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Creating Scholar Athletes:
Investigating the Academic Support Provided to High School Student Athletes
in Southern California High Schools

by
Melinda Love

A dissertation presented to the Faculty of the School of Education,
Loyola Marymount University,
in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Education

2019

Creating Scholar Athletes:
Investigating the Academic Support Provided to High School Student Athletes
in Southern California High Schools

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by

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This dissertation written by Melinda Love, under the direction of the Dissertation Committee, is approved and accepted by all committee members, in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

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DEDICATION

Other seed fell among thorns that grew up and choked out the tender plants so they produced no grain. Still other seeds fell on fertile soil, and they sprouted, grew, and produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted

—Mark 4:7-8

To every educator working in a system that threatens to choke out the tender spirit of the youth. Continue to do the good work of planting seeds of hope. Continue to engage with those who are allies in dismantling social, financial, political, cultural, and sexual oppression. The fruits of your labor can, will, and have changed the world.

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ABSTRACT

Creating Scholar Athletes:

Investigating the Academic Support provided to High School Student Athletes in Southern
California High Schools

by

Melinda Love

This study used semi-structured interviews of athletic directors to present a descriptive narrative of academic support provided to student athletes in five Southern California high schools. These interviews highlighted what supports were provided as well as structures that would better support student athletes. The impetus of this study was the mixed findings regarding the academic performance of student athletes in comparison to their non-athlete peers. While high school students must satisfy academic requirements to remain eligible to participate, California high schools are not required to provide academic support to their student athletes (California Interscholastic Federation, 2017). Without an obligation to provide academic support, some schools may not (or cannot) invest in the resources needed to ensure that student athletes remain academically eligible, causing further disparate outcomes.

The purpose of this research was to investigate what academic supports were being provided by five Southern California high schools to ensure that all student athletes were eligible to play their sport while achieving academic success. Additionally, the study further uncovered what structures athletic directors believed would better support their student athletes. This study

applied the Total Person Program (TPP), a framework utilized by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), as a basis of holistic supports for student athletes. Through analysis of the interviews, the researcher curated strategies that were being used to support the academic performance of student athletes and synthesized the ideas about structures that would better support student athletes. The results revealed that a collaborative approach is needed to implement various academic supports. The athletic directors identified that structures need to change to address the variance in academic performance and support student athletes with applying to college. Findings also point to the leadership capacity of athletic directors.

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM

Across the country, there are thousands of high school students who represent their schools as athletes. In the 2017-18 school year, it was estimated that 7.9 million students played high school sports (National Federation of State High School Associations, 2018). These student athletes dedicate a great deal of time to their sport, yet research suggests that participation in sports has both positive and negative outcomes for student athletes. Benefits of being a high school student athlete include higher grades and graduation rates in comparison to nonathletic peers (Broh, 2002; Fejgin, 1994; Lumpkin & Favor, 2012). However, not all student athletes experience these positive outcomes; Black male athletes, for instance, have lower grades and graduation rates in comparison to other student athletes (Broh, 2002; Lumpkin & Favor, 2012; Shifrer, Pearson, Muller, & Wilkinson, 2012). These outcomes are important to consider because regulations exist that control who can play sports in college. While academic support is required in college, this study took a closer look at the academic support high schools provide to their student athletes to ensure that athletes are experiencing success in the classroom as well as on the field.

Origins of High School Sports

An analysis of the history of high school sports suggests that sports were originally a grassroots effort by students rather than organized competition. The documentation of high school sports dates back as far as the 1700s at boys' private boarding schools on the East Coast, where only White males could attend (Davies, 2017; Pruter, 2013). Young boys were self-

organizing and directed all games on campus and between schools (Davies, 2017; Pruter, 2013). While educators did not organize sporting events, they believed that sports promoted health and physical development in young boys that supported the principles of Christian Masculinity (Davies, 2017; Pruter, 2013). Christian Masculinity was a movement in the mid- to late-1800s that promoted the idea that participation in sports produced young men who valued fair play, sportsmanship, and appreciation for God (Davies, 2017; Pruter, 2013). Additionally, educators noted other benefits such as school spirit, scholarship, and self-control (Davies, 2017; Pruter, 2013). However, there were growing concerns over the increasing corruption that undermined the core principles of Christian Masculinity. For example, there was a developing amount of commercialism as students began to make money from gambling on the results of a game, in addition to “shopping players” from outside of their local area or using players who were not enrolled in high school (Pruter, 2013). This early history of sports reveals that the good intentions of athletics soon became marred by the desire for competitive success. In an attempt to curb corruption, regulations on high school athletics were implemented.

In the late 1800s, high school leaders began to take control away from the students who ran the school sports programs. During this time, Dr. Luther H. Gulick, who originally wanted to become a medical missionary, became a strong advocate for creating physical education programs in schools (Davies, 2017). In 1903, Gulick founded the first competitive league for schoolboys; its motto was, “Duty, Thoroughness, Patriotism, Honor, and Obedience” (Davies, 2017). His objective was to not only create a physical education program that would prioritize the physical and moral development of students but also exert a form of social control over students to instill behavioral norms that resembled White Christian Masculinity.

As sports programs in schools became common, the need for regulatory bodies emerged. Wisconsin was the first state to develop a state high school athletic association in 1897, and Delaware was the last state to create their athletic association in 2002 (Pruter, 2013). California created the California Interscholastic Federation (CIF) in 1914 to regulate and standardize school sports across the state. The CIF began to oversee the rules, regulations, and scheduling of high school athletic games (Pruter, 2013). While the rules of the game were regulated, the academic performance of players was not. In 1983, less than 100 out of 16,000 California school districts had set forth minimum GPA requirements for their student athletes (Lapchick, 1989). At this point in time, academic achievement and participation in sports were not discussed together.

National action was required to rectify the lack of academic achievement and the low, if not nonexistent, standards. Action was taken at the collegiate level to set forth academic requirements for high school students entering college. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), a member-led organization that regulates collegiate sports and aids athletes across the country, passed Proposition 48 in 1984 (Jackson, 2014), which required incoming college freshmen to have a minimum 2.0 GPA in 11 core classes and score a minimum of a 700 on the SAT or a 17 on the ACT (Lapchick, 1989; Reynolds, Fisher, & Cavil, 2012). Students wishing to continue to play sports in college had to now meet these new expectations. While colleges set this benchmark for academic performance, it was up to high schools to make sure that students met these expectations (Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, 2001; Reynolds et al., 2012).

Current Academic Regulations

The social conditions and academic regulations for student athletes have changed dramatically since the 1700s. The current academic regulations are the standard of academic expectation for student athletes across the country. Taking California as an example, the CIF oversees athletic programs at most high schools in California, and it requires students to have a 2.0 GPA to play (California Interscholastic Federation, 2017). Schools can also enforce additional academic requirements, along with the state requirements, to increase the academic level of achievement expected of student athletes, such as setting a minimum GPA or establishing a minimum number of classes (Lumpkin & Favor, 2012). Schools can implement additional requirements, but they must follow their states' minimum academic requirements.

In addition to satisfying school and state requirements, students considering playing collegiate athletics must adhere to additional regulations. As mentioned in the history of regulation, Proposition 48, passed by the NCAA, set forth minimum academic requirements for incoming freshmen. Today, to be recruited to a Division I or II league high school students have to complete requirements similar to the admission requirements for the California State Universities (Cal States) and University of California (UC) systems. Entering Freshmen students are required to have completed courses in subjects such as math and English, and they must also achieve an SAT or ACT score matching their core course GPA on the NCAA sliding scale (Powell, 2014a). The minimum GPA requirement is a 2.3 for Division I schools and 2.0 for Division II schools (Powell, 2014a).

These requirements are meant to ensure that students have reached an adequate level of academic achievement and that their academic standing has not been compromised by their

participation in a sport (Lumpkin & Favor, 2012). While these are the current academic expectations, the social realities of being a student athlete can impact their academic experience and can turn into a hurdle that impedes academic achievement (Howard, 2014; Hwang, Feltz, Kietzmann, & Diemer, 2013; Ryska, 2002). Therefore, it is important to understand the complex issues student athletes have to navigate.

Being a Student Athlete

Research has examined the academic performance of student athletes in high school and has found some positive outcomes. For example, when compared to the academic performance of non-athletes in high school, some studies indicate that athletes have higher GPAs in comparison to their non-athletic peers (Broh, 2002; Fejgin, 1994; Lumpkin & Favor, 2012). Other research highlights that certain sub-groups benefit from athletic involvement; female student athletes attain high GPAs and high graduation rates at the high school level (Fejgin, 1994; Lumpkin & Favor, 2012; Sorkkila, Aunola, & Ryba, 2017). Academic success continues for student athletes as they move onto college. According to the NCAA 2017 report (National Collegiate Athletic Association Research Staff [NCAA Research Staff], 2017), the graduation rate for the 2017 cohort was 66% overall but 68% for student athletes.

In addition to experiencing positive academic outcomes, student athletes also experience social benefits from their participation in sports. Research indicates that high school student athletes have better attendance, fewer disciplinary problems, and lower dropout rates in comparison to their peers who are not in school-sponsored sports (Fejgin, 1994; Lumpkin & Favor, 2012; Sorkkila et al., 2017). High school student athletes have also been noted to receive additional privileges at school due to their status as an athlete, including work extensions,

excused class time, and extra tutoring (Fuller, Lawrence, Harrison, Eyanson, & Osika, 2017).

Student athletes in high school can also experience a level of celebrity status due to their role as a student athlete. High school sports have increased the role of athletes in the community, even more so in small towns where social life can often revolve around high school sports (Davies, 2017). Studies have found that students participating in sports have even experienced improved self-esteem (Duncan, Strycker, & Chaumeton, 2015). Taken together, these studies suggest participating in sports has both academic and social benefits for student athletes.

While there are clearly positive outcomes associated with being a student athlete, some studies suggest that participation in sports is not always positive. Athletes of color, when compared to their nonathletic peers, have lower academic performance (i.e., GPAs) (Lumpkin & Favor, 2012); lower grades in core subjects (Broh, 2002); and lower college enrollment (Shifrer et al., 2012). The pattern of underperformance continues at the collegiate level. A study performed by the National Collegiate Athletic Association Research Staff (2017) revealed that race impacts the result of graduation rates. Black males had the lowest college graduation rate (55%) among student athletes. While Black female athletes in college outperform Black males, graduating at a rate of 67%, they still underperform White females, who graduate at a rate of 78%.

In addition to these negative academic outcomes, students suffer socially as well. Child development specialists are concerned with an over-commitment to athletics, which can cause children to limit their opportunities, which in turn limits their development of a more multidimensional self-identity (Davies, 2017; Marcia, 1980; Ryska, 2002). In 2015, an estimated 12 million kids ages 7 to 13 took part in youth sports leagues, so this concern impacts many

children (Davies, 2017). This community pressure can make it difficult for children and teens to cultivate other interests when athletics can bring so much attention.

As mentioned previously, some communities treat student athletes like local celebrities (Bissinger, 1990). Members of the community can begin to ignore negative behavior or poor academic performance to preserve the athletic success of the team. The desire to win can create conditions where schools are willing to compromise their values to see results. Academic scandals at the collegiate level have been noted since the beginning of school sports (Davies, 2017; Lee & Hardin, 2015). These issues of academic integrity have trickled down to the high school level (Fuller, Lawrence, et al., 2017).

Along with glorifying local players, communities are not afraid to invest city money into sports as well. More and more districts are electing to build multi-million-dollar stadiums, broker television broadcasting contracts, and gain sponsorships with sporting goods companies (Barker, 2015; Herrera, 2016; Koba, 2012; Lowe, 2012; Pruter, 2013). The commercialization of high school athletics is reminiscent of some of the early concerns of an emphasis on sports over academics, which can call into question the priorities of these educational institutions.

When students are not academically eligible to play in high school, they cannot be recruited by colleges, ending many athletic careers before they even begin. High schools need to ensure they have created an environment where athletic success is not achieved at the expense of academic success. If not, schools could be perpetuating the historical exploitation of subgroups (i.e., women and people of color) by allowing families to invest their social, emotional, and financial resources into an athletic system that is not designed for their child to succeed academically (Davies, 2017; Howard, 2014). No matter what their ambitions, no matter how

much they love the game, student athletes must abide by several layers of regulations if they want to continue to play. Students must carefully navigate these academic requirements, as NCAA requirements may not be the same as high school graduation requirements or college entrance requirements. With such a complex system to navigate, it becomes critical for student athletes to receive academic support that encourages their academic achievement.

Statement of the Problem

Research studies regarding academic outcomes for high school student athletes are mixed. Some research has suggested that while some athletes experience an increase in academic performance, certain subgroups of students do not (Broh, 2002; Comeaux, 2005; Howard, 2014; Lumpkin & Favor, 2012; NCAA Research Staff, 2017). These issues are further compounded by varying support from high school leaders. Like college-level students, high school-level students must satisfy academic requirements to remain eligible to participate. However, unlike colleges, high schools only need to comply with eligibility rules and are not required to provide academic support to their student athletes (California Interscholastic Federation, 2017). Additionally, public databases tracking the academic performance of high school student athletes do not exist like they do for collegiate athletes. This makes it difficult to know whether high schools are effectively supporting student athletes. Without an obligation to provide academic support, some schools may not (or cannot) invest in the resources needed to ensure that student athletes remain academically eligible, causing further disparate outcomes between schools. With varied academic outcomes for student athletes and with no requirement to provide academic support, there is a danger of athletic exploitation if schools benefit from the talent of student athletes without cultivating their academic skills.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

While high school student athletes must navigate complex academic eligibility requirements, it is unclear if they are receiving academic support to do so. There is very little research about what high schools are doing to academically support student athletes, creating conditions where school leaders are navigating these issues in isolation. Thus, the purpose of this descriptive study was to understand the supports provided by high schools to help student athletes achieve academic success. Additionally, athletic directors were invited to discuss ways to improve support for student athletes. To begin to uncover the support available to student athletes, the current study attempted to contribute to understanding support for high school student athletes by speaking to high school athletic directors to address the following questions:

1. How are student athletes supported academically in high school?
2. What structures would better support student athletes?

Conceptual Framework

This study utilized the Total Person Program (TPP) as a framework to analyze the academic supports provided to high school student athletes and as a tool to identify structures to better support student athletes. Specifically, the TPP framework provided the lens for analysis of what is currently being done to support athletes (Georgia Tech Athletics, 2018; National Collegiate Athletic Association [NCAA], 2014). The Total Person Program is a framework describing which supports to provide to student athletes at the collegiate level. Dr. Homer Rice, a former college and National Football League coach, created the TPP while serving as the athletic director at the Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech Athletics, 2018). It is grounded in the belief that student athletes have unique needs that go beyond academics and athletics. To

meet these needs, Dr. Rice developed a program that addressed academic excellence, athletic excellence, personal development, career development, and service (Georgia Tech Athletics, 2018).

Many of these TTP components are supported by recommendations from various studies (Carodine, Almond, & Gratto, 2001; Cooper, 2016; Etzel, Ferrante, & Pinkney, 2002; Gill & Farrington, 2014; Lottes, 1991). These studies assessed various factors, such as academic support, coach influence, parental involvement, peer influence, professor interactions, involvement in the school community, and systems of support, and documented their impact on the academic performance of collegiate student athletes. Based on the results of these studies, researchers made recommendations on how to best support college student athletes, and many of these recommendations were in alignment with the TPP framework. Therefore, the TPP aligns to research about how to support student athletes and is appropriate to apply to the current study as a framework for analyzing the supports provided for high school athletes. The TPP framework provided a lens through which the data from the current study were examined.

Research Design

To address the research questions, a qualitative approach including interviews with current athletic directors from large public high schools was implemented to learn about the support provided to high school athletes. Originally, the current study included a quantitative survey, sent to high school athletic directors to first measure information regarding graduation rates and the types of supports being provided to high school student athletes. However, after five attempts to gather survey data, response rates were low. In fact, out of the 160 athletic directors who were sent the survey, only 33 clicked on the survey, and only five completed the

survey, even after several attempts to gather survey data, including reminders. As such, the decision was made to focus on qualitative interviews with athletic directors to better understand what was happening at the various school sites.

Interestingly, all participants had stopped at the same block of survey questions asking them to report on graduation rates for student athletes. To gain some clarity on this trend, interview participants were asked to reflect on why the survey response rates were so low. Athletic directors shared that they were unable to complete the survey due to a lack of access to the requested information. As a proxy for understanding high school graduation rates for student athletes, the public database DataQuest (run by the California Department of Education) was reviewed to highlight available information about graduation rates for all students.

Qualitative data were gathered from five athletic directors, who self-selected to participate in a semi-structured interview about the academic support provided to student athletes at their schools. Four of these directors identified as male, one as female, two as White, one as Black, one as Asian, and one as Hispanic. Together, they had an average of eight years of experience as an athletic director, with one in their first year as an athletic director and one with 19 years of experience. The directors were asked a series of questions related to their personal background, the school's background, the athletics climate at their site, academic supports for athletes, examples of academic encouragement, and athletic support for athletes. These athletic directors worked at large public high schools in Southern California. The schools ranged in school enrollment of approximately 1,500 to 3,700 students. The demographic makeup of students included large Latino populations as well as a percentage of Black, White, and Asian

students. Over 65% of the students at four of the five schools receive free or reduced lunch, indicating that there is a high financial need at the schools.

Positionality

My personal experiences and my role as an educator have deeply impacted my reasons for focusing on the academic support provided to student athletes. I am a Black female educator, and I have been teaching math since 2011, working at both the middle and high school levels in various settings, including public, magnet, and charter schools. I have always been passionate about education and social justice. As an undergraduate, I majored in urban education and learned for the first time that issues in education stem from the racial, historical, social, and economic injustices in our communities. Therefore, my positionality is such that when my students struggle academically, I believe that there are systems and structures that either create or perpetuate these struggles.

At the beginning of every school year, I ask my freshmen students what they want to be when they grow up. While I get many different responses, many of the boys in my class often share that they want to be a professional athlete. While being a professional athlete can be an exciting career, I also know that very few people can make that dream a reality. I wonder who is supporting and preparing my students academically, emotionally, and physically for the life of a professional athlete. I wonder if they are encouraged to cultivate their academic ability as much as they are cultivating their athletic abilities. I worry about the exploitation and struggles that befall many athletes.

While in my doctoral program, I had the opportunity to shadow a school leader. I chose to shadow an athletics director at a local high school. I assisted the athletic director with an

NCAA informational night for all student athletes and their parents or guardians. During the event, I helped students calculate their GPA based on the NCAA requirements. One student was shocked when he found that his GPA did not meet the minimum requirement. It was at that moment that I realized my passion for social justice, my love of sports, and my career in education had come together, informing the decision to study this topic for my dissertation. My experience as an educator has provided me with an understanding of the types of academic support schools are, or are not, providing to student athletes. My passion for social justice has compelled me to use my dissertation as an opportunity to shed light on the needs of my students and to think critically about what can be done to better address these needs.

Limitations and Delimitations

The study explored the academic support available to student athletes and discussed the structures necessary to ensure academic success. Inherently, there are limitations to the study. The small sample size of athletic directors limits the generalizability of the results. However, as with all qualitative studies, the purpose was not to generalize the academic supports provided by high schools or to create blanket recommendations for improvement. Rather, the in-depth and descriptive examples offered here may transfer to school leaders working in similar contexts.

A delimitation of the study was that the participants consisted of only athletic directors at public schools in Southern California. This omitted various geographical and financial factors that may impact the academic support that is provided to student athletes in other contexts. While this delimitation will impact the transferability of the results, it also controlled for these various factors such as financial resources and cultural context. With a more controlled participant

population, more specific recommendations are offered to address the specific concerns of the athletic directors interviewed.

This study was designed to include athletic directors because their position allows them to see both the academic and athletic talents of students. While this positionality places them in a unique position to comment on current supports and their vision for future academic supports, the views of the other stakeholders (teachers, counselors, coaches, parents, and students) were not captured in the current study.

Significance of the Study

Despite these limitations, the current study still benefited those interested in learning more about academically supporting high school students. First, the study contributed to the gap in the literature about support at the high school level. As such, the current study focused on what supports high schools provided to their student athletes. This study curated the academic supports being provided to student athletes at a sample of Southern California schools and provided space for athletic directors to discuss what structures they would like to see change. This perspective is needed given the academic requirements for continued eligibility and college recruitment.

Furthermore, the implications for the school site may lead to changes that could potentially impact high school student athletes positively. After analyzing the supports provided to student athletes, schools may come to realize that adjustments are needed to ensure that students have a range of options post high school. Some student athletes limit their choices and devote much of their attention to sports because they believe that success in sports will get them

into college or allow them to bypass college and play professionally. If schools implement changes to improve academic support at the high school level, students may ultimately benefit.

Finally, this study can inform the work of policymakers. As stated previously, high school athletes must adhere to state regulations, yet high schools are not mandated to provide academic support to their student athletes. Perhaps policymakers for the organization that regulates high school sports, as the CIF, will consider changes that will require high schools to provide more academic support for their student athletes, like the expectations required of colleges by the NCAA. State-regulating institutes could also consider requiring high schools to report data for a public database about the academic performance of high school student athletes, which will help increase school accountability and will allow schools to monitor their own improvement. With such policies in place, hopefully more student athletes will successfully complete high school and be eligible to go to college. With changes, perhaps schools can cultivate athletic scholars, who use academics to support their athletic ambitions rather than student athletes who maintain academics to participate in sports.

Connection to Social Justice

The goal of this dissertation was to explore the types of supports provided to student athletes at the high school level and offer suggestions for an academically responsive support program to ensure that all students have the knowledge they need to navigate the school-to-career pipeline. There are countless students and families pouring their energy and resources into perfecting athletic skills, to only later discover that their aspirations are not possible due to low academic performance. This creates a system where schools benefit greatly from the students—both through sports' notoriety and revenue generation—at the expense of students. As a leadfor

social justice, it is my view that school leaders are responsible for creating systemic change that will support student athletes academically. To bolster students' agency over their academics and their career, schools need to go back to their core values and mission: "The pursuit of excellence in both academics and athletics" (Jackson, 2014).

Key Terms

Academic support: Systematic programs in place that address the academic needs of students.

Athletic Director: An educator who is assigned to oversee the athletic department. This may be done in addition to a full-time teaching load or may be the sole responsibility of the individual.

A-G Requirements: The required courses needed to be eligible to apply to a California State University or and the University of California.

Academic Engagement: The level to which students are actively involved in their learning and their level of commitment to their academic success.

Scholar Athlete: A student who has an integrative relationship between academic and athletic pursuits based on research that proposes three different relationships student athletes have with their academics: Maintenance, Incentive, and Integrative (Dawkins, Braddock, & Celaya, 2008).

Student Athlete: Students who play a sport for their high school. This term was originally coined by the NCAA to establish the college students were students first and athletes second (Davies, 2017)

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 established the need to focus on the academic support provided to student athletes and outlined the framework for the study. The chapter stated the research questions and outlined the proposed research plan to address those questions. Chapter 2 presents an overview of the literature about student athletes at the high school level. The literature review contains a brief history of athletics and an overview of the rules and regulations governing school sports. Next, the advantages of participating in sports, as well as the disparate academic outcomes are reviewed, laying the foundation for the current study. Finally, the literature review presents the conceptual framework for the study and concludes with a discussion about effective academic support systems for student athletes. Chapter 3 discusses the methodology for the study. The chapter includes information about the sample, including a discussion of the criteria for the selection of athletic directors, sample selected, and sampling issues. The chapter also describes the methods and procedures used to collect qualitative data from athletic directors. Chapter 4 presents the results of the study and includes reflections from the participants. The fifth and final chapter briefly summarizes the implications of the findings and suggests action steps for schools to continue and improve their academic support of student athletes. The final chapter also addresses the limitations of the study and suggests directions for future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to identify the academic supports schools provide to their student athletes and to discuss ways to build upon those supports. The literature review presented in this chapter begins with an analysis of the complex and layered life of student athletes to establish the context they must navigate. The literature review then highlights the current academic expectations for student athletes to provide a sense of the relationship between athletics and academics. Studies regarding the positive and negative academic outcomes for student athletes are then explored to help emphasize the need for academic support and the danger of exploitation. The literature review ends with a review of the conceptual framework used to analyze the data and research informing current recommendations on how to best support student athletes.

Being a Student Athlete

The term *student athlete* was created by the NCAA to encourage the idea that young adults in school were students first and athletes second (Davies, 2017). While the realities of this title can be widely debated, the term reveals that student athletes have two identities that interact with each other. It is important to explore the context student athletes must navigate to better understand how students must merge these identities. Further, student athletes must operate within their school environment, all while understanding their role within their greater community. Student athletes must also be aware of the business of athletics, which causes celebration and controversy. Finally, student athletes face numerous psychological and physical concerns due to their participation in sports.

Athletes and Their School Environment

There are various reasons why a student would want to participate in their school's athletic program. Research on the intersectionality of school culture and athletics has found that reasons for participation in sports include making a contribution to school life, receiving recognition, having fun, and balancing out the academic demands of school (Burrows & McCormack, 2011). As an example, a case study of a private high school in New Zealand found that girls were participating in school athletics as a way to contribute to the school community while attempting to claim a space in the school's athletic legacy. Furthermore, this study found that the girls used athletics as a way to have fun and relax from the academic pressures of school (Burrows & McCormack, 2011). Thus, students have many reasons why they choose to participate in school athletics, and the school environment can support or discourage students from using athletics as a way to contribute to the greater school community.

In addition to a student's individual reasons for participating in sports and to better understand the complexity of being a student athlete, it is also important to understand the role of athletics in the school environment. There is a wide range of sports culture in high schools across America; there are schools that do not offer sports, schools that have minimal sports, and schools where sports dictate school life. The school environment can either promote or discourage athletics on campus. In a study about Canadian schools, researchers found that school culture and social valuing of athletic elitism impacted the role athletics had in the school environment (Fuller, Lawrence, et al., 2017; MacQuarrie, Murnaghan, & MacLellan, 2008). The study found that schools either constructed a deliberate culture where physical activity and athletics were valued and embedded in the structure of the school or created structures within the school that

de-emphasized athletics. The study also found that some schools have a culture that values being athletically skilled, which can create an environment that excludes students who do not have a sense of athleticism. This climate can have implications for how athletes are viewed by their teachers and peers.

When athletic elitism is valued by the school, some educators believe that a hierarchy is created where student athletes receive additional privileges at school due to their status as an athlete (Fuller, Lawrence, et al., 2017). Researchers interviewed 40 teachers at a large public school in Southern California about their perception of student athletes receiving privileges not afforded to their non-athlete peers. The study found that educators believed that student athletes often received work extensions, excused class time, and extra tutoring (Fuller, Lawrence, et al., 2017). The study also found that participating educators believed student athletes benefited from grade inflation and athletic privileges. Participants also shared that they at times felt pressured to inflate the grades of student athletes. The educators felt like these norms were a product of a school environment that valued athletics at the expense of academics. About 40% of the teachers in the study did not have a favorable perception of athletic privileges, stating that preferential treatment was unfair. Such findings are important because they shed light on how a school culture that emphasizes athletics can impact how teachers interact with student athletes on an individual basis.

While research has indicated that student athletes are not always viewed in a positive light by their teachers, a qualitative study conducted by Rankin et al. (2016) found that the most significant factor to influence success was faculty-student interaction. The researchers sent out a survey inquiring about the environmental factors that played a role in the success of collegiate

athletes. Climate was measured by interactions with faculty members, interaction with athletic personnel, comfort with team diversity, diverse leadership, and perceived discrimination. There was a significant correlation between positive faculty interaction and academic success. The results of this study could be applied to a high school context to establish the need for positive interactions between teachers and student athletes.

Other studies focused on the behaviors of faculty members that can cultivate or stymie this relationship. Comeaux (2008), an education researcher, conducted a study using longitudinal survey data to assess how interactions with faculty have influenced the academic performance of Black male student athletes in revenue-generating sports—sports that bring in a large amount of revenue for colleges and high schools, such as football and basketball (Howard, 2014; Van Rheenen & Atwood, 2014). Comeaux found that faculty interaction was not enough to positively influence the participants of the study; the quality and nature of the interactions mattered. For example, when faculty members encouraged Black male student athletes to pursue graduate school, there was a significant change in student GPA (Comeaux, 2008). The study found that positive encouragement from faculty members can lead to improved academic achievement and aspirations. The results of the study further established that positive interactions between teacher and student improved the academic achievement of student athletes. While receiving positive encouragement from faculty was important, faculty members must first have a positive view of their student athletes.

Studies have shown that teachers can have negative views and preconceived notions of student athletes (Benson, 2000; Comeaux, 2008, 2011; Fuller, Lawrence, et al., 2017). This can lead to negative interactions with faculty (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Comeaux (2011)

conducted another study that delved deeper into the attitudes of college faculty towards student athletes. This study looked at how race, gender, and college affiliation impacted the attitudes faculty members had towards student athletes at the collegiate level. The study found that the listed traits did influence faculty views of student athletes. Comeaux argued that the implications of the study suggested that the attitudes and beliefs of faculty members can hinder the quality of engagement between educator and student.

These studies have shown that the academic performance of student athletes is impacted by both positive and negative interactions with their teachers. If teachers' interactions with students can be negatively influenced due to their negative perception of student athletes, it becomes paramount that high school officials implement systems and structures that help ensure a positive relationship between teachers and student athletes.

Athletes in the Community

Outside of school, a student athlete can be viewed as a local celebrity. High school athletics can have an increased role in the community, even more so in small towns where social life can often revolve around high school sports (Davies, 2017). This spotlight can encourage younger children to pursue athletics in order to achieve a level of notoriety, but there can be negative outcomes that result from that same notoriety as an athlete. These consequences were best highlighted in the book *Friday Night Lights*, written by reporter H. G. Bissinger (1990). The book highlighted the year he spent in Odessa, Texas, observing the role high school football played in the community. An interview with a parent revealed that the community had glorified student athletes and overlooked their wrongdoings, setting them up for harsh realities, disappointment, and disillusionment when their high school careers were over (Bissinger, 2015).

Bissinger's work showed that the greater community can be just as invested in the success of an athletic program as the students who are on the court or field. While this level of investment can be seen as supportive, it can easily enable and excuse poor behavior from student athletes.

In addition to glorifying local players, communities are not afraid to commit financially to athletics. More and more districts elect to build multi-million-dollar stadiums to house high school sports teams. Bissinger (2015) noted the town's skewed priorities after citizens choose to spend \$5.6 million to build a 20,000-seat stadium for the high school (Bissinger, 2015; Pruter, 2013). Other schools are also guilty of spending large amounts of money on sports. In 2014, voters in the Kathy Independent School District (Texas) approved a \$748 million bond measure that included funds to build a 12,000-seat high school football stadium estimated to cost \$58 million (Herrera, 2016). The citizens in the Allen Independent School District, also in Texas, approved the construction of an 18,000-seat stadium at a cost of \$60 million (Herrera, 2016; Koba, 2012). Some schools even pool their resources to share the cost of building and maintaining a stadium. For example, in 1997 Fawcett Stadium in Canton, Ohio spent \$4.3 million in renovations. The stadium is shared between two high schools and two colleges (Krider, 2014). These practices would not be concerning if the school district was spending just as much money on the academic needs of the schools they serve.

Athletes and Commercialism

Spending city funds on athletics also highlights a growing concern of commercialism in high school sports. In addition to the community spending financial resources on athletics, more and more high school athletic programs are making deals with corporate sponsors, brokering television broadcasting contracts, and paying coaches large salaries (Eitzen, 2000; Koba, 2012;

Pruter, 2013). In 2011, a shoe company, New Balance, paid \$500,000 to help refurbish an existing high school football stadium in Massachusetts. In return, the stadium was named New Balance Track and Field at Newell Stadium (Koba, 2012; Lowe, 2012). School districts have also made lucrative deals by selling broadcasting rights for high school games. In 2011, the New York City public school system negotiated a two-year, \$500,000 contract with a cable network, and the California Interscholastic Federation (CIF) signed a 15-year \$8.5 million deal with Time Warner Cable to broadcast high school football playoff games (Koba, 2012). The issue of commercialism expands to equipment as well. Sporting goods companies such as Nike, Adidas, and Under Armor partner with high schools around the nation. These partnerships include discounts on uniforms, equipment, and apparel (Barker, 2015). With so much money at stake, athletics is turning into a big business for high schools that have a history of winning or have notable alumni. These questionable priorities and practices are not exclusive to high schools but continue at the collegiate level as well.

At the collegiate level, a look at spending decisions can shed light on the misaligned priorities of the university (Curtis & Thornton, 2014). Universities are spending more and more money on the salaries of coaches of money-generating sports, such as football and basketball (Eitzen, 2000). Within a five-year period, spending on academic support increased 1.5% per student at public four-year universities across the country, while spending in the athletics department had gone up 24.8% per student athlete. During that period, the overall spending on Division I athletics had gone up an average of 36%. The pressure to have a winning season has even caused some colleges to pay coaches' salaries that surpass that of faculty members. The same report investigated the change in median salary for staff at Division I schools, finding that

salaries increased by 102% for basketball head coaches, 93% for football head coaches, and 4% for professors (Eitzen, 2000). More recent data have shown that the median salary for college football coaches was over \$5 million and women's basketball coaches had a median salary of nearly \$1 million (Fulks, 2017), whereas full-time professors at public doctoral colleges made an average of \$127,000 in the 2013-14 academic year (Curtis & Thornton, 2014). While paying coaches more than faculty is well documented at the collegiate level, there is a concern that these practices will trickle down to the high school level.

The financial practices of colleges and high schools calls into question the priorities of the university and has implications at the high school level as many districts begin to invest millions of dollars into athletics. The increasing financial investment in athletics by schools further emphasizes the importance of having systems and practices in place that protect student athletes from being financially exploited by their school.

Athletes and Health

In addition to concerns of financial exploitation, there are psychological and physical concerns associated with being a student athlete. In 2015, an estimated 12 million kids ages 7 to 13 participated in youth sports leagues (Davies, 2017). Child development specialists noted concern with the amount of dedication that is demanded of children so early in their development (Davies, 2017). If children commit to sports at an early age, they might not create time to explore and develop other talents and interests. An over-commitment to athletics can cause children to limit their opportunities and development of interests in other areas, thereby limiting their ability to create a multidimensional self-identity (Marcia, 1980; Ryska, 2002).

Exposure to sports at an early age also results in exposure to the consequences of sports, including injury, stress, unrealized aspirations, and emotional loss at an early age. Research on the health outcomes of athletes has indicated that students who are solely focused on their sport are at increased risk for concussion, depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and substance use (Carter & Rudd, 2005; Miller & Kerr, 2002). The social, emotional, developmental, and physical implications occur at all stages and can cause damage over time. These various negative outcomes must be acknowledged, and they must be weighed carefully by student athletes and their families. Full transparency of these issues can help many athletes avoid or mitigate such dangers and make the most of their athletic careers.

Being a student athlete comes with additional struggles that non-athletes do not have to face. In addition to navigating the social landscape of being an athlete, these high schoolers are also students. They must meet the academic expectations of their family and meet the academic requirements set forth by their school, the state, and the nation. These expectations and regulations contribute to the difficult climate student athletes must navigate.

Current Academic Expectations of Athletes

Navigating the context of being a student athlete along with meeting the academic expectations of student athletes can be difficult. The external conditions that student athletes must operate in make academic success even more difficult. Regulations have been imposed at the school, state, and national levels to try to improve academic standards for all student athletes. The history of high school sports shows a need for academic standards to prevent students from neglecting their academics (Davies, 2017). Furthermore, the academic expectations have supported the idea that student athletes are students first and athletes second (Davies, 2017).

School Requirements

In addition to the difficulties associated with being a student athlete, high schools place academic expectations upon their student athletes in terms of eligibility. Schools enforce academic performance criteria for students to practice and represent the school in games. Schools can also implement additional academic requirements to increase the academic level of achievement expected of student athletes. One popular requirement is “pass to play,” where students need to have a minimum GPA or must be passing a minimum number of classes (Lumpkin & Favor, 2012). For example, students may not play if they are failing two or more classes. This rule prevents students from playing, despite failing core classes like math and English. While schools are at liberty to increase requirements, they must meet the minimum requirements set forth by their state’s athletic governing body. These requirements were meant to ensure that students were maintaining a level of achievement and that their academic standing was not compromised by their participation in a sport (Lumpkin & Favor, 2012).

The California Interscholastic Federation

An example of a state governing body is CIF, which oversees most high school athletics in California. It requires students to have a 2.0 GPA in order to play (California Interscholastic Federation, 2017). In addition, it requires schools to set periodic grading periods (in the intermediate of the final grades for the semester or quarter) where the grades of student athletes are evaluated. If students do not meet the grade requirements, then they are ineligible to play for the next grading period (California Interscholastic Federation, 2017). While this is the expectation across California, exceptions can be made for students who do not meet expectations. For example, schools can offer students an academic probation contract where

students can continue to play despite being ineligible with the promise of improving their grades in a specified period; the CIF allows for a student to go on probation one time a year (California Interscholastic Federation, 2017). Student athletes must meet these academic expectations if they wish to continue to play for their high school. If students wish to continue to play at the collegiate level, they will need to reach even more stringent academic expectations.

The National Collegiate Athletic Association

If students wish to continue their athletic pursuits beyond high school into college, they must make sure they are academically eligible to be recruited. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) is a member-led organization that regulates collegiate sports and aids athletes across the country (Jackson, 2014). It also regulates the recruitment process of high school seniors to college. For high school students to be recruited to a Division I or II conference, the NCAA requires high school students to take prescribed classes (see Table 1). These requirements are similar to the college entrance requirements for the California State Universities, as well as University of California institutions (Regents of the University of California, n.d.; California State University, 2014). Additionally, Division I schools use a sliding scale to match students' SAT/ACT scores and their GPA from their core classes (see Table 2) to determine eligibility (Powell, 2014a). The sliding scale balances standardized test scores with GPA. For example, if a student has a low SAT/ACT score, they would need a higher GPA to be eligible and vice versa. Table 2 shows that a student with a GPA of 3.0 would need at least a 720 on the SAT, whereas a student with a 2.5 would need to score 900.

Table 1
Comparison of Course Requirements for UC/Cal States and NCAA

Subject	College Eligibility Requirements	NCAA Requirements
History/social science	2 years	2 years
English	4 years	4 years
Mathematics	3 years	3 years
Laboratory science	2 years	2 years
Language other than English	2 years	none
Visual and performing arts	1 year	none
College-preparatory course/elective	1 year	5 years

Note. Sources: Adapted from “Test Scores,” by R. Powell, November 21, 2014b, Indianapolis, IN: National Collegiate Athletic Association. Copyright 2014 by the National Collegiate Athletic Association; and “A-G Subject Requirements,” by Regents of the University of California, n.d., Sacramento, CA: Author, Copyright 2017 by Regents of the University of California.

Table 2
Excerpt of NCAA Sliding Scale

Core GPA	New SAT ^a	Old SAT ^b	ACT Sum ^c
3.55	400	400	37
3.5	430	420	39
3.0	720	620	52
2.5	900	820	68
2.3	980	900	75

Note. Sources: Adapted from “Test Scores,” by R. Powell, November 21, 2014b, Indianapolis, IN: NCAA. Copyright 2014 by the NCAA. ^aThe new SAT scores range from 400-1600 (College Board, 2016, page 1). ^bThe old SAT scores ranged from 600-2400 (College Board, 2016, page 1). ^cThe ACT Sum ranges from 0-144 (ACT, 2019, para. 15).

While these regulations were created to ensure that student athletes were academically prepared for college, they also highlight how athletes may have a hard time continuing to play. Students must carefully navigate these academic requirements, as there is no guarantee that they are the same for all three entities. Sports eligibility requirements may not be the same as high school graduation requirements, college entrance requirements, or NCAA requirements. With such a complex layer of regulations to adhere to, it is important to assess if all student athletes are supported to meet these academic requirements.

Academic Outcomes for Student Athletes

Academic regulations for athletes were put in place in response to the low academic performance of student athletes, calling into question if both the school and the student were prioritizing athletics over academics. Still, the implementation of academic requirements does not guarantee that all student athletes are achieving at the same level. Research examining the academic performance of student athletes has been very mixed. Some studies have supported the argument that participation in sports decreases academic performance (Broh, 2002; Reynolds et al., 2012; Shifrer et al., 2012), while others have suggested that student athletes outperform their nonathletic peers (Broh, 2002; Fejgin, 1994; Lumpkin & Favor, 2012; Reynolds et al., 2012; Sorkkila et al., 2017).

Positive Outcomes

Research has examined the academic performance of student athletes in high school and has found a positive correlation between academic performance and athletic participation. When compared to the academic performance of non-athletes in high school, athletes had higher GPAs (Broh, 2002; Fejgin, 1994; Lumpkin & Favor, 2012). Research has further examined various

subgroups to see if there is any variation in academic performance. For example, Lumpkin and Favor (2012) examined the academic performance of high school athletes compared to that of their non-athlete peers. Most student subgroups (by gender and ethnicity) attained a higher GPA in comparison to their non-athletic peers. The study showed that while 44% of female non-athletes attained a GPA of 3.5, 62% of female athletes attained a GPA of 3.5. The study also examined graduation rates of high school athletes and non-athletes. All subgroups of athletes had higher graduation rates than their non-athlete peers. Black athletes benefitted the most, achieving a 97% graduation rate in comparison to their non-athletic peers, who had a 79% graduation rate. Asian athletes also had a higher graduation rate compared to Asian non-athletes but had the smallest change (88% overall compared to 91% for athletes) in graduation rates.

Research has suggested that these academic benefits continue for student athletes as they move onto college. According to an NCAA 2017 report (2017), the graduation rate for the 2017 cohort was 66% overall but 68% for student athletes. While all subgroups had an increased graduation rate in comparison to their non-athletic peers, Black females benefitted the most from their status as student athletes, graduating at a rate of 67%, or 18% higher than their non-athletic peers. Female student athletes outperformed their male peers, graduating at a much higher rate (93.3%) than men (82%).

If these findings hold true across contexts, it would mean that many young athletes, young women, in particular, may be successful in their academic performance, which may lead to increased educational opportunities after high school (Lumpkin & Favor, 2012; Reynolds et al., 2012). The studies did not cite a specific reason behind this general increase in the academic performance of female athletes, but Reynolds, Fisher, and Cavil (2012) speculated that perhaps

this increase was due to the fact that there are fewer opportunities for women to obtain a professional athletic contract, and as a result, they prioritize academics.

The studies that showed positive results also did not take into consideration that to be a student athlete inherently required students to maintain a higher level of academic achievement than their non-athlete peers due to the academic eligibility requirements for athletes. There is also the pressure noted previously on teachers to possibly pass student athletes (Fuller, Lawrence, et al., 2017). Therefore, it is difficult to identify the cause of improved academic achievement found among athletes.

Negative Outcomes

While these studies indicated there are positive academic outcomes for student athletes, other studies have shown negative academic outcomes. In fact, some of the same studies that suggested positive outcomes for some subgroups of students also showed negative outcomes (such as decreased academic performance and graduation rates) for other subgroups. For example, in the same study by Lumpkin and Favor (2012) that found increased academic performance for student athletes, the authors found that certain subpopulations of students did not experience an increase in academic performance. The results of the study indicated that among students who have a GPA of 3.5 or higher, only 20% were Black athletes, whereas 22% of Black non-athletes reported this GPA. A similar discrepancy in achievement was found for students who declined to indicate their ethnicity; 37% of these athletes indicated they had attained a 3.5 or higher GPA, but 46% of non-athletes in this category indicated this GPA. In a longitudinal study done by Broh (2002), results indicated that Black and Hispanic high school athletes were the only subgroups of student athletes who experienced a decrease in their

mathematics and English grades in comparison to their non-athlete peers. In another longitudinal study, among high school athletes Hispanic athletes have had the lowest enrollment in four-year colleges for the last three decades (Shifrer et al., 2012). These mixed academic outcomes for student athletes are not exclusive to the high school level.

The pattern of underperformance continues at the collegiate level. Further analysis of the NCAA study revealed that race impacted graduation rates (NCAA Research Staff, 2017). Black males had the lowest graduation rate (55%) among student athletes, which was lower than the overall national average of 66%. While Black female athletes outperformed Black males, graduating at a rate of 67%, they still underperformed White females, who graduated at a rate of 78%. Both high school and collegiate studies have shown that not all student athletes are performing at the same level.

While some research has suggested that there are factors that can help increase academic performance, such as encouragement to go to graduate school (Comeaux, 2008) and positive interaction with faculty (Comeaux, 2008, 2011), the desire to win can create conditions where schools are willing to compromise their values to see results. Academic scandals have been noted since the beginning of school sports. A study by the Carnegie Foundation in 1929 revealed that 75% of the collegiate institutions that participated in their study had serious academic integrity issues (Davies, 2017; Lee & Hardin, 2015). Issues of academic integrity have trickled down to the high school level. As stated previously, school culture can create an environment where high school teachers experience pressure to provide special academic accommodations to student athletes, causing some teachers to inflate students' grades beyond what they deserve (Fuller, Lawrence, et al., 2017).

Despite the requirements put into place, research has shown that the academic performance of student athletes is mixed. Student athletes must manage their academic load with their commitment to their team in order to meet the academic expectations set forth by the school and the state. This merger of academic responsibilities with athletic pursuits can be difficult for some students and can potentially have an impact on the academic outcomes of student athletes. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the relationship student athletes have between their academics and athletics.

Merging Academics with Athletics

Students who are athletes must navigate the context of being student athletes while meeting the academic expectations of participating in sports. If students want to experience success, they must balance their academics and athletic responsibilities. Academic identity is defined as an individual's belief in their ability or the perception of their capability to perform academic tasks (Manning, 2007; Ryska, 2002; Woolfolk, 2012). Athletic identity is defined as the degree to which a person identifies with the athletic role (Ryska, 2002). Some researchers believe that student athletes experience conflict because they are highly invested in their athletics and have restrictions on their time, which often means that academics are neglected (Powell, 2007; Ryska, 2002; Watson, 2016). Students come to school with an identity that has been shaped by their experiences inside and outside of the classroom. These experiences can influence how students choose to engage with academics and athletics. This belief aligns with the idea that athletes with a strong and exclusive athletic identity may focus solely on athletic performance to the detriment of their academic performance (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Hoffman, 2016; Howard, 2014; Ryska, 2002; Watson, 2016).

Some student athletes may disengage from school while others find that sports incentivizes academic success. Dawkins, Braddock, and Celaya (2008) created a framework describing three types of relationships that student athletes may adopt between athletics and academics: maintenance, incentive, or integrative. A maintenance relationship between sports and school describes a student who maintains academic achievement only to continue to stay eligible for sports. As mentioned previously, there are certain academic expectations student athletes must meet to maintain eligibility to play, graduate from high school, and be eligible for college recruitment (California Interscholastic Federation, 2017; Powell, 2014a; Regents of the University of California, n.d.). Athletes with a maintenance level of engagement perform on academics only to the extent of complying with academic expectations; academics are viewed as a hurdle that must be overcome to achieve athletic aspirations. In an incentive relationship, both sports and academics are priorities but can often conflict with one another. Students with this level of engagement see their academic success as a way to propel their athletic success and vice versa. However, due to the time-intensive nature of performing well on their field and in the class, student athletes with this level of engagement often view sports and academics as competing forces. Finally, in an integrative relationship sports and academics are considered compatible forces that help students excel. An integrative model uses athletics as a means of increasing academic engagement by incorporating sports into the learning process (Dawkins et al., 2008).

Applying the framework, researchers analyzed the experiences of a Black male who played football, named “Eddie B” (Dawkins et al., 2008). The interview revealed that the student’s level of academic engagement changed over time and was impacted by various factors.

Eddie's parents maintained that academics were important and expressed concern when coaches and school focused more on Eddie's athletic performance than his academic performance. While the message from his parents remained consistent, Eddie received various messages and support from his peers, coaches, and teachers that influenced his level of engagement with his academics. Eddie's coaches overemphasized his athletic ability in high school, which contributed to Eddie's desire to maintain his grades for the sole purpose of being recruited by a college in the hope of one day playing football professionally. As Eddie moved to college, he found it difficult to keep up with the demands of his sport and academics. His inability to experience success in any area caused him to disengage entirely by dropping out of his university to attend his local community college. Eddie was able to improve his GPA and enrolled in another university. There, Eddie found courses that talked about the historical exploitation of student athletes, and this integration of sports and academics helped Eddie began to prepare himself for a life outside of sports.

The results of the study showed that parents, peers, coaches, teachers, and schools can have an impact on the academic success of student athletes. The identity of student athletes is shaped and influenced by various external forces. A result, when a student athlete engages with academics it is not a personal choice. Rather, it is an action that has been shaped by the views of others. The study highlighted the need for a system of comprehensive supports to be in place to ensure that student athletes integrate their academic identity and their athletic identity (Dawkins et al., 2008).

As there is no requirement for high schools to provide academic support to their student athletes, there is no guarantee that students will receive support in navigating the academic requirements for recruitment. When stakeholders promote educational values that foster

academic success, it is possible that students will display better engagement with their education (Beamon, 2010; Reynolds et al., 2012). When students perceive that they must excel academically, they are likely to work towards that expectation (Anderson, 1990; Howard, 2014; Hwang et al., 2013). However, if schools are not taking steps to mitigate issues that impede academic success, schools could be guilty of prioritizing athletics over academics.

The life of a student athlete can be layered and complex. Student athletes must reconcile their athletic and academic identity while navigating the complexity of being a student athlete. Though some literature has highlighted the advantages of participating in sports, additional literature has suggested that not all students are experiencing the same benefits. With inconsistent academic success, it becomes clear that not every student athlete achieves the same level of academic success. With a better understanding of the academic expectations and the realities of being a student athlete, attention is now shifted to how schools can help student athletes integrate academics and athletics together.

Conceptual Framework

The intersectionality of being a student and being an athlete highlights the need for schools to support all aspects of their student athletes (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). It was in 1991 that the NCAA passed bylaw 16.1.0, mandating academic support be provided by college athletics departments (Gill & Farrington, 2014). As of 2019, at the high school level there is no requirement to provide specific services to support student athletes in California (California Interscholastic Federation, 2017). With such a complex system to navigate, it becomes critical for student athletes to have support from their high school to achieve their goals. Furthermore, there is a moral obligation to ensure that schools are creating an environment where a student can

integrate their academic and athletic pursuits. Therefore, the conceptual framework applied in this study highlights the specific supports that need to be in place to help student athletes integrate academics and athletics. The Total Person Program (TPP) helps frame what supports should be provided to student athletes.

Total Person Program Framework

At the collegiate level, the NCAA mandates colleges provide academic and counseling services to student athletes. The NCAA recommends a total person approach to assisting student athletes with their success in school, on the athletic court or field, and beyond (NCAA, 2014). The NCAA's Life Skills program, formally known as the Challenging Athletes' Minds for Personal Success (CHAMPS) program, has been committed to preparing student athletes with life skills that are useful through college and after graduation (NCAA, 1999, 2008, 2014). This student athlete development program was modeled after the "Total Person Program" established by Dr. Homer Rice, longtime athletics director at the Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech Athletics, 2018; NCAA, 2014). Dr. Rice believed that excellence is the result of a balanced life that addresses academics, athletics, and personal well-being, and therefore, schools had a responsibility to support students in all aspects of their life (Georgia Tech Athletics, 2018; NCAA, 2014).

Dr. Rice created the TPP model with the belief that student athletes needed support in various areas to help fill any gaps that would prevent them from experiencing success (Georgia Tech Athletics, 2018). A TPP model is grounded in five central commitments: academic excellence, personal development, career development, service, and athletic excellence. A TPP model is the recommended approach to supporting student athletes because it takes into

consideration the background of students and works to identify factors that might facilitate or impede their learning and personal development (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Cooper, 2016; Etzel et al., 2002; Gill & Farrington, 2014; Lottes, 1991). Successful TPPs include more than just academic supports, but also address the unique lifestyle of student athletes and address issues frequently faced by student athletes such as nutrition, eating disorders, stress management, athletic retirement, illegal agent activity, career counseling, and much more (Carodine et al., 2001; Gill & Farrington, 2014). While the TPP model is used at the collegiate level, it can serve as a framework to assess high school level supports.

Commitment to academic excellence. The main objective of TPP programs is to support the academic progress of student athletes towards development and graduation (NCAA, 2008). Strategies such as orientation, teaching studying, and time management skills, tutoring, structured study sessions, academic counseling and advising, enrollment in a meaningful curriculum, assistance with scholarship applications, awards are recommended to help increase and celebrate the academic performance of student athletes. Various studies have been conducted that support these recommendations.

A study by Gill and Farrington (2014) showed that when college football players enrolled in a TPP program, their GPAs were higher than that of football players who did not participate in the program. In this study, the TPP program included the use of study hall, along with the use of academic tutors and learning specialists. Gill and Farrington (2014) also recommended that students take skill development seminars where they can learn about note-taking and organizational skills. Another study by Comeaux, Speer, Taustine, and Harrison (2011) found that when collegiate student athletes are engaged and enrolled in purposeful activities and

classes, they are more engaged with the school overall. Additional studies regarding collegiate student athletes recommend providing various supports such as study halls, tutoring, and mentoring programs to help support the academic performance of student athletes (American Sports Institute, 1996; Carodine et al., 2001; Cooper, 2016; Gill & Farrington, 2014; Zigelbaum, 2014).

Commitment to personal development. To support the development of a well-balanced lifestyle for student athletes, the second commitment recommended under the TPP framework has been engaging students in activities that develop their emotional well-being, personal growth, and decision-making skills (Carodine et al., 2001; Gill & Farrington, 2014). Some recommended topics of discussion to help with the personal development of student athletes include nutrition, developing self-esteem, interpersonal communications, personal and social development, dealing with authority, and fiscal responsibility to name a few. One aspect of personal development is to encourage students to participate in activities and meet other students outside of sports. Successful programs have encouraged students to have positive social interactions where students develop skills to engage with their non-athletic peers (Comeaux, Speer, Taustine, & Harrison, 2011). Such programs encouraged participation in events such as orientation, which can help students engage with the campus and their peers in a way that was not related to sports (Carodine et al., 2001). This non-sport related exposure can allow student athletes to become situated with the general events that the school has to offer and allows students to engage in the social life schools provide (Gerdy, 1997; Tinto, 1993). It is important that schools are fostering an environment where their students will want to seek out and adopt the school culture rather than isolate themselves within athletics, which can negatively impact

academic performance (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). This allows students to expand their interest outside of athletics, ultimately promoting a multidimensional self-identity.

In addition to engaging with their peers, TPPs promote interaction with faculty. Previous students have shown positive interactions with teachers can have a positive impact on academic performance (Comeaux, 2008, 2011; Fuller, Harrison, & Bukstein, 2017). While this is important, it can pose a challenge; at the collegiate level students may feel they are engaging with faculty who have low expectations or negative misconceptions of them as athletes, particularly of male students of color (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). To combat these negative perceptions, researchers recommend that colleges provide training for educators on cultural competency to counter negative stereotypes and improve faculty interactions with student athletes (Cooper, 2016; Rankin et al., 2016; Reynolds et al., 2012). Additionally, schools can design programs that allow student athletes to interact with faculty in meaningful ways (Comeaux et al., 2011). Schools can provide spaces and opportunities for faculty to work with student athletes to identify strategies to overcome or avoid any roadblocks to dialogue with teachers (Comeaux, 2008). Despite this potential difficulty for athletes, learning to interact with adults in power positions can provide personal development and potentially assist student athletes with their career aspirations, playing sports professionally or otherwise. These strategies can be very helpful in creating positive interactions to help curb negative perception of student athletes at the high school level (Benson, 2000; Comeaux, 2008, 2011; Rankin et al., 2016).

Commitment to career development. In addition to supporting students in school, implementation of a TPP model also requires students and staff to have discussions about career aspirations and life goals (Burns, Jasinski, Dunn, & Fletcher, 2013; Carodine et al., 2001;

Cooper, 2016; Zagelbaum, 2014). The NCAA recommends colleges provide assistance with job searches, career counseling about post-college goals, discuss how to find a good agent, and build an alumni network to help with career advancement. Burns, Jasinski, Dunn, and Fletcher (2013) found that when college student athletes perceived that their school provided a strong support program, their confidence in making career decisions increased and they had improved levels of control when it came to making career decisions in comparison to student athletes who did not perceive their support program as strong. In an article by Carodine, Almond, and Gratto (2001), they recommended that colleges provide career planning and placement opportunities. They recommended that schools work to match students with summer jobs and internships that align with the busy schedule of student athletes and provide workshops that focus on resume building and interviewing skills, a practice recommended by other researchers (Beamon, 2008; Cooper, 2016; Van Rheenen & Atwood, 2014). These practices can be modified at the high school level to help student athletes explore career options and plan for life after athletics.

Commitment to service. Another layer of the TPP model is to encourage service. The NCAA also encourages student athletes to engage in service to their campus and surrounding communities. This service can be in the form of mentoring younger students in surrounding schools, providing peer counseling to other student athletes, or working in the surrounding community. These practices can be modified at the high school level as well.

Commitment to athletic excellence. The final commitment under a TPP model is the commitment to athletic excellence. The NCAA recommends that schools run a broad-based athletics program that is founded on equitable practices that promote the well-being of the student athlete. This final tenet acts as the philosophy of how an athletics department should be

run and is grounded in a commitment to creating an environment where the needs of students is put first. This commitment includes a culture of constant reflection for improvement. To implement this commitment, there is a call for exit interviews with graduating senior student athletes to assess the impact the athletics department had on their educational experience (Carodine et al., 2001). This evidence can provide insight into the effectiveness of departmental operations and the support programs in place for student athletes.

Overall, the research has suggested that schools not only provide academic counseling but also assist in personal and career development of their student athletes to offer a TPP model of support. This recommendation supports research done by Dawkins et al. (2008) regarding student athlete engagement with academics. If schools create an environment where all aspects of a student athlete are supported, they can help reduce the perception that students have to choose between academics and athletics. The two aspects will be viewed not as competing forces but as aspects of a well-balanced life that need to be nurtured and integrated.

In 2008, the NCAA released a life skills handbook outlining the components of a TPP program (NCAA, 2008). In the handbook, the NCAA stated that 330 Division I schools, 155 Division II schools, and 141 Division III schools had committed to providing a TPP program to their student athletes (NCAA, 2008). While the TPP model was designed and has been implemented at the college level, high schools can learn from these examples. There are aspects of the TPP program that can be easily adapted to a high school setting, whereas other components need to be modified to be age and context appropriate. While this is an undertaking for high schools to provide such supports, the athletic director will likely need to be one of the first stakeholders on board to implement a TPP model.

Conclusion

High school sports have come a long way since the 1700s. There has been an increase in regulation at all academic levels to help ensure the integrity of amateur athletics. While interscholastic sports have become organized, they have also become more integrated. Young women and students of color have gained acceptance in mainstream athletics. With increasing inclusion, there has also been increasing regulation in the academic expectations of student athletes. While academic standards have been put into place, outcomes are not yet equal. There are social and academic advantages associated with being a student athlete, but there are also drawbacks and concerns regarding the institution and its practices. With disparate outcomes in mind, some schools have taken steps to engage student athletes in their academics in the hopes of increasing academic achievement. The TPP model is currently adopted by the NCAA as a recommendation for colleges to provide to their student athletes. Such support from the school may assist student athletes to achieve positive outcomes across all aspects of their life—academics, athletics, and personal development. The focus on not only academic success but also personal, career, and athletic development provides a holistic approach that struggling students need. While there is a wealth of information on how colleges have been working to support student athletes, little is known about how high schools have been supporting student athletes.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to identify the academic supports provided to high school student athletes to assist them in experiencing academic success. Research has been mixed regarding the academic and social benefits of being a student athlete. Research has indicated positive outcomes for student athletes such as higher GPAs (Broh, 2002; Fejgin, 1994; Lumpkin & Favor, 2012); higher graduation rates at the high school level (Lumpkin & Favor, 2012); and higher graduation rates at the collegiate level (NCAA, 2017). However, some research has suggested that there are subgroups of students who do not experience similar academic improvements in comparison to other student athletes and are at times underperforming their non-athlete peers. One reason why there may be mixed results about the academic outcomes of student athletes is that there may be inconsistencies in the type of academic support provided to high school student athletes. Like colleges, high school student athletes must satisfy academic requirements to remain eligible to participate. However, unlike colleges high schools do not have to provide academic support to their student athletes. Therefore, the current study attempted to describe the academic support provided to student athletes and reveal structures that would better support student athletes. This chapter provides an overview of the methodology that was used to analyze these issues and address the research questions. It reviews the participants and setting, as well as the data collection procedures and the analytical plan.

Research Questions

There is little public information regarding the academic performance of high school student athletes. Furthermore, very little research exists that is focused on the support that

schools provide to help student athletes achieve academic success. The current study contributes to the literature by examining support for high school student athletes by speaking to high school athletic directors to address the following questions:

1. How are student athletes supported academically in high school?
2. What structures would better support student athletes?

This study focused on the academic support provided to all student athletes at five high schools in Southern California. The study asked athletic directors to speak to these research questions because their position requires them to be mindful of both the academic and athletic performance of students.

Research Design

To answer the research questions, a qualitative research design was implemented. Qualitative research validates experiential data, allowing the researcher to understand human behavior from the perspective of participants while preserving their voices (Creswell, 2013; Moen, 2006; Sandelowski, 1991). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with athletic directors to gain a deeper understanding and more context about the academic supports currently being offered to students. Furthermore, athletic directors offered their perspective on what structures would better support student athletes.

A qualitative approach further aligns with social justice leadership. In fact, a qualitative approach does not give a voice to participants but instead creates a platform from which they can share their stories. Qualitative methods allow for participants to be actively engaged in the interview process by telling their stories in a way that makes sense to them, further increasing the

participant authority and creating a co-constructed process between participants and researcher (Adriansen, 2012).

Participants

Initially, the study consisted of two parts: a quantitative survey (see Appendix A) and qualitative interviews (see Appendix B). Participants for the survey portion of the study were delimited to public high schools from across Southern California (as far north as Santa Barbara and as far south as Orange County). A list of all the school districts in the designated regions was composed. High schools within those districts were then identified. The email address of each athletic director was collected using public email addresses from school websites. This process generated a list of 160 email addresses for athletic directors at public high schools. These 160 potential participants were sent an email and were informed that the study involved an online, anonymous, confidential, and voluntary survey through Qualtrics (Qualtrics, Provo, UT, 2018), followed by optional individual interviews. There were 33 clicks on the survey, but only five surveys were fully completed. Those who stopped the survey all stopped at the same block of questions that asked for information about graduation rates for student athletes. Ultimately, the sample size was too small to accurately reflect the trends of the population, so due to the low response rate, the quantitative data were omitted from the research. The 160 athletic directors were contacted again via their publicly available email address and invited to participate in an interview.

Five athletic directors self-selected to participate in a qualitative interview. Participants came from a variety of public schools in the Southern California region. Each school was given a pseudonym to protect their identity and maintain confidentiality. Table 3 provides the

demographic information that was provided from each of the five athletic directors. Four out of the five athletic directors identified as male. The athletic directors are diverse in their ethnicity and have a wide range of experience as athletic directors, ranging from less than a year of experience to nearly 20 years of experience. The schools represented in the sample are all large high schools, and a majority of the schools have a high percentage of students who qualify for free and reduced lunch (often an indicator of financial need among students).

Table 3
Participant Overview

School	Gender	Ethnicity	Years in the Position	Total School Population	Percent of Students on Free and Reduced Lunch
Citadel High	Male	White	7	2,076	35.3%
Lakeshore High	Male	Black	5	2,193	82.1%
Navidad High	Male	Hispanic	19	1,314	70.9%
Westfield High	Female	Asian	< 1	3,678	69.1%
Willcrest High	Male	White	6	3,739	67.3%

Data Collection

The study was originally designed to gather quantitative data on the academic achievement of student athletes, then follow-up with interviews to learn more about the supports implemented to support student athletes. The quantitative survey included questions to ascertain indicators of academic success such as graduation rates and college eligibility rates (see Appendix A). These items were to be used as indicators of academic achievement for student athletes in comparison to their non-athlete peers. For example, the survey asked athletic directors to indicate how many senior student athletes graduated in the 2017-2018 school year, how many

graduating senior student athletes were accepted into a four-year college or university, and how many college-going senior student athletes were recruited to play college/university sports. While survey response rates stopped prematurely, the athletic directors who participated in interviews indicated that the reason why these questions were not answered was likely because such data were not collected for student athletes. Instead, such data are only tracked for the entire senior class. Therefore, data about demographics, graduation rates, and college eligibility rates were gathered from a public database, DataQuest. DataQuest is a public database run by the California Department of Education that houses a variety of reports on the performance of K-12 public schools across California (California Department of Education, 2015). However, schools do not report specific data for the academic performance of high school student athletes; therefore, data about the academic performance of the entire school population were examined. The data were aggregated by gender and ethnicity to allow for more in-depth analysis.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of the athletic directors individually. The interview lengths varied from 20 to 40 minutes. Of the five interviews conducted, four were over the phone and one was in person at the participant's school site. After receiving verbal consent, participants were asked a series of questions to ascertain the supports provided by the school to help the student athletes achieve academic success as well as the systems in place to help execute these supports. The topics covered in the interviews included personal background, school background, school climate regarding athletics, academic support for athletes, examples of academic encouragement, athletic support for athletes, and the future of

academic support (see Appendix B). All interviews were recorded (with consent) and transcribed.

Analytical Plan

All interviews were transcribed by a private and secure company. Once the interviews were transcribed, the information was coded into themes. At the start of the coding system, the transcripts were read alongside the audio recording of the interview to ensure that the transcriptions were an accurate representation of what was said. Then, the transcripts were read through twice to make sure that there was no information left out for the study. Both an emergent and theory-informed approach were implemented to code the data (Creswell, 2013). For the a priori, theory-informed coding, aspects of the TPP framework, such as study skills, goal setting, time management, tutoring, and academic counseling were originally used to examine the data. Additional emergent codes were also coded in the data, allowing for the inductive approach as well. As the interviews were read, key quotes that stood out in conjunction with the research questions were highlighted. These quotes were categorized by theme. Initially, 17 different themes were identified in the responses of the athletic directors. Corresponding themes were then consolidated into patterns.

Limitations and Delimitations

The current qualitative study explored the academic support available to student athletes. Due to the small sample size of athletic directors, the study lacked generalizability. Nevertheless, qualitative studies tend to have smaller samples but provide deeper information using interview data (Flick, 2014). The qualitative nature of the study allows for in-depth and descriptive

testimonies to be shared. These perspectives may be transferable to other school leaders working in similar contexts.

The study asked athletic directors to comment on existing support and to comment on what structures would better support student athletes. Athletic directors were specifically chosen because they are able to comment on the intersectionality of academics and athletics. However, this excludes the perspective of students, parents, coaches, teachers, and counselors. There is value in the viewpoint of these various stakeholders; however, the inclusion of these stakeholders was beyond the scope of this study.

The study was delimited to public high schools only, excluding private and charter schools. While such a delimitation attempted to control the element of financial resources, findings do not take into account how different contexts can impact the academic support provided to student athletes. Therefore, the study missed the perspective of other types of schools that may have to operate with different resources. Furthermore, the study was delimited to public schools located in Southern California. The culture of high school athletics in Southern California is different than the culture of high school athletics across the country. This delimitation in geographical scope can impact the ability of findings to resonate with contexts outside of the Los Angeles region.

As with all qualitative studies, the positionality of the researcher has the potential to influence the interpretation of data and affect findings. To compensate, I practiced reflexivity during the coding of data and attempted to engage in member checking (Flick, 2014), where the athletic directors were able to review their data prior to drawing conclusions. Despite these limitations and delimitations, the results of this research can greatly benefit schools. Other

schools might also find the process of self-reflection beneficial and can critically analyze their own supports and think of creative and innovative ways to expand on their current supports.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

While student athletes must maintain academic eligibility, high schools are not obligated to provide academic support to their student athletes. This study attempted to understand what schools are currently doing to support student athletes to minimize the chances of the school benefiting at the expense of student academic performance. To that end, the study was guided by the following questions:

1. How are student athletes supported academically in high school?
2. What structures would better support student athletes?

To address these research questions, athletic directors were interviewed about their understanding of school support for athletes. Part of the duties of the athletic director is to ensure that all student athletes are following the academic regulations put forth by the state and by the school. Therefore, athletic directors are at the intersection of academic and athletic performance. Additionally, athletic directors serve as leaders on the school campus. The study calls for these leaders to be reflective about the services their school site provides and to identify structures and systems that would better support student athletes with their academic performance.

Five athletic directors from large public high schools in the Southern California area agreed to be interviewed for this study. The directors were asked questions in several categories: personal background, school background, school climate regarding athletics, academic support for athletes, examples of academic encouragement, athletic support for athletes, and the future of academic support. The interviews ranged from 22 to 40 minutes. Each interview was transcribed and coded based on inductive and *a priori* themes. The *a priori* themes came from the TPP

framework and included study skills, goal setting, time management, tutoring, and academic counseling. Emergent themes were also coded inductively. Themes were then compared and condensed into major patterns. The patterns found in the data from athletic directors paint a detailed picture of the support provided to student athletes, including academic support, community support, issues with academic performance, collegiate support, systematic support, and future supports.

Study Context

For this inquiry, five participants, who were then-current athletic directors of large comprehensive public high schools in the Los Angeles region, participated in interviews where they were asked to elaborate on the academic support their schools provided to student athletes. In Southern California, families have a wealth of school options for their children, including charter, public, magnet, pilot, independent, religious, and private schools. In the fall of 2018, it was estimated that 50.7 million students, kindergarten through 12th grade, were enrolled in public schools as opposed to 5.9 million enrolled in private schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Due to the large amount of students enrolled in public schools and the corresponding likelihood that athletic programs would be similar in these sites, this study chose to focus on this public educational context. The culture of athletics in the Los Angeles region is impacted by the variety of school options. Not all schools, particularly magnet and charter schools, have a robust athletic program or one at all. This can diminish the role high school sports plays in the community overall. For example, the role that football has on high schools in Texas can be significant, often intertwining in a way where high school football is seen as the pastime of the entire community (Bissinger, 1990; Washington & Karen, 2010).

While that is a widespread characteristic across Texas, Southern California high schools and their surrounding communities are not particularly known for their devotion to athletics. Rather, large public high schools in the Los Angeles region, especially those participating in this study, often offer sports programs to a diverse student body.

Table 4 provides background information on each of the participating athletic directors from the five public high schools. All school names were pseudonyms to protect confidentiality. Additionally, athletic directors were asked in a survey to provide demographic data for their school demographics, including data on student athletes, but they were unable to provide this information. Therefore, demographic information about the ethnic breakdown of students at each of the participating schools was gathered from a public database called DataQuest, run by the California Department of Education.

Table 4
Demographics of Participating Athletic Directors

School	Gender	Ethnicity	Years in the Position
Citadel High	Male	White	7
Lakeshore High	Male	Black	5
Navidad High	Male	Hispanic	19
Westfield High	Female	Not Disclosed	< 1
Willcrest High	Male	White	6

Table 5 provides the demographic data for each participating school and indicates the total number of students and the ethnic breakdown of students enrolled in the school. The table also indicates the percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch. This demographic is often used to indicate the student population's level of financial need.

Table 5
Demographics of Participating Schools (2016-17)

Ethnicity	Number of Students	Percentage
Citadel High School		
White	514	25.00%
Asian	213	10.00%
Black	420	20.00%
Hispanic	803	39.00%
Free and Reduced Lunch	—	35.30%
Total	2,076	—
Lakeshore High School		
White	42	1.92%
Asian	37	1.69%
Black	396	18.06%
Hispanic	1,599	72.91%
Free and Reduced Lunch	—	82.10%
Total	2,193	—
Navidad High School		
White	122	9.00%
Asian	27	2.00%
Black	42	3.00%
Hispanic	985	75.00%
Free and Reduced Lunch	—	70.90%
Total	1,314	—
Westfield High School		
White	185	5.00%
Asian	44	1.00%
Black	101	3.00%
Hispanic	3,282	89.00%
Free and Reduced Lunch	—	69.10%
Total	3,678	—
Willcrest High School		
White	720	19.00%
Asian	262	7.00%
Black	419	11.00%
Hispanic	2,121	57.00%
Free and Reduced Lunch	—	67.30%
Total	3,739	—

Citadel High School

In the 2016-17 school year, 2,076 students attended Citadel High. The demographics of students at Citadel were very diverse, with a fairly equal distribution of White, Black, and Hispanic students. Many students attending Citadel were Hispanic (39%), with the next largest ethnicity group being White (25%). In comparison to all the schools interviewed, Citadel had the lowest proportion of students receiving free or reduced lunch (35.3%). The athletic director at Citadel was a male who had been serving in that role for seven years. Twenty-two different sports were provided for students at Citadel High. The athletic program had experienced success, winning championships in girls' volleyball and girls' water polo. The more popular sports on campus included football as well as the former two sports mentioned. When asked about the perception of student athletes on campus, the Citadel director said, "I don't think we have any labels, you know, dumb jock, those kinds of things. I don't think we see that here because most of our kids are 3.0 or higher." When asked about why students participate in sports, the director commented:

I think a lot of kids at Citadel play sports to help them on their college application. You know, playing a sport helps them get into college, helps them as a student, helps their resume, I would say. I think we have a lot of students play sports maybe to help most of them get into college as a student. I see that a lot.

The director noted that students at the school use sports as a resume booster and that most of the students do not have an interest in playing sports professionally. Overall, the school served a diverse set of students, and the student athletes appeared to be in good academic standing at the school.

Lakeshore High School

Lakeshore High School was home to nearly 2,200 students in the 2016-17 school year. The student demographics at Lakeshore High were primarily Hispanic (89%), with the next largest group being Black students. Of all the schools interviewed, Lakeshore had the greatest proportion of students receiving free or reduced lunch (82%). The athletic director at Lakeshore was a male who had been serving in that role for the last five years. In the interview, the director shared that a lot of the school's athletic history and tradition was lost when the school closed down for 20 years. The athletic program had grown significantly since the school's reopening, particularly since his tenure. The athletic department was comprised of 14 different sports. The school has won championships in basketball, football, and soccer. The more popular sports on campus included football, soccer, basketball, and volleyball. When asked about the culture among the student athletes, the Lakeshore director commented that "it's kind of like a fraternity or a sorority-ish vibe. There's a sense of belonging to an organization. Those students usually hang out together at lunchtime." The student athletes appeared to be a close-knit community, and there was a sense of comradery among them. When asked how the general school population views student athletes, the director added, "It isn't quite to the point where those kids are seen as the leaders of the campus, but it is a different acknowledgment that they are given versus your other students on campus." At Lakeshore, the students seemed to benefit from their social status as student athletes. On the other hand, the student athletes on campus were not necessarily known as the model students on campus.

Navidad High School

Navidad was the smallest school where the athletic director was interviewed, with 1,314 students in attendance in the 2016-17 school year. Many of the students in attendance at Navidad High were Hispanic (75%), with the next largest group of students being White (9%). A significant portion of the student population received free or reduced lunch (70.9%). The athletic director at Navidad High was male and had been serving as director for 19 years. Navidad High offered 15 different sports to its students. The more popular sports at Navidad were football, wrestling, and baseball. The director indicated that more than half of the students participate in athletics at the school. When asked to reflect on how the school views student athletes, the Navidad director shared a mixed perspective:

It's just like anything else. I think there are probably groups of students who think that the athletes get everything, and that's not true, but some people want to think that. There might be even a couple of teachers who might think that too.

Athletes at Navidad High were perceived in various ways by both their peers and by teachers. Some believed that student athletes received special privileges, whereas others didn't believe student athletes received special treatment. Despite this mixed perspective, the director shared that sports have played a significant role in the lives of students at Navidad:

There's a lot of kids who come in [to high school] with very little expectations or no intention of moving on beyond high school, and year after year, we have kids that because of athletics they completely go down a different path, and they end up in [college], and they end up with their degrees and becoming professional[s].

The director noted that the athletics program has transformed over the years and has played a role in transforming the culture of the school. He believed that sports play a role in directing students down a path that led to academic and professional success. At one time, students did not

aspire to continue their education past high school. Now, more and more student athletes were continuing their education beyond high school.

Westfield High School

Westfield High was the second largest school interviewed, with 3,678 students in the 2016-17 school year. The demographics of students at Westfield were overwhelmingly Hispanic (89%), with the next largest demographic group being White students (5%). A significant amount of the student population received free or reduced lunch (69.1%). The athletic director at Westfield High was the only female athletic director interviewed, and she was in her first year in the role. There were 20 sports offered at Westfield High, and according to the Westfield athletic director, about a third of the students participated in athletics. Some of the more prevalent teams on campus were track and field, cross country, football, and soccer.

The athletic director commented on how athletics fits into the culture of the school and in the wider community. When asked how athletics is viewed by others on campus, the Westfield athletic director noted:

I would say that we have a longstanding tradition of proud, proud athletic accomplishments and proud athletic participation on our campus. I always feel like when we go out to lunch, rallies or assemblies, or to games, we have got a great inclusive environment, and our general student body is happy to celebrate our student athletes.

With a third of students participating in athletics, it was evident that there was a high interest to participate in sports. Furthermore, the director indicated that students enjoyed attending games and participated in sports-related events and celebrations.

The athletics program at Westfield High played a significant role not only on campus but in the community as well. When asked about how the role of athletics was viewed by the community, the athletic director commented:

Athletics has played a large, prominent role on our campus and in our community. . . . We get tremendous support from our administration and from our district and our board members. . . . We have a local newspaper that does a fantastic job covering our athletes and making sure that they're getting the notoriety that they deserve.

Westfield High had a wide variety of people who are invested in the success of the athletic program. The athletics program was a source of entertainment and pride for not only students but also their community.

Willcrest High School

Willcrest High was the largest school interviewed, with 3,739 students enrolled in the 2016-17 school year. A little over half of the student population at Willcrest was Hispanic (57%), with the next largest demographic group being White students (19%). More than half of the students received free or reduced lunch (67.3%). Despite this statistic, the Willcrest athletic director noted that Willcrest High has an economically diverse student population:

We will draw kids from our area . . . which is fairly high-end housing, multi-million-dollar homes down that way, and then we will also draw kids going another direction, from poor, apartment-living kind of housing. So, we're kind of a unique mix in the sense that you'll have kids that'll drive high dollar cars to school, and you'll have kids that are taking the bus and that's, you know, trying to get here.

The school district that Willcrest was in was a district of choice. This meant that students could go to any school within the district, even if was is not the student's local school. As a result, students at Willcrest came from various socioeconomic backgrounds. Due to the diverse background of the students, the social and academic needs of the students (and in turn student athletes) varied dramatically.

The male athletic director at Willcrest had been serving as director for the last six years. The director indicated that nearly half of the student population participated in athletics. Willcrest's athletics program offered 25 different sports to its students, the most of any school

interviewed. The athletics program at Willcrest had a long-standing tradition of success, being over 90 years old and having the most league championships in the district. Willcrest High was known particularly for its prowess in aquatics, especially swimming and water polo.

While Willcrest appeared to have a robust athletics program, there also seemed to be a mixed level of support for athletics at the school between athletes and non-athletes. The athletic director commented on the climate, saying:

We will see groups of students coming to support for big games, but often those are just simply other student athletes that are out of season celebrating in-student athletes. I wouldn't necessarily say I've seen an overall push of students coming to events that are not already athletes in some other sport.

There was a perception that the greater student population was not that interested in attending sports activities. However, the participation rate in athletics was very high, and it could be said that there was still a high level of support for athletics if student athletes were attending games to support their peers. Despite the potential indifference of non-athletes, the school and athletic director found it important to recognize the achievement of student athletes:

We do a ceremony every spring, and that we honor any of our student athletes that are going to go play college the next year, whether that's a junior college or anywhere from junior college all the way up to Division I . . . [it] is a worthy accomplishment, and we feel like they should be celebrated for that.

In addition to a ceremony celebrating recruited and committed student athletes, there were even spaces on campus that were dedicated to recognizing alumni who have achieved success in athletics:

One thing we do have is we do have an athletic hall of fame where we will honor athletes that have gone on to have success after high school at the collegiate or professional levels, so when we are able to honor them and bring them back is kind of a special thing that our school does.

With so many students participating in sports, athletics played a large role in the school culture at Willcrest. Thousands of students had participated in Willcrest athletics over the years, and as a result, the program had a long and rich history, one that school administrators loved to celebrate.

With these contexts in mind, the athletic directors from these five participating schools were asked interview questions in a semi-structured format. The purpose of the interviews was to learn more about what their school site was doing to support student athletes from the perspective of the athletic directors. The results are categorized in the following section by the research question, beginning with a description of what schools are currently doing to support student athletes, followed by what structures need to be in place to better support student athletes academically.

Current Support for Student Athletes

To address the first research question about how schools were supporting student athletes, each athletic director was asked to discuss the academic supports that existed in their school. Based on the interview data from the athletic directors, schools were supporting their student athletes by providing various types of academic support such as counseling and tutoring. Furthermore, athletic directors highlighted that there was a community of people working to support student athletes, including teachers, counselors, coaches, and parents.

Academic Support

This section highlights all the academic supports in place at the various school sites. Each of the schools had policies and practices in place to provide academic support to all students. Supports included study hall, office hours, peer tutoring, academic coaches, school interventions, and academic coaching. Only one athletic director indicated the availability of academic supports

specifically for student athletes, which was collegiate-style advising for their student athletes. Often, the support described by athletic directors was the support that all students had access to rather than tailored support for student athletes.

Study hall. The directors at Navidad and Willcrest both indicated that some of their teams conducted study halls to help ensure that student athletes were keeping up with their coursework. Study hall was a period of time where students would work on their homework or other school assignments. The director at Navidad, who also served as a coach for the wrestling team at his school, shared how teams on campus were implementing study hall, saying, “I do study hall. Our football program, they do a study hall. Our basketball program has done it off and on.” While study hall was a practice conducted by some of the coaches, the director at Navidad indicated that study hall was not a consistent practice by the mentioned coaches, and it was not a habit of all coaches. The director at Willcrest echoed this sentiment about study hall for his athletes, saying:

Our coaches from time to time will hold study halls, especially in offseason trying to get the kids caught up, eligible, or let them go visit teachers during their athletic class training occasionally so they get a chance to catch up on work when they can.

Both directors indicated that some coaches do hold a study hall for their athletes. However, both directors also indicated that study hall was held inconsistently, and neither director indicated that there was a uniform structure to study hall. This inconstancy, both in the holding of study hall and in the format of study hall, could provide student athletes with varied support.

Office hours. Another strategy for academic support that directors cited was having students attend teacher office hours. During office hours, a student could take advantage of a smaller environment to get assistance from their teachers. Each of the directors mentioned some

form of office hours available to all students, not just athletes. Interestingly, the director at Westfield shared the various office hour opportunities teachers at her school provided to athletes, saying, “We have after-school and before-school tutoring hours. Not only do we offer those tutoring hours directly after school, but we also offer 4:00 [pm] to 5:00 [pm] sessions.” At Citadel High, twice a week there was “an extra 20-minute period [where student athletes] can go to any of their teachers and get extra work during the day” (Citadel athletic director). Both Citadel and Westfield had a unique approach to office hours that appealed specifically to student athletes. However, at the other schools office hours were for all students immediately before school or after school.

While office hours can be a great opportunity for students to check in with their teacher, they were not designed with student athletes in mind. Office hours after school, for example, can conflict with team practices. As a result, student athletes were then forced into a system where academics and athletics was viewed as conflicting commitments. The extended times for office hours at Westfield gave student athletes the opportunity to get academic support after their practice was over. Similarly, the open period at Citadel allowed student athletes to meet with their teachers during school hours. These variations in office hours can make them more accessible to student athletes.

Peer tutoring. Only two athletic directors interviewed said that they provided peer tutoring for students. At Navidad, peer-to-peer tutoring was available “in the afternoons in the library Monday through Thursday for all students, not just athletes” (Navidad athletic director). Meanwhile, Citadel had been able to build on the model of peer-to-peer tutoring and had developed a program where student athletes were tutoring other student athletes. Through the

program, student athletes with a 2.5 GPA or lower were identified and then assigned to sixth-period tutoring and after-school tutoring once a week. When asked how this program was made possible, the director at Citadel stated that the school received funding from a grant to provide this service to student athletes exclusively. Citadel's ability to provide exclusive peer-to-peer tutoring for student athletes was made possible by the funds from a grant that the school applied for; therefore, the future of the program was uncertain given its dependence on external funds. Additionally, other school sites may have been unable to provide a comparable service because they did not have access to these grant funds.

Academic coach. An academic coach is normally a person hired to assist with the tutoring of students. The director at Navidad was the only director to mention that the school provided academic coaches. However, the academic coach has since left the school. The Navidad director said:

We had hired an academic coach a few years ago, and basically, he came in every afternoon, and he would be in my classroom for about four hours a day. It was predominately for student athletes, but other students started figuring out the guy was in there, and he was really good, so they would go in there and get help. Unfortunately, he finished his credential, and he moved onto another district, but having something like that was super helpful, and then our kids did really, really well when they had that extra support.

While this support was very helpful to student athletes, the director noted that the academic coach was available to all students, not just student athletes. This was similar to what directors said about peer-to-peer tutoring and office hours. Additionally, the ability to provide an academic coach was made possible because there was an effective candidate to hire and funds to pay for the academic coach.

Credit recovery. Directors mentioned some of the practices that their school had for students who were struggling to pass or had failed to pass their classes. Practices such as Saturday school were available to students at Navidad, where “students can come in if they need to catch up, and again, it’s open to all of our students, and different teachers from different disciplines come in and help the student get caught up” (Navidad athletic director). If a student happened to fail a class, there were ways that students could make up that credit. All five school sites also noted that they provided summer school as an option for credit recovery. Willcrest offered an online “credit recovery program where students can take classes in an online forum and makeup credits. This way they were still Cal State and UC eligible.” The director at Lakeshore noted that student athletes need to be careful about taking online courses:

We have a lot of kids that are retaking classes, but they’re retaking classes via E-20/20, which is online, which is no face-to-face teacher. That does not qualify for a lot of schools; like for NCAA, that does not qualify. It’s something that, you know, we put kids in, but it’s a requirement or to help them graduate, but we’re not really helping them as far as preparing them for [college].

The director brought up a concern that there was a misalignment regarding graduating high school, qualifying for college, and qualifying under NCAA regulations. The director further stressed that it was important to monitor what type of credit recovery classes student athletes were taking to ensure that they were meeting all academic requirements for recruitment.

Credit recovery is an important option for all students to have available to them. The ability to retake a failed course can mean the difference between graduating for some students and can put students on the path to college eligibility. However, if student athletes are unaware of the details of NCAA regulations, they can find themselves taking courses that do not count towards their eligibility. The online recovery classes provided at Navidad were overseen by a

teacher, whereas the E 20/20 recovery classes that Lakeshore provided were independent. This nuanced detail made all the difference in terms of recruitment eligibility.

Academic counseling. The issues related to credit recovery highlight the importance of having academic counseling. Interaction with a counselor plays an important role in the general success of students. When assisting student athletes, an academic counselor can help ensure that students are completing classes that satisfy graduation as well as recruitment requirements. All five schools interviewed had counselors present on campus, and each student was assigned a counselor. The directors at Navidad and Willcrest High indicated that students meet with their counselors about twice a semester to go over classes, review high school graduation requirements, schedule make-up classes if needed, and to counsel students who wish to go to college. Each athletic director indicated that student athletes were not meeting with their counselors more than their non-athlete peers. All five schools had a designated counselor who was familiar with and trained in the NCAA requirements. However, each athletic director indicated that this trained counselor was not specifically assigned to all student athletes. The director indicated that the counselor trained in NCAA requirements typically stepped in only during the college recruitment process for a student athlete. This could create scenarios where student athletes were getting inaccurate counseling that would allow them to graduate high school but would not be counted towards classes needed for recruitment.

NCAA program. Westfield High had a unique support system in place for their student athletes. Westfield developed a support program that was modeled after collegiate athletics departments, where there is a branch dedicated to the logistics of running an athletics program and a branch dedicated to the academic support of athletes. The NCAA coordinator worked

closely with students who have self-identified as a potential college athlete and with students who coaches identified as potential collegiate athletes. The athletic director at Westfield elaborated on the duties of the NCAA coordinator at their site stating:

Then, the NCAA coordinator will often meet with teams, specifically with each program, to explain how the program works and what he's looking for and making sure that [students] are staying on track of their academic progress. Then he'll also do meetings with individual athletes.

The NCAA coordinator at Westfield was an additional member of the support team who was focused specifically on student athletes who were interested in playing sports at a collegiate level. The NCAA coordinator was trained in the requirements for recruitment, so the coordinator was able to provide specific academic advice and ensure that students were taking the appropriate classes and were performing at an academic level that would not compromise their recruitment prospects.

Recently, Westfield opened an assistant coordinator position that works specifically with struggling student athletes. As the Westfield athletic director described,

The [assistant] coordinator does individual meetings with the athletes who have been identified as at-risk, whether they're deficient on credits, or their grades are low on the sliding scale, or they're not quite meeting the standards that they need to meet with regards to GPA or test scores. She will pull out those athletes and meet with those at-risk athletes individually and stay on top of them, so they have multiple people tracking their progress if they've been identified as at-risk.

Both the coordinator and the assistant coordinator worked to make sure that all student athletes were supported academically. The athletic director was very proud of this additional layer of support for student athletes. She noted that the support system was modeled after the support that student athletes receive at the colligate level.

The athletic directors shared that their schools were providing academic supports to student athletes, albeit general and not exclusive. While each of the schools provided a variety of supports, only two schools had supports exclusively and specifically for student athletes. Many of the academic supports indicated were available to all students, and therefore, they did not always address the unique needs of student athletes. These results substantiated the concern that high school student athletes were not receiving a standard level of academic support, if any support at all, and that schools have not been designing supports to meet their specific needs.

Community of Support

As each athletic director commented on the academic support provided to student athletes, a theme began to emerge from their responses. The athletic directors shared that they were not solely responsible for ensuring the academic success of students, and they were not the sole source of academic support. Each director indicated that student athletes achieve academic success when stakeholders work as a team to support students. Stakeholders include teachers, counselors, coaches, and parents. The directors noted how each of these stakeholders plays a role to make sure all student athletes are on the track to academic success. The director at Willcrest stressed how it took a collaborative effort to ensure that student athletes were not falling through the cracks:

It takes a village here. I mean, it also takes teachers bringing it to the counselor's attention: "Hey, this kid's struggling. Hey, did you look at this? Do you know if this kid needs this class?" So, it takes many people helping.

The athletic director from Lakeshore echoed this sentiment of collaboration, saying:

I definitely would say that the teachers are working to try to talk to coaches or to talk to me, and then admin as well. They're here to support, as well, whenever students have certain situations.

Both directors highlighted specifically how there were many people on a student's support team, and each athletic director alluded to frequent communication between themselves, teachers, counselors, coaches, and parents. It was through that communication that a student's issues and needs were identified and addressed as soon as possible. This section dives deeper into the role that each of these people plays in the academic success of student athletes.

Teacher support. According to the athletic directors, teachers were a necessary member of the support team for student athletes as they were some of the first people to identify if a student was struggling academically. The director at Navidad High stressed the importance of reaching out to teachers early, saying,

I'll email my teachers and make sure that if there're any issues that they can let me know. I try to be proactive. I try to have a proactive relationship with our teachers so that way grades aren't as surprising, we know ahead of time if the kid's having a hard time, that we know what we need to do to get him the support he needs so that before the report card comes out.

This proactive communication could help ensure that students were getting the support they needed before they fell far behind. The director at Citadel High shared a similar sentiment and spoke about his informal system of communicating with staff regarding struggling students:

If we're having trouble with a student, their counselors put all their teachers on one email to help with that student. I think that really helps identify kids that maybe we are struggling with.

This type of communication between teachers and counselors allowed teachers to share the best methods of how to help specific students. Support from teachers did not end at noting that a student was struggling; rather, it also entailed supporting that student inside and outside of class time. The director at Westfield High had high praise for the efforts of their teachers:

Our teachers, I believe, really go above and beyond to help ensure that students are getting their grades into a good place. They'll stay during their lunchtime. They'll come

earlier, before school. They'll stay late after school. . . . They're willing to work with our student athletes, and I see that across the board among our staff members.

This response indicated that it is critical for teachers to be flexible when working with student athletes. As mentioned previously, office hours provided by teachers could be a source of help for student athletes who might have missed content due to a game or have been struggling in class.

When speaking of academic supports for student athletes, all the athletic directors noted the importance of having teachers as allies. Teachers can identify struggling students and bring them to the attention of the athletic director. Additionally, teachers can provide one-on-one support to student athletes by making themselves available through office hours or by providing additional support in class. While teachers play a critical role, their cooperation was not always guaranteed. While the five participating athletic directors had high praise for their teachers, that may not have been the case at all schools.

Counseling team. Counselors also emerged as pivotal members of the team supporting student athletes. Specifically, athletic directors shared that counselors monitored students to ensure that they stayed on track to graduate and that counselors can also guide students to take courses that fulfill college eligibility requirements. The counselor served as another set of eyes on a student athlete's transcript to make sure that all academic requirements were being met. The athletic director at Lakeshore shared that he had a similar relationship with the counselors at his site, saying,

When they know that someone is an athlete, they'll usually come to me. If there's anybody with a glaring situation where, hey, this kid is not on track to graduate, they will kind of pull me aside right away and say, "Hey, this kid needs this."

Where teachers were able to see a student's daily academic progress, counselors had a bird's eye view. They can look across all classes and check from year to year to see if a student was on track to graduate. Counselors could work with the athletic director to create a support plan for student athletes who may have gotten off track.

Each athletic director interviewed also indicated that there was one counselor on site who was trained in the academic requirements for college recruitment. Therefore, the counselor could be a crucial ally to athletic directors during the recruitment process. For example, the director at Navidad worked with his counselors to review student transcripts to ensure that everything was in order before the recruitment process began for student athletes:

I'll make sure that I check their transcript. If I have any questions about [transcripts], if there're any issues with it, I will send it to their counselor, who is best informed on the Clearinghouse, and make sure that if there's an issue that we try to get it taken care of, so that way when the time comes, if they have the chance, they can accept an offer.

Here, the director made a reference to the Clearinghouse and the preparation for the recruitment process. The Clearinghouse is an online database managed by the NCAA Eligibility Center where student athletes who want to be recruited to play sports must upload their transcript and test scores and answer a questionnaire regarding their status as an amateur athlete. If a recruiter was interested in a student, they requested their information from the NCAA Eligibility Center. The Eligibility Center then went through the Clearinghouse database to see if a student athlete had met the necessary academic requirements to proceed with the recruitment process. Each of the schools had a counselor who was trained in this database; therefore, counselors with this specific knowledge become a critical component in the community of support for student athletes. However, the counselor trained in the NCAA eligibility requirements was not

specifically assigned to all student athletes. This can leave room for students to receive academic advising that does not align with the NCAA requirements.

Coach support. While many coaches are not directly involved in the education of student athletes, the athletic directors indicated that coaches could serve as an ally by emphasizing the importance of academics. The director at Navidad talked about how the coaches could serve as a mentor to many athletes, saying, “All of our coaches who have a kid that’s a good student, who’s having success as an athlete. We all start trying right away to steer them in the right direction.” The director’s comments supported the belief that coaches can play a role in putting students on the right academic track. The director at Citadel echoed this sentiment, saying, “Some kids are not as motivated in the classroom. So that coach can help get them to realize, hey, this is why you’re going to school.” The director at Citadel believed that coaches had a special relationship with students and that their opinions and advice could reach a student in a way that counselors and teachers cannot.

In addition to providing motivational words of encouragement, coaches also serve as another set of eyes to monitor students’ academic progress. The director at Westfield indicated that “the coaches regularly track our student athletes’ academic progress, making sure that they’re staying on track.” At some school sites, coaches were heavily involved if not responsible for tracking the academic progress and eligibility of their student athletes. When this responsibility was left to coaches, it could allow them to be more involved; however, there could be variance in how frequently grades were checked. The director at Lakeshore revealed that “certain coaches will track more than others as far as where their kids are, as far as passing classes, et cetera.” This means that some students were getting a more frequent check-in,

allowing for quick intervention to take place. Some coaches, the director at Willcrest suggested, lack the time to monitor every student on the team: “The coaches will try, but that’s unfortunately one of the many jobs that they’re doing, and often it’s only on the kid that’s really struggling.” While this was helpful to struggling students, this observation by the director suggested that coaches do not necessarily have the bandwidth to monitor the academic performance of every student on their team.

Overall, the athletic directors interviewed agreed that coaches can be allies in supporting and encouraging student athletes to maintain good grades. Some coaches had the capacity to check the grades of their players frequently, potentially allowing for quicker intervention. Some coaches, however, were unable to check grades frequently or were not required to take on this duty. This indicated that there was variance in support from coaches not only between schools but also within schools.

Parent engagement. Athletic directors also commented on the need to keep parents informed of the academic expectations of student athletes. For example, the director from Citadel High spoke of a workshop where the parents of freshmen, sophomore, and juniors were invited to discuss “the new rules for Clearinghouse, the core classes, the GPAs, and their SATs.” All five athletic directors mentioned provided a similar workshop for their parents and students to share critical information. What was absent from all the responses was that the athletic director was in conversation with parents about their student’s academic performance. None of the directors indicated that they reached out to parents when they noticed that a student was struggling academically. The absence of this from their responses did not mean this communication was not happening, yet it was unclear how the school engaged parents about the

academic performance of their student. It may have been the assumption of the directors that just making parents aware of academic expectation was enough and that other members of the support team (teachers and counselors) were reaching out to parents when a student was struggling.

Overall, each athletic director indicated that there were many people on campus who played a role in the academic success of student athletes. Teachers, counselors, coaches, and parents must communicate and work together as a community to ensure the academic success of student athletes. When these different stakeholders come together, they create a greater network of support, leading to a higher chance of academic success for students. Despite all five athletic directors referencing a community of support, the amount of support that was provided to student athletes looked different from school to school and even from sport to sport within a school.

Improving Support for Student Athletes

While athletic directors were able to identify existing supports for students, there are still ways to provide better academic support for student athletes. To address the second research question, athletic directors spoke about additional supports that schools could offer to better support student athletes academically. The athletic directors indicated several issues that existed within high schools related to academic performance and used those observations as the impetus for brainstorming structures needed to better support their athletes academically.

Issues with Academic Performance

Despite providing the supports described above, athletic directors indicated that there are still issues with academic performance among student athletes. Student athletes, by design, must meet a minimum level of academic achievement in order to stay eligible to play sports. Taking

California for example, the California Interscholastic Federation (CIF) required that all students have a minimum of a 2.0 GPA in order to participate in athletics (California Interscholastic Federation, 2017). This requirement ensured that student athletes were meeting a baseline level of academic proficiency. These academic requirements were meant to ensure that athletics did not impede academic performance. For example, the athletic director at Lakeshore commented on how the athletics requirement aligns with graduation requirements:

There is a little bit of carrot that's dangled with athletics with the 2.0 GPA, so I mean, at the bare minimum that kid should be graduating from high school if they're meeting those requirements.

As seen in the example above, the 2.0 GPA was the baseline requirement set by the CIF, and if achieved by the student, it would help steer students towards fulfilling their high school graduation requirements. Some schools go beyond the minimum 2.0 GPA and required an even higher level of achievement from their students. Westfield was the only school interviewed that indicated any additional academic requirements beyond the minimum 2.0 GPA. The athletic director at Westfield High stated that their district passed a board policy that required student athletes not to have any combination of three Ds or Fs in their required coursework. The rationale behind this policy, the athletic director said, was to prevent student athletes from meeting the 2.0 GPA requirement due to high grades in elective classes despite having low grades in core classes such as English and math. This additional requirement meant that the academic expectations of student athletes at Westfield were different than other schools.

Despite CIF and school-specific academic requirements for athletes, there was still variance in the academic success among student athletes between and within each of the five

schools. Each athletic director indicated variety in academic performance of their student athletes, but the director at Willcrest put it best, saying,

We have students that will take a heavy load of advanced placement courses and still be a student athlete. And then we also have some kids that are just taking the minimum and just enjoying the athletic experience and trying to stay eligible and manage their way to get through.

This quote and the sentiments of the athletic directors revealed that there was wide variance when it came to the academic performance of student athletes. Some student athletes were taking advanced courses and others were not. There were some student athletes who were going above and beyond the 2.0 minimum GPA, while others were barely meeting the expectation. While the academic requirements of student athletes could create an environment where achievements such as high school graduation can be possible, there were still students who were struggling to meet that minimum requirement. Even more concerning was that despite the supports being provided to student athletes, there was still a wide range in terms of academic performance. When I asked athletic directors to speculate the reason behind this, many reasons were given such as academic preparation and time management.

Academic preparation. Academic preparation refers to how much knowledge students come into high school with from middle school. The athletic director at Citadel pointed to students' level of academic preparation as an explanation for why there was such a variance in performance. The director stated that "not all students have the same opportunities as others" and that "once they were given the right support, they could reach the desired level of achievement, it just took time." The director at Citadel acknowledged that all students do not come into high school with the same academic skills or the same academic strengths. It was his belief that this

variance in preparation caused a variance in performance. The athletic director at Lakeshore made a more specific observation:

With the African-American population in particular, we do notice that they do struggle with some of the core classes, math classes, even some of the English classes. Those are some of the things that prevent them and hinder them from making it to the next level.

The director at Lakeshore, being a Black male himself, saw that the Black students at his school were struggling with math and English. This struggle may have been due to a lack of academic preparation in elementary and middle school. If students had not mastered or not been exposed to the skills they needed for their high school courses, it would have been natural for them to struggle with the content. If student athletes did not come in with the academic skills they needed for class, it would be difficult for them to experience academic success and to reach the academic expectations set forth.

Time management. When asked about the roadblocks that prevented student athletes from academic success, the overwhelming response was time management skills. The athletic director at Lakeshore commented on how time management is a widespread concern:

That's probably the toughest thing with any student athlete, no matter what school you're at, is to find that balance because it's demanding to be at practice every day for multiple hours a day at the same time that other students are able to do homework.

Student athletes must balance their academic responsibilities with their athletic responsibilities.

The struggle to balance academics was not exclusive to student athletes who are deemed "low academic achievers." The athletic director at Willcrest added to this observation, noting that even students deemed high academic achievers struggle in this area:

There are some [student athletes] that will take that overwhelming AP class load, but then there are others that will realize, like, "Hey, I've got to find a balance. I want to take a couple of advanced classes, but I can't be successful at my sport and yet at the same time still take four or five advanced placement classes. It's just not going to work."

The observations by the director indicated that even students who were considered high achievers cut back on their academic load during their athletic season to prevent their grades from being compromised by their athletic commitment. Not all students struggled with time management while participating in athletics. The athletic director at Citadel found that the addition of athletics has helped some students with their academic achievement:

I find that kids do better during their season because we monitor their GPAs throughout the year, and usually during their sport, they do better. And sometimes when they have more free time, I think they get distracted.

The director found that when students were in season, they had a routine and a schedule that made it easier for them to focus on their academics. When students were not in their athletic season, that structure and routine were lost, causing students to mismanage their time.

Additionally, student athletes received more academic support than they received when they were not in season.

The comments regarding academic performance painted a picture of varying achievement among student athletes. Some student athletes were high academic achievers, while others were barely making the minimum academic requirement. One potential reason for this achievement gap was the academic preparation of students. Students came into high school with varied academic experiences and preparation, causing high schools to provide additional support to students to get them to where they needed to be. Moreover, athletic directors indicated that having time management skills was crucial to keep student athletes on track to graduate. Directors indicated that student athletes struggle to balance both athletics and academics. However, for some students the time constraints that athletics imposed gave them the structure they needed to do well. The issues with academic performance among student athletes

emphasized a need for continued academic support to ensure all students graduated and were qualified to move on to a four-year college.

Collegiate Support

As discussed in Chapter 3, athletic directors indicated that graduation data were available for all students at their high schools but not always tracked specifically for student athletes. The number of student athletes graduating and attending college (whether recruited or not) could be used as an indicator of success for academic supports. In the absence of data regarding student athletes in this study, I reviewed publicly available data from DataQuest, which was run by the California Department of Education, to comment on how successful each school is in getting their students to graduate and be eligible to go to college. The data presented in this study were a representation of the cohort of students who graduated in the 2016-2017 school year. These data were important to take into consideration and provided evidence for the effectiveness of existing academic supports available to student athletes. The study examined both high school graduation data, defined as the percentage of students who graduate, and college eligibility data, defined as the completion of the required courses for college admission, which in the State of California are called the A-G requirements.

High school graduation. The graduation rates for student athletes as a subgroup of students could not be gathered from each participating high school. However, the information in Table 6 provides data on the graduation rates for all students at each of the participating school sites. In addition to the overall graduation rate, the chart disaggregates the data by ethnicity and gender. Table 6 shows that the graduation rate at each of the schools is higher than the state average. All five participating school sites had graduation rates above 90%, which was above the

state average (88.7%). At all five school sites, female students graduated at a higher rate than their male peers. When broken down by ethnicity, there was a close margin in the graduation rates. However, Westfield High was the only school that had a sizable difference between male and female student athletes by ethnicity. For example, 100% of Black females graduated as opposed to only 86.7% of Black males. Additionally, 100% of females of other ethnicities graduated in comparison to their male peers, who graduated at a rate of 84.6%.

While there was still some disparity in academic achievement for this specific indicator, the high graduation rate of each school was an important accomplishment. High school graduation was the first step to college acceptance for students and was a critical step in recruitment for student athletes. The director at Lakeshore foreshadowed a new focus on completion of courses that satisfy college eligibility when he said, “Most athletes are already on track to graduate. Our biggest hurdle now is the college requirements, A through G.” The data showed that schools were on their way to having 100% of their students graduate high school, which was a positive indication of student athletes being on track to graduate as well. Now, the next hurdle is to ensure that those graduating are also eligible to apply to college.

Table 6
Graduation Rates by Ethnicity and Gender (2016-17)

School	Gender	White		Asian		Black		Hispanic		Other		Total	
		Number of Seniors	Percent of Graduates	Number of Seniors	Percent of Graduates	Number of Seniors	Percent of Graduates	Number of Seniors	Percent of Graduates	Number of Seniors	Percent of Graduates	Number of Seniors	Percent of Graduates
Citadel High	Female	58	98.3%	30	100.0%	58	98.3%	108	99.1%	9	100.0%	263	98.9%
	Male	53	100.0%	26	100.0%	48	93.8%	101	94.1%	12	100.0%	240	96.3%
	Total	111	99.1%	56	100.0%	106	96.2%	209	96.7%	21	100.0%	503	97.6%
Lakeshore High	Female	4	100.0%	5	100.0%	51	94.1%	158	91.1%	11	N/A*	229	93.4%
	Male	5	100.0%	9	100.0%	43	93.0%	194	90.2%	12	N/A*	263	92.0%
	Total	9	100.0%	14	100.0%	94	93.6%	352	90.6%	23	N/A*	492	92.7%
Navidad High	Female	18	94.4%	6	100.0%	6	83.3%	117	97.4%	20	100.0%	167	97.0%
	Male	16	87.5%	4	100.0%	9	100.0%	120	95.0%	17	94.1%	166	94.6%
	Total	34	91.2%	10	100.0%	15	93.3%	237	96.2%	37	97.3%	333	95.8%
Westfield High	Female	17	N/A*	5	100.0%	9	100.0%	439	98.6%	9	100.0%	479	99.2%
	Male	27	88.9%	3	100.0%	15	86.7%	372	96.5%	13	84.6%	430	95.3%
	Total	44	97.7%	8	100.0%	24	91.7%	811	97.7%	22	90.9%	909	97.4%
Willcrest High	Female	90	95.6%	33	87.9%	54	81.5%	260	93.5%	33	97.0%	470	92.3%
	Male	94	97.9%	28	96.4%	48	79.2%	233	86.3%	20	100.0%	423	89.4%
	Total	184	96.7%	61	91.8%	102	80.4%	493	90.1%	53	98.1%	893	90.9%
State Total	Female	58,297	94.8%	20,651	96.7%	14,576	88.0%	123,331	90.5%	17,159	94.0%	234,014	92.2%
	Male	63,474	89.7%	22,350	93.3%	16,223	76.8%	129,862	82.8%	18,246	87.8%	250,155	85.5%
	Total	121,771	92.1%	43,001	94.9%	30,799	82.1%	253,193	86.5%	35,405	90.8%	484,169	88.7%

Note: Data sourced from DataQuest, by the California Department of Education, 2019, Sacramento, CA. Author: Copyright 2019 by California Department of Education.
* N/A refers to erroneous data; raw numbers exceeded the total number of graduates

College eligibility. Table 7 shows the percentage of graduating seniors who were eligible to apply to college during the 2016-2017 academic year. Being eligible meant that the student completed the required courses and earned the required GPA in those courses to be considered for college admissions. Table 7 also provides a breakdown of the eligibility rates for college admission by gender and ethnicity. The table shows a dramatic decrease in the number of students who were eligible to apply to college in comparison to the number of students graduating. Navidad had the highest college eligibility rate (69%), supporting the statements of the athletic director who praised the school for its improvement over the last 10 years. Citadel, the most ethnically diverse of the schools interviewed, had the second highest rate of college eligibility (63.3%). The college eligibility rate was substantially lower at Lakeshore High, with less than half of their graduating seniors eligible to apply to college (46.1%), which was slightly below the state eligibility rate (46.8%). The data revealed that across the board, students were graduating, but a significant percentage of them were not eligible to go to college.

At all five school sites, the total percentage of females eligible for college was higher than the percentage of male students eligible. At some of the school sites, there was a noteworthy difference between the graduation rate of female students and male students for certain demographics. For example, at Citadel 75.4% of Black females were eligible to graduate whereas only 48.9% of Black males were eligible to graduate. If this statistic holds true, it will support other studies' findings that show female student athletes perform better than their male student athlete peers (Broh, 2002; Fejgin, 1994; Lumpkin & Favor, 2012; Reynolds et al., 2012).

Table 7
Graduating Senior College Eligibility by Ethnicity and Gender (2016-17)

School	Gender	White		Asian		Black		Hispanic		Other		Total	
		Number of Graduates	Percent College Eligible	Number of Graduates	Percent College Eligible	Number of Graduates	Percent College Eligible	Number of Graduates	Percent College Eligible	Number of Graduates	Percent College Eligible	Number of Graduates	Percent College Eligible
Citadel High	Female	57	89.5%	30	93.3%	57	75.4%	107	59.8%	9	55.6%	260	73.5%
	Male	53	67.9%	26	65.4%	45	48.9%	95	41.1%	12	50.0%	231	51.9%
	Total	110	79.1%	56	80.4%	102	63.7%	202	51.0%	21	52.4%	491	63.3%
Lakeshore High	Female	4	50.0%	5	80%	48	54.2%	144	53.5%	13	53.8%	214	54.2%
	Male	5	60.0%	9	55.6%	40	30.0%	175	38.9%	13	46.2%	242	38.8%
	Total	9	55.6%	14	64.3%	88	43.2%	319	45.5%	26	50.0%	456	46.1%
Navidad High	Female	17	82.4%	6	83.3%	5	40.0%	114	76.3%	20	70.0%	162	75.3%
	Male	14	71.4%	4	75.0%	9	44.4%	114	59.6%	16	81.3%	157	62.4%
	Total	31	77.4%	10	80.0%	14	42.9%	228	68.0%	36	75%	319	69.0%
Westfield High	Female	19	52.6%	5	60.0%	9	44.4%	433	61.9%	9	55.6%	475	61.1%
	Male	24	41.7%	3	66.7%	13	23.1%	359	46.0%	11	54.5%	410	45.4%
	Total	43	46.5%	8	62.5%	22	31.8%	792	54.7%	20	55.0%	885	53.8%
Willcrest High	Female	86	80.2%	29	62.1%	44	52.3%	243	57.6%	32	75.0%	434	63.1%
	Male	92	73.9%	27	74.1%	38	31.6%	201	39.3%	20	60.0%	378	50.5%
	Total	178	77.0%	56	67.9%	82	42.7%	444	49.3%	52	69.2%	812	57.3%
State Total	Female	55,240	57.9%	19,969	78.4%	12,827	42.5%	111,557	45.9%	16,133	58.7%	215,726	52.7%
	Male	56,931	46.6%	20,850	68.8%	12,473	28.3%	107,555	32.7%	16,025	47.3%	213,834	40.8%
	Total	112,171	52.1%	40,819	73.5%	25,300	35.5%	219,112	39.4%	32,158	53.1%	429,560	46.8%

Note: Data sourced from DataQuest, by the California Department of Education, 2019, Sacramento, CA. Author: Copyright 2019 by California Department of Education.

The director at Westfield expressed that the staff had a desire to see all students reach this goal:

So many people are invested in [students'] successes that we really do try to offer them as much support as possible to get them to the next level, should they choose at the very least to graduate and to be able to go to a CSU or UC. Even if they choose not to go that route, we try to make sure that they have that option available to them.

The academic supports provided at Westfield were put in place to help students succeed academically so that they can have options after graduating high school, one of those options being the ability to apply to college. The director at Lakeshore expanded on this desire and made a critical connection:

I understand graduating and college is not necessarily everyone's plan, but I would love for every kid to have that option by the time of graduation. . . . I think if we prepare them that way, to where we have more kids A through G, you'd probably see a lot more scholarships.

Academic support is clearly about more than just improving academic performance and graduating high school. Academic support is now framed as helping students be eligible to go to college, increasing their potential to be eligible for scholarships both academic and athletic. This also widens the options that students have available to them after graduation.

Given the data above, high schools were doing a good job getting students to graduate, but they had room to improve when it comes to college eligibility rates. The data also showed that Black males were underperforming their Hispanic male classmates in terms of college eligibility. This was a point of concern because if students are not academically eligible, those who were student athletes were also not eligible for recruitment to play at the collegiate level. More specific data are needed to assess whether student athletes are getting the support they need to meet their goals to be recruited by a college.

Recruitment. If students want to play collegiate sports, they must go through a formal recruitment process. Recruiting happens when a college representative invites a high school student athlete to play sports for the college they represent. Recruiting can occur in a variety of ways, such as face-to-face contact or phone calls, and through mailed or emailed material. Each of the directors indicated that they do provide information about and assistance with the recruitment process. All five schools indicated that they provided workshops to students and parents about the academic requirements for the NCAA. The director at Citadel High described the information that is provided to student athletes as well as parents:

We have different workshops at nights for the parents that we go over the Clearinghouse. We go over what it takes to get into college as a student athlete. We'll have all the freshman parents or all the sophomore and junior parents come one night, and we'll go over the new rules for Clearinghouse, the core classes, the GPAs, and their SATs.

These workshops could be very eye-opening for both students and parents. Directors indicated that many times parents and students were not aware of how important academics was to the recruitment process. Colleges and universities may not even consider students, regardless of their talent, if they do not meet the minimum academic requirements.

The directors stressed that the more students know, the more likely they were to make choices that support their goal. When students demonstrated high athletic talent coupled with high academic performance, their chances of being recruited improved. Student athletes who were low academic achievers were reducing their chances of being recruited, according to the director at Lakeshore:

That [recruitment] process is never really started because once a school knows that a kid doesn't have the grades, they quickly inform the others. Usually, most schools aren't willing to take that risk because colleges care about their graduation rates. Accepting a kid like that, they think that that's a risk to their program and their graduation rate.

He had seen on multiple occasions students with high athletic talent be passed over because recruiters were afraid that the student would struggle with the heavy workload that college demands. College recruits, the director suspected, would prefer to bring on a student they knew will stay eligible to play all season long.

Regarding the support schools can provide student athletes, the emerging theme of collegiate support highlighted the progress schools have made in helping students to complete the high school graduation requirements. However, the publicly available data also highlighted the gap between high school graduation and college eligibility, including gaps for Black and Hispanic students. Athletic directors were working to inform students of the NCAA academic requirement in hopes that more students would be motivated to do well in their classes and become eligible for recruitment. The reality is high school students cannot be recruited on pure talent alone; they must meet the academic requirements set forth by the NCAA. A student's academic performance can play a critical role in the recruitment process because it is an indication of how likely a student will be academically eligible to play in college.

Modified expectations. When athletic directors spoke of having informal conversations about future aspirations, they shared specific examples of talking with students about adjusting their expectations beyond high school. Athletic directors shared that families can have an unrealistic expectation that their child will be recruited and/or receive an athletic scholarship to play in college. The director at Lakeshore talked about parents and their views on becoming a collegiate athlete:

I feel like from like Pop Warner football, to AAU basketball, to Little League baseball, all those sports, even their club soccer teams, parents are probably even more invested in their success than the kid is a lot of times. There is this pressure to earn a scholarship and to make it.

The observation revealed that dreams to go to college and/or play professionally were driven not just by students but also by parents. This could force coaches to have difficult conversations with students when they were not performing at a level that matches their dreams. The director at Lakeshore High continued his reflection:

Maybe the D-I school that you want to go to isn't matched with your athletic ability, maybe there's a Division II or Division III school you can go to where, you know what, it's not as high of an expectation as far as the type of athletes they're recruiting, but at the end of the day, it's still an opportunity for you to continue to play sports. It's still an opportunity for you to receive aid in order to pay for your education.

Sometimes the coach or the director was the person to have a hard conversation with students that the Division I school of their dreams was not attainable. They may have even needed to encourage students to consider a Division II or Division III school.

In addition to modifying expectations of athletic ability, coaches and directors may even need to have conversations about the financial realities of paying for college. The director from Navidad High echoed that sentiment, reflecting on the school's desire to match students with the right college for them: "[Students] have to get in the school they can afford, that they can be successful in, and we're getting better and better at it." While the director at Navidad commented on the school's improved ability to send students to the college right for them, this was a school effort, not one that could be driven solely by the athletics department, and not an objective exclusively for student athletes. The director at Citadel High also served as a coach for the school football team. He spoke of the harsh realities of being recruited:

I think that's the biggest struggle that I as a coach; we have 140 kids in the program in school. Not all 140 are going to go on to play college football, but all 140 can pursue college or trade school or something, have a goal of what they want to do in the future.

According to the statistics gathered by the NCAA, only 6% of high school athletes go on to play collegiate sports (NCAA Research Staff, 2015). The director at Citadel cited the intense odds of being a collegiate athlete as a reason for student athletes to shift their focus to getting into college regardless of their ability to play collegiate sports.

None of the directors indicated that their school was providing services to student athletes that addressed their specific future aspirations. Despite not providing formal supports, there was an indication that informal support was provided to students, particularly when it comes to the realities and difficulties of becoming a collegiate athlete. Directors and their coaches must provide counseling regarding post-high school aspirations. Difficult discussions took place when a student realized that recruitment to a Division I school was not attainable. Directors and coaches might have had to counsel students to consider a school that was more appropriate for their talents and their family budget. The variance and lack of specific academic support for student athletes across the schools highlighted a need to assess the systematic structures in place that cause this variance.

Systematic Support

The interviews with the athletic directors revealed that there was variance in the support being provided to student athletes; in other words, some schools could provide more support than others. One reason behind this variance might have been the level of agency and autonomy that the directors had at their school sites. An emerging theme in the interviews was the systematic structures in place at the respective school sites that impacted the individual athletic director's ability to be innovative and to address the academic needs of student athletes. This section focuses on how directors navigate the systems and structures in place at their school site to help

support student athletes. Directors were dealing with issues of data collection, limitation of specialized support staff, and a heavy workload. Despite these difficulties, the directors had a vision for the future.

Collecting data. What makes an athletic department successful? Whatever the indicator of success is, it is typically measured to monitor progress and improvement. Therefore, the lack of responses and completed surveys for the quantitative portion of the study spurred a list of new questions. Why were directors unable to finish the survey? What data did athletic directors have access to? Is academic performance not an indicator of success that is measured? As discussed in Chapter 3, the survey sent to athletic directors was meant to collect data on the demographic makeup of student athletes, the number of senior student athletes who graduated, the number of graduating senior student athletes who were accepted into a four-year college or university, and the number of senior student athletes going to college who were recruited to play sports for the college or university. After receiving incomplete survey data, I made sure to ask these questions during the interviews. While the directors could tell me anecdotally the trends regarding these indicators, they could not give numerical data. When asked if their program was tracking these achievements, all of the athletic directors said that this was not data that they had access to, nor was that data explicitly collected about student athletes. They admitted that was why the survey was so hard to complete. The director at Willcrest stated:

It's not something that we do track. Our school, like counseling office, will track our overall student population and kids going on to college and what universities or junior colleges and stuff that they are registered to go to. But from an athletic standpoint, we don't look at it necessarily as our student athletes and what specifically, where they're going, are they going on to universities or not.

The director at Westfield echoed these sentiments:

We are tracking the student athletes who are identified as having a potential, and we are tracking all of our student athletes; however, we just don't have concrete numbers on who's meeting A through G requirements and who's meeting UC and CSU requirements as of this year, but that's something that we're hoping to have by the end of this school year.

The tracking that she was alluding to was the collection of students' GPAs; this is a requirement by the CIF. The school was collecting data regarding graduation and A-G completion; these data were even publicly available in online databases. The data could be broken down to various subpopulations by race, gender, socioeconomic status, migrant status, and English learners. However, student athletes were not one of the subpopulations where the data were available. Data can be a powerful tool to justify needs, provide accountability, and monitor performance. Since high schools are not required to collect that information and are not yet taking the initiative to do so, they are losing access to a powerful tool.

Specialized support staff. The leadership structure of high school athletic departments varied from school to school. While each director indicated there was a counselor on site who was familiar with the NCAA Clearinghouse, counselors had their own caseloads and did not work under the athletic director. Nearly all the athletic directors interviewed worked as individuals. The director at Westfield High was the only director who had a support staff team (the NCAA coordinator and assistant coordinator) to assist with some of the responsibilities of supporting student athletes. The director at Lakeshore commented on how the leadership structure can impact the efficiency of the athletics program:

Some schools, you might have a co or a secretary or something like that, but here, we only have me. . . . There's a lot of ideas that I have or the teachers bring up to me; it's hard to execute in addition to your current job duties.

The presence or the lack of specialized support staff can impact the capacity level of the athletic director. Many of the academic support programs that were provided specifically for student athletes were available because there was specialized support staff involved (i.e., academic coach and NCAA coordinator). The heavy workload of the position and the need to focus on operational demands could potentially be preventing directors from bringing change about.

Workload. All of the athletic directors noted that their workload made it difficult for them to achieve their goals. The director at Lakeshore described the long list of duties that fell under the athletic director:

My role here is basically to make sure that the athletic department runs smoothly, everything from transportation to schedules, to budgeting, equipment, running through and checking academic grades, transfers, everything almost. You name it, it pretty much goes with athletics.

Athletic directors have a wide range of responsibilities and a limited amount of time to accomplish them. When asked about the work schedule, the director at Citadel responded, “It’s a 60-hour work week, so when you come in it is, it’s pedal to the metal.” This fast-paced work environment could cause athletic directors to prioritize time-sensitive issues like scheduling games, organizing transportation, and monitoring eligibility. This made it difficult to prioritize long-term change. The director at Lakeshore commented on how the demands of the job can often impede the growth of the program:

If you don’t know [athletic directors], you have a million different issues throughout the day, and it’s hard to do the extensive things that need to be done in order to further promote the success of your student athletes, especially when it comes to academics, because you’re just trying to take care of the basic needs of your programs.

The workload that athletic directors had to manage seemed to be preventing them from making innovative changes in their programs overall. This fast-paced work environment could often

cause athletic directors to function in a reactionary way, responding to the current emergency or need. This prevented them from taking time to reflect on the systems they had in place to support student athletes academically and ways to improve those supports.

Athletic directors have various levels of systematic support to accomplish their job. Some directors were fortunate enough to work at a school where there was additional support staff to help provide specialized support exclusively to student athletes. This additional support could help lighten some of the load by delegating some responsibility to support staff, thereby giving athletic directors more time to focus on academic needs. However, without additional specialized support staff, it became difficult to focus on the long-term goals of the program. The immense workload could cause directors to prioritize urgent issues and neglect more time-intensive tasks such as collecting data. Athletic directors were operating in various contexts and had various levels of systematic support to accomplish their job. This variance in support caused variance in the services that student athletes were receiving from school to school.

Future Support

Despite these hurdles in their various contexts, each of the athletic directors elaborated on what improvements and changes they would like to see at their site to help improve the academic performance of student athletes. The directors had a variety of ideas, but many of them desired to have an additional staff member who would either work with students one on one or would help with the academic tracking of students. The director at Citadel would like to give students additional time to complete their work:

I think all kids could use an extra study hall period. That we could really help them academically take more time with them in certain classes and stuff. I think any time they can get more one-on-one tutoring, one-on-one help, I think that would be great.

The director at Citadel wanted to expand the athletic peer tutoring program that the school had created, a space where students were required to spend time studying within the school day, rather than having students miss a practice or come after practice. The director at Navidad would also like to provide more individualized academic support by hiring a full-time academic coach:

I would say the biggest thing is just finding somebody who's qualified [to be an academic coach] who has the time. I'm sure you could find the stipend for the guy to do it, but it's just very hard to find somebody that was so gifted like he was to be able to the kids were very, very comfortable coming in the door and just getting the help they needed.

The director at Navidad expressed interest in having a long-term academic coach for student athletes but expressed having an unreliable influx of people to fill the position.

Expanding staff within the athletics program was also a common vision for future supports. The athletic director at Lakeshore High would like to model a program like Westfield's NCAA coordinator in order to provide more academic advisement to student athletes. The director was working to bring on additional staff to help focus on academics:

I'm planning to bring someone in that is specifically on the academic side for our athletes. Someone who can assist with pulling grades on a more frequent basis. . . so to have another person on campus that can focus on a sub-group that needs it, that needs that help, would help tremendously.

Lakeshore was not the only school with an athletic director who would like to see more members on the academic support staff for student athletes. The director at Willcrest wanted to take academic advisement a step further:

An academic advisor assigned to each team to where there's a person that was specifically focused on the academics of all the student athletes on each team, and being able to work with them and help them balance their schedules and balance their time.

This structure is modeled after TPP, which can be found at the collegiate level. Each sports team has its own academic advisor to provide more personalized advising on academics. Both

directors believe that if students had more advising, more data could be collected, and more tailored supports could be provided to student athletes.

Both Lakeshore and Willcrest wanted to see academic supports like what is already available at Westfield High. The Westfield director desired to see the current NCAA coordinator dedicate more time to the position:

I would love for the NCAA coordinator to be its own position on our campus, manned by a credentialed teacher, of course, but I would love to see that really be its own position or at least a teacher on special assignment-type position, maybe if you pull out periods where he could strictly focus on the NCAA program.

Turning the NCAA coordinator into a full-time position would mean that more attention could be given to student athletes. As of 2019, the coordinator still had a full-time teaching assignment in addition to his role as NCAA coordinator. The demands of the position required him to put in countless hours outside of school, causing him to put in more work than he was compensated for.

In addition to making the role of the NCAA coordinator a full-time position, the director at Westfield would like to create a student athlete success center to mirror the supports seen at the collegiate level:

What I envision with that would be essentially a computer lab, where that would be open before school and after school, where student athletes could come to get their work done. We would have tutors coming in, and we could work with some of our local community college students to see if we could bring tutors over who would help man the student athletes success center, provide resources and help for students who are struggling with their various homework assignments.

This vision for the Westfield athletics program models what colleges and universities are providing to their student athletes. Space would be created on campus that is specifically for student athletes. The center would implement strategies such as peer tutoring academic coaches to provide one-on-one tutoring.

The different athletic directors had a range of ideas to help support their student athletes, but their interviews indicated that they need additional support to see their vision of academic support realized.

Conclusion

Findings revealed that schools were providing a variety of supports to help student athletes academically. Various academic supports included study halls, office hours, peer tutoring, and credit recovery. Students also had access to academic coaches, academic counseling, and at some schools, NCAA programming. These supports were maintained by a community of stakeholders that included teachers, counselors, coaches, and parents, all working together to support student athletes academically. However, many of these supports were for the general student population and not exclusive to student athletes. According to the athletic directors, only two schools indicated they were providing academic supports that were exclusively for student athletes.

While the schools had academic supports in place, there were policies and practices that could be changed to better support student athletes. Despite providing the listed academic supports, athletic directors were still seeing variance in academic preparation and achievement within the student athlete population. While some student athletes were performing at the top of their class, others were struggling to meet the minimum academic requirements. These academic supports implemented by a community of people have made it possible for the schools to graduate over 90% of their students. However, the data also showed that less than 70% (with the state average being 47%) of graduating seniors were college eligible (California Department of Education, 2019). This was arguably the greatest area of growth for each of the school sites.

When asked what academic support they would like to see at their school site, many athletic directors indicated the desire to increase the amount of one-on-one tutoring (through a support center, additional academic coaches, or even through office hours during school time) or by increasing the staff within the athletic department to focus specifically on academics.

While these visions of future support could help address some of the shortcomings of the athletics program, the results of this study have also created additional questions about the capacity of athletic directors to make actual changes. The directors indicated that their heavy workload made it difficult for them to focus on some of the issues mentioned or to implement the visions they have for future support. The variance in resources, context, and systematic support made it difficult for directors to focus on anything other than the daily operations of the athletic program. Additionally, a lack of data on the academic performance of student athletes made it difficult to advocate for and justify the need for added support. The next chapter discusses these findings through the theoretical lens of transformational leadership.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

While there are regulations stipulating the minimum GPA requirements and specific courses required for student athletes to remain academically eligible, very little is known about the types of support high school student athletes receive to succeed academically. The purpose of this study was to identify academic supports being provided to student athletes to assist them in experiencing academic success. The study also asked athletic directors to speak about structures that would better support student athletes. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How are student athletes supported academically in high school?
2. What structures would better support student athletes?

This study engaged five athletic directors from across Southern California in a conversation about the academic support their school provided and asked them to identify what structures would better support student athletes with their academics. The results of this study were analyzed in a way that assessed how well current supports aligned with the TPP framework used by many universities to support student athletes with balancing their academic workload. Additionally, this study viewed athletic directors as leaders who were interested in identifying structures and practices that may need to be strengthened because they generated unequal outcomes and were not as effective as they could be.

As reviewed in Chapter 4, the interviews generated several reoccurring themes related to academic support such as study hall and a community of supports formulated by counselors, teachers, and parents. At the same time, issues with academic performance, problems navigating

collegiate eligibility, and a lack of systematic school support also emerged. The purpose of Chapter 5 is to discuss the findings in conjunction with prior research, identify limitations, pinpoint opportunities for further research, identify the implications of this research, and provide recommendations.

Discussion of Findings

Community of Supports

A theme that emerged from the data was that it is critical for there to be a community of support for student athletes at the high school level. This community included various stakeholders, including teachers, counselors, coaches, and parents. When these various individuals worked together for the good of the student, success could be achieved.

Each athletic director indicated that student athletes achieve academic success when various staff members work together as a team. It takes constant communication and collaboration to ensure that students are not falling through the cracks. A study by Harris, Hines, Kelly, Williams, and Bagley (2014) supported these findings. Harris et al. (2014) interviewed various stakeholders to assess what factors contributed to the academic engagement of student athletes. The study found that a team approach, one that involved all stakeholders executing one vision for the success of all students, should be employed in order to promote the academic engagement and success of Black male student athletes in high school. While this study specifically focused on Black male student athletes, these practices can benefit all student athletes.

Another study by Reynolds et al. (2012) further supported the need for a community of support. In this study, the researchers analyzed the relationship between demographic variables

(family structure, socioeconomic status, and gender) and athletic and academic performance. Participants were student athletes in selected NCAA Division I basketball programs in Southern states. The study found that the variables of family structure, socioeconomic status, and gender had a correlation with academic performance. Given the multiple environments (i.e., home, school community) and people within those environments who influence the educational experience of student athletes, it is only appropriate that all stakeholders be involved when creating an environment of academic success for student athletes.

Teacher support. As studies have indicated, interactions with educators can have an impact on the academic success of student athletes (Benson, 2000; Comeaux, 2005, 2008; Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Fuller, Lawrence, et al., 2017). The five athletic directors had high praise for their teachers and their willingness to provide accommodations for student athletes. These accommodations were consistent with the findings of a study by Fuller, Lawrence, Harrison, Eyanson, and Osika in 2017. The study surveyed various teachers and found that student athletes were given work extensions, excused from class time, and provided extra tutoring that was not available to their nonathlete peers. These types of accommodations allowed for student athletes to be academically successful and highlighted the importance of a positive relationship with teachers. Furthermore, if an athletic director had positive relationships with educators, teachers could become allies in identifying struggling students. Three of the five athletic directors made a specific reference to teachers identifying students who were struggling and bringing it to the attention of the athletics director in the hopes of providing intervention and correction.

Counseling support. In addition to teachers, counselors are a critical member of the community of support for student athletes. A key component of the TPP model is a commitment to academics. The NCAA recommended that student athletes receive academic counseling and advising to help ensure that they can reach their academic goals (NCAA, 2008). The high school athletic directors indicated that counselors assisted with monitoring the academic performance of student athletes and helped guide students to take classes that will allow them to be college eligible. A study by Gill and Farrington (2014) supported frequent contact with counseling staff. In their study of the impact of a TPP program on the GPA of Black male football players, the researchers found that schools should provide a dedicated counseling staff to student athletes and meet with them to discuss class attendance, relationships with professors, time management, and adapting to and coping in a university environment. While the participating schools in the current study provided opportunities for their students to meet with a counselor, there was not a dedicated counselor for student athletes who was informed of NCAA requirements, and there was no indication that counselors were meeting with athletes multiple times a year. While counselors played a critical role in advising and guiding student athletes, there is clear room for improvement.

Coach support. Another key player in the community of support for student athletes is the coach. The athletic directors indicated that coaches can serve as allies in academic achievement by reinforcing and prioritizing education to the students on their teams. The need for coaches to be engaged in the academic performance of their students was reinforced by a study by Comeaux et al. (2011). The study examined the extent to which transitioning first-year student athletes engaged in educationally sound activities in college. The researchers

recommended that coaches build meaningful relationships with the student affairs department to increase the coach's academic involvement and also increase accountability for the academic success and failures of their students. This level of engagement allows coaches to encourage students to be fully engaged in all their school has to offer beyond athletics. Further research would be needed to see if this holds true at the high school level.

In addition to being allies, coaches can also serve as mentors. The athletic director at Navidad noted how some of his coaches serve as mentors, steering their students in the right direction when they falter. This type of informal mentorship can help address some of the personal development and career advising needs of student athletes. While this type of mentorship is something coaches may naturally fall into, it is important that this practice is cultivated. This issue was the topic of a study by Banwell and Kerr (2016). The pair interviewed coaches on how they viewed their role in the personal development of student athletes. They found that coaches contributed in an informal rather than a formal way of mentorship. Banwell and Kerr recommend that schools train coaches on how to help with the personal development of student athletes. With this study in mind, high schools may want to consider having coaches play a more intentional role in the academic success of student athletes.

Parental support. Another partner in the community of support is parents. All five athletic directors noted that they provided workshops to keep parents informed about the NCAA requirements. What was absent from their responses was how the school kept parents engaged in the academic performance of their students.

The implications of this result highlighted the need for schools and athletic programs to engage parents in the academic performance of their children. Adam Zigelbaum (2014), the

author of *School Counseling and the Student Athlete*, recommended that schools take a collaborative approach and involve parents early and often when it comes to the academic performance of student athletes. Parents and family members can influence their child's drive for academic success; therefore, it is critical to engage parents in order to positively impact the academic success of a student athletes (Anderson, 1990; Beamon, 2010; Howard, 2014; Hwang et al., 2013; Reynolds et al., 2012; Zigelbaum, 2014). In his book *Race in Play*, author Carl James (2005) recommended that parents stay engaged in the educational experience of their child by ensuring that schools were providing equitable resources for all students, including student athletes.

Each of the athletic directors indicated that there was a community of teachers, counselors, coaches, and parents who worked together to help support student athletes. However, this community was only effective if there was a dialogue between all members. Members of the community did not always communicate frequently or effectively. This can lead to misinformation, miscommunication, and misinterpretations between the various stakeholders.

Alignment with Total Person Program

The theoretical framework that was used to interpret the data was the Total Person Program (TPP) framework of supports for collegiate student athletes. The supports that each of the participating high school athletic directors indicated were compared to that of the TPP framework used at the collegiate level. The TPP model calls for multidimensional support that addresses commitment to academic excellence, career development, personal development, athletic excellence, and service. While this study focused specifically on support to achieve academic excellence, the interviews shed light on what schools provided to support student

athletes with the other tenets of the TPP model. While the athletic directors did not mention providing specific support for the other tenets, that does not mean the supports were not provided. Athletic directors did discuss the need for assisting students and their families with time management, goal setting, and the realities of recruitment. The findings revealed that there may have been gaps in the holistic supports that are present in a TPP.

Commitment to academic excellence. In alignment with many study recommendations, the participating high schools were making study halls, office hours, and tutoring available to their student athletes (American Sports Institute, 1996; Carodine et al., 2001; Cooper, 2016; Gill & Farrington, 2014; Zigelbaum, 2014). While these supports were made available to student athletes, only two of the five schools (Citadel and Westfield Highs) had academic supports exclusively for student athletes, and several schools indicated that, at the time of this study, supports were not consistently provided. The directors at both Navidad and Willcrest both indicated that study hall was held inconsistently and that the structure of the study hall was inconsistent from team to team. Furthermore, only Westfield and Citadel provided variations in their office hours that made them accessible to student athletes. The lack of consistent and exclusive supports for student athletes highlighted a need for consistency and underscored the need for supporting student athletes in a more intentional way.

An additional component of academic excellence is receiving academic counseling and advising. All five participating schools had multiple counselors present on campus, and each student was assigned a counselor. Additionally, each school had at least one counselor who was trained in the NCAA recruitment requirements. However, all the athletic directors indicated that this trained counselor was not specifically assigned to all student athletes. This counselor only

took an active role if a student was being recruited to a college. Again, this underscores the need for supporting student athletes in a more intentional way. Without informed academic advising, students can take classes that fulfill graduation requirements but would make them ineligible for recruitment. For example, the athletic director at Lakeshore noted that students took online classes for credit recovery, but pure online classes did not fulfill NCAA requirements. Without regular access to an informed counselor, student athletes could be in danger of taking classes that do not meet the requirements for graduation and recruitment.

Athletic directors were concerned with the academic preparation and the variance in academic performance it caused among student athletes. When asked about what issues exasperated these issues, the overwhelming response was time management. While the athletic directors were able to identify that this was a needed skill, there was no indication that these executive functioning skills were intentionally being taught to student athletes. This was of concern because athletic directors indicated that some students adjust their course load to accommodate the demands of their athletic schedule. Students needed to be given the tools to integrate their academic and athletic priorities. As it stood, schools were creating an environment where students were forced to prioritize one over the other. An area of growth for each school is to provide intentional workshops on study skills, time management, and other academic skills. This can provide students the tools they need to manage their academic and athletic workload.

Commitment to career development. This pillar of the TPP framework potentially needs adjustment to be more relevant to the high school context. Researchers have recommended that students and staff members have intentional discussions about career aspirations and life goals (Burns et al., 2013; Carodine et al., 2001; Cooper, 2016; Zigelbaum, 2014). This mirrored

what athletic directors said about having discussions with students about adjusting their recruitment expectations. With only 6% of high school athletes going on to play collegiate sports, there is an urgent need to discuss alternative options. In fact, career development support may boost student agency (NCAA Research Staff, 2015). A study by Burns et al. (2013) found that students had more confidence in making career decisions when there was a perception of a strong support program. A strong program at the high school level might provide students more agency over their career choices if they provide assistance with finding summer internships or summer jobs, as recommended by Carodine et al. (2001). In addition to providing career guidance, the participating directors each indicated that their athletics program provided workshops to educate parents and students about the academic requirements for NCAA recruitment.

Commitment to personal development and service. While the study focused specifically on academic supports, it should be noted that there were aspects of TPP that did not reveal themselves in the findings. A TPP is meant to support student athletes by addressing the specific needs of student athletes and the diverse background of students. This approach can provide student athletes with the tools to navigate the academic, social, and athletic demands of being a student athlete. Aspects of personal development and service were not evident in the results of the study.

The NCAA recommends topics that can be covered to support personal development within student athletes. Topics such as nutrition, stress management, and addictive behavior can help student athletes understand the importance of maintaining a healthy physical and mental lifestyle needed to perform well in athletics and in class. Workshops that focus on topics such as

media relations, fiscal responsibility, and interpersonal communication skills can help student athletes navigate the social demands of being a student athlete. Such characteristics of personal development can be adjusted for high school students and assist with their transition to college. Studies have discussed the importance of student athletes transitioning to college and engaging with peers and professors (Comeaux, 2008; Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Gerdy, 1997; Tinto, 1993). This transition could be just as important with freshmen students in high school. While sports can be a great way to engage in school culture, it is important for student athletes to develop an identity outside of sports.

Absent from the results was also a culture of service. A TPP approach to supporting athletes incorporates mentoring and community service. While a culture of service was not discussed within the athletics program, that was not to say that it was not present in the schools overall. Perhaps incorporating service at the high school level can change the culture and view of athletes in the school and in the community overall. There was a perception that student athletes are local celebrities who receive privileges that non-athletes do not receive (Bissinger, 1990, 2015; Davies, 2017; Pruter, 2013). A culture of service may allow the school and the community to see athletics as more than just entertainment and athletes as role models in the community.

The results revealed that there was room for growth when it came to providing TPP supports at the high school level. Incorporating a TPP model at the high school level might help more student athletes transition to the demands of college and the workplace.

Commitment to athletic excellence. The NCAA encourages athletic departments to be robust and reflective. Their recommendations for creating an environment of athletic excellence demonstrate the desire to have schools evaluate their coaches, staff, operations, and program

with the intent of constantly making improvements (NCAA, 1999, 2008, 2014). The results of the study showed that not all schools operated with the resources and supports to run an athletics department that provided robust supports and was reflective of their practices. The results of the interviews showed that only one of the five schools had a team of educators dedicated to the academic support of student athletes. No school indicated that there was a formal evaluation of programs and practices within the athletics department with the goal of overall program improvement. Additionally, the lack of data collection cast doubt on the idea that success in the classroom was an indicator of success for student athletes as much as success in the arena. Collaboration between counselors and the athletic director can take place to build a collective database that combines the data that each one collects. Athletic directors had to track grades to ensure eligibility, and counselors collected data on which students were getting into college and where they chose to go. This data can be combined and used to inform all stakeholders about what is successful and what needs improvement.

While the participating schools were providing supports to help student athletes achieve academic success, they were providing general supports that did not necessarily address the needs nor fit within the schedule of student athletes. The original goal of a TPP was to create supports that were responsive to the unique needs of student athletes. The supports that existed at some of the school sites were not designed with student athletes in mind and were not inclusive of all five principles of the TPP framework. It will take leadership on the part of the athletic director to make the necessary changes to provide more holistic supports for student athletes.

Capacity for Improvement

Findings also showed that athletic directors identified areas to improve academic supports, correct the variance in academic preparation, develop student athletes' time management skills, and improve college eligibility rates. However, athletic directors from across all five schools expressed that the operational demands of their job made it difficult to implement change. Results also showed that many schools were not tracking the academic progress of their student athletes, making it difficult to identify whether the supports were effective or whether student athletes were performing at the same level as their non-athlete peers. These results showed that athletic directors were not able to operate as progressive leaders. Therefore, changes to existing support structures were viewed through a progressive leadership model, which was applied to the data to analyze how athletic directors were operating, analyzing, and modifying their athletics department.

According to transformational and transformative leadership models (Lambert, Zimmerman, Gardner, & Hargreaves, 2016; Langlois, 2011; Shields, 2011; Wagner, 2005), leaders must emphasize equitable change practices that seek to deconstruct and reconstruct social-cultural knowledge (Langlois, 2011; Shields, 2011). This requires athletic directors to take a critical look at existing organizational structures and cultures that generate inequality. To enact change, the improvement science model can be applied as a way to operationalize progressive leadership (Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, & LeMahieu, 2015). Applying this lens to the current study, athletic directors are in a position to implement progressive school leadership and work to improve the systems of support available to student athletes. However, the findings indicated that the athletic directors were not yet progressive leaders; to operationalize this process, school

leaders might adopt improvement principles to increase the leadership capacity of athletic directors (Bryk et al., 2015; Lambert et al., 2016).

The first improvement principle used to increase leadership capacity is to identify a specific problem that is impacting the academic performance of student athletes. The first step in becoming a leader dedicated to change is to identify a problem that needs to change. The athletic directors acknowledged that there were issues with the academic performance of student athletes. Not all student athletes were able to meet the academic expectations, and some were taking a challenging course, while others were taking the bare minimum. As stated by the directors, this variance in academic performance was due in part to the academic preparation students received prior to high school and the time management skills students had or had developed to cope with the workload. The athletic directors who participated in this study were able to identify issues specific to their educational context, which was a first step to increasing their leadership capacity. Moving forward, directors need to identify how these problems have created varied academic outcomes.

To continue to increase the leadership capacity of athletic directors, attention should be given to the variation in performance of student athletes. This was where the participating schools fell short. There were not very many supports in place exclusively for student athletes. Only one school site indicated that there was a staff member on site who was dedicated to monitoring the academic performance of student athletes. Other exclusive supports, such as study hall, were implemented irregularly, and tutoring services were dependent on additional educational funding. The existing supports varied greatly, and their implementation was not consistent, which can make it difficult to prove causation. Schools need to provide consistent and

exclusive support to accurately determine if or why there is a variance in academic performance. Once supports are consistent and exclusive, athletic directors can use the framework of progressive leadership to acknowledge the systematic power and privilege that produces inequity at their respective sites. Athletic directors and school leaders can determine what supports are producing positive outcomes for student athletes and identify systems and supports that produce harmful variation in performance. However, to show that these variances exist, athletic directors will need data on the academic performance of student athletes—data that schools are currently not collecting.

Another key principle of improvement is a recommendation delivered as a warning: “We cannot improve at scale what we cannot measure” (Bryk et al., 2015). Once a problem is identified, indicators of success must be developed and then measured frequently. This will allow organizations to identify variance in outcomes produced by the current system and assess if changes are having the desired effect. The athletic directors who participated in this study indicated that their school site was not collecting data on the graduation rates or the college eligibility rates of student athletes. If graduation and college eligibility are indicators of success for the athletics program, then they must be measured. The collection of this data will help increase the leadership capacity of athletic directors because they will have data to support their observations.

Limitations and Delimitations

The study had two delimitations that served as controls for the study. Athletic directors from charter and private schools were excluded from the study to control for school context. Private schools may have different funding sources available to them. To control for the variance

in financial resources (from schools with minimal funds to spare on athletics, to schools with robust booster clubs ready to donate additional money), only large public high schools were selected. Additionally, the study was delimited to schools in Southern California. This allowed for cultural differences due to geography to be controlled. There were cultural differences within high school sports that were a result of geographical location. Sports culture in California is different from the Midwest, the South, or even the East Coast. Additionally, sports culture in a large metropolitan area differs from that in rural communities. The cultural differences can oftentimes influence the financial resources allotted to school athletics (Bissinger, 1990, 2015; Herrera, 2016; Krider, 2014; Lowe, 2012).

By design, there were some limitations in the current study regarding the assessment of current supports. The study lacked generalizability in that the sample size is small in comparison to the number of athletic directors in the greater Los Angeles area. The purpose of this study was not to generalize findings but rather to identify what high schools were doing and what they would like to do in the future to support student athletes. From the findings, other schools with a similar context may find the study beneficial in informing their work to support student athletes.

The study was limited to the perspective of athletic directors only. The views and opinions of other stakeholders (teachers, counselors, coaches, parents, and students) were not taken into consideration. These various stakeholders may have different perspectives on the supports that are being provided and can have different opinions on what additional supports are needed. These limitations and delimitations indicate that further research is needed to fully understand the structures in place in high schools and possible improvements to these structures.

Future Research

Considering these limitations, future studies can include a wider scope and a wider participant base. This study chose to focus on public high schools across Southern California and to speak with athletic directors due to their unique position as both stewards of the athletics program and monitors of academics. Further research is still needed to fully understand what academic supports are being provided to student athletes at the high school level.

- 1. Increase the sample size of athletic directors.** Given the lack of literature about the support offered at the high school level, future research should enroll more schools across Southern California and be extended to all of California. With a larger sample of athletic directors participating, definitive patterns and observations can be made about academic supports provided to high school student athletes.
- 2. Assess the academic performance of subgroups of student athletes.** Further research can be done on the academic performance of various demographics of athletes (gender, ethnicity, sport played, etc.). This further analysis is important to ensure that all historically marginalized groups of students (particularly women and Black students) are not underperforming their peers. Women and Black students are a subgroup of students who have been historically excluded by this country and the educational system (Howard, 2014). Segregation laws in the South prevented White and Black children from going to school together. As a result, Black high schools had to form their own leagues independent of White high schools (Pruter, 2013). It was not until the early 1900s that high schools began to involve girls in physical activities such as basketball, volleyball, tennis, and swimming (Davies, 2017). The acceptance

of young women in sports culminated with the passing of Title IX of the *Education Amendments Act* in 1972. Title IX banned sexual discrimination in schools, which meant that schools were required to provide similar opportunities for girls in sports as boys (Davis, 2002; Lee & Hardin, 2015; Pruter, 2013). If student athletes feel valued solely for their athletic talent at the expense of their academic potential, they are more likely to feel exploited by their school (Beamon, 2008; Van Rheenen, 2013; Van Rheenen & Atwood, 2014). Therefore, it becomes paramount that schools take steps to identify and mitigate any issue of underperformance. To neglect to do so could be perpetuating historical exploitation.

- 3. Expand the sample to include schools other than public schools.** Further research can include charter schools, independent private schools, and religious private schools. By extending the research to a wider variety of schools, best practices can be curated. Additionally, with the inclusion of various types of schools, more analysis can be done to see if varying financial resources have an impact on the quality and variety of academic supports provided.
- 4. Expand the study beyond California.** As stated previously, the culture of high school athletics varies across the country. This study can be replicated in a different area of the country to assess how social and regional context play a role in the academic performance of student athletes and the systems in place to support student athletes academically.
- 5. Talk with students and alumni about gaps in support.** While this study showed that each school has support systems in place, it is unclear how effective and

meaningful those supports are. Student athletes would be the best to speak to the effectiveness of the current supports. Additionally, it is unknown if student athletes have their own ideas about what can be done to improve the academic supports currently being provided. Discussions with alumni can reveal what supports contributed to their success and what additional support they wish they had. Further distinctions can be made between student athletes who went on to college and played sports and those who went on to college and did not play sports.

Implications

In addition to future research, there are several implications that emerged from the current study. The findings from this study highlighted a need for reform in practices at the high school level and have implications for policy regarding standard supports that need to be provided to high school student athletes.

Implications for Practice

Regarding academic performance, past research has shown that student athletes perform better than their non-athlete peers. Student athletes have higher GPAs (Broh, 2002; Fejgin, 1994; Lumpkin & Favor, 2012) and higher graduation rates (Lumpkin & Favor, 2012). However, this study showed that high schools were not tracking the long-term academic performance of their student athletes, specifically data on high school graduation rates and college eligibility rates. The lack of data reflecting the academic excellence of student athletes calls into question how schools measure the success of their athletic program.

In Chapter 2, the literature review began with a look into the origins and history of athletics to provide historical context to the relationship between athletics and academics.

Originally created by students, athletics soon became marred by scandal and corruption (Davies, 2017; Pruter, 2013). Regulation began to increase, and state organizations such as the California Interscholastic Federation (CIF) began to emerge (Pruter, 2013). In its mission statement, the CIF stated, “The CIF governs interscholastic athletics, promoting equity, quality, character and academic development” (California Interscholastic Federation, n.d.). The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) also included the pursuit of excellence in both academics and athletics in their core values (Jackson, 2014). If the CIF and the NCAA both promote academic development and excellence, why is the academic development and progress of student athletes not being tracked?

The study’s results also revealed that athletic directors do not have the capacity to track the long-term academic performance and success of their student athletes. However, this practice is not in alignment with the mission and values of regulatory organizations. This misalignment calls into question the mission and values of high school athletics programs. Athletic programs need to recommit to the expectation of academic success and incorporate this expectation into the athletic culture. This can begin by implementing intentional practices that support the academic success of student athletes. The results showed that high schools were providing some supports, albeit general and non-exclusive to student athletes. High schools across the country can begin to assess their current academic supports and align them to the practices outlined by the TPP model as recommended by the NCAA (NCAA, 2008, 2014). Hopefully, this study will prompt high schools to re-evaluate the mission and values of their athletics department and implement intentional practices to lead student athletes to success.

Implications for Policy

The results of this study showed that indicators of academic success among student athletes were not being recorded. Due to a lack of data, it was difficult to justify the need for change, and it was difficult to prove that improvement is being made when it comes to academic support of high school student athletes. Governing bodies for high school sports in the United States, such as the CIF, should require high schools to report the graduation rate and the college eligibility rates of student athletes broken down by various demographics. This can create another level of oversight on high schools to ensure that they are truly providing academic development and that students are pursuing academic excellence. These governing bodies should also create a public database where parents, students, and other stakeholders can access this information. This can serve as public accountability for serving the needs of student athletes. With the accumulation of more data, governing bodies can assess if student athletes are performing at the same level as their non-academic peers. If the data show that student athletes are underperforming, the governing bodies across the state should consider requiring high schools to provide the same base level of TPP support to their student athletes that the NCAA requires of colleges. With such policies in place, hopefully more student athletes will successfully complete high school and be eligible to go to college.

Recommendations

While this study has far-reaching implications for practice and policy, there are steps that schools can take right now to help prioritize the academic success of student athletes. The structure of the athletic department needs to change to help prioritize the academic support of student athletes, not just the daily function of the athletic program. A progressive leadership

model, grounded in transformative and transformational principles, should be adopted to help increase the capacity of athletic directors. School leaders need to also go through problem improvement cycles to constantly identify and improve issues found within their programs, particularly issues that have social justice implications.

Transformative Leadership

The results of this study brought light to the feeling that athletic directors have a heavy workload and do not always have the capacity to make a change. Athletic directors are situated in unique positions where they can observe the intersectionality of athletics and academics. Additionally, athletic directors are school leaders on campus, with the ability to change systems and structures that are in place in their high school. As such, athletic directors should be viewed as transformative leaders as opposed to transactional leaders (Avant, 2011; Burton & Peachey, 2009). Transactional leadership is a more traditional model of leadership, grounded in the exchange of services (Shields, 2011). Conversely, transformative leadership is focused on articulating a purpose, deconstructing frameworks and reconstructing them, and effecting deep, equitable change (Avant, 2011; Lambert et al., 2016; Langlois, 2011; Shields, 2011). Table 8 explores some of the core components of the leadership models that reflect the evolution of leadership adopted from *Transformative Leadership: An Introduction* (Shields, 2011).

The traditional approach is called transactional leadership, which can create an efficient exchange of services. However, the components of transformative leadership suggest a more progressive approach to creating sustainable structures that focus on reducing power and inequity. When applied to athletics, transformative leaders focus on the goals of their school site and advocate for inclusive environments with equitable outcomes for all students. One of these

goals could be to create structures that would better support the academic performance of student athletes guided by the principles of a TPP.

Table 8
Evolutionary Dimensions of Leadership

Core		
Compenency	Transactional Leadership	Transformative Leadership
Emphasis	Means	Deep and equitable change in social conditions
Goals	Agreement: mutual goal advancement	Individual and organizational learning; societal transformation
Leader	Ensures smooth and efficient organizational operation through transactions	Lives with tension and challenge; requires moral courage, inclusive organizations, participation, advocacy, activism
Process	Immediate cooperation through mutual agreement and benefit	Deconstruction and reconstruction of social-cultural knowledge frameworks that generate inequity, acknowledge power and privilege, encourages dialog between individual and community

Note. Source: Adapted from *Transformative Leadership: An Introduction*, by C. M. Shields, 2011, New York, NY: Peter Lang. Copyright 2011 by Peter Lang.

Transactional leadership. Before describing transformative leadership, it is helpful to review a traditional model of leadership known as transactional leadership, which is grounded in the exchange of services (Shields, 2011). This leadership style is influenced by components of bureaucratic leadership and scientific management. Bureaucratic leadership prioritizes compliance with rules and procedures (Parlar & Cansoy, 2017). Scientific management, first conceptualized by Frederick Winslow Taylor at the start of the 20th century, prescribes to the ideology that organizations could achieve maximum efficiency through a scientific approach (Oakes & Lipton, 2007). This model was then applied to early schools to impose order and structure by emphasizing specialization and tracking. In a transactional leadership model, leaders value an organization that runs smoothly and efficiently through various systems and exchanges.

Efficiency is gained through mutual agreement and benefit. The responsibilities of an athletic director can easily cause them to fall into a transactional role where the accomplishment of the day-to-day logistics in the most efficient manner is prioritized. Additionally, their role also requires that they are in constant compliance with the rules and procedures of the school and of their state governing body. Athletic directors can take a more progressive approach to their work that prioritizes socially equitable outcomes.

Transformative leadership. Transformative leadership is a framework that seeks to focus on academic excellence as well as social transformation (Shields, 2011). A transformative approach to leadership looks to create deep and equitable change in the social conditions that exist. This requires leaders to deconstruct social-cultural frameworks that generate inequality and takes steps to rebuild these structures (Avant, 2011; Shields, 2011). Transformative leadership can also be used to advance an ethical approach to leadership (Langlois, 2011). Transformative leaders highlight disproportionate benefits and injustices based on racial, sexual, and other discriminatory biases that cause inequitable outcomes. Transformative leadership also encourages dialogue between the individual and the community, allowing transformative leaders to engage stakeholders in a discussion on existing power and privilege that may create disproportionate benefits (Avant, 2011; Langlois, 2011; Shields, 2011). If applied to the athletic director position, a transformative approach would require constant analysis of the academic outcomes of student athletes to identify an area of improvement.

Seeking improvement with transformative leadership. A transformative model of leadership calls for frequent reflection and improvement of practice. In *Learning to Improve*, Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, and LeMahieu (2015) gave insight on how to address and improve issues

that arise in work, grounded in a philosophy of transformational leadership. The authors outlined five improvement principles:

1. Make the work problem specific and user centered.
2. Focus on variation in performance.
3. See the system that produces the current outcomes.
4. We cannot improve at scale what we cannot measure.
5. Use disciplined inquiry to drive improvement.

Transformative leaders start by identifying specific problems that impact students. Athletic directors are working in service of their students; therefore, they must identify problems that impact their students' performance. After a problem is identified, variance in student outcomes must be assessed. By assessing outcomes, practices that yield positive results can be maintained and improved, and harmful practices can be improved or eliminated (Avant, 2011; Langlois, 2011; Shields, 2011). The third principle calls for a critical analysis of the current learning environment and policies and practices that sustain it. This critical analysis is in alignment with the principles of transformative leadership that require leaders to understand, identify, deconstruct, and reconstruct the norms and culture that generate inequality (Avant, 2011; Langlois, 2011; Shields, 2011). When taking steps towards improvement, it is important to take frequent measurements of indicators of success. Without measures of success, it will be difficult to determine if practices are yielding the desired impact. Finally, the last improvement principle calls for inquiry to drive improvement. Athletic directors, when using a transformative approach, engage in dialog and seek input from various stakeholders to turn good ideas into practices that

work (Avant, 2011; Langlois, 2011; Shields, 2011). With this input, the athletic director can create structures that will better support the academic performance of student athletes.

Cultivating leadership capacity. School districts and principals need to cultivate the leadership capacity of athletic directors to help them enact some of the ideas they have to build on the current academic supports. School sites need to enlarge the circle of leadership to engage more members of the school community in the execution of the school's vision and mission. By increasing the leadership capacity of athletic directors, the school community can have more allies to accomplish the overall mission of increasing the academic performance of students. To increase the leadership capacity of athletic directors, I recommend that schools engage in an inquiry cycle to identify any variation in the academic performance of student athletes. An inquiry cycle will help increase the leadership capacity of athletic directors in two ways: It will allow them to identify various indicators to measure academic success for their program, and it will allow for continuous improvement through inquiry.

Inquiry Cycle

An inquiry cycle can help athletic directors increase their leadership capacity by allowing them to self-assess the supports that their school is providing for student athletes and adjust their practice in ways that are suitable for their school context (Bryk et al., 2015). Inquiry cycles, a form of improvement science, are a way to address issues that arise in the workplace. This method of reform takes the perspective that issues and ineffectiveness arise in the workplace due to the systems that are in place; therefore, educators should use inquiry to improve systems (Bryk et al., 2015). An inquiry cycle is not a one-time occurrence; instead, it is a continuous process as each cycle illuminates subtle issues that may not have been identified or anticipated (Bryk et al.,

2015). Multiple inquiry cycles are needed to develop change that actually works (Bryk et al., 2015). This constant development, revision, and finetuning of policies, structures, and norms can lead to improved academic outcomes for student athletes.

Inquiry cycles allow educators to focus on the specific tasks people do, the process and tools they use, and how policies, organizational structures, and norms affect the learning outcome of students. Inquiry cycles typically unfold in three stages: assessment, review, and revision (Bryk et al., 2015; Lambert et al., 2016; Mills & Gay, 2016). Figure 1 gives an overview of the first inquiry cycle that should take place and the objectives at each stage. If athletic directors engage in this process, it will allow them to take a critical look at how their school site's policies, structures, and norms impact the academic outcomes of student athletes. Athletic directors, along with the help of other stakeholders, can engage in this cycle to assess the academic performance of student athletes, review the supports being provided to student athletes, and to revise the current supports to see improved performance.

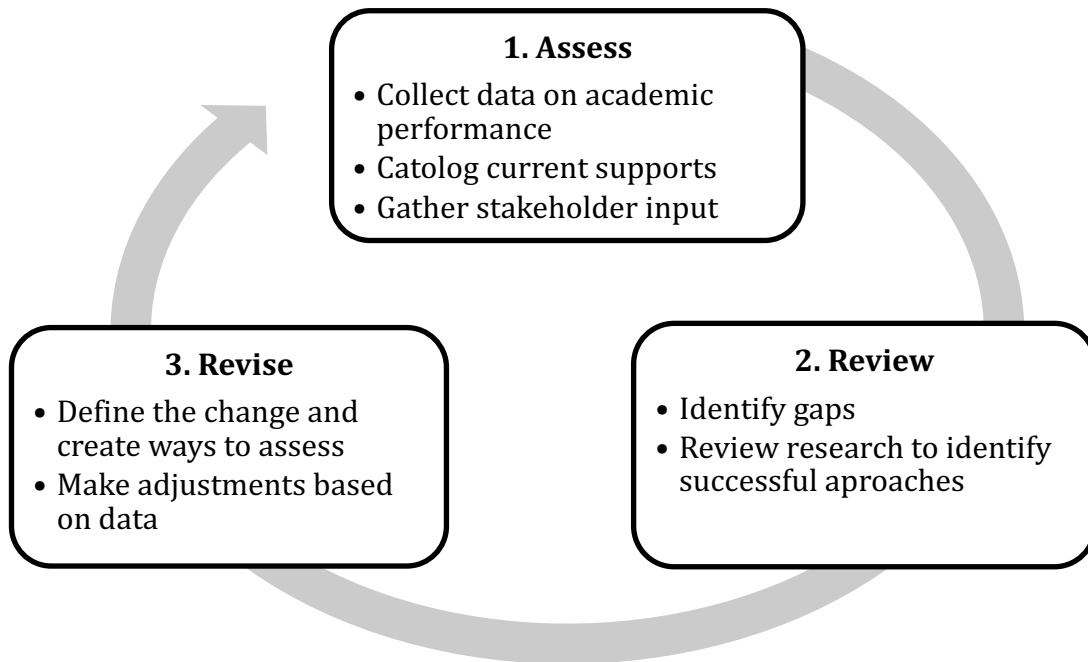


Figure 1. Inquiry cycle. Adapted from *Learning to Improve: How America's Schools Can Get Better at Getting Better*, by A. S. Bryk, L. M. Gomez, A. Grunow, & P. G. LeMahieu, 2015, Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, Copyright 2015 by Harvard Education Press; *Liberating Leadership Capacity: Pathways to Educational Wisdom*, by L. Lambert, D. P. Zimmerman, M. E. Gardner, & A. Hargreaves, 2016, New York, NY: Teachers College Press, Copyright 2016 by Teachers College Press; and *Educational Research: Competencies for Analysis and Application* (11th ed.), by G. E. Mills & L. R. Gay, 2016, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, Copyright 2016 by Pearson.

Assess. The first part of the cycle encourages leaders to gather quantitative data on the academic success of student athletes. This will allow directors to gather baseline data on the academic performance of student athletes to see if all students are performing. Every year, there are several freshmen athletes who drop out of sports because they are unable to meet the academic requirements of their school. It is important for freshmen to have a strong start to high school; however, this can be difficult as the students are transitioning to the social and academic demands of high school. Data regarding the drop off of freshmen student athletes should be tracked formally to help measure the success of academic intervention and monitoring. Data should also be gathered on the grades students are receiving in NCAA required classes (i.e., A-G

requirements). This tracking can help identify if there are specific courses or subjects where student athletes struggle. Data in this area can lead to more targeted interventions with specific subjects. Similarly, the SAT/ACT scores of students should be collected to assess if there is any variance in performance. This information can also lead to more targeted supports to ensure that student athletes are meeting the expectations of the sliding scale. Graduation rates of student athletes need to be tracked formally to help ensure that student athletes are meeting expectations of high school. The graduation rate of student athletes will need to be compared to that of the senior class overall. If student athletes are graduating at lower rates, this would indicate the need for more academic support. Data should be collected on the graduation rate and college eligibility rate of seniors. The college eligibility rate indicates how many students have taken courses that are required for entrance at a four-year college. It will be important to assess how many graduating seniors and senior athletes are eligible to apply to college. All data should be sorted by various subgroups (i.e., gender, ethnicity, sport, year, etc.). Gathering baseline data is important because it will allow directors to identify learning gaps and underachievement for various subgroups of student athletes.

The second part of this cycle is to catalog what is currently in place to support student athletes academically. Similar to this study, athletic directors might reflect on current supports offered at their school and ask, “How does our school support student athletes?” Observations of current practices (i.e., study hall, office hours, etc.) would take place to allow the director to catalog what is already being done. A distinction should be made as to what supports are available exclusively to student athletes versus supports that are available to the general student body. Assessment in these two areas will allow academic directors to understand the current

academic performance of student athletes and the full range of supports that the school has to offer.

After this initial assessment, it is important to incorporate the voice of various stakeholders. Students, parents, coaches, teachers, and counselors should be engaged in conversation to get a deeper understanding of what is working and what needs improvement. When these various stakeholders are engaged in dialogue, unknown issues may arise or overlooked practices can receive praise. An assessment of all the performance data, current supports, and the effectiveness of those supports will allow athletic directors to focus on what specific problem they need to solve. Identifying a specific problem will help directors move on the next stage of the inquiry cycle and review strategies that might help them see improvement.

Review. The second stage, mirroring this study, has athletic directors ask, “What structures would better support student athletes?” Athletic directors can review research-backed practices that can help fill the gaps identified previously. These policies and practices should be grounded in the practices of a TPP. This framework of supporting student athletes takes a holistic approach to support the various needs of student athletes (Cooper, 2016; Etzel et al., 2002; Gill & Farrington, 2014; Lottes, 1991). A TPP model is grounded in five central commitments: academic excellence, athletic excellence, personal development, career development, and service (NCAA, 1999, 2008). The NCAA gives suggestions on how best to execute these commitments. Athletic directors may find that one of the practices listed in Table 9 may help address the identified problem.

Table 9
NCAA Life Skills Strategies and Practices

Life Skills Commitments		Ways to Implement Commitment	
Commitment to Academic Excellence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study skills • Note-taking skills • Organization • Goal setting and time management • Test anxiety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivation • Tutoring and structured study sessions • Engaging with teachers • Orientation and summer bridge • Academic counseling and advising 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Registration in meaningful classes • Scholarship assistance • Awards, honors, and recognition
Commitment to Athletic Excellence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coaching and support staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team operations 	
Commitment to Personal Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nutrition counseling • Eating disorders prevention education • Establishing healthy relationships • Sexual assault and violence prevention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing self-esteem • Stress management • Alcohol choices and addictive behavior • Dealing with depression and grief • Interpersonal communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media relations • Personal and social development • Manners and etiquette • Dealing with authority • Understanding and celebrating diversity • Financial planning and wealth management
Commitment to Career Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career development • Post high school/college • Navigating the life of a professional athlete 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mock interviews • Life after sports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resume and cover letter development
Commitment to Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service commitment • Mentoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer mentoring and peer counseling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student athlete assistance programs

Note: Sources: Adapted from *NCAA CHAMPS/Life Skills Program*, by National Collegiate Athletic Association, 1999, (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED435366), Copyright 2008 by the National Collegiate Athletic Association; *NCAA CHAMPS/Life Skills Program Brochure*, by National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2008, retrieved from <http://www.ncaapublications.com/p-3883-2008-2009-ncaa-champs-life-skills-program-brochure-25pkg.aspx>. Copyright 2008 by the National Collegiate Athletic Association; and *Life Skills*, by National Collegiate Athletic Association, October 20, 2014, retrieved from <http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/leadership-development/life-skills>, Copyright 2014 by the National Collegiate Athletic Association.

Revise. The “last stage” in the inquiry cycle is to define the change that will take place and create indicators of success to assess the effectiveness of the change. This change has been informed by the literature review and review of best practices. New policies and practices will be put into place to fill in the identified gap. These policies and practices will now be evidence and data-driven. Once revisions are made, the improvement cycle will begin again: The supports will be re-evaluated, and adjustments will be made. Results will need to be compared to initial data to see if any positive gains have been made and for which subgroups. As the progressive leadership model suggests, dialogue will need to take place between all stakeholders to identify what is working and what still needs improvement. A program that is consistently looking for ways to improve might create more opportunities for all students to be academically, socially, and emotionally prepared for life after high school.

Expanding Staff

As indicated by the athletic directors, the demands of running an athletics program can be very demanding of their time, making it difficult to dedicate time to implementing an inquiry cycle. One potential strategy is to hire or train staff who focus specifically on providing academic support for student athletes. These additional leaders would oversee the implementation of holistic strategies outlined in the TPP framework to help ensure all students:

1. stay eligible to play all four years of high school, without ever being placed on academic probation;
2. meet the eligibility requirements for college recruitment; and
3. are prepared to succeed academically at a collegiate level and have social-emotional tools necessary to pursue a career, potentially in athletics.

To achieve these goals, these school leaders would monitor, support, and advise student athletes (Appendix C provides a specific timeline for the responsibilities listed). Certainly, high schools might look to what universities are requiring and begin implementing similar support.

Monitor. A prevalent result of the study showed that schools were not intentionally tracking the academic outcomes of student athletes. One responsibility of the school leaders would be to provide direct advising on a range of issues, including academic progress and policies through collaboration with a wide variety of stakeholders (teachers, parents, councilors, coaches, athletic director) to ensure continued eligibility. To execute this responsibility, the staff member will need to document and report the academic progress and outcomes of student-athlete progress to the athletic director, coaches, and parents. The staff member would monitor the various indicators that were outlined in the assessment stage of the inquiry cycle (i.e., freshmen drop off, grades, SAT/ACT scores, graduation rate, college eligibility rate). The staff member would use the school's existing student database to tag and monitor student athletes. The staff member should also run reports of students' grades every five weeks to take a proactive approach in identifying struggling students. For struggling students, the staff member can implement an improved contract that will mandate additional interventions (i.e., study hall, tutoring, peer tutoring, etc.). By taking a proactive approach to monitoring students' grades, there will hopefully be a decrease in the number of students who become academically ineligible.

Support. Results of the study showed that student athletes were not receiving academic supports that targeted their specific needs. Another responsibility of the staff member would be to administer a specialized program based on the TPP framework for student athletes and analyze its effectiveness. The implementation of specialized programs is meant to help student athletes

with meeting academic and athletic requirements of high school. The additional staff member would take the lead in engaging in productive dialogue with students, teachers, and other faculty to create and implement strategies that promote a greater chance of academic success. The staff member would use this information to design and present programming to the student-athlete population in the areas of study skills, time management techniques, and social-emotional issues as modeled by the NCAA's TPP. The topic of this programming should be informed by the inquiry cycle that has taken place.

Programming can also be based on the NCAA's implementation of a TPP, its Life Skills program. The NCAA gives suggestions on what topics can be covered under each of the principal commitments of a TPP as seen in Table 9. Programming should focus on academic excellence, career development, and personal development, as these three commitments are the most transferable to the high school context. The NCAA recommends that programming content be delivered in classes, workshops, new student orientations, social settings, community service activities, or guest speakers (NCAA, 1999, 2008). Topics such as study skills, goal setting, and time management can be covered to increase academic performance. A workshop can be held on resume creation, internships, and job searches to help student athletes with their career aspirations. Support groups can be created that focus on nutrition, stress management, self-esteem, and other personal development issues.

Advise. The results of the study show that many schools have a counselor on site who is familiar with the NCAA academic requirements and the clearinghouse process. However, the counselor with this knowledge is not the full-time counselor of all student athletes. The staff member should serve as an NCAA academic eligibility expert to all counselors, varsity coaches,

and student athletes. The staff member will remain current with CIF and NCAA academic and recruitment rules and regulations. More importantly, all student athletes would have frequent and exclusive access to this staff member. Additionally, the assistant will design information sessions for parents and athletes about the eligibility and recruitment rules. The assistant would advise students with the college application process and SAT/ACT preparation. If students are being recruited by a university, the staff member can act as a liaison to the university to ensure that the recruitment process goes smoothly. Additionally, the staff member can schedule check-in meetings with junior and senior students to ensure that their post-graduation plans are on track.

Conclusion

The history of high school sports, while rooted in sportsmanship, is also full of social justice controversies related to access and equitable outcomes for all (Davies, 2017; Lee & Hardin, 2015; Pruter, 2013). In the past, there were blatant barriers to access for all students. Today, there are more nuanced and subtle practices that prevent equitable outcomes for all student athletes. Research has established the benefits of participating in sports, yet at the same time, research has been clear in terms of the disparate academic outcomes experienced by various sub-groups. As a result, the regulations that were originally designed to benefit students by setting high academic expectations now highlight an inequitable system where some schools support students in meeting academic expectations while others do not.

What defines the success of an athletics program? Is it measured in the improvement of a sports program? Is it measured by the impact the program has on school culture? Is it measured by the number of state championships? Or is it measured in how many athletes graduate from high school? Or perhaps by how many student athletes get recruited on full scholarships? One

thing is certain: Metrics of success are measurable. Without this critical information, success cannot be celebrated, and improvements cannot be made. The lack of data on academic outcomes for student athletes makes it difficult to determine the effectiveness of current supports. Furthermore, it is difficult to justify creating new policies and practices when there is a lack of evidence to justify a need.

This study was a call to action as much as it is a description of the current academic supports provided to student athletes. The results of this study show that there is a community of people who are available to support student athletes to meet academic expectations. Moving forward, the community needs to engage in practices that address the specific needs of student athletes and follow the best practices of colleges outlined in the TPP framework. While it takes a community to implement these practices, the community can only do so much within the current culture and structures in place. If schools are not implementing a TPP program, they are creating environments where students constantly have to compromise between academics and athletics rather than integrate the two identities. Athletes should not have to choose between participating in sports or taking an additional AP class. They should not have to choose between office hours or team practice. High schools should be creating an environment that supports student athletes in achieving excellence in the classroom and in the arena.

Athletic directors are in a position to not only identify inequalities that may exist in their organization, but they are also in a position to enact systematic change that promotes equity. As a leader for social justice, it is paramount that systems and policies are put in place to ensure that all students can succeed and that there is a constant assessment of how to make those systems and policies better. It takes a progressive leader to critically analyze the systems in place that

generate inequality and to have the moral courage to implement change. The time has come for high schools to rethink the role of athletics on campus; rather than managing logistics, athletic directors should be athletic *and* academic advocates.

APPENDIX A

Survey Questions

The following questions ask about your school's demographic profile.

What is the percentage of each subgroup of students who graduated in the 2017-2018 school year?

Example:

White Students 15%

Asian Students 3%

Black Students 30%

Hispanic Students 45%

Other 7%

Total 100%

White Students: _____ (1)

Asian Students: _____ (2)

Black Students: _____ (3)

Hispanic Students: _____ (4)

Other: _____ (5)

Total: _____

End of Block: School Demographics

Start of Block: Student Athlete Demographics

The following questions ask about the demographic profile of Student athletes.

What percentage of students participated in athletics from each grade level at your school in the 2017-2018 school year?

Freshmen: _____ (1)

Sophomores: _____ (2)

Juniors: _____ (3)

Seniors: _____ (4)

Total: _____

What percent of your student athlete population fell under the following demographics in the 2017-2018 school year (total must sum to 100)?

White Students: _____ (1)

Asian Students: _____ (2)

Black Students: _____ (3)

Hispanic Students: _____ (4)

Total: _____

What sports are offered by your school? Check all that apply.

- Baseball (1)
 - Basketball (2)
 - Cross country (3)
 - Football (4)
 - Soccer (5)
 - Softball (6)
 - Track and Field (7)
 - Volleyball (8)
 - Wrestling (9)
 - Other (10) _____
-

How many of your senior student-athletes graduated in the 2017-2018 school year? Please enter in numeric form.

How many of your graduating senior student-athletes were accepted into a four-year college or university? Please enter in numeric form.

How many of your senior student-athletes who are going to college have been recruited to play sports for the college or university? Please enter in numeric form.

End of Block: Student Athlete Demographics

Start of Block: Academic Requirements

The following questions ask about the academic requirements for student athletes.

What are some of the academic requirements for students to participate in sports? Select all that apply

- Minimum GPA of 2.0 (1)
- Minimum number of classes passing (2)
- Other additional academic requirements (3)

Skip To: Q25 If What are some of the academic requirements for students to participate in sports? Select all that... = Other additional academic requirements

Skip To: End of Block If What are some of the academic requirements for students to participate in sports? Select all that...! = Other additional academic requirements

You selected that your school has additional academic requirements. Please describe what these additional academic requirements are.

End of Block: Academic Requirements

Start of Block: Student Support

The following questions ask about the supports available to students and student athletes at your school.

Which of the following is provided to students to help improve their academic achievement?

	General Population		Student Athletes		Black Male Student Athletes	
	Yes (1)	No (2)	Yes (1)	No (2)	Yes (1)	No (2)
School Orientation (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Study skills (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Goal setting and time management skills (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Registration in meaningful courses (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dedicated Counselor (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Assistance with college applications (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Information regarding NCAA academic requirements (i.e. NCAA Clearing House) (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
College and Career Center (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Support Groups (i.e. Honors Society, Student Athlete Association, Male Success Alliance) (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Which resources are provided to help students who seek academic support/acceleration?

	General Population		Student Athletes		Black Male Student Athletes	
	Yes (1)	No (2)	Yes (1)	No (2)	Yes (1)	No (2)
AP Courses (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Honors Courses (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Credit Recovery Courses (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Study Hall Course (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Peer to Peer Tutoring (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Before School Tutoring (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lunch Time Tutoring (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
After School Tutoring (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Summer School for Advancement (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Summer School for Remediation (10)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: Student Support

Start of Block: College-Going Culture

Please rate your agreement with the following statements about **college-going culture for student athletes in general**.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
I believe that all student athletes at our school are capable of going to college after high school (1)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Our counseling department shares the belief that all student athletes can go to college (2)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Our teachers share the belief that all student athletes can go to college (3)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Our coaches share the belief that all student athletes can go to college (4)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Our student athletes share the belief that they can go to college (5)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I believe that our school promotes a culture of success for all student athletes, regardless of their background (6)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Page Break

End of Block: College-Going Culture

Start of Block: Student Athlete Support

Please rate your agreement with the following statements about **school supports for student athletes in general**.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
Our school has an effective "early warning" system(s) to identify student athletes that struggle academically (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe that our students are being adequately prepared in their courses for the academic challenges of high school (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Our student athletes are enrolled in rigorous courses that are preparing them for college success (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Our athletic department works to ensure a positive and productive relationship with parents, to achieve success for all student athletes (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: Student Athlete Support

Start of Block: Assist with College Recruitment

Please rate your agreement with the following statements about **how the school supports student athletes with college recruitment.**

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
Our school provides professional development for counselors about the NCAA academic requirements (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Our athletic department holds regular informational sessions for student athletes and parents about the NCAA recruitment process (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Our school has instruments in place to help student athletes plan for college (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Our school has instruments in place to help student athletes plan for college recruitment (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The student athletes at our school are well-informed about college requirements, the application process, financial aid, and NCAA requirements (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: Assist with College Recruitment

Start of Block: Athletic Department Support

Please rate your agreement with the following statements about **supports provided by the athletic department**.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
I meet with student athletes regularly, keeping track of their college prep progress (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Our athletics department has an efficient system for monitoring seniors' application progress (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Our athletic department works with the counseling department to ensure all student athletes take the PSAT, SAT, and or ACT (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Our athletic department works with the counseling department to ensure all student athletes obtain test fee waivers if needed (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Our athletic department works with the counseling department to ensure all student athletes receive test preparation strategies/resources (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: Athletic Department Support

Start of Block: Comparative analysis

Please rate your agreement with the following statements **comparing general students, student athletes, and Black Male Athletes**.

	It is expected that students graduate high school			It is expected that students go to college			Students are supported by the school to do well academically		
	General Students (1)	Student Athletes (2)	Black Male Athletes (3)	General Students (1)	Student Athletes (2)	Black Male Athletes (3)	General Students (1)	Student Athletes (2)	Black Male Athletes (3)
Strongly agree (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Somewhat agree (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Neither agree nor disagree (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Somewhat disagree (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Strongly disagree (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: Comparative analysis

Start of Block: Follow up for Interview

If you are comfortable, please indicate the name of your school.

NOTE: The name of your school will only be used to gather demographic data regarding

graduation rates for the general student population. The name of your school in conjunction with the information provided in this survey will not be revealed in no way.

Would you like to be contacted for a follow-up interview so that you may go into depth about the academic supports in place for student athletes?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Skip To: Q11 If Would you like to be contacted for a follow-up interview so that you may go into depth about the... = Yes

Skip To: End of Survey If Would you like to be contacted for a follow-up interview so that you may go into depth about the... = No

Please provide an email address where you wish to be contacted.

End of Block: Follow up for Interview

APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol

Personal Background

- What is your role at the school?
- How long have you been at this school?
- How long have you been Athletic Director?
 - Are you a full-time director or do you still have a teaching assignment?

School Background

- Tell me more about the student population at your school.
 - How many students attend your school?
 - What are the demographics of the student body?
 - What neighborhoods do you serve?
- Tell me about the student athlete population at your school.
 - How many student athletes do you have in your program?
 - What sports are popular at your school?
 - What sports do Black male athletes particularly play?
- About how many athletes get recruited to play sports at the collegiate level?
- About what percentage of your student athletes graduate?
 - A trend I was noticing in the survey was that athletic directors were unable to answer specific questions about graduation rates. Do you feel that this information is accessible/ measured?

Athletics Climate at your school

- What is the history of the role sports has played at this school?
- What do you notice about the culture of student athletes at the school?
 - Is there any variance between the different sports?
 - Is there any variance with your Black male student athletes?
- How does the general student population view student athletes? Academically? Socially?
- How do student athletes balance academics and athletics here at the school?

Academic Support for Athletes

- What is the school doing to support student athletes in terms of getting them to graduate?
 - Do Black male student athletes receive the same types of supports?
- How do teachers, coaches, and parents collaborate to ensure student success?
- How do you work with student counselors to ensure that students are on track to graduate?
 - Do Student athletes have a dedicated counselor?
 - Is there any variance when trying to get student recruited?
- What is the school doing to support student athletes in terms of being college-ready when they graduate?

- What are the academic requirements the school has in place for student athletes?
Why?
- Does the school reinforce A-G requirements and help with college applications?
How?
- Do you notice any variance in these supports when it comes to Black male student athletes?

Examples of academic encouragement

- What experiences do you have of families encouraging student athletes in their academics?
- What experiences do you have of students encouraging their friends who are student athletes in their academics?
- What experiences do you have of teachers encouraging student athletes in their academics?
- Do you feel that families, students or teachers encourage Black male athletes in the same way at your school?

Athletic Support for Athletes

- What is the school doing to help students be the best athlete they can be?
- What is the school doing to support student athletes in terms of being recruited to play in college?
- What additional academic supports would you like to provide to student athletes?
 - What are barriers are there that prevent you from providing these supports?
- Do you feel that Black male athletes are treated the same in this regard? If so how?

Closing

- Is there anything else you wish to share about student-athletes at your school that I didn't ask?
- Thank you so much for your time.

APPENDIX C

Timeline for Additional Staff Member

Summer

June

- **Monitor:** Spring Semester 18 Grade Check- Eligibility check for Fall Sports
- **Department:** Freshmen Sports Fair
 - Outreach to incoming freshmen to provide information on sign-ups, tryout, practice schedule, and games.

July

- **Department:** Assist with filling in open coaching positions
- **Monitor:** Indicators for success for Senior Class (Graduation rate, college eligibility (etc.))

August

- **Department:** Meet with all coaches (head and assistants) to formally introduce the candidate and their role and responsibility
- **Advise:** Meet with head coaches to create a protocol for reporting student eligibility

School year

August

- **Monitor:** Code Fall Student athletes
- **Department:** Fall Sports Meeting
 - Communicate academic expectations to students and parents

September

- **Monitor:** 5-week Grade Check- Preliminary Check
- **Advise:** Junior/Senior Parent Meeting
 - Share with parents and students how to navigate the college application process and provide a timeline for juniors preparing for college application and for seniors on the application process
 - Workshop: Registering on the NCAA Clearinghouse website
- **Advise:** Sophomore/ Freshmen Parent Meeting
 - Share with parents and students A-G requirements for college and the sliding scale requirements for the NCAA.
 - Workshop: How to calculate G.P.A and creating a 4-year Plan
- **Advise:** Senior Athlete Meetings #1
 - Meeting with seniors regarding their college applications or career plans

October

- **Monitor:** 10-week Grade Check- Eligibility check
- **Advise:** Senior Athlete Meetings #2
 - Meeting with seniors regarding their college applications or career plans

November

- **Monitor:** 15-week Grade Check- Preliminary Check
- **Advise:** Senior Athlete Meetings #3
 - Meeting with seniors regarding their college applications or career plans

December

- **Monitor:** Fall Semester 18 Grade Check- Eligibility check for Spring Sports

January

- **Monitor:** Code Winter Student athletes
- **Department:** Winter Sports Meeting
 - Communicate academic expectations to students and parents
- **Advise:** Junior Athlete Meetings #1
 - Meeting with Juniors regarding SAT ACT testing or career plans

February

- **Monitor:** 5-week Grade Check- Preliminary Check
- **Advise:** Junior Athlete Meetings #2
 - Meeting with Juniors regarding SAT ACT testing or career plans
- **Advise:** Signing Day Celebration for recruited seniors (Football)

March

- **Monitor:** Code Spring Student athletes
- **Monitor:** 10-week Grade Check- Eligibility Check
- **Advise:** Junior Athlete Meetings #3
 - Meeting with Juniors regarding SAT ACT testing or career plans

April

- **Monitor:** 15-week Grade Check- Preliminary Check
- **Department:** Spring Sports Meeting
 - Communicate academic expectations to students and parents

May

- **Advise:** Signing Day Celebration for recruited seniors (All other Sports)

June

- **Monitor:** Spring Semester 19 Grade Check- Eligibility check for Fall Sports
- **Department:** Sports Banquet
 - Acknowledge Student athletes who have a 3.5 or higher
 - Highlight Seniors and their future

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