 2014).

School B had a very similar policy. They checked grades at midterm and term. All classes must be passed with a D- or above. A failure at midterm resulted in ineligibility until the grade was raised. Failures at the end of a term resulted in 30 days of ineligibility (School B, 2014)

School C had the most intricate policy and the one that most closely resembles the project and recommendations. If a student was failing a class at the end of a grading period they would be ineligible for 30 days in accordance with the state rule. School C also used an accountability period to check grades throughout the school year. Grades were checked every two weeks. A student failing at a two week checkpoint was placed on probation for the next two weeks. During this time they must work to improve that grade. They can do this through study time with the teacher. This is not mandatory, only encouraged. If the grade is not a passing grade at the end of the two weeks the student would then be ineligible for the next two weeks. Again the student would be encouraged to study with the teacher to improve the grade. This would continue until the grade was raised or ineligibility would remain in place. Parents would be notified if their child was on the ineligibility list. They did this to promote academic integrity throughout the school year not just at the end of grading periods (School C, 2014).

Another policy was examined that implemented two initiatives that are not common in the local setting but could have benefit if applied. One idea is to utilize summer school to make up credit and regain eligibility for fall sports. The second idea is to employ an eligibility coordinator to oversee all eligibility issues (Club BMCT, 2014).

### **Project Implementation**

This project will be implemented for the following school year beginning in August, 2014. The amended eligibility policy will take effect then so that all involved will have time to adequately familiarize themselves with the changes. All parents, students, teachers, and coaches will be made aware of the new policy and how those changes will affect them.

### **Potential Resources and Existing Supports**

The new policy will be an update of the current policy so it will not be a dramatic difference in how things are operated at the school. The administration will be supportive of the change and aide in easing the transition from the old policy to the new one. They are willing to back any policy or change that is beneficial to the school and the students. The needed resources for implementing the new policy will be staff to monitor study tables and other study times. These extra duty times for the staff will be compensated so there must be monies factored into the budget. Another resource to properly implement the project will be a person or a group of people to keep track of grades, students in probationary periods, and ineligibility.

### **Potential Barriers**

Potential barriers that could harm the implementation of the new policy could be a lack of support from the stakeholders. There could be an adjustment period where some revert back to the old system. Another barrier could be the lack of funds to support the teachers and staff volunteering extra time causing them to be reluctant to help. Time is a barrier as well. This project calls for a lot of time to be put in by students and staff during

non-normal school hours. This could lead to issues with finding support people to help, students being able to attend, and other issues.

### **Proposal for Implementation and Timetable**

There is already an eligibility policy at the school so this should be a smooth transition. The new policy will take effect for the following school year. To ensure the policy is ready for the following school year, the recommendation will be taken to the principal and superintendent to get support. With their backing, the recommendation will be presented to the school board in the fall of the current year. After the initial presentation, there will be public discussion and explanation of the policy for stakeholders at future meetings. This process will be finished by winter so that the school board may vote to adopt the new measure. This will give time to update the student handbook and inform all the stakeholders about the new policy going into effect for the next school year.

### **Roles and Responsibilities of Students and Others**

The students will be required to do nothing new, only to continue to try their best and get passing grades above a C-. The students will be made aware of the new policy at summer orientations and at back to school class meetings. The changes will also be posted and announced at numerous times at the beginning of the school year. Teachers and teacher/coaches will be instructed to discuss the new policy in their classes and at practice. The new part for the students would be if they have a grade below a C- at the grade check then they will be required to attend a study table to improve their grade. They will not be ineligible at this time, as in the past. Students will be on a two week



probationary period to improve the low grade. The probationary period will be lifted at any time the grade is raised to a C- or higher and validated by the teacher with a grade report. Teachers will be asked to maintain current grades and be able to update the students, coaches, parents of progress in their class. Teachers will also be asked to monitor and help students at study tables. Parents will be made aware if their student's grade drops below a C- and they are on probation or ineligible. They would be asked to support the student and the school in the process of improving the grade. Someone, most likely an administrator, will be required to track grades, probations, and eligibility. Coaches will be asked to take an active role in the academic progress of their team members so they can be another avenue for support.

### **Project Evaluation**

Feedback on the project will be collected through a short survey given to all stakeholders before the planned implementation of the project in November 2014. Evaluations will take place at the beginning of each semester once the policy changes are made by the school board. The initial survey will garner feedback on the project itself before it is put in action. The post implementation evaluations will illicit thoughts and feelings about the program after it has been instituted to determine strengths, weaknesses, if the goals were met, and areas for improvement. The stakeholders will consist of any parents who may have a child go through the program, the teachers and teacher/coaches who would be impacted by the new policy, and the high school administrators. In addition, a goal-based evaluation was chosen because it is a method to determine the worth of a program to evaluate if the project met the intended purpose. A goal-based

evaluation will be able to reach conclusions that will show strengths and weaknesses of the project in meeting the desired outcomes of the project. A survey will be used so that more people can be reached to gain their perspective, and more feedback will be obtained that way. It will be made available on the school website and at school registration. The survey will strive to discover the opinions of the stakeholders to find out if they think the new policy will result in goals to increase participation, improve academic achievement, and reduce the number of students on the ineligible list. The survey will inquire how the stakeholders feel about the new policy and whether it would be an improvement from the past. The reason for evaluating the project will be to determine if the policy recommendation addresses the problem and if it will have a positive impact on the school and community.

The survey questions to evaluate the project are as follows:

1. Do you think policy recommendation will be beneficial to the students at the school?
2. Do you think policy recommendation will have the ability to raise academic performance at the school?
3. Do you think policy recommendation will lead to increased participation numbers at school?
4. Do you think policy recommendation will decrease the number of ineligible students at school?
5. What other recommendations do you have for this policy change?

At the conclusion of each semester during the initial year of the implemented new policy a survey will be made available to stakeholders on the school website to assess the policy and to determine if it met its desired outcomes. The survey questions are below:

1. Did the new policy have an impact on academic performance at the school?
2. Did the new policy lead to increased participation numbers at school?
3. Did the new policy help in decreasing ineligible students at school?
4. Was the new policy beneficial for the school? Why or why not?
5. Any other comments?

### **Implications Including Social Change**

#### **Local Community**

This project addressed the needs of learners in the local community by focusing on the perceptions of the teachers and teacher/ coaches at the high school who have a direct knowledge of issues that can be problematic to the community like high numbers of student athletes on the ineligible list and declining grades in the off season for student athletes. The policy was designed from the views and perceptions of the teachers and teacher/ coaches, which should lead to credibility for the project in the community. The project is important to members of the community because it is driven by the perceptions of the teachers and the teacher/coaches at the local school. The ideas and thoughts that those two groups viewed as issue areas are what allowed this project to develop. Community members can see that teachers and teacher/coaches are making decisions that positively affect their children in the classroom and in regards to their future. These

views are what drove the design of the policy recommendation. The goal of the project at the specific school is to increase participation that connects students with the school and creates a sense of belonging. The project also aims to elevate performance in the classroom. Doing better academically leads to more opportunities after graduation such as more post-secondary schools being available and increased scholarship possibilities. It is important to all stakeholders because students doing better academically is a benefit to all involved. It creates a sense of pride around the school when more students participate and have success.

### **Far-Reaching**

If it is believed that this project will be successful at the school and these benefits will be reaped by all of its community stakeholders the results should be easily transferred to other schools around the area and all over the country. The ideas from this project on how to implement a successful eligibility policy infused with an academic support system could be utilized anywhere to benefit students and schools.

### **Conclusion**

In this section, the details of the project were described. The why, when, and the how of the recommendation were discussed. A review of the literature was presented to give validity to the project. Section 4 will further discuss the project and the researchers' roles and scholarship during the process of the study.

## Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

### **Introduction**

This section contains a variety of topics, including my reflections on the strengths and weaknesses of the project, ways to address the limitations of the project, and scholarship. Within the scholarship portion of the section I discuss what I learned about myself, project development, and impacting social change. This section was an area for me to reflect back and analyze the entirety of this doctoral undertaking and my growth within the framework of becoming a scholar.

### **Project Strengths**

The project's strengths in addressing the problem come from the data gained in the interviews with the participants of the study. The teachers and teacher/coaches are the ones who inspired the development of the project. The policy that was recommended in the project came from what was lacking in the previous policy. The participants indicated a need to raise expectations of the students. That idea is validated by Bukowski (2010) who said students will adjust to the expectations placed on them. That is addressed in the higher grade standards to remain eligible. There was also a need to deal with the penal side of the policy and look at how ineligible students were punished. This area was handled by creating probationary periods and putting into place study tables and academic support for struggling students. Study tables for student athletes are supported by various authors (Manning, 1990; Smith & Herman, 1996). These two parts of the project were a positive compromise between the two groups of interviewees. One group stressed the need to heighten grade requirements, and the other group wanted to address

the time when a student is ineligible. Both of those issues were dealt with in a positive way.

Making changes to the two areas of increasing expectations and supporting students helped address the overall problem facing this study, decreasing participation numbers. By implementing a support system for students who would have otherwise not had one and who would have been declared ineligible and quit the project enables those students to stay in the sport and reap all the possible benefits that sports can offer. Increasing participation numbers and having a positive impact on academic achievement are two desired outcomes for this project. Data presented in this study demonstrated that participation can improve grades, test scores, and involvement in the school (Broh, 2002; Holloway, 1999; Fejgin, 1994; & Rosewater, 2009). Therefore, keeping students participating in sports is an important task for schools to address.

The overall positive aspects of this project are that it had input from multiple viewpoints, it addressed many issues that lead to the central problem, and most importantly, it has an extremely beneficial impact on the students.

### **Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations**

There are weaknesses and limitations in this project. One limitation is that the project does not attack the problem directly. Declining participation numbers is not an issue that can be dealt with in one certain way. The project took one avenue and tried to deal with many facets of the problem, like eligibility, that help cause the problem. Another limitation of the project is that it is a time consuming undertaking. It requires many hours of work beyond the contracted school day for the staff who will monitor

study tables and help the students. The added work of record keeping and staying up to date on students and their grades is another limitation of the project. This is already being done, but with the added probation period, it adds to the work that must be done. There are many theories on how to fight resistance to change and create a smooth transition to a new policy or program. One theory is to involve the people most affected by the change in the change itself. By properly communicating what is going on and why it is happening, resistance can be limited (Angel-Sveda, 2012). It is important that the individuals affected by the change are heard, have influence, and plays a role in the planning of the change. They should be aware of how the change will impact them (Hutton, 1994).

Solving the issues with the project is an ongoing process. By addressing the problem in the manner that this project does allows for the school to reach goals in other areas even if it does not increase or maintain participation numbers. The school still should raise performance in the classroom because that is the ultimate goal of a school. The time limitation is addressed by compensating the ones who give their time for the students. Hopefully, as the project evolves, each year the number of students affected by the policy will be less and less so that the time factor can be dealt with appropriately. The added work created by the project is difficult to avoid. The goal would be to discover ways to simplify and streamline the process for the future through evaluative surveys and discussions with the school staff.

There are other ways to address the problem. It would be possible to create a professional development class that would educate teachers on how to deal with student

athletes in the classroom in the hopes of raising participation. Another idea would be to take the issue directly to the students and offer incentives for participation or developing a class or credit for athletics to try and urge more students to go out for sports.

Another way of looking at the problem would be to consider just the eligibility part of the issue. The school has a high percentage of its students on the ineligible list. Trying to discover the reasons for this and ways to combat it would be a worthwhile undertaking. It could be done in many ways that include questioning the students, developing a probationary period, changing standards, moving grade check dates, or eliminating the local rule.

### **Scholarship**

This process taught me that I cannot be afraid to fail. It is important to keep the final goal in mind and do what it takes to accomplish that goal. There will be setbacks and roadblocks along the way, but by staying focused and working, the goal will be achieved. Another large part of scholarship that was learned through this process was that the more information that can be gained and utilized, the better everything will be. This goes for almost anything: gather as much information as possible, consider all alternatives, and then proceed with any decision made. Another aspect of scholarship that has benefited me from this process is the language skills, reading and writing. Having to read research documents and scholarly language and then put my own words into academic writing has allowed me to expand my reading and writing abilities.



### **Project Development and Evaluation**

Developing a project requires a great deal of work. It is necessary to acquire as much information as possible and be as thorough as one can be. It is important to consider every potential viewpoint that could be involved in the outcome. The more work, time, and effort that are put into the project, the more students will reap the rewards once it is put into action. Completing the work beforehand can limit the questions, headaches, and issues that arise when it is administered. Considering all aspects of the problem allows for better preparation of unforeseen problems and issues that may arise. This project was developed in this manner. I collected a thorough amount of data, analyzed that data, and made an informed decision to create a project that could have a positive impact on the focus school.

Evaluation is a component of that process as well. The evaluation was developed to elicit feedback that could benefit the project, the student of the school, and the local community. Evaluation is a vital component of the process. Having the skill to examine what has been done and objectively analyze it to make needed adaptations is of the utmost importance. The ability to determine success or failure and take responsibility for either is missing in today's society. Too many people, especially people in managerial or positions of power, fail to admit their mistakes and learn from them. When others observe that persons are not afraid to fail or take responsibility for their own failure, it leads them towards doing the same and towards growth.

### **Leadership and Change**

I learned about leadership that making tough decisions is very important and part of the territory. Anyone who is in a leadership position will be faced with significant, impactful choices and decisions that must be made. Being a leader is being a hoarder. Leaders need to hoard knowledge and information. The more informed a leader can become, the better the decision that can be made. It is easier to stand behind decisions and actions when they can be supported with facts.

Being a leader also means being able to admit errors, learn from those errors, and grow. Not everything will work as planned, but if there is an overall vision and goal; missteps will be smaller than if there is no future in mind. Along with admitting mistakes, the ability to ask for help is a wonderful quality for a leader to possess. My project required that I work to empower those around me to take responsibility and buy into what was being accomplished rather than being dictated to. This required collaboration.

### **Analysis of Self as Scholar**

I learned that procrastination is an ugly word. I work better with deadlines. I learned that it is amazing how much I could grow academically through the process. I learned that the way to grow is by developing quality relationships with people who are positive influences on life. The professors, my colleagues, and my chair have played an instrumental role in helping me develop as a scholar.

All areas of my scholarship have made gains through this process. My ability to read and analyze what I am reading is much better now than when I started this journey. I realize that as I am doing it, I now look at situations differently now than before. It has

opened my eyes to truly see the world. I would say the same about my writing. I was never a bad writer or had any trouble with words, but taking this doctoral journey has expanded my abilities to communicate through writing to a brand new level. I have to say that the reason I have made all of these strides is because this process has taught me to face challenges and conquer them so that I can improve, grow, and better myself.

### **Analysis of Self as Practitioner**

As a practitioner, I see the results of my journey every day. In the classroom teaching students, I have learned to examine situations or lessons from all different viewpoints. It has dramatically changed how I teach. It is the same in my coaching. I analyze and carefully evaluate options much more than I did in the past. I realize that there are many unique student athletes out there that I can have an impact on, each one is different, and I can use a new technique for all of them. A large part of where I have grown as a practitioner is in my communication. Being able to get across the point and purpose of what and why we are doing something in class or on the field is much easier now that I have been through this process. I am thankful to Walden University for teaching me valuable lessons that have merit in the real world.

### **Analysis of Self as Project Developer**

The most important aspect of project development that I learned is to do what is best for all involved while still listening and taking into consideration the ideas of those who the project will directly impact. Too many times as teachers we are just dictated to by administrators who have never been in the classroom, so they do not understand how a policy or a change will impact the people who have to actually deal with it. The more

information gathered from the correct sources, the better the project will be. It will be easier to sell to the ones who have to abide by the policy, and the implementation will go much more smoothly if those people have had a say in the project. It is vital to examine as many sides, views, and angles of a problem or a situation before it can be dealt with. Getting input from trusted and valued persons is a major part of making important decisions. I learned that anything is possible if you believe it is possible. It will not be easily or without challenge, but if there is a vision and drive to accomplish, it will get done.

### **The Project's Potential Impact on Social Change**

The project was very important. It deals with an issue that every high school in Iowa has to address: participation in athletics and eligibility. Developing the project taught me that any problem can be evaluated and attacked to find a solution. Not every solution will be foolproof the first time, but through evaluation, reflection, and humility, those solutions can be crafted, changed, and reworked to better address the original problem.

The potential impact for social change is great. This is an issue that affects all Iowa high schools, so if this project is shown to create the benefits that I think it will, the potential for school improvement is significant. More students will be participating in high school athletics and will benefit from everything that athletics teaches and provides. Academic performance will rise; test scores, GPAs, and college aspirations will all improve, and there is not a school anywhere that would deny those results if they could obtain them. The system created in this project can go a long way to helping students

achieve their dreams. Whether that is playing sports in high school, going to college, or anything in between, high school should be about giving the people they serve opportunities. That is what this project is aimed at doing.

Locally, this project will have enormous impact. It will raise the standards and expectations of the students while giving them the support they need to reach those goals. It will grant a compromise to the teachers and teacher/coaches who differ on how the policy was administered in the past by upping grade requirement but creating a system where one mistake does not cost a student an entire season. Students will have opportunities to maximize their potential and take advantage of second chances.

### **Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research**

This project was designed with the idea that high school athletics are far more beneficial for its participants than not. Future research should be conducted on a few areas such as if high school sports good for high school students, what the effects of eligibility and suspensions are on high school students, how effective study tables are on the academic performance of high school athletes, and if there a better way to increase participation in high school athletics.

I think this project is a step in the right direction for the local school and that it could be easily transferred to other schools so that they could also gain the positive outcomes that it will render. Other schools could tweak it to fit more directly for them, but the core issue of helping students would always be at the forefront.

## **Conclusion**

In Section 4, I covered the project's strengths such as addressing a gap in the current policy. The project's weaknesses such as not directly solving the local problem were observed. I also discussed other possible ways to solve those issues. They included professional development and incentives for participation. Section 4 went into a discussion of scholarship, evaluation, and leadership as those related to the project and process. I learned about myself in all of those areas. I learned that the process had a positive impact on me and allowed me to flourish in a scholarly setting. Those same areas were reflected on and analyzed to address how I viewed myself through the journey of creating the project. Lastly, the project was examined for its impact on social change, which has the possibility to have an impact on the local community and further. It was determined that future research should address the topic in an array of areas to reach a complete understanding.

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## Appendix A: Project

### Academic Eligibility Policy Recommendation

After conducting interviews with members of the faculty at the focus school the faculty seemed to indicate that a change needed to be made to the current academic eligibility policy for extra-curricular activities. The interview consisted of questions on a variety of topics that dealt with the teachers' perspectives on academic effects from athletic participation. The eligibility policy was one of the topics addressed in the interview, and after exploring the data gained from the interviews with the teachers, specifically the information provided on the eligibility policy, the data findings suggested that a change to the policy was needed.

Some of the issues with the current policy were easy to see after speaking with the teachers. One interviewee said, "It seems like we're all about getting the kid ineligible, but we're not all about helping that kid not become ineligible." This speaks to the notion that the school checked grades often but did not have a system to help those student athletes who become ineligible regain their eligibility. Another teacher expressed their concern about the same problem by stating, "We need to have a more formal intervention that catches them earlier."

According to the school handbook obtained from the school website, the policy reads as follows:

#### ACADEMIC ELIGIBILITY FOR EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

The School X CSD and the Board of Education believes that student activities are a vital part of the total educational program and that student

activities and academics should go hand in hand in providing for the development of the complete student.

State Law 36.15(2) Scholarship rules:

a. All contestants must be enrolled and in good standing in a school that is a member or associate member in good standing of the organization sponsoring the event.

b. All contestants must be under 20 years of age.

c. All contestants shall be enrolled students of the school in good standing.

(1) Each contestant shall be passing all coursework for which credit is given and shall be making adequate progress toward graduation requirements at the end of each grading period.

Grading period, graduation requirements, and any interim periods of ineligibility are determined by local policy.

For purpose of this sub-rule, "grading period" shall mean the period of time at the end of which a student in grades 9 through 12 receives a final grade and course credit is awarded for passing (24) grades.

For these students, this is at the end of each semester (2) If at the end of any grading period a contestant was given a failing grade of an F in any course for which credit was awarded, the contestant was ineligible to dress for and compete in the next occurring interscholastic athletic

contests and competitions in which the contestant was a contestant for 30 consecutive calendar days.

d. A student with a disability who had an IEP shall not be denied eligibility on the basis of scholarship if the student was making adequate progress, as determined by school officials, towards the goals and objectives on the student's IEP.

Local Eligibility Rules:

To be in good standing and be eligible for extracurricular activities, a student must receive a passing grade in all academic classes with no more than two grades below a C-.

Any student receiving a failing grade, or more than two grades below a C- at midterm and/or the end of each quarter, would be declared academically ineligible for two weeks. It is the responsibility of the student to turn in a progress report of their grades to the office by 4:00 p.m. on the second Friday in order to be considered for regaining their eligibility. Two week ineligibility periods run from Monday to Monday.

Students who are declared ineligible are required to practice. They may not suit, play or perform in contests. Students may travel with the team, be in the dugout, on the bench, or on the sidelines.

Ineligible students will not be dismissed early from classes to travel with the team.

To fulfill eligibility requirements, students must complete the entire season in good standing. If not, the ineligibility will carry over to the next activity. (Focus School Community School District, 2013)

The policy recommendation is to only deal with the local eligibility rule, not the state scholarship law. The state mandates a student athlete must be passing all of their classes at the end of each grading period with a minimum of a D-. For the focus school a grading period is at the end of each semester. That means that to be in accordance with state law a student athlete only has his or her grades checked twice a year. If a student athlete is deemed ineligible they must sit out 30 consecutive days. This means that they are not allowed to participate in games, contests, events, or productions but are allowed to practice and travel with the team. State law requirements are appropriate for a statewide guideline that each school district can abide by or strengthen based on the discretion of each local school board. The focus school seems to have already decided to go above and beyond the state requirements so my focus will be on their local requirements.

I am going to go through the policy line by line and discuss the changes, the rationale behind those changes, and give supporting evidence from the literature and from the interviews that were conducted with the teachers and teacher/coaches at the school.

Local Eligibility Rules:

**Line 1.** *To be in good standing and be eligible for extracurricular activities, a student must receive a passing grade in all academic classes with no more than two grades below a C-.*

Many of the interviewees expressed their view that the requirements were too easy and that a student athlete should be able to maintain at least all C's to remain eligible. "I think it needs to be higher standards." This was a common quote from the majority of those interviewed. Almost all of the teachers acknowledged that the students will do what they need to do to stay eligible. Student athletes will play the game keep their grades up just enough in order to be able to participate. "They want to stay eligible." This sentiment came up time and time again. Raising the minimums also means heightening the expectations and according to one teacher, "it all goes back to expectations." For the student athletes if they continue to play the game of meeting the expectations, and staying eligible it would mean higher outcomes and increased academic performance, which is what the ultimate goal is anyway. The idea that students will rise to the standards they are held to was a key point made by Bukowski (2010). He argued much like the interviewees, that students will play the game and adjust to what is expected from them. Higher standards lead to increased performance, and low standards hurt schools because students will strive to meet the standards that are in place.

My policy, based on the data findings gained through the interviews and the literature, would be to eliminate the two grades below a C- and change it to NO grades below a C- in any academic class because students will adjust to achieve what is required of them to participate.

**Line 2.** *Any student receiving a failing grade, or more than two grades below a C- at midterm and/or the end of each quarter, will be declared academically ineligible for two weeks.*

This is the line where most of the changes will take place to the current policy. For this school, these grade checks come rather quickly. Students are on block scheduling with classes meeting every other day. This means that at the midterm check a student athlete has only been in each class nine or 10 times. That does not allow enough time to adequately assess an academic performance especially with a possible two week suspension looming. One teacher addressed this issue, by stating, “How much has been assessed in a lot of classes?” Many classes have not even tested or possibly just once in that time. This means that there is a lack of grades for each student, and one poor grade could render that student ineligible for two weeks. Many teachers did not view this as fair. Some teachers saw the policy as a gotcha measure. The policy does a good job determining who are struggling and punishing them for their shortcomings, but it does not allow or provide a way back to eligibility for those who are caught by it. A common idea brought up by the interviewees was a buyback plan. “I would like to see a provision where buyback time could be reduced. Ours is two weeks. I would like to see it be one week.” My plan would put in place some extra steps to prevent the large number of ineligible students and give them the opportunity to see they are in danger, and if they become ineligible, to work their way off of the ineligible list. Muir and Education Partnership (2005) showed that participating in a support system lead to students being more likely to improve grades and restore eligibility. By putting a step in place to give students help academically while maintaining their eligibility will allow for student athletes to stay out for sports, not quit, and raise their performance in the classroom.

The new policy will read as follows:

Grade checks will take place the first four weeks of each quarter at the end of each quarter.

On the first four week check, a student with a D or an F will be placed on a *watch list*. They are NOT ineligible. They will be required to complete a minimum of 2 hours in a study table per week. At any point when that grade is no longer below a C- that student will be removed from the *watch list* and not be required to attend study tables. If the grade is not raised to a C- or higher, the student will become ineligible.

**Line 3.** *It is the responsibility of the student to turn in a progress report of their grades to the office by 4:00 p.m. on the second Friday in order to be considered for regaining their eligibility.*

The main idea from this line would be that students must be accountable. The teachers all shared the opinion that one of the best things about the current system is that it teaches accountability. One teacher said, “They want to make sure their grades are up so they can play.” If they want to be eligible it is up to them to take responsibility and provide the information to the administration to become eligible. The two week ineligible period will not take place until later in the new policy. All of the teachers interviewed spoke about how one of the best things about the current policy is that it does make student athletes accountable. The students know when the grade checks are and what the need to do to meet the requirements. The grade checks are similar to School C and they have a probationary period much like the *watch list* in the new policy (School C, 2014).

Under the new policy a student who is on the watch list can turn in a grade report at any time signed by the teacher showing an improved grade above a C- to be removed

from the watch list. This allows students to take responsibility for their low grade(s), but not punish them with becoming ineligible.

**Line 4.** *Two week ineligibility periods run from Monday to Monday.*

The watch list and any ineligibility will begin on Monday. A student athlete can be removed from the watch list or have their eligibility returned at any time with a signed grade sheet from the teacher. There is not a clear justification for this line other than the school week and most sporting events begin on a Monday, and it will make it easier to keep track of all aspects of the policy.

This will not change in the new policy.

**Line 5.** *Students who are declared ineligible are required to practice. They may not suit, play or perform in contests.*

Line 5 and Line 6 are similar in intention because they address ineligible student athletes practicing and attending games. Because of their similarity, both lines are discussed following Line 6.

**Line 6.** *Students may travel with the team, be in the dugout, on the bench, or on the sidelines.*

These two lines will be maintained in the new policy. Keeping student athletes eligible for sports is a good thing. One teacher summed it up best when he said, "It's in the best interest of the school for these kids to be eligible. If they're there and able to play then we {teachers} have more of an ability to influence them." Many of the teachers were of the opinion that for a lot of students, sports are the only or at least a main reason they come to school. So if that is completely taken away from them by not allowing them to



practice or be around the team and teammates it can have a negative impact. They quit the sport, stop attending school, let their grades get even worse, or even drop out of school. Rombokas et al. (1995) found a positive link between academic achievement and involvement in activities beyond the school day. By allowing student athletes, even requiring them to continue to be part of the team while they are ineligible, it gives them hope, structure, and a network of support to help them improve.

**Line 7.** *Ineligible students will not be dismissed early from classes to travel with the team.*

This is another part of the current policy that will remain intact under the new policy. A lot of the teachers expressed the view that, for many students, athletics comes before academics in their list of priorities. This line of the policy demonstrates that that is not the case for the school. One way the school can stress academics is by requiring all ineligible students to not miss any time in class. If you are ineligible you must take care of your academic responsibilities before you are allowed to take part in any athletic events. It makes little sense for students who are struggling in a class to be allowed to leave that class to attend an event in which they are not permitted to participate. Many of the interviewees expressed a key idea for the entire project. “They are students first.” By embracing the idea of academics first and staying eligible, student athletes can then reap the benefits that studies like Zaugg (1998), Holloway (1999), Broh (2002) and Eccles (2003) all discuss.

**Line 8.** *To fulfill eligibility requirements, students must complete the entire season in good standing.*

The next two lines are linked together because Line 9 is based off of Line 8. For that reason these two lines will be discussed together after Line 9.

**Line 9.** *If not, the ineligibility will carry over to the next activity.*

These two lines work together. A student must finish the season they start while eligible. If they quit or are ineligible on their last day out for the sport they will start the next season on ineligible status. Some students may face challenges adjusting to the new policy but as Bukowski (2010) argued, students will adapt to the expectations placed upon them. The interviewees agreed. Most all of the participants in the study talked about how students will play the game to keep their grades up. “They want to stay eligible.” One teacher was quoted as saying.

The new recommendation will reflect a similar idea. An ineligible student will remain ineligible indefinitely until the grade(s) in question are above a C-. If the class is over and the grade(s) are not above a C- that student will start the next grading period on the *watch list*. At the first grade checkpoint in the new term that student must demonstrate that he or she has all grades at or above a C- or they will be deemed ineligible.

The Policy Recommendation for Academic Eligibility for Extra-Curricular Activities

State Law is in place and will be followed.

Local rule will be as follows:

Grade checks will take place the first 4 weeks of each quarter and at the end of each quarter. Grade checks will be gathered through submissions from the teachers.

Students must have no grade below a C- on any grade check in any academic class without consequence. That consequence could be mandatory study table, being declared ineligible, or both.

On a 4 week grade check, a student with a D or F will be placed on a “Watch List”. The “Watch List” is an intervention to aid the students in danger of receiving a grade below a C-. They are NOT ineligible at this point. They will be required to complete a minimum of 2 hours in a mandatory study table per week. At any point when that grade is no longer below a C- that student will be removed from the “Watch List” and not be required to attend study tables.

Any student can voluntarily attend study tables.

Study tables will be a full year, fully staffed, paid position open to all who wish to attend.

Times will include: Before school, after school, and seminar.

If at the end of quarter check a student has a grade below a C- that student is ineligible for 2 weeks and must attend mandatory study tables. At any time that grade rises above a C- that student is eligible again.

Any student who is deemed ineligible by the state will be required to spend the entire ineligible period in study table for a minimum of 3 hours per week. The ineligible student may still participate in any sport during their probationary time abiding by the rules of the school and coach/ sponsor while still meeting the required 3 hours of study table.

If at any time 20% or more of a team/group is on the *Watch List* or ineligible the entire team/ group will attend study table for a minimum of 1 hour per week regardless of their current grade. Once the percentage of members falls below 20% the entire team/ group will be released from study table.

Any student who refuses to meet the study table requirements will receive 3 day In School Suspension (ISS).

Objectives- Increase standards and academic performance

Increase participation

Maintain eligibility

Audience- School Board

Issue- Teacher and teacher/coach concerns with the current policy

-too easy of standards

-too severe of punishments

-no intervention or support

Options- School A, School B, and School C

Fit Culture- Improving student performance

Examples- Other schools

Impact- Literature

Infinite

Importance- Achieving the goals of the district

#### Project Evaluation

The following is a goal-based evaluation survey of the project. The survey will be given to stakeholders in the community, parents who had students affected by the project, teachers, teacher/coaches, and the school administration. The survey will be dispersed at the conclusion of the first school year following the implementation of the project. The desired outcome of the evaluation is to determine the worth of the project and to analyze the projects effectiveness in meeting its intended goals.

#### Project Evaluation Survey

Do you think,

1. this policy recommendation will be beneficial to the students at the school?
2. this policy recommendation will have the ability to raise academic performance at the school?
3. this policy recommendation will lead to increased participation numbers at school?
4. this policy recommendation will decrease the number of ineligible students at school?
5. What other recommendations do you have for this policy change?

Post implementation policy evaluation survey.

The survey questions are below,

1. Did the new policy have an impact on academic performance at the school?
2. Did the new policy lead to increased participation numbers at school?
3. Did the new policy help in decreasing ineligible students at school?
4. Was the new policy beneficial for the school? Why or why not?
5. Any other comments?

## Appendix B: Interview Guide

## Interview Guide: Teachers' Perception of Athletic Participation

Time:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Subject &amp; Years Taught:

(Introduction)

Questions:

1. What effects in the classroom, both positive and negative, do you feel result from athletic participation?
  - a. Positives-
  - b. Negatives-
  - c. Why do you feel those results occur?
  - d. Follow up questions that probe deeper and allow interviewees to further explain answers-
2. What are your feelings regarding your students playing sports on a high school team?

- a. Follow up questions that probe deeper and allow interviewees to further explain answers
  
3. What can student athletes learn from non-athletes about being students?
  - a. And vice-versus-
  
  - b. Follow up questions that probe deeper and allow interviewees to further explain answers
  
4. Is there a difference in how you view athletes and non-athletes in your classroom?
  - a. If so, why?
  
  - b. If you do not, is this a conscious effort?
  
  - c. Follow up questions that probe deeper and allow interviewees to further explain answers
  
5. What, if any, differences do you see between student athletes in season versus off season?



- a. Could this be tied to eligibility? How or how not? What are your thoughts on the eligibility policy?
  - b. Follow up questions that probe deeper and allow interviewees to further explain answers
6. Are there certain times in the school year that student athletes or non-athletes change their behavior in the classroom? Why do you think this is?
  - a. Follow up questions that probe deeper and allow interviewees to further explain answers
7. Are there any issues that you see between teachers and teacher/coaches?
  - a. What are they?
  - b. Why do think that dynamic is?
8. What, if any, differences do you see between male and female student athletes in the classroom?
9. In your view, what is the most difficult aspect of being a high school student athlete?

10. What are your final thoughts on the topic? Do you have anything to add?

(All follow up questions will be based on answers provided in the interview. They will be questions to clarify, probe deeper, and give examples.

Thank you and all information is 100% confidential).

## Appendix C: Findings

### Importance of Participation

- Athletes have higher scores and perform better in class
- Athletes try harder in season
  - o Main goal is to stay eligible
    - It is their motivation
    - It is the difference between C's and D's & D's and F's
  - o Sports gives athletes a network of help
    - Teacher/Coach- Student-Athlete relationship
- Sports teaches discipline and leadership and gives students a routine
- Sports keeps them in school and builds a sense of community and spirit
- More or all students should participate

### Negatives of Participation

- Can be a distraction in class
- Miss a lot of school to play
- Make-up work and catching back up

### Eligibility Policy Issues

- Teachers want higher standards and Coaches want to address the punishments
- Should have all C's or at least pass all classes
- Timing of the checks is fast with not a lot of grades
- There should be a plan to become eligible again (intervention)
- Students should be accountable
- No consequences for non-athletes is an issue
- School comes first

### Teacher and Teacher/Coach Issues

- Coaches getting out early or before contract day is over to practice or games
- Pressure applied to teachers
- Cliques
- Lack of communication
- Coach first??
- Favor athletes?
- Is there an understanding of coaching?

### Challenges to Student Athletes

- Balancing time- Worn out
- Off season grades and attendance slip

Appendix D: IRB Approval Number

The Walden IRB approval for the study # 05-25-13-0085025.

## Curriculum Vitae

**Chris Starostka**

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**Experience**

Social Studies Teacher & Coach

August 2011-Present Southeast Polk High School, Pleasant Hill, Iowa  
Instructed Government and United States History

Coaching responsibilities:

Assistant Football

Assistant Track

August 2004-June 2011 XXXX High School, XXX, Iowa

Instructed Dual Credit Government, Economics, & Geography

Coaching responsibilities:

Head Girls Track

Head Freshman Boys Basketball

Assistant Varsity Football

Coach

August 2001-June 2004 Valley High School, West Des Moines, Iowa

Assistant Varsity Football

Track and Field Assistant

Boys and Girls Jumps Coach

Iowa Evaluator Training Level I 2010

**Education**

Walden University, Minneapolis, Minnesota

May 2008-December 2014

- Ed.D Administrative Leadership for Teaching and Learning

Drake University, Des Moines Iowa

June 2002- December 2003

- MAT Education

Simpson College, Indianola, Iowa

August 1997- May 2001

- BA History and Political Science