When students face threats to their personal safety at school, their education suffers, particularly when it comes to graduating from high school. (Grogger 1997; Bowen and Bowen 1995; Lee & Bryk, 1989; Rumberger & Palardy, 2005) School administrators at these schools are quick to point out that many of these threats to school climate begin in the surrounding community – e.g., students encountering gun violence and drug trade on the way to and from school - and are therefore outside of their sphere of influence. If this is the case, then research must provide policymakers with practical solutions for those school administrators for whom the odds seem to be stacked against them. For example, much has been made of the benefits of extracurricular programming for students in general, but particularly among at-risk populations (Broh 2002; Akos 2015; Covay and Carbonaro 2010; Gilman, Meyers, and Perez, 2003). Unfortunately, this programming comes at a price, and as a result, a high-needs school may not necessarily enjoy the same robust variety of activities often seen at their better-resourced counterparts.

Can this programming significantly offset the negative impact of a challenging school climate? The purpose of this paper is to examine the extent to which extracurricular programming may have on counteracting the effects of attending classes in an unsafe school climate.  By examining the survey data of public high school students who began with a high level of graduation anticipation from the NCES Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002, I can isolate the data of those who reported having experienced any threat to their personal safety while in their first semester at school, determine which of those students also participated in an extracurricular activity, and from there, examine how the trajectories of extracurricular participants differed from those who did not. If these programs indeed play a significant role in counteracting issues of school safety, then we may be able to argue in favor of more equitable school finance formulas which can allow for greater programming at the schools which need it most.