Schools and Scouting: A Natural Partnership

What does an elementary school principal or school board member need to know about Scouting?

It's easy to simply describe Scouting by pointing out the numbers: Around the world, over 28 million young people are scouts. Twenty six of the first twenty nine astronauts were scouts when they were young. There are twelve points to the scout law and an Eagle Scout has to earn 21 merit badges to earn that distinction. In 2010, Scouting in the United States Celebrated its 100th anniversary and recognized its two-millionth Eagle Scout.



But, as with most important things in life, reducing it to a set of numbers misses the point of what Scouting brings to young people—and how scouting and schools form a natural partnership for youth and their families.

A Primer on Scouting

If you are an adult American male, you were more than likely to have spent some time as a scout. Perhaps you remember your time at camp, cheering on your pinewood derby car during the big race, or even receiving a merit badge or other honor at a court of honor. Those age-appropriate experiences fit into one or more levels of the delivery model used in scouting. Broadly speaking, there are three levels in Scouting: Cub Scouting, Boy Scouting, and Venturing. Cub Scouting is a home and family-centered experience for boys in first grade through fifth grade. Boy Scouting is an outdoor-based program that serves young men from fifth grade through their senior year in high school. Venturing and Sea Scouting are programs to serve the adventure-based interests of young men and women from high school through the first years of college.

While the outdoor program is synonymous with Scouting, scouting uses its experiences to develop leadership skills, dispositions that support ethical decision making, good citizenship, and personal fitness. The good citizen element of scouting has been clearly recognized for decades. The first *Boy Scout Handbook* published in the USA featured a drawing of a scout helping an elderly woman across the street. That image of helpfulness and service has been one of the iconic images of the twentieth century.

What is the connection between Scouting and Schools?

At the most fundamental level, both the scout movement and schools seek to help young people become effective, participating citizens. Scouting does so by embracing practices associated with experiential education, and helps the young people in the movement apply what they learn in school to their own adventures. As such, scouting provides an opportunity to emphasize and apply the content covered in many disciplines, from science and social studies, to consumer education, physical fitness, and service learning initiatives.

Academics and Scouting

Scouting provides opportunities to add value and application to academic experiences that are part of the school's curriculum. In the Cub Scout program, opportunities for academic growth and exploration come from both their traditional advancement experiences as well as a special add-on program that emphasizes academic pursuits. Some examples shown in the sidebar are consistently part of the school curriculum. As with school, scouting seeks to produce not only mastery of new skills and knowledge, but also new dispositions and attitudes.

Scouting is also about *action*. In the sample requirements listed as well as any drawn from the entire scope and sequence of scouting's advancement requirements, there is a consistent opportunity to learn and do put what was learned into action. Scouting offers many opportunities to help amplify the delivery of your school's curriculum.

KEEP YOUR BODY HEALTHY

- *Make a chart and keep track of your health habits for two weeks.*
- *Tell four ways to stop the spread of colds.*
- *Show what to do for a small cut on your finger.*

KNOW YOUR HOME AND COMMUNITY

- *Make a list of phone numbers you need in case of an emergency. Put a copy of this list by each phone or in a central place in your home. Update it often.*
- *Tell what to do if someone comes to the door and wants to come in.*
- *Agree on the household jobs you will be responsible for. Make a list of your jobs and mark off when you have finished them. Do this for one month.*
- *Visit an important place in your community, such as a historic or government location. Explain why it is important.*

YOUR LIVING WORLD

- *It takes a lot of energy to make glass, cans, and paper products. You can help save energy by collecting these items for use again. Find out how recycling is done where you live. Find out what items you can recycle.*
- *With an adult, pick up litter in your neighborhood. Wear gloves to protect your hands against germs and cuts from sharp objects.*
- *With an adult, find three stories that tell how people are protecting our world. Read and discuss them together.*
- *Besides recycling, there are other ways to save energy. List three ways you can save energy, and do them.*

The academics program is an adjunct to the traditional advancement program that cub scouts use. The academic program operates at two levels—an introductory level and a more advanced level, with some of the requirements deliberately designed as a challenge for cub scouts. Topics are wide-ranging, but include such traditional academic pursuits such as mathematics, geography, science, and reading.

As Cub Scouts make the transition into Boy Scouting, they have further opportunities to learn and apply content that is also covered in school. One of the more innovative badges is the Environmental Science merit badge, required to advance to the level of Eagle Scout. In this challenging award, scouts carry out a series of personally designed experiments to explore the effects of air pollution, land pollution, impact on local ecology, and carry out a comparative analysis of two different ecosystems. These investigations find support from the National Research Council's *National Science Education Standards*, covering both rich science content and the important inquiry skills associated with engaging in scientific investigations.

Venturers, as the oldest youth in the movement, likewise have opportunities to learn and apply rich content, but a final part of their development program is to teach the skills that they learn to others. As Venturers, they may specialize in hobby and adventure skills as their specialty—or even carry out their own, youth-designed plan of investigation as they pursue the Math and Science recognition program. They demonstrate their mastery of the new information they have gained by teaching it to other young people.

While the older scouts will not be part of your school, they have an interest in—and obligation to provide service that you are welcome to pursue to help meet the needs of your school and its students.

Leadership and Citizenship

John Dewey, the educational philosopher, once characterized education as "a process of living and not a preparation for future living." Learning by doing—education as a way of living as opposed to an adjunct to living—informs scouting's practices. This

is particularly true as it pertains to cultivating values associated with good citizenship.

Part of being an effective citizen is to be a participating citizen. One of the significant characteristics of scouting is how it is structured as a youth-led experience, with you leading and working with other youth through various forms of community service.

Community Service

Scouting has long been a leader in its advocacy of *Service Learning*, predating the adoption of the term that recognizes the instructional value of learning as one "gives back" to the community. And more than simply returning a favor, scouting embeds a reflective process in its experiences to help scouts better understand how they made a difference—and how they can internalize that disposition to be of service to the community.

How to Get the Most out of Scouting to Support Your School

Scouting is out there—as a largely untapped resource for your school. As you consider ways to engage scouting with your school, here are some ideas that have been put to work and shown to have been found to be very successful for all participants.

- Recruit a Boy Scout troop or Venturing crew to help with a school's athletic day/field day program
- Invite Boy Scouts or Venturers to help as after school tutors
- Invite Boy Scouts or Venturers to help with after school recreational programming
- Work with a scout troop to "adopt a school" to provide service such as flag bearers for school meetings, service work with school grounds, ushers at school functions, safety officers at school events.
- Borrow a pinewood derby track from a Cub Scout pack; have a school wide race as part of a school fair or carnival
- Have a school bicycle safety fair. Boy Scouts working on a Cycling merit badge or Venturers with an interest in long-distance cycling would be a great resource to help deliver and supervise the program.
- Encourage your teaching staff to ask boys that they know are involved as cub scouts to share some of their specific knowledge during class. Many Cub Scouts would be eager to share what they learned during day camp the previous summer, for example, as they searched the bottom of a small creek for invertebrates.
- Seek involvement yourself in a local district committee or council board of directors. Numerous elementary school principals report great satisfaction as a member of the local committee that reviews prospective Eagle Scouts as part of their final progress review.
- A member of the local volunteer committee or professional staff would be more than happy to discuss with you how to build a working and productive relationship with local scouting units in your area. Local council contacts can be secured from www.scouting.org

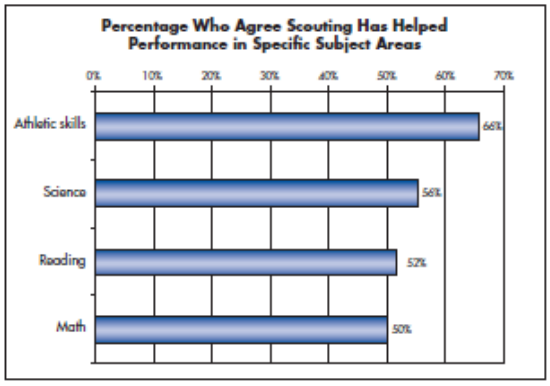


Back to the Numbers

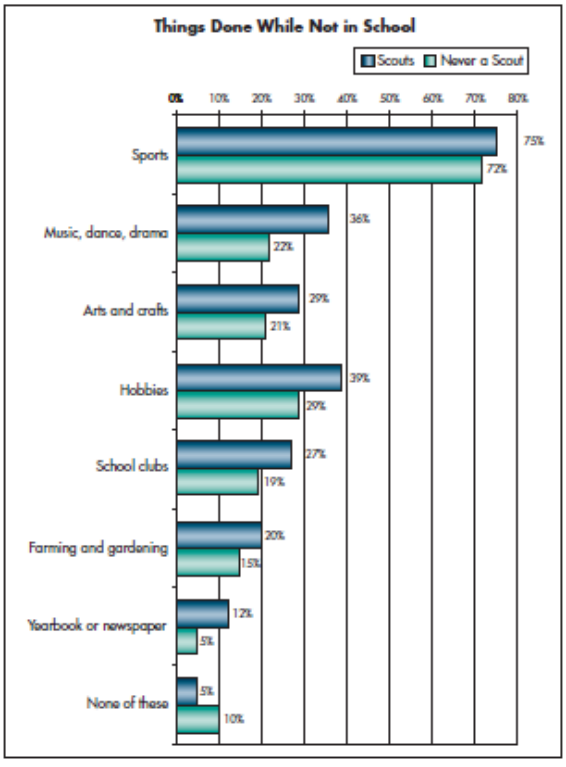
While the numbers do not tell everything there is to know about scouting, the numbers *do* give us some insights into the impact that scouting has on the young people who take part in and the adults that support the movement. Harris Interactive conducted an outcomes survey for the Boy Scouts of America, and found these relationships among those who participated in scouting and how it influenced their success in school.

More than half of all Boy Scouts agree that Scouting has improved their performance in academic and

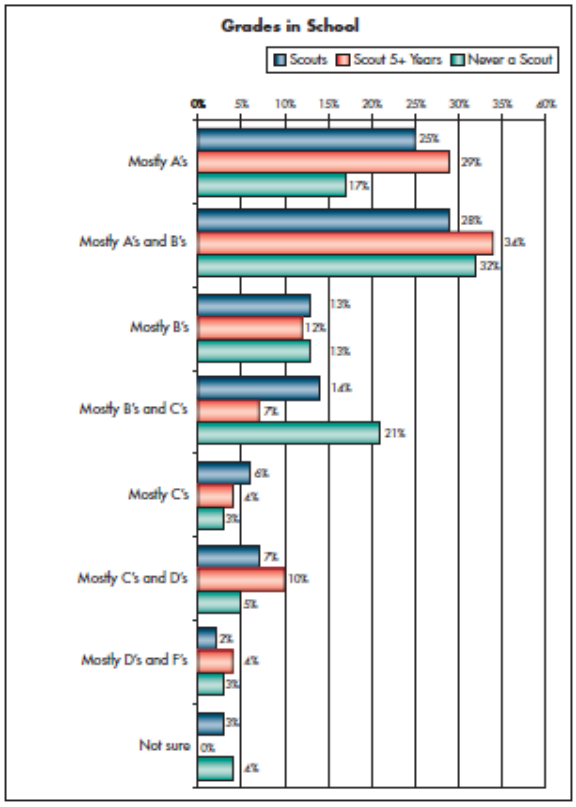
non-academic areas, particularly in athletic skills, science, reading, and math.



Boys who are Scouts are involved in a variety of other after-school activities. In fact Scouts are more often involved in after-school activities such as sports, visual arts, or hobbies than are boys who have never been Scouts.



Scouts are more likely than boys who have never been Scouts to report they earn mostly an A grade. This is especially true of boys who have been Scouts for five or more years.



These goals are experiences school leaders are seeking for our youth. Your support and embrace of scouting has the potential to help more young people experience these important dispositions.

Prepared. For Life.

The Boy Scout motto of "Be Prepared" has become as iconic over the last century as the picture of the scout and the elderly woman on the cover of this document. Scouting seeks to help scouts become prepared for "any old thing," as the founder of the scouting movement once quipped. As school leaders, your interest in the success is the shared by local scout volunteer and professional leadership. Our goal: to work together to help our young people to become prepared. For Life.

Prepared. For Life.™