



# Salida High School:

An Analysis of how School-Sponsored Student Activity Involvement Supports Student Outcomes & Success

## ABSTRACT

This policy brief seeks to examine the benefits of student involvement with school-sponsored student activities, and analyzes ways in which Salida High School could incentivize activity participation to support positive academic and personal outcomes.

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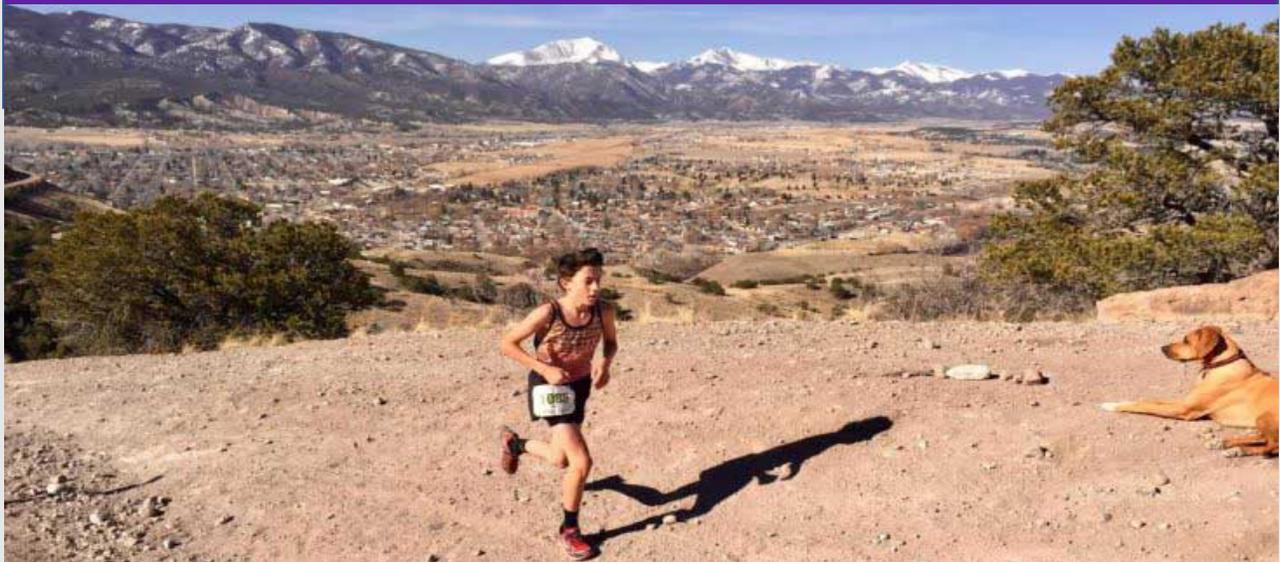
## Executive Summary

For the younger generations, obtaining a postsecondary degree and demonstrating college and career readiness is vital for success. However, almost half of the students in Colorado are not enrolling in postsecondary institutions of any kind (including technical, associate, and bachelor's degree programs) upon graduating from high school. This opportunity gap has profound impacts on the long-term return on investment for students, as students with less than one year of college credit have lower earnings and less mobility compared to their two-year and four-year degree earning peers. Salida High School has so far done well to match the statewide postsecondary immediate enrollment rate, but has an opportunity to become a leader in Colorado's efforts to ensure that all students can obtain a postsecondary credential.

This brief considers how student participation in school-sponsored activities may support college and career readiness for students at Salida High School, therefore creating mobility and opportunity for the community as a whole. As an umbrella term for both extracurricular and co-curricular activities, school-sponsored activities yield highly positive outcomes for high school students of all backgrounds in ways that are social, emotional, and academic. They also support the development of high school students in ways that allow them to become "college ready" by helping them become more competitive and desirable college applicants.

The brief concludes with three recommendations for how Salida High School might incentivize school-sponsored activity participation for all of its students to support them on their college and career pathways:

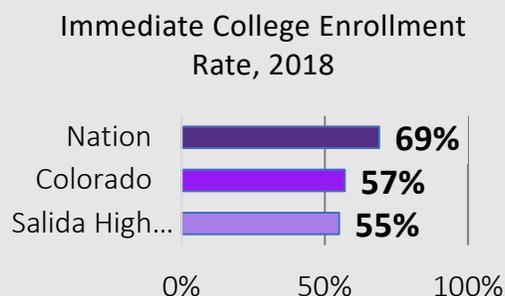
1. Continue emphasizing and supporting school-sponsored activities at Salida High School as a means of encouraging high-levels of student participation.
2. Consider making participation in school-sponsored activities a graduation requirement in order to incentivize involvement and track students towards positive outcomes.
3. Establish activity theme buckets that students can choose from to meet the activity graduation requirement, therefore providing choice and flexibility for all.



## Introduction

For the younger generations, obtaining a postsecondary degree and demonstrating college and career readiness is vital for success. However, almost half of the students in Colorado are not enrolling in postsecondary institutions, of any kind, upon graduating from high school.<sup>1</sup> With an immediate college enrollment rate of only 57% in 2018, Colorado is below the national immediate college enrollment average of 69%, as shown in Figure 1.<sup>2,3</sup> Postsecondary certificate and degree completion is vital, both for an individual's personal growth and return on investment, but also for statewide economic growth.<sup>4</sup>

Salida High School has so far done well to maintain course with the statewide postsecondary immediate enrollment rates, with 55% in 2018 and 57% in 2019.<sup>5</sup> But instead of maintaining course with the state's below national average rates, Salida schools can become a leader in the state's efforts to ensure that all Colorado students can obtain a postsecondary credential.



*Figure 1*

Encouraging involvement in school-sponsored student activities plays an essential role in creating avenues of postsecondary access and opportunity. The following brief summarizes some of the many benefits students experience by being involved in school-sponsored activities, and examines how these positive outcomes lead to college and career success. Based on these positive outcomes, the brief will conclude with recommendations for how Salida High School can incentivize school-sponsored activity involvement for students, therefore pointing them towards successful life pathways.

## School-Sponsored Student Activities

For high school students, there are a wide variety of student activities to participate in, ranging from acting in the school musical, to playing for the school basketball team, to enjoying chess with a group of classmates. For the purposes of this brief, only school-sponsored activities will be referenced, therefore not taking into account the non-school-sponsored activities, such as community jobs and childcare responsibilities.

"Idle time is the devil's playground - doing good things with one's time takes away from opportunities to get involved in risky activities."  
- Eccles & Barber, p. 10

School-sponsored activities take two different forms: Extracurricular and co-curricular. Extracurricular activities are those that students participate in outside of school hours, and are considered fully optional to participate in. Many extracurricular activities, being that they are not required, cost small fees and require additional time commitments.<sup>6,7</sup>

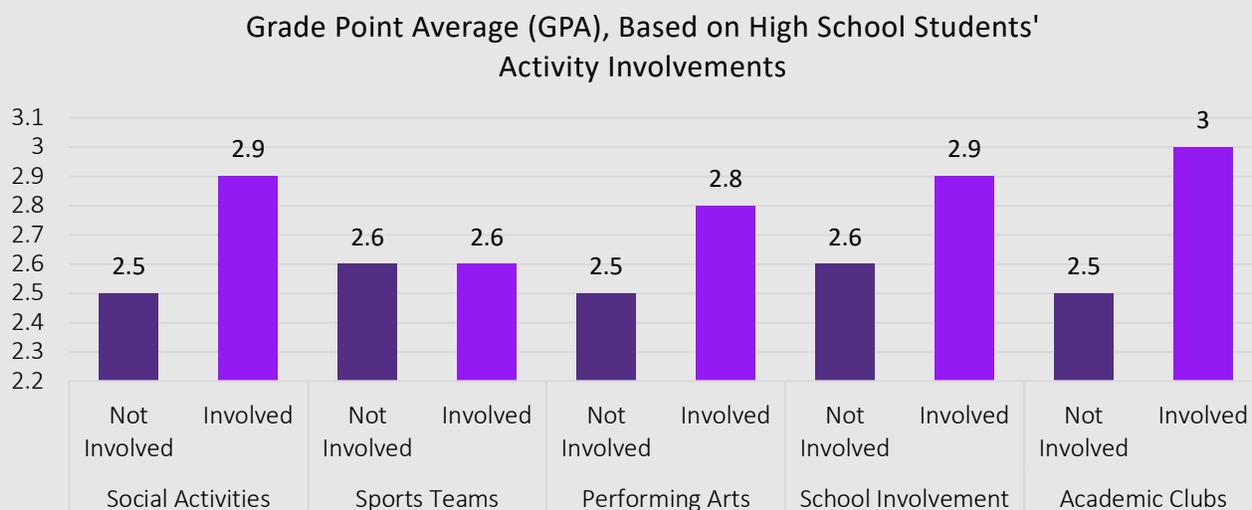
By contrast, co-curricular activities are those that take place during school hours. Also known as elective courses, co-curricular classes are non-core courses that are counted for credit, and therefore help students meet graduation credit minimums.<sup>8</sup> The need to take co-curricular

courses varies by school and district; some districts and schools require specific co-curriculars for graduation, oftentimes being a physical education (P.E.) or fine arts requirement.<sup>9</sup> Other schools and districts allow permissions for certain school-sponsored extracurricular activities to function as a substitute for co-curricular requirements. For example, many high schools allow student athletes the opportunity to opt-out of P.E. classes, either fully or partially.

Both extracurricular and co-curricular activities are essential for accessing postsecondary institutions; many postsecondary institutions review high school students' activity involvements to better understand student passions and interests outside of the core academic experience.<sup>10</sup> Because of this, many college applications include questions about student activities, as postsecondary institutions believe that student involvement is a vital component to demonstrating "college readiness." In response to this demand by postsecondary institutions, many high school students opt to partake in multiple activities, both during and after school, in order to differentiate themselves from other applicants; see Appendix A for more on the pressures that this application expectation may put on students.<sup>11,12</sup>

## School-Sponsored Student Activities as a Catalyst for Positive Student Outcomes

High school students of all backgrounds (gender, race/ethnicity, sexuality, and socioeconomic status) experience an abundance of positive outcomes from involvement in school-sponsored activities, in ways that are academic, social, and emotional. For example, research suggests that students who participate in activities experience higher levels of academic achievement.<sup>13</sup> Most clearly, data reveals that students involved in school-sponsored activities have higher GPAs and test scores compared to their uninvolved peers; see Figure 2 as a demonstration of this academic outcome.<sup>14,15</sup>



*Figure 2*

### Percentage of Students Enrollment Full-Time at a College or University, Based on High School Students' Activity Involvements

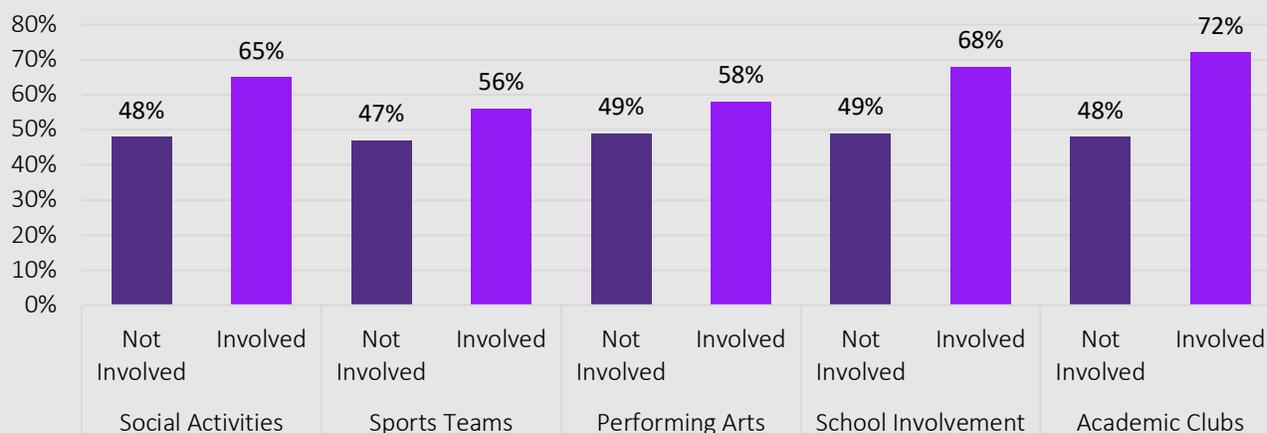


Figure 3

Additionally, students involved in activities are more likely to be college bound and see themselves as “college ready,” regardless of demographic background. For example, research shows that tenth graders involved in activities are more likely to look ahead towards a bachelor’s degree pathway compared to their uninvolved peers, revealing that activity involvement opens doors to college and career opportunities by introducing students to new skills and interests.<sup>16</sup> Also, as aforementioned, students involved in activities are more competitive applicants in the college application process; postsecondary institutions encourage students to diversify their passions and involvements, and therefore the students who pad their resumes with activities become more desirable to admit.<sup>17,18,19</sup> Figure 3 demonstrates the correlation between high school activity involvement and full-time enrollment at a postsecondary institution.<sup>20</sup>

See Figure 4 to also understand just some of the primary social and emotional skill outcomes from school-sponsored activity participation.<sup>21,22,23</sup> Of these social and emotional outcomes, it is important to emphasize that all school-sponsored activities allow students the opportunity to make social connections with their peers and classmates in ways that are unique compared to social connections made in core academic classes.<sup>24,25</sup> Because activities are often hands-on and skill-based, students have very different outcomes by participating in activities compared to being enrolled in core academic classes.<sup>26</sup>

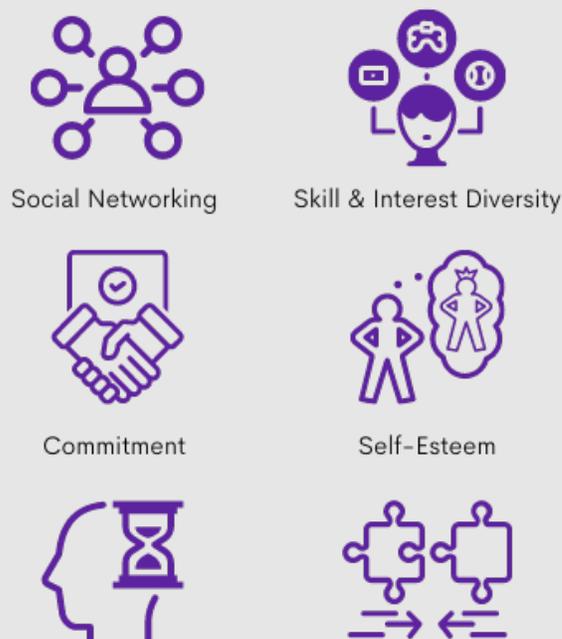


Figure 4

## Recommendations

The following recommendations seek to guide the way Salida High School frames and encourages student participation in school-sponsored activities. Because students experience great benefits from participation in school-sponsored activities, the two recommendations presented within this brief will support in the creation of an activity-focused high school experience that expands college and career opportunities.

Recommendation 1: Continue emphasizing and supporting school-sponsored activities at Salida High School as a means of encouraging high-levels of student participation.

The data presented throughout this brief is clear; no matter a student's demographic background, all high school students show more positive academic, social, and emotional outcomes when involved in school-sponsored activities. With this in mind, Salida High School should encourage all students to participate in these activities during and after school, and continue funding these activities appropriately. Creating a high school culture that embraces school-sponsored activities as a part of its mission is vital, and will demonstrate the belief that activities can be just as important for growth and development as core academic classes.

Recommendation 2: Consider making participation in school-sponsored activities a graduation requirement in order to incentivize involvement and track students towards positive outcomes.

By expanding the graduation requirement framework to include student activity participation, Salida High School can encourage involvement for all students beyond core academic classes. For this requirement, it is important that both extracurricular and co-curricular activities can be used to satisfy the requirement so as to avoid potential accessibility barriers for those who have other responsibilities outside of school hours.<sup>27</sup> In this way, extracurricular and co-curricular activities must be valued equally so that all students have the opportunity to satisfy the requirement.

In order to be a graduation requirement, school-sponsored activities must be credit-earning opportunities. This allows students to be rewarded for the time and effort required to participate in activities that are not part of the traditional high school curriculum.<sup>28</sup> Additionally, by requiring students to earn credits to their diploma through activity participation, Salida High School incentivizes students to develop new skills and interests, and supports them on a pathway for more positive high school outcomes.<sup>29</sup>

Recommendation 3: Establish activity theme buckets that students can choose from to meet the activity graduation requirement, therefore providing choice and flexibility for all.

If school-sponsored activity participation becomes a requirement to graduate, Salida High School must maximize the activity options provided students. Instead of requiring all students to take a P.E. class, for example, students should be able to choose from activity theme buckets that include all the school-sponsored activity options.<sup>30</sup> This allows for the flexibility that many students crave, and avoids putting students in activities that make them uncomfortable.<sup>31</sup>

Activity options can be presented to the students in four categories: active, creative, technical and social. Students should be required to engage with activities in at least two of the categories so as to diversify their activities and maximize the potential for positive outcomes.<sup>32</sup> Some examples of what types of activities might exist within each activity bucket are presented below:



**Active:** Life Fitness P.E, Football Team, Mountain Biking Team, Hip Hop Club



**Creative:** Ceramics, Musical Theater, Jazz Band, Poetry Club



**Technical:** Economics Club, Coding and Computer Science, Robotics Club, Chess Club



**Social:** Service Club, Student Government, Prom Committee, Peer Counseling

<sup>1</sup> Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE) (2020a). *Pathways to prosperity: Postsecondary access and success for Colorado's high school graduates*. Colorado Department of Higher Education. Retrieved from [https://higher.ed.colorado.gov/Publications/Reports/Legislative/PostSecondary/2020\\_Postsecondary\\_Progress\\_rel20200515.pdf](https://higher.ed.colorado.gov/Publications/Reports/Legislative/PostSecondary/2020_Postsecondary_Progress_rel20200515.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> National Center for Education Statistics (IPEDS) (2020). Immediate college enrollment rate. *The Condition of Education*. Retrieved from [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator\\_cpa.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cpa.asp).

<sup>4</sup> Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE) (2020b). *The road to affordability: Reducing cost and maximizing value for students and our state*. Colorado Department of Higher Education. Retrieved from [https://higher.ed.colorado.gov/Publications/Reports/Legislative/ROI/202008\\_ROI.pdf](https://higher.ed.colorado.gov/Publications/Reports/Legislative/ROI/202008_ROI.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Colorado Department of Education [data set] (2020). *Salida high school graduation and completion rates (4 years): College enrolled immediately after HS*.

<sup>6</sup> Sarikas, C. [blog] (2020). "What high school electives should you take?" *PrepScholar*. Retrieved from <https://blog.prepscholar.com/which-high-school-electives-should-you-take#:~:text=Like%20other%20high%20school%20classes,you%20get%20in%20those%20courses>.

<sup>7</sup> Eccles, J., & Barber, B. (1999). Student council, volunteering, basketball, or marching band: What kind of extracurricular involvement matters? *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 14(1). 10-43.

<sup>8</sup> Sarikas (2020).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> National Federation of State High School Associations [web] (n.d.). "The case for high school activities." National Federation of State High School Associations. Retrieved from <https://www.nfhs.org/articles/the-case-for-high-school-activities/#chapter5>

<sup>11</sup> Dumais, S. (2009). Cohort and gender differences in extracurricular participation: The relationship between activities, math achievement, and college expectations. *Sociological Spectrum*, 29. 72-100.

<sup>12</sup> Hurst, W. (2016). "End the extracurricular arms race." *Inside Higher Ed*. Retrieved from <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2016/04/11/extracurriculars-are-robbing-students-their-education-essay>

<sup>13</sup> Craft, S. (2012). The impact of extracurricular activities on student achievement at the high school level. *Dissertations*, 543. Retrieved from [https://aquila.usm.edu/dissertations/543?utm\\_source=aquila.usm.edu%2Fdissertations%2F543&utm\\_medium=PDF&utm\\_campaign=PDFCoverPages](https://aquila.usm.edu/dissertations/543?utm_source=aquila.usm.edu%2Fdissertations%2F543&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages)

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- <sup>14</sup> Eccles & Barber (1999).
- <sup>15</sup> Din, F. (2006). Sport activities versus academic achievement for rural high school students. *National Forum of Applied Educational Research Journal*, 19(3).
- <sup>16</sup> Dumais (2009).
- <sup>17</sup> Leon N. Weiner Education Foundation (2020).
- <sup>18</sup> Hurst (2016).
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- <sup>22</sup> Sarikas (2020).
- <sup>23</sup> Eccles & Barber (1999).
- <sup>24</sup> Schaefer, D., Simpkins, S., Vest, A., & Price, C. (2011). The contribution of extracurricular activities to adolescent friendships: New insights through social network analysis. *Development Psychology*, 47(4). 1141-1152.
- <sup>25</sup> Eccles & Barber (1999).
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- <sup>27</sup> Hurst (2016).
- <sup>28</sup> Schuler, M. (2016). "Credit for extracurricular activities?" *OHS Magnet*. Retrieved from <https://ohsmagnet.com/11533/showcase/credit-for-extracurricular-activities/>
- <sup>29</sup> Craft (2012).
- <sup>30</sup> Sarikas (2020).
- <sup>31</sup> National Federation of State High School Associations (n.d.).
- <sup>32</sup> Leon N. Weiner Education Foundation (2020).

## Appendix A

The discussion of the researched positive outcomes of student participation in school-sponsored activities warrants a discussion on the potential negative outcomes. The following three counterarguments to requiring and encouraging school-sponsored activity participation have been pulled from the literature referenced throughout the brief.

1. Emphasizing and incentivizing school-sponsored student activities may pressure students towards overinvolvement, overextension, and overscheduling (Hurst, 2016).

Also referenced as the “extracurricular arms race,” parents, administrators, and researchers have noticed that the pressure to be involved in activities pushes students towards burnout and exhaustion. This occurs during both high school and in college, especially when reinforced at the high school level. Part of the pressure stems from the competitiveness of the postsecondary world; as students work to make themselves appealing to college admissions representatives, they often participate in as many teams, clubs, and groups as possible to set themselves apart from other applicants.

This counterargument towards requiring activity participation does not truly apply to actions done at the high school level. Instead, researchers and academics suggest that postsecondary institutions themselves should be responsible for “reining in” the inflationary expectations of high school applicants, focusing on depth instead of breadth.

2. Sports-based activities, on average, may show more negative than positive outcomes for its participants (Din, 2006; Craft, 2012; Eccles & Barber, 1999).

Research produced by Din, Craft, and Eccles and Barber suggests that while a majority of high school activities yield positive social, emotional, and academic outcomes, sports-based activity involvement does not show a statistically significant difference, and instead can yield more negative outcomes than positive. Examples of these negative outcomes can include increased risk for criminal behavior, such as drug and alcohol use, as well as lower attendance, less engagement, and a higher likelihood to fall behind.

This counterargument can be remedied by Recommendation 3 presented in this brief; by encouraging students to participate in activities from multiple activity theme buckets, negative outcomes of sports-based involvements may be easier to counter. For example, if a student is on the tennis team as well as in the poetry club, the likelihood for negative outcomes may diminish. Additionally, by supporting at least two activity involvements, students would have less time to engage in “high-risk” behaviors.

3. School-sponsored student activities take time and focus away from core academic classes (Schuler, 2016; Hurst, 2016).

By setting aside time both during and outside of school hours for school-based student activities, the amount of time that students can dedicate towards their core academic classes diminishes. This counterargument, therefore, frames activities as a distraction for

high school students. In this way, students involved in too many activities outside of school time lose opportunities for asynchronous engagement and homework, therefore causing them to fall behind in their core classes.

Research and data does not support this perspective, as students involved in school-sponsored activities have better academic achievement rates as shown through GPAs, test scores, and attendance. See pages 2 and 3 of the brief for this data.

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