

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
Civilian

## Breadth of Extracurricular Participation and Adolescent Adjustment Among African-American and European-American Youth

Fredricks, J. A., & Eccles, J. S. (2010). Breadth of extracurricular participation and adolescent adjustment among African-American and European-American youth. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 20(2), 307-333.  
doi:10.1111/j.1532-7795.2009.00627.x

**SUMMARY:** Extracurricular activities provide youth with additional time and resources for positive development beyond school. This study examined the relationships between adolescents' extracurricular involvement and youth outcomes (e.g., educational attainment, family and community involvement). Results suggest participation in more activities (up to five) is associated with positive outcomes for adolescents during and after high school.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Participating in more activities was associated with higher educational attainment and greater family, political, social, and charitable involvement among adolescents.
- Although participating in more activities was associated with positive outcomes, youth who participated in five or more activities education attainment leveled off or decreased.
- Participating in a wider range of activities was associated with less alcohol and marijuana use and decreased internalizing and externalizing behavior among adolescents.
- Adolescents participating in more activities in high school finished higher levels of education and had more community involvement one year after high school.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Collaborate with military programs for parents to educate military parents about the importance of extracurricular activity involvement for youth
- Facilitate after-school programs for military youth to encourage educational achievement and community involvement

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer military youth opportunities to participate in multiple programs by providing flexible program scheduling
- Develop rotating activities or offerings for military youth programs to provide a variety of experiences to allow youth to develop skills in many areas

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Promote collaboration and communication among both military and community programs and organizations to ensure a broad range of activities are offered to military youth
- Continue to support a diverse set of programs and opportunities for military youth

This product is the result of a partnership funded by the Department of Defense between the Office of Military Community and Family Policy and the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture through a grant/cooperative agreement with The University of Minnesota.



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## METHODS

- Data from a large longitudinal study of youth development, the Maryland Adolescent Development in Context Study, which surveyed all youth in schools in a county in Maryland, were used.
- Adolescents and parents completed questionnaires regarding adolescents' extracurricular activity involvement, educational attainment (e.g., grades, expectations), family involvement, substance use, psychological adjustment, and civic engagement.
- Data were collected during 8th grade, 11th grade, and one year after high school.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included youth surveyed longitudinally in 8th grade (n = 1060), 11th grade (n = 1075), and one year after high school (n = 912); youth were 51% female.
- Participants were 67% Black and 33% White, with 6% of families living at or below the poverty line.
- Black and high-risk youth were more likely to drop out of the study than White or low-risk youth.

## LIMITATIONS

- No data were collected on the characteristics of programs (e.g., program quality) which may influence the association between participation and positive youth outcomes.
- The direction of the relationships cannot be inferred, and it is possible that positive adolescent adjustment predicts more involvement in extracurricular activities.
- Other unmeasured factors (e.g., parent support, availability of extracurricular programs) may have influenced the findings.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Explore whether different types of extracurricular activities (e.g., arts, sports, academic) have different effects on youth development outcomes
- Examine what aspects of extracurricular participation contribute to positive outcomes (e.g., positive relations with supportive adults, positive peer relations, new skills acquired, sense of community)
- Investigate how differences in depth of extracurricular activities (e.g., time spent, leadership roles taken, competitions or presentations attended) may influence the degree to which these activities effect youth outcomes

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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