



ELEVATING STUDENT VOICE

Student Educational Equity Development (SEED) Survey

Extracurricular Participation and Barriers

Access to extracurricular activities and events, both within and outside of the school environment, provide vital opportunities for students to develop social skills and bonds, enhance self-regulation skills, and apply academic skills in real-world contexts. When well-implemented, these activities enable students to develop diverse friendships, practice teamwork skills, and improve social skills¹ and academic, artistic, and/or physical capabilities.² Extracurricular activities are correlated with enhanced student engagement with the school curriculum and academic performance and offer students an opportunity to stand out when considered for post-secondary opportunities.^{3,4} Results from the 2021-22 [Student Educational Equity Development \(SEED\) Survey](#) pilot can help educators determine how to increase student access to extracurricular activities and events.

Key Takeaways

- Only around half of students surveyed reported participating in school-sponsored extracurricular activities.
- While most students reported having opportunities to participate, most reported their barrier to participation was or included a lack of interesting or relevant options.
- Some students (8% of those reporting barriers) did not participate in extracurricular activities because they did not feel welcome or safe engaging. Students expressed a desire to be invited to participate, rather than just allowed to join.
- Participation in extracurricular activities is correlated with higher attendance rates and increased sense of belonging.
- Students with disabilities reported less access to school-sponsored activities and events, though similar rates of access to community activities, compared to students not served through an individual education program (IEP).

Key Recommendations

- Providing opportunities for student voice to shape school decision-making can empower and engage students, as well as highlight areas where improvements are needed. When districts and schools have student voice data and conduct needs assessments, they are better positioned to consider what barriers they are able to remove for students.
- Working with students to generate activities that resonate with their interests and expertise may help generate higher rates of engagement.
- Many barriers to participation mentioned by students could be addressed by schools directly, including some of those related to logistics, policies imposed by the school, or information barriers (lack of knowledge about how to participate). Others would need to be addressed at a systems level.
- Empathy interviews support local educators to assess needs and create a locally-specific plan for addressing barriers, including partnering with community organizations as appropriate. Increased staffing to allow for appropriate monitoring and oversight of the students participating may be necessary to ensure all students feel welcome and safe.

¹ Durlak, Joseph A., and Roger P. Weissberg. "[The impact of after-school programs that promote personal and social skills.](#)" *Collaborative for academic, social, and emotional learning* (NJ1) (2007).

² NCES Policy Issues, [Extracurricular Participation and Student Engagement.](#)

³ Kaufman, Jason, and Jay Gabler. "Cultural capital and the extracurricular activities of girls and boys in the college attainment process." *Poetics* 32, no. 2 (2004): 145-168.

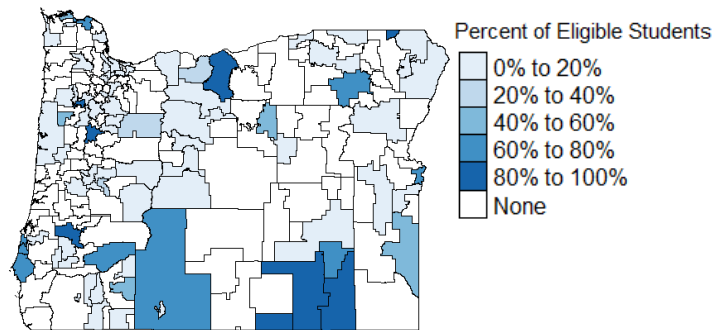
⁴ Gibbs, Benjamin G., Lance D. Erickson, Mikaela J. Dufur, and Aaron Miles. "Extracurricular associations and college enrollment." *Social Science Research* 50 (2015): 367-381.

Student Educational Equity Development Survey (SEED)

Since 2020-21, ODE has developed and administered the [SEED Survey](#) to collect information about the educational experiences of students in grades 3-11. SEED enables ODE to gather data on student experiences, including:

- access to learning resources
- opportunity to learn
- sense of self-efficacy
- sense of belonging⁵

Who Responded to SEED in 2021-22?



This survey, which provides universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations, as well as multiple language versions that students need for access, is available to all Oregon public schools and districts. The survey was optional for schools and districts to administer in the 2021-22 school year. Although the majority of students did not have the opportunity to participate in SEED in 2021-22, those who did participate mirror the overall student demographics in Oregon fairly closely.⁶ These data should not be considered representative of all Oregon students, but can be examined for their ability to shed light on common student experiences and barriers that may be present across the state. ODE encourages school and district leaders who read this brief to examine their own institutions for similar barriers and to review best practices included here for opportunities to enhance their connection to and services for students.⁷

Using data from the 2021-22 SEED Survey pilot, this brief examines students' access to extracurricular activities, the relationship between those activities and measures of engagement and belonging, and students' self-reported barriers to extracurricular activity participation. Many of the barriers reported are logistical in nature and could be addressed by schools directly via alternative scheduling practices, changes to participation prerequisites, or improvements in information sharing and recruitment, or at a systems level via additional funding. Other barriers may be more difficult to address, requiring empathy interviews to identify activities that would be of interest to students, as well as identifying behaviors and practices within an extracurricular activity that may cause students to feel unwelcome or unsafe. Some constraints, such as caregiving responsibilities, may be best addressed through partnerships with community-based organizations. Leveraging student voice to broaden access to and engagement with extracurricular activities has the potential to positively influence student engagement, academic success, social-emotional well-being, and access to opportunities beyond high school.

OVERALL ACCESS TO EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS

Students reported their agreement/disagreement with five items related to extracurricular participation, shown below. Between 9,200 and 9,900 students responded to each item.⁸ Most students (84%) agreed or strongly agreed that they have opportunities to participate in extracurriculars at their school, but only 54% reported that they regularly *do* participate. Around half of students reported that they have opportunities to create or plan activities and events, which may speak to a need to incorporate deeper opportunities for student voice and agency.

⁵ A [full list of items asked](#) on each grade level's version of the survey is available online.

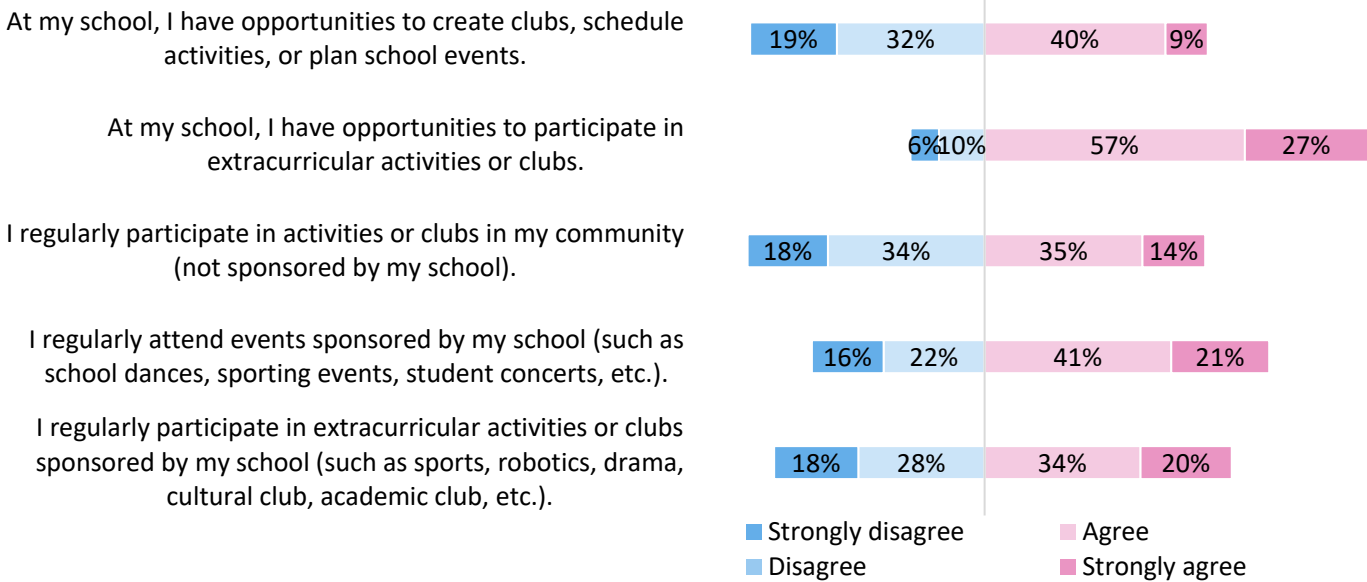
⁶ See [Student Sense of Belonging in Schools: Predictive Factors](#) for participation rates and demographics.

⁷ One suggested option for reviewing this brief is to use the School Reform Initiative's ["4A"s](#) protocol.

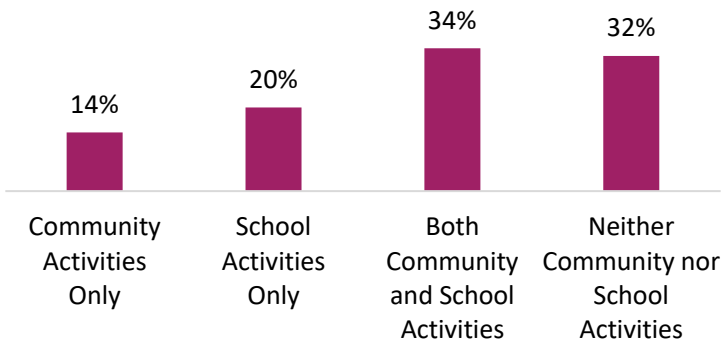
⁸ Students may skip any SEED item for any reason, without penalty.

Most Students have the Opportunity to Participate in Extracurriculars, but Only about Half Actually Participate

2021-22 Responses to Extracurricular Items, among respondents



Most Students Participate in Activities or Clubs, within or outside of School, but 1 in 3 do not % agreeing or strongly agreeing, among students who responded to both items



Combining the responses related to participation in activities and clubs within or outside of school (shown to the left), the majority of students surveyed (68%) reported that they participate in extracurricular activities of some nature. While school-based activities served many students, community-based activities provided an important supplement, with 1 in 7 students reporting that they only participate in activities outside of school. These rates are slightly higher than extracurricular participation rates reported nationally, which were [estimated by the Census Bureau](#) at 57% in 2014 and [have not changed dramatically](#) since then.

THE VALUE OF EXTRACURRICULAR PARTICIPATION

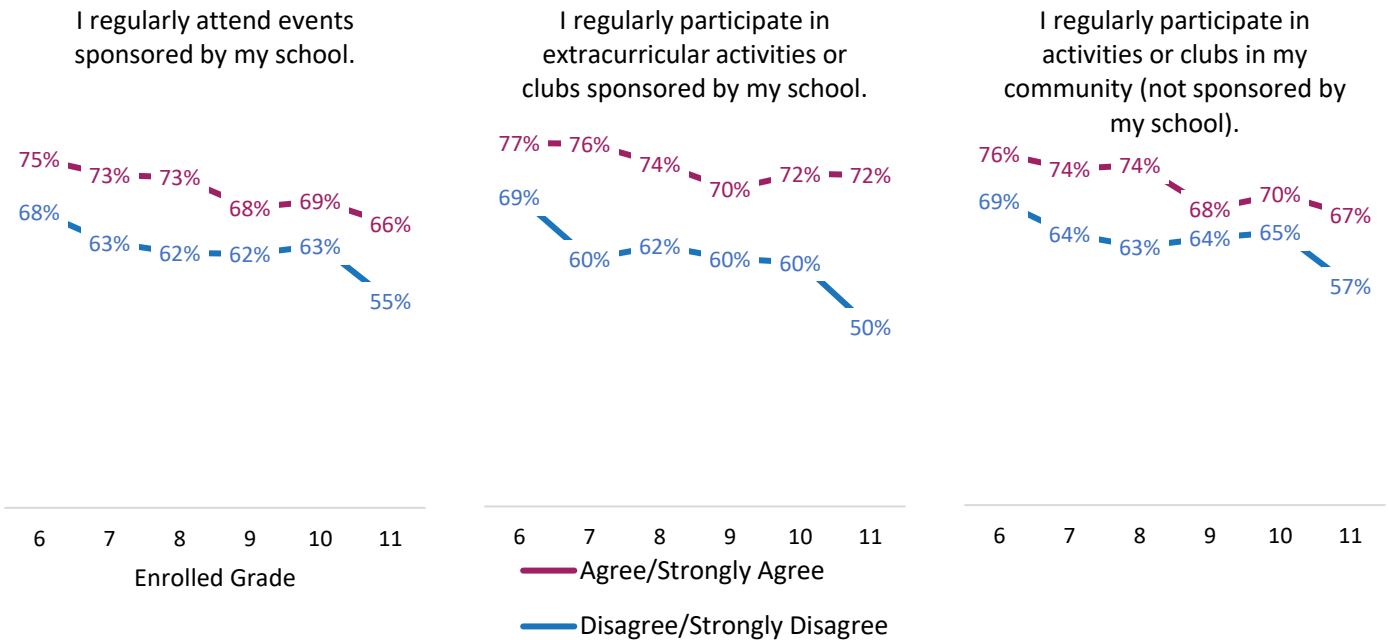
Students who participated in extracurricular activities reported substantially higher rates of regular attendance⁹ than those who did not. While the effect was present in both community and school activities, the difference was larger for school-based activities. School-based activities and clubs were also associated with a bigger difference in attendance rates than school-based events. This may be attributable to the ongoing nature of activities and clubs, as well as their fostering of group dynamics and self-perception. Specific extracurricular activities have also been linked to specific academic benefits; for example, participation in competitive debate is associated with higher English Language Arts performance, stronger critical

⁹ Attending more than 90% of their enrolled school days, among students who were enrolled on the first school day in May and had been enrolled for at least 75 total days in the same district.

thinking skills, and increased likelihood of postsecondary enrollment.¹⁰ Participating in extracurriculars (both school and community activities) was associated with slightly higher proficiency rates in Math and English Language Arts in all tested grades (6, 7, 8, and 11). The largest differences were among high school students who did/did not participate in school-sponsored extracurricular activities or clubs.

Students who participate in extracurriculars are more likely to be regular attenders¹¹, across grade levels

Percent of Students Attending Regularly, by Response and Grade Level



Previous research has found that joining extracurricular activities is associated with better mental health over time, engaging in fewer risky behaviors, and heightened intrinsic motivation,¹² with the effect explained by the heightened levels of peer and school belonging felt by those who began participating.^{13,14} Another study (of undergraduates) found that extracurricular events, when designed to facilitate networking and mingling, improved students' sense of belonging and helped them to make friends and develop social skills.¹⁵ Additional studies have linked students' association with prosocial peers, through extracurriculars, to increased empathy,¹⁶ prosocial behavior, and connectedness to school.¹⁷

¹⁰ Schueler, Beth E., and Katherine E. Larned. "Interscholastic Policy Debate Promotes Critical Thinking and College-going: Evidence From Boston Public Schools." *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* (2023).

¹¹ Attend more than 90% of the school days for which they were enrolled in 2021-22, as of May 1.

¹² Pleasure and satisfaction while learning and discovering new things and broadening knowledge.

¹³ Oberle, Eva, Xuejun Ryan Ji, Martin Guhn, Kimberly A. Schonert-Reichl, and Anne M. Gadermann. "Benefits of extracurricular participation in early adolescence: Associations with peer belonging and mental health." *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 48 (2019): 2255-2270.

¹⁴ Bouchard, Maxim, Anne-Sophie Denault, and Frédéric Guay. "Extracurricular activities and adjustment among students at disadvantaged high schools: The mediating role of peer relatedness and school belonging." *Journal of Adolescence* (2023).

¹⁵ De Sisto, Marco, Afreen Huq, and Genevieve Dickinson. "Sense of belonging in second-year undergraduate students: The value of extracurricular activities." *Higher Education Research & Development* 41, no. 5 (2022): 1727-1742.

¹⁶ Carrizales, Alexia, Zehra Gülseven, and Lyda Lannegrund. "The mediating role of empathy in the links between relationships with three socialisation agents and adolescents' prosocial behaviours." *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 40, no. 9 (2023): 2855-2877.

¹⁷ Brown, Randall, and William P. Evans. "Developing School Connectedness among Diverse Youth through Extracurricular Programming." *Prevention Researcher* 12, no. 2 (2005): 14-17.

On the SEED [Sense of Belonging](#) items, participation in extracurriculars was correlated with higher levels of agreement on all sense of belonging items, with particularly strong effects on agreement with “I like going to school,” “My classmates care about me,” and feeling safe talking with students and adults.¹⁸ However, it is important to note that the relationship is likely mutually reinforcing. For some students, participating in extracurricular activities boosts their connection to and engagement with school. For others, particularly those for whom

extracurricular activities feel [unsafe or unwelcoming](#), exclusion from extracurricular activities may contribute to decreased sense of belonging, and a lack of belonging within the school may discourage them from pursuing extracurriculars.

Among students who participated in SEED in both 2020-21 and 2021-22, an increase in extracurricular responses (corresponding to increased participation in extracurricular activities) was associated with an increase in sense of belonging responses (corresponding to heightened feelings of welcome, safety, and comfort within the school setting).¹⁹ Overall, students tend to decrease in reported sense of belonging over time,²⁰ but a majority of students who increased their extracurricular participation also reported increased sense of belonging (52%, compared to only 41% among those who did not change their extracurricular participation and 34% among those whose extracurricular participation decreased).

DIFFERENCES IN ACCESS TO EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS

Grade Level Patterns

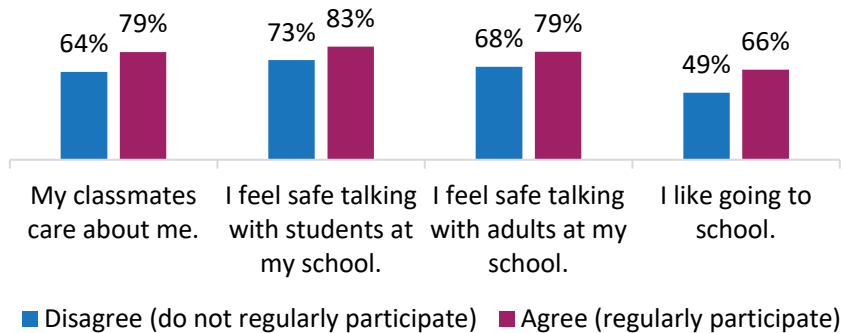
Students in high school were substantially more likely to report that they have opportunities to plan or create activities and events (62% of students in grades 9-11, compared to 42% of students in grades 6-8), but were not more likely to report regularly participating in school events. Most students in both grade bands reported regularly attending school events (62%) and regularly participating in school activities (54%).

Students reported substantial declines in their rates of participation in community activities in higher grades, with 52% of 6th graders but only 42% of 11th graders reporting that they regularly participated in community activities. The decline was concentrated in the transition from 7th to 8th and 8th to 9th grades, but was not associated with a corresponding increase in reported participation in school extracurricular activities or events. Full grade level responses are available in [the appendix](#).

Disparate Access for Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities (served through Individual Education Programs, or [IEPs](#)) reported similar rates of participation in community activities, but substantially lower rates of participation in school-sponsored events or clubs, compared to students not served through IEPs. They also reported fewer opportunities to participate within their school, which is consistent with previous findings at a national level.²¹ Students served through [Section 504 plans](#) reported more opportunities to participate

Students who regularly participate in extracurriculars feel higher sense of belonging in school
 % of students agreeing/strongly agreeing with each item, by responses to "I regularly participate in extracurricular activities or clubs sponsored by my school."



¹⁸ Full Sense of Belonging Item correlations is available in [the appendix](#); more information about Sense of Belonging Items is available in [Student Sense of Belonging: Predictive Factors](#), a previous brief using this dataset.

¹⁹ Average change calculated using numeric item responses, where 1 = Strongly Disagree and 4 = Strongly Agree.

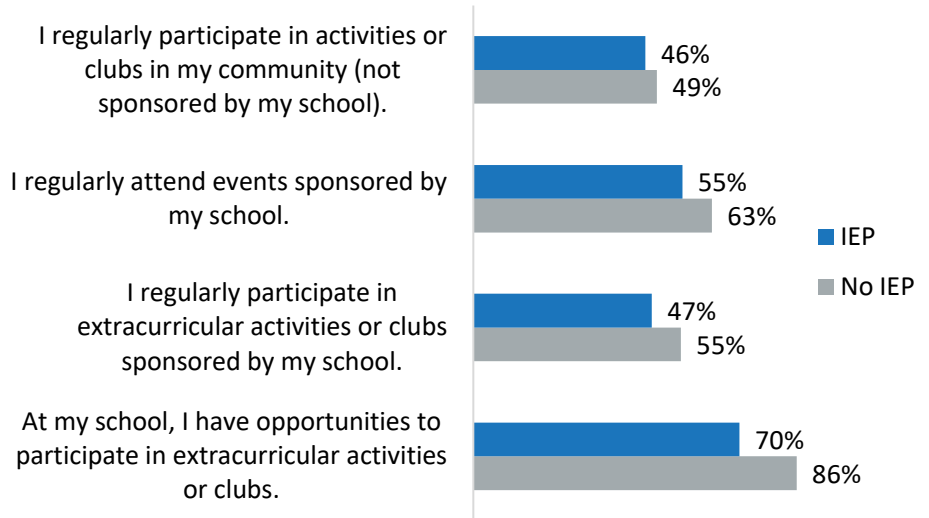
²⁰ See [Student Sense of Belonging: Predictive Factors](#), page 8.

²¹ US Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, [Dear Colleague Letter](#) from January 2013.

in school activities (81% agreed they have opportunities), but very similar rates of *actual* participation compared to students served through IEPs. This finding highlights an opportunity for schools and districts to examine their extracurricular opportunities more closely, to ensure that they offer appropriate accommodations and that they are made welcoming and inviting for all students. There may be opportunities to learn from community activities as well, which appear from this data to more equitably support participation. Schools have an obligation under federal law to ensure that students with disabilities have equal access to extracurricular opportunities. More guidance can be found in [a 2013](#)

Students with Disabilities Report Less Access to School-sponsored Activities and Events

% of students agreeing or strongly agreeing to each item



[Dear Colleague Letter](#) from the Office for Civil Rights, the corresponding [Background and Fast Facts](#) document, and in ODE’s [Understanding and Addressing Ableism in Schools](#).

LEVERAGING STUDENT VOICE TO UNDERSTAND BARRIERS TO STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

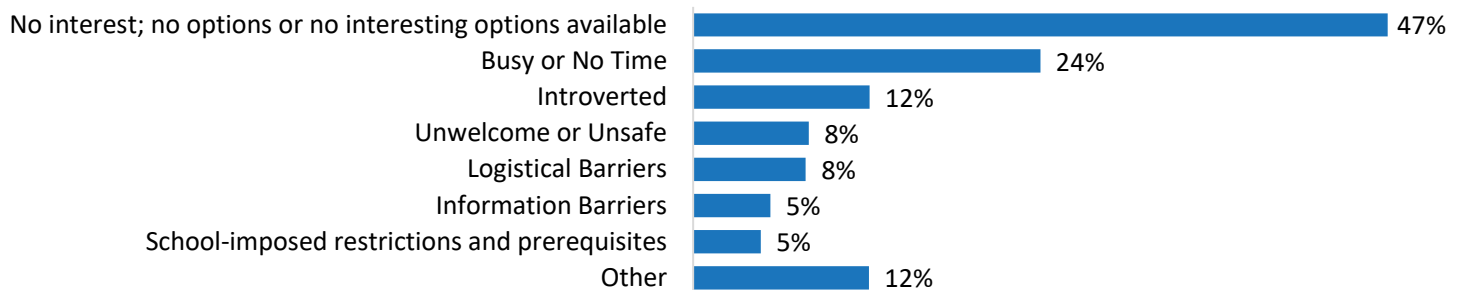
In addition to the quantitative items discussed above, students who did not participate in extracurriculars were asked an open-ended item: “If you do not participate in any school or community activities or clubs, please describe why.” From analysis of these responses, we can gain a deeper understanding of the concerns, barriers, and needs of students that can be addressed by schools and districts to support broader extracurricular participation going forward.

About the Data and Methodology

The authors of the brief reviewed the students’ open-ended responses to quantify and analyze the presence, meanings, and relationships of prevalent themes of student experiences.²² After removing non-informative responses,²³ all 2,406 remaining

Student Reasons for Not Participating in Extracurriculars

Responses sum to more than 100% due to multiple themes present in some responses



²² The authors reviewed student responses to identify descriptive patterns and overarching themes to create codes that reflected participants’ words and experiences. The authors then participated in joint exercises to ensure their understanding and application of each code was aligned and consistent.

²³ Students who skipped the question, off-topic responses, responses that were unintelligible, and responses that were uninformative (e.g. “idk,” “I just don’t,” and similar). We also filtered out responses that indicated that the student did participate in school- or community-based extracurricular activities, since they were outside the scope of the question.

responses were read by an ODE staff member and categorized by major theme(s) present in the responses. A detailed description of each theme is presented in the following sections. Responses are presented below verbatim except where edits are necessary for reader clarity or to protect student confidentiality.

Overall Results

While some responses indicated barriers that might be persistent regardless of school efforts, such as students being busy with family obligations, many of the themes and responses highlighted barriers that our system can address. Overall, the most common response by students was that no interesting options were available to them. Other common barriers reported included logistics, prerequisites, and lack of a sense of safety or feeling welcome within the extracurricular context. More details on each theme, and opportunities to hear directly from students, are presented below.

No interest; No Options or No Interesting Options Available

Around half of respondents reported that they were not interested in participating in extracurricular activities, or that their school did not offer any activities that interested them. While many these responses were variations of “I don’t want to,” some students did offer more details:

“Most of the clubs are athletic and I’m not really athletic...I would attend clubs if they were interesting to me like a robotics club or even an electronics elective or maybe a chess club.”

“A lot of the events interfere with work and are not planned well. When I do go there is not a whole lot to do.”

“There are very little clubs after school and the ones that are open are pretty much just babysitting.”

Several students mentioned attending an online school as a barrier to participating in activities, and others noted that their school mainly offers sports, with few alternative options. Schools and districts may be able to address this barrier by leveraging student voice to develop options students may be interested in, or by supporting students to develop their own clubs. When diverse options are available, schools and districts should invest staff time in making sure all of the activities are well-organized and productive/generative, so that participating students feel their time is well spent, and in helping students to connect extracurricular activities to their postsecondary goals.

Busy or No Time

Some Oregon students report leading very busy lives. One in four student responses mentioned lack of time as a reason for not participating in extracurricular activities. Students are busy with jobs, schoolwork, caring for siblings, completing chores, and more. In some responses, lack of time is just one of multiple reasons cited for not participating.

“I work everyday after school 4-10:30 so I don't have the time”

“I don't participate in them because I don't usually have the time to do so with so many of my classes already, and I have to babysit after school everyday.”

“I don't attend any school clubs because I already have too much to do like excessive homework and chores. Clubs like that would be a waste of time and it won't allow me to talk with most of my friends.”

“bc I don't have the time and my parents can't take me bc we are homeless.”

“I don't like doing things by myself, and I don't have any friends. Also, sports and dances are kind of expensive. Plus, I don't have time while trying to find a job, do homework, chores, finding a job, and trying to learn to drive.”

Creative solutions are needed to help responsively address the responsibilities many students hold as caregivers for their younger siblings or other family. A study in Rhode Island found that caregiving was relatively common among students, and caregiving students were more likely to experience intense sadness than non-caregivers,²⁴ suggesting a need for additional supports and opportunities for connection for caregiving students. The study also found gender and racial disparities in caregiving, which may contribute to inequalities in ability to participate in extracurricular activities. One important strategy for providing supports is for schools to partner with community organizations and state or local agencies to connect students and families with the financial, social and mental health resources they need. Models for this type of work include [Community Schools](#) and ODE's [Community Care Demonstration Project](#).

Introverted

Upwards of 12% of student responses indicated social anxiety or being an introvert as a reason for not participating in any extracurricular activities. While some responses indicated a complete lack of desire to participate in extracurricular activities due to their social anxiety, other responses indicated that students would like to participate in extracurricular activities, but fear interacting with new people and/or in unfamiliar settings.

“I am an introvert and do not like being around people I do not know.”

“I have social anxiety so going out anywhere is hard for me. I also don't like being around big crowds of people.”

“I want to, but I get shy.”

“I have social anxiety and talking to people who aren't my friends is difficult and I often don't enjoy it that much. I would like to join clubs, but I'm scared of meeting people, and I've decided it may just not be worth it. I'd rather do things that I like to do in the safety of my own home with my family or friends than with other people.”

For introverted students that would like to participate in extracurricular activities, schools can expand extracurricular activities to include those that appeal more to introverts' personalities, strengths, and interests, such as small group or individual activities (e.g., boardgame, puzzle, or craft clubs) in quiet, low-key settings. Musical groups may also appeal to more introverted personalities.

Unwelcome or Unsafe

Eight percent of students reported that a major reason they did not participate in extracurricular activities was that they felt they would be unwelcome. Responses included fears that none of their friends would participate and descriptions of specific negative interactions with adult leaders/coaches. Some students also reported actively avoiding extracurriculars out of safety concerns, including bullying, harassment, or bias.

“...everytime I joined something I got bullied, so I stopped.”

“I used to participate...but I quit because of how the coaches treated me and how I felt unwelcomed and how they would treat me and other team mates horribly and it ruined the idea of ever wanting to join a sport here again.”

“A lot of the people here can be really transphobic, homophobic and racist so sometimes I just don't feel safe.”

²⁴ Armstrong-Carter, Emma, Steve Osborn, Olivia Smith, Connie Siskowski, and Elizabeth A. Olson. "Middle and High School Students Who Take Care of Siblings, Parents, and Grandparents: Associations With School Engagement, Belonging, and Well-Being." *AERA Open* 9 (2023): 23328584221140337.

“Most clubs and groups within the school feel like very closed circles.”

“I don't get invited.”

“I was in one at one point, but the boys were making fun of me, so I quit...I did find it fun at first though.”

”

Some of these concerns can be addressed by creating a more welcoming space²⁵, including reaching out to students and inviting them to participate rather than relying on students to opt into activities. Others will require addressing more fundamental issues of culture and respect within the activities, including ensuring sufficient staff to monitor student interactions and ensure they remain prosocial. More resources on combating bias and bullying are available in [In Their Own Words](#), a companion brief looking at responses to another SEED Survey item.

Logistical Barriers

Eight percent of students reported barriers to participation, primarily centered around costs or lack of transportation. Many students mentioned a range of transportation challenges, including parents who don't drive (or can't, because of a disability), cars that are not reliable, the cost of gasoline, and conflicting priorities with siblings who also need transportation at the same time or parents who work or are otherwise busy.

“I do not participate in any school or community activities or clubs because I do not have an after school ride, so therefore I cannot stay after school for anything.”

“They don't make it very easy for students without a ride to do anything and if they have a ride and are late the school and coaches are super hard on the students.”

“I live farther away and don't have a ride. Our cars don't work sometimes.”

“Gas prices are too high for my [family] to drive me home after school clubs.”

“Both my parents work...my mom comes home...and she's tired and doesn't wanna drive.”

”

Offering consistent transportation options, or offering space within the school day for clubs and activities to take place, might significantly boost participation. When schools conduct needs assessments, it is easier to identify what logistical barriers may be common to their students and within their scope to influence.

Another commonly mentioned barrier was costs related to participation in extracurricular activities.

“I can't because it might cost money”

“I can't cuz my mom can't afford it and it cost lots of money that we don't have for [sport].”

Schools and districts can offer a simple and clear fee waiver process, and broadly advertise it in multiple languages, for families experiencing economic hardship.²⁶ Students are understandably reluctant to sign up for activities that may incur costs they cannot pay, or from which they may be forced to withdraw once they determine they cannot afford to participate. Increased clarity about the fee waiver process and the likely costs to students may incentivize more students to participate.

²⁵ See Oregon's [Social and Emotional Learning Standards](#).

²⁶ [ORS 339.147 \(3\)](#) “Any parent or guardian who believes that payment of any fee authorized under ORS 339.155 is a severe hardship may request the district school board or public charter school to waive payment of the fee and the board or public charter school shall waive in whole or in part the fee upon a finding of hardship. Consideration shall be given to any funds specifically available to the parent, guardian or child for the payment of fees or other school expenses.”

Where possible and within district budgets, offering activities that are clearly advertised as free to all students could also increase participation and reduce administrative burden.²⁷

Given the number of students who reported a lack of interesting options was a barrier, the true number of students who would encounter logistical barriers to participation may be higher than reported, as students may not discover logistical barriers until they have found an activity they are interested in joining.

Information Barriers

Five percent of students reported that they need more information about what is available and how to join. Some noted that their schools don't use enough methods of communication (e.g. relying too heavily on social media) to reach them. As mentioned above, many students noted that they would prefer more proactive outreach to help connect them to activities, in addition to helping them feel wanted and welcome. Most respondents in this category indicated a strong desire to participate in activities, but no knowledge of where to start.

“I have tried but I never seem...to really get into one.”

“The reason why I don't participate is because I don't know how to ask I really want to be in a club or activity...but...I don't know how to sign up.”

“I would actually love to participate in community activities, but I do not ever really see any opportunities available. If there are though, please contact me. I am highly interested.”

“What happens with clubs is it is hard to know what club would like you. I would recommend doing a club information day or something like that.”

One response highlighted the impact simple outreach can have on a student's sense of connection to their school and community. This student indicate that they usually don't know about events in time to participate, but offered this counterexample:

“We didn't know about [a holiday] but this year the people that go to [a nearby school] came to our house with their teachers and said HAPPY [Holiday] and...I had fun and was happy for the rest of that day.”

Collectively, these responses indicate a need for schools to communicate frequently and in a variety of ways, and to proactively reach out to students to invite them in, rather than relying on students to take the initiative. The [Care & Connection Toolkit](#) may be helpful for schools in considering ways to reinforce outreach and activities to support this work.

School-imposed restrictions and prerequisites

In addition to fees, 5% of students mentioned other prerequisites that kept them from participating in activities. These were most commonly grades/GPA, but also included disciplinary incidents, deadlines, and tryouts.

“I try to do my best in school to keep my grades up but sometimes it's frustrating and hard. I wasn't able to play [sports] this year because of one grade. And to be honest I'm not able to play [sports] next year either because of my grade that I have right now in my [specific] class.”

“I don't participate in any school activities because I know my grades won't allow it and I feel as if my peers will be mean about it.”

²⁷ Sulz, Lauren Denise, Doug Lee Gleddie, Cassidy Kinsella, and M. Louise Humbert. "The health and educational impact of removing financial constraints for school sport." *European Physical Education Review* 29, no. 1 (2023): 3-21.

“I want to try out for sports but my grades are bad and one D messes it all up.”

”

More recent perspectives help to frame extracurriculars as complementing, rather than competing with, academics. Research increasingly supports extracurricular participation as helping to develop skills, attitudes, and self-concept that in turn benefit students’ academic performance.²⁸ Grade-based restrictions also risk depriving the most at-risk students of valuable opportunities to connect and engage with school through extracurriculars.

Behavior-based restrictions on extracurricular activities may sometimes be necessary to protect other students; however, most students cited policies that ban them from participating after a single office referral.

“I can't go to school events because I got in a fight and now they don't allow me to go to anything anymore.”

” “I honestly would go if I could but the principle made a rule where you can't have any F's or referrals so most kids can't go.”

“The teachers don't let us...they think we are bad people and don't give us the chance.”

A school’s first priority is to keep students safe. However, excluding students from extracurricular school events due to disciplinary issues should be carefully considered. Exclusionary practices can have negative consequences and may not be the best practice for several reasons:

- **Alienation and Stigmatization:** When students are excluded from school events, they may feel alienated and stigmatized. This can reinforce negative behavior and create a sense of resentment, leading to further disengagement from school.
- **Missed Learning Opportunities:** School events and extracurricular activities provide valuable learning opportunities beyond the classroom. By excluding students, they miss out on important social and emotional learning experiences that can contribute to their overall development.
- **Lack of Positive Reinforcement:** Exclusion doesn’t provide students with an opportunity to learn from their mistakes in a positive and supportive environment. Instead, it removes them from the community without addressing the underlying issues or teaching appropriate behavior.
- **Community Building:** Schools should aim to create an inclusive and supportive community where students feel valued and connected. Exclusionary practices work against this goal, hindering the sense of belonging among students.

The unintended long-term impact of alienation from school events can lead to disengagement from school as a whole, potentially increasing the risk of being pushed out or engaging in more serious disciplinary issues in the future. To address this issue, schools can consider alternative approaches such as restorative practices and providing additional instruction and support to students who are struggling with behaviors of concern in the school setting.²⁹ These approaches focus on addressing the root causes of the behavior, promoting accountability, and helping students reintegrate into the school community in a positive way.

²⁸ Seow, Poh-Sun, and Gary Pan. "A literature review of the impact of extracurricular activities participation on students’ academic performance." *Journal of Education for Business* 89, no. 7 (2014): 361-366.

²⁹ The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) and the OSERS Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) has prioritized reducing exclusionary discipline and supporting the implementation of evidence-based practices that focus on prevention, intervention and behavioral strategies. [Resources on school climate and discipline](#) are available to assist in addressing students’ social, emotional, behavioral, and mental health needs; understanding and complying with Federal laws (including those that prohibit discrimination based on race, color, national origin, sex, or disability); and promoting welcoming, safe schools.

Additionally, fostering a positive school climate and implementing proactive behavior support strategies creates an environment where students are less likely to engage in negative behaviors in the first place. By focusing on prevention and early intervention, schools reduce the need for exclusionary disciplinary practices.

Given that disciplinary incidents are most commonly reported for the subjective category of “disruptive behavior,”³⁰ a close examination of disciplinary practices helps to ensure that policies linking behavior and extracurricular access do not disproportionately exclude students with marginalized identities, or keep students who would most benefit from engagement from the opportunity to form connections to school through extracurricular activities.³¹

Another common subject within this theme was students who were not permitted to participate in a given sport due to physical characteristics or competitive ability.

” “I would love to participate, but I got cut from [sport] and that’s the only thing that brings me joy.”
“I try to...but I get declined cause of my height.”

While athletic competitiveness is valued by communities, the primary purpose of extracurricular opportunities is to foster student engagement and belonging. Where possible, schools may consider adding intramural or other more open opportunities to broaden the range of activities available to all students. Over-emphasis on athletic identity over a student’s other identities may contribute to poor academic outcomes; in college settings, this may result in students choosing (or being advised towards) less rigorous courses so as not to risk their athletic participation.³² Over-emphasis on athletic identity also risks depriving the most at-risk students of valuable opportunities to connect and engage with school through extracurriculars.

Finally, some students cited missed deadlines or joining the school mid-year as reasons they were not able to participate. While remaining cognizant of administrative burdens, schools may be able to offer more flexibility to students navigating school mobility or housing instability in the service of more quickly integrating these students into the school community. Students experiencing mobility are less than half as likely as non-mobile students to graduate on time;³³ more flexible and accommodating school policies may help narrow this gap.

Other Response Themes (1% of students or less, except where noted)

- **Parents/caregivers do not allow:** Students reported that their parents do not allow them to participate in activities. Specific reasons included concerns about injuries (e.g. football), prioritization of family time, or desire for students to be available to provide housework or childcare. Many students simply noted that their parents do not allow them to participate, with no additional specificity.
- **Physical barriers:** Students reported that they did not believe they would be capable of participating in activities (mostly sports), largely out of physical fitness concerns, but sometimes due to injury or illness. Again, offering intramural or other less-competitive options, or expanding activities that do not require high levels of fitness, may expand the number of students who are able to engage with these activities. In some cases, just offering encouragement may be sufficient:

³⁰ ODE Data Brief, [Student Sense of Belonging in Schools: Predictive Factors](#), page 9.

³¹ Additional resources on disciplinary practices include: [Guiding Principles and Best Practices in School Discipline to Support Students’ Social, Emotional, Behavioral, and Academic Needs](#) (US Dept of Ed, 2023), [Resources for Schools to Use in Addressing](#) (ODE, 2023), [Understanding and Addressing Ableism in Schools](#) (ODE, 2023), [Understanding the Complexity of Student Behavior: An Empathetic Approach](#) (ODE 2023), and [Examples of Evidence-Based Behavioral Interventions with an MTSS](#) (ODE, 2023).

³² Cooper, Joseph N. "Excellence beyond athletics: Best practices for enhancing black male student athletes' educational experiences and outcomes." *Equity & Excellence in Education* 49, no. 3 (2016): 267-283.

³³ ODE Report, [Community-Informed Recommendations for Equitable Graduation Outcomes](#), page 71.

“Well at first I didn’t want to be in sports...because I thought I would be super bad because I’m not the fittest but since I’ve got a lot of friends telling me to try it because it’s a lot of fun so my plan next year is to [participate]!”

- COVID precautions: Students reported avoiding in-person activities out of COVID concerns, including some students who volunteered that they have health conditions that put them at high risk.
- Lack of accommodations: Students reported that they have health conditions that make it hard for them to participate in activities, which were inaccessible to them. As discussed [in the disparate access section](#), schools have an obligation to make school-sponsored activities accessible to students with disabilities. Some students also mentioned English language proficiency as a barrier; similarly, multilingual learners are [entitled to an equal opportunity to participate in extracurriculars](#).
- Lack of energy/motivation: 3% of students reported that they do not have enough energy. Many students self-described as “lazy” or unmotivated. Some research suggests that students who internalize negative labels such as “lazy” may be suffering from undiagnosed and inadequately supported disabilities,³⁴ lacking in executive skills,³⁵ or attempting to save face when they don’t demonstrate immediate skill in an activity.³⁶

“I really just don't have the energy to do anything besides school it really wears me out.”

“Ok, so I am just lazy, and I can't focus for like, ANYTHING.”

“I don't participate because I’m a generally lazy person and don't like being competitive in things I’m not good at.”

Other students more explicitly cited executive function disorders, mentioning that they want to participate but “keep forgetting.”

- Lack of confidence: Students reported that they did not feel skilled enough to attempt a sport, and expressed concerns about attempting new skills in front of their peers.

“I want to but it is hard. I've never felt good or I don't want a reason for more people looking at me. I would like to play [sport] but I don't feel confident.”

“I never grew up playing sports, so now you can't start if everyone is already doing good.”

DISCUSSION

Providing opportunities for student voice to shape school decision-making can empower and engage students, as well as highlight areas where improvements are needed. Schools and districts have a range of options available to them to capture student voice, including [surveys](#), [empathy interviews](#), and other [community engagement](#) strategies. While student-level constructed responses from the SEED Survey are not available directly to districts (in order to protect student confidentiality), districts and schools can examine the responses and themes presented here and use them as a starting point to evaluate whether their students have similar concerns and needs. Additionally, ODE encourages school and district participation in the SEED Survey in order to gather unique state-level student experience data to support effective and well-tailored policymaking.

³⁴ Tiebout, Harry M. "The misnamed lazy student." *Educational Record* (1943).

³⁵ Dawson, Peg. "Lazy--or Not?." *Educational Leadership* 68, no. 2 (2010): 35-38. <https://www.ascd.org/el/articles/lazy-or-not>

³⁶ Kessels, Ursula, and Anke Heyder. "Not stupid, but lazy? Psychological benefits of disruptive classroom behavior from an attributional perspective." *Social Psychology of Education* 23, no. 3 (2020): 583-613.

Several resources are available to support districts and schools with finding and connecting to community organizations that provide extracurricular activities. The Regional Arts & Culture Council launched [artlook](#) in 2020, a web platform that maps arts and culture education assets in schools, arts education partners, and arts education programming in the Portland metropolitan area. The [Well-Rounded Access Program](#) (WRAP) at ODE developed a statewide [Oregon Arts and STEAM Organization Lookup Tool](#) to provide district and school staff a way to find and learn about arts and STEAM education organizations in their region.

Broadening student access to extracurricular activities has the potential to offer wide-ranging benefits to students. When districts and schools have student voice data and conduct needs assessments, they are better positioned to consider what barriers they are able to remove for students, including reducing or eliminating fees, offering transportation, and evaluating policies on who may participate in extracurricular activities to determine whether the restrictions are necessary and appropriate. Adding outreach and communication may also be an effective strategy: many students reported that they would benefit from more information on how to sign up, as well as explicit encouragement and direct invitation to do so.

Addressing student interest and sense of welcome may be more challenging but is vitally important to broadening extracurricular participation: empathy interviews support local educators to assess needs and create a locally-specific plan for addressing barriers, including partnering with community organizations as appropriate. Increased staffing to allow for appropriate monitoring and oversight of the students participating may be necessary. Extracurriculars should be offered in a way that is accessible to all students, and both deepens and broadens the sense of community within the school so that all students feel safe and welcome.

Limitations to this work include that we did not have a sufficient sample size for many student group disaggregations, including by race/ethnicity. This is a promising direction for future work, using the anticipated larger samples in future years of the survey.

With thanks to ODE's SEED team; our colleagues on the Health in Education Team, the Well-Rounded, Integrative & Digital Learning Team, and the School Choice, Options & Recovery Education Team; our colleagues in the Office of Research, Assessment, Data, Accountability & Reporting, the Office of Teaching, Learning & Assessment, and the Office of Education Innovation & Improvement, the Student Advisory Panels; and the thousands of students who bravely and vulnerably shared their honest experiences with us

APPENDIX A: RESPONSES BY GRADE LEVEL

% of Students Agreeing/Strongly Agreeing with Extracurricular Item Prompt, by Grade Level

Grade Level	6	7	8	9	10	11
At my school, I have opportunities to create clubs, schedule activities, or plan school events.	38%	43%	46%	66%	60%	60%
At my school, I have opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities or clubs.	79%	84%	83%	88%	88%	86%
I regularly attend events sponsored by my school (such as school dances, sporting events, student concerts, etc.).	64%	64%	59%	64%	64%	59%
I regularly participate in activities or clubs in my community (not sponsored by my school).	52%	53%	48%	44%	42%	42%
I regularly participate in extracurricular activities or clubs sponsored by my school (such as sports, robotics, drama, cultural club, academic club, etc.).	52%	57%	53%	54%	56%	52%

APPENDIX B: SENSE OF BELONGING CORRELATIONS

% of Students Agreeing/Strongly Agreeing with Sense of Belonging Prompt, by Extracurricular Item Response

I regularly participate in extracurricular activities or clubs sponsored by my school.

Sense of Belonging Prompt	Students who disagree (do not regularly participate)	Students who agree (regularly participate)
My classmates care about me.	64%	79%
There are adults at my school who care about me.	87%	93%
I feel safe talking with students at my school.	73%	83%
I feel welcome at my school.	76%	85%
I feel safe talking with adults at my school.	68%	79%
I have friends at school.	89%	96%
I like going to school.	49%	66%

I regularly attend events sponsored by my school.

Sense of Belonging Prompt	Students who disagree (do not regularly attend)	Students who agree (regularly attend)
My classmates care about me.	62%	78%
There are adults at my school who care about me.	86%	92%
I feel safe talking with students at my school.	71%	82%
I feel welcome at my school.	75%	84%
I feel safe talking with adults at my school.	68%	78%
I have friends at school.	86%	97%
I like going to school.	48%	64%

I regularly participate in activities or clubs in my community (not sponsored by my school).

Sense of Belonging Prompt	Students who disagree (do not regularly participate)	Students who agree (regularly participate)
My classmates care about me.	65%	79%
There are adults at my school who care about me.	87%	93%
I feel safe talking with students at my school.	74%	83%
I feel welcome at my school.	76%	85%
I feel safe talking with adults at my school.	70%	79%
I have friends at school.	90%	95%
I like going to school.	51%	66%