**Busy lives create havoc but also character**

Students are constantly reminded of what they should be doing without a thought given to the consequences these busy schedules may create. They are pressured into participating in clubs and other extracurricular activities in order to appear well rounded to colleges, but the ultimate decision of whether this extra strain is worth it is in the hands of the participants, the students. Although it may appear that sports and other activities may distract from school, many students involved in sports and other extracurricular activities have said the opposite.

“I feel like sports make me a better student,” senior Katelyn Stevens said. “School comes first, and when I don’t do as well in school I can’t play my sports. That being said, sports are my motivation to do my best in school.”

For Stevens, a student who has participated in sports since she was a toddler now participates in track, basketball, and cheerleading, sports are much more than an extra activity and they are definitely not a distraction or additional stress. Sports are a piece of who she is and her background, and she claims that she could never envision herself not being involved in other activities. However, as much as she enjoys sports, she does feel pressured to participate in extracurricular activities.

“School is definitely a top priority, but in this era that is not enough. Colleges want the most well-rounded students they can find. I excel in school and sports and am involved in clubs as I know being top of my class is not enough to attract the attention of colleges.” Stevens said. “There are multiple occasions in which I have not completed school work on time due to being invested in sports and extracurriculars. However, knowing that I am involved and that is just as important to colleges reassures my choices.”

Senior Navdhit Bedi has participated in track, football, and wrestling throughout the past two school years while also having a schedule filled with honors and AP level classes. Although partaking in sports does consume time that could be geared towards studying or homework, they have also managed to teach him valuable lessons about time management and allotting enough time for every activity on his agenda.

“Being involved in sports has taught me that time is valuable and wasting it is not an option,” Bedi said. “Before my experience with sports I used to slack off more, wasting time I could have devoted to school, and I felt less confident in my abilities, but now I feel more confident in myself and have less time to waste. I’m always busy, whether I’m practicing or studying for a test, and I can’t afford to waste time.”

Being committed to a sport is not simple and requires commitment and practice. Practice length varies depending on the sport, football lasting at least two hours Monday through Thursday. Stevens claimed that she devoted at least three and a half hours a week for practices in the winter, but nine to eleven hours during the spring, proving that different sports need varying amounts of attention and time dedicated to them. The additional effort and time necessary for excelling in sports is definitely beneficial, as students claim it improves character and self esteem.

Although initially it may appear that sports and outside activities serve as distractions for students or possible barriers to being a successful student, those who have participated in such activities disagree. Not only do these additional interests allow for glowing college applications and resumes, but they also provide personal growth and benefits for students.

“I enjoy the sports I play,” Bedi said. “They have positively influenced me and affected my character and lead me to many new opportunities.”

Jobs are another activity that consume the valuable time that students have outside of school. Teenagers are pressured into getting jobs to teach us responsibility and to start making our own money, again without the toll that it takes on us considered. Countless horror stories reveal the hardships of working while in school: coming home late after working for almost six hours and being in school for a similar length of time, having to complete homework while being exhausted, struggling to maintain a social life and good study habits, and many more barriers which prevent students from being able to be the best student that they can be while also having a job.

Although traditional “teenager jobs” are not anyone’s dream job, they still offer many valuable lessons and necessary experience despite their possible setbacks. There are a select few students who are given opportunities to get a head start on their dream career, but senior Miguel Caldwell is one of these lucky individuals.

Caldwell is the author of his published novel *Rise Above* and is currently working on various other works. Adding to his list of careers, he is also a producer and the director of a charity, The Community Empowerment Group of South Carolina. Considering that he does not work for a company, Caldwell has much more control over his work schedule than the average teenager.

“I work an average of four hours a day, Monday through Sunday.” Caldwell said. “I tend to aim for at least three, but I always become immersed in my work and surpass that limit.”

To Caldwell, working is not a burden or something that he was pressured to do, but rather it is a passion.

“I must find ways to incorporate my craft into my everyday life, because it is something I am very passionate about. Writing is an urge I can’t deny even if school is going on,” Caldwell said.

“However, I do not have a full schedule which I believe benefits me because I can begin my work earlier in the day, making it less difficult to have school while I work.”

Similarly to participating in sports, working does often enhance students’ sense of responsibility and improve their time management abilities. After working throughout the day, students must come home to complete schoolwork, demonstrating how a minimum wage job can hold valuable lessons.

“Working has forced me to prioritize. Before working, all I had to do was school work, but now that there are other obligations, I have been forced to learn how to juggle all of it. It has made me an all around better worker and student,” Caldwell said.

Caldwell often expresses his immense satisfaction with his career and acknowledges how lucky he is to have stumbled upon his passion so early. Although not every high schooler manages to discover his ideal profession at this time, he does have the opportunity to be involved in other jobs to begin to form an idea of what he may one day hope to pursue as his set career. Minimum wage jobs are often necessary to develop oneself and understand what type of job is or is not suitable for him. These jobs may not seem so glamorous, but they do contribute to the growth of students, even if they can sometimes be thought of as more of a hindrance.