

## The State of Intramural Opportunities in Texas Public Schools

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In the United States, over 7.6 million students participate annually in interscholastic sport (Fellmeth, 2010). In spite of increasing participation in this sector, only 29% of adolescents currently meet the federal guidelines of 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity (PA) daily (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012). This is problematic because studies have shown inactivity and sedentary lifestyles can lead to higher rates of obesity, high blood pressure, and type II diabetes (Ogden, Curtin, Lamb, & Fiegall, 2010; Lee, Bergeson, Fulton, & Spain, 2007), as well as the feelings of detachment from social structures, depression, and lower self-esteem (Edwards, Bocarro, Kanters, & Casper, 2011; Eccles, Barber, Stone, & Hunt, 2003). It is possible for sport to be part of the solution to the problem of adolescent inactivity, yet there exists a need for additional sport designs beyond interscholastic sport. Alternative sport programs could attract more youth, especially those who have chosen not to participate either through self-selection, or have been cut from interscholastic teams (Koplan, Liverman, Kraak, 2005).

Intramurals are promising as an alternative to interscholastic sport on many fronts, especially because the barriers to entry and continuation are typically lower than those for interscholastic sport (Bocarro et al., Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009). Intramurals provide opportunities for those who want to be physically active and involved, but may desire lower commitment, perceived pressure, or skill level than seemingly required for participation at the interscholastic level (Oosterhous, 1930; Schnell, 1938; Fraser-Thomas, & Côté, 2009). Further, intramural participation has been argued to provide a number of benefits including improvements in at least the following: social skills, sport skills, body image, self-esteem, attachment to school, and even academic achievement (Peguero, 2010; Tracy & Erkut, 2002). Despite these known benefits, there has been little implementation of intramurals on a national scale. It is estimated that less than 50% of middle schools and 30% of high schools currently offer intramural programs (Story, Kaphingst, & French, 2006). The question remains, however, if intramural programs show such potential to service non-interscholastic participants, why have they not been implemented more broadly?

The purpose of this exploratory study is to gauge the current offerings of intramurals in Texas public schools, as well as examine the perceived benefits and barriers related to intramural sport programming. In this in-progress study, an open-ended survey method has been utilized to evaluate current intramural program availability in Texas public secondary schools. Using publically-accessible email addresses, 300 questionnaires (via a web-based link) have been sent to Texas public school administrators and coaches. To date 62 fully completed usable responses have been returned.

Preliminary results indicate that only 6 schools in the state of Texas currently offer any form of intramurals. The most frequently reported actual and perceived benefits of intramurals include, but are not limited to: opportunities for students to stay physically active (n=19), additional sport participation opportunities (n=12), connection to school community (n=8), something positive to do after school (n=7), camaraderie (n=6), social networking (n=6), team work (n=5), improved social skills (n=5), improved relations between students and staff (n=4), and self-esteem improvement (n=3). The primary reasons given for not offering intramurals were the following: lack of financial resources (n=35), lack of facilities (n=24), lack of interested and available coaches/personnel (n=21), and lack of student interest (n=19). Interestingly, although respondents indicated a lack of interest for intramurals within their schools or districts, 43 of the respondents stated they had never even tried to implement an intramural program into their respective schools.

It is not surprising that lack of funding was the most frequently cited barrier to intramural implementation. However, it is during this time of economic uncertainty and interscholastic participation fees that intramurals can show their true value. Intramural programs can offer many of the participation benefits without the social downsides and expense associated with interscholastic sports. More youth can participate, and reap the benefits of sport and physical activity while the school is able to get a handle on its financial well-being. The results show no lack of awareness concerning the benefits of intramurals, but more a lack of effort on the part of our public schools to

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even try the program. Intramural programs have reported many benefits (cf. Kanters, 2012), and increased breadth of participation (i.e., does not “steal” from varsity sports (cf. Dixon & Green, 2011)). These results suggest that more schools should explore the addition of intramural sports. As this research proceeds, suggestions for overcoming barriers to implementation, particularly those regarding financial cost, will be developed and discussed.