



The NFHS Voice



High School Coaches, Parents Helping Students to the Finish Line

Dr. Karissa L. Niehoff, NFHS Executive Director

 @KarissaNFHS

The finish line – a familiar image in high school sports and performing arts. The breaking of the tape in a 100-meter dash. Crossing the goal line with the winning touchdown. Touching the end wall first in the 100-meter freestyle. Claiming the state debate title after a long and grueling season.

Sometime next year, we hope there's a new finish line – one that ends the COVID-19 pandemic and the return of full-scale athletics and performing arts in our nation's schools. In advance of that dream later in 2021, the next four months are critical as schools try to keep these programs going with the start of winter indoor activities.

Soon, it is the hope that all states will be competing in high school sports as the final six states begin play over the next two months. And as the move to winter activities occurs, there are two groups of individuals that will continue to play significant roles in high school sports and performing arts making it to the finish line – coaches and parents.

In addition to their existing workloads, high school coaches have acquired a number of other challenges this year, including serving as mask enforcers, dealing with the weekly loss of players due to COVID-19 quarantine, and connecting with players virtually in those areas of the country where activities have been modified or pushed back to later in the year.

The tasks of education-based coaches are extraordinary this year, and they deserve our utmost respect and appreciation. In those situations where students lack guidance at home, coaches may be the most significant mentors in students' lives.

Earlier this year, the NFHS launched a new program to assist high school coaches with these important tasks. The **NFHS School Honor Roll** is a national recognition program designed to promote professional development for high school coaches through the completion of specific courses on the NFHS Learning Center at www.NFHSLearn.com.

In the first seven months of the program, more than 70 schools have earned this special recognition and provided important education resources for their coaches. In return, schools receive a large banner to place in their gymnasiums indicating that they are in the NFHS School Honor Roll.

Schools can achieve three levels of merit within the Honor Roll, which are obtained once 90 percent of a school's coaches – excluding volunteer coaches – complete various course combinations.

Three free offerings from the Learning Center – “Concussion in Sports,” “Sudden Cardiac Arrest” and “Protecting Students from Abuse” – as well as “Fundamentals of Coaching” comprise the required courses for Level 1. To earn Level 2, coaches must navigate the courses that pertain specifically to their sports, as well as “First Aid, Health and Safety,” “Heat Illness Prevention” and “Student Mental Health and Suicide Prevention.” Finally, a Level 3 banner can be attained for schools when their coaches complete “Sportsmanship,” “Strength and Conditioning,” “Teaching and Modeling Behavior,” “Engaging Effectively with Parents” and “Bullying, Hazing, and Inappropriate Behaviors” courses.

North Carolina has been the runaway leader among the states with 52 schools earning Honor Roll status, including five that have achieved multiple levels. In addition to the competitive spirit on the field, this is a great example of friendly pride and competition off the field. We salute these schools and school districts in North Carolina for encouraging ongoing education.

In addition to North Carolina, schools in 10 other states have been recognized, including Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, South Carolina, California, Mississippi, Indiana, New Jersey and Texas. The first international school joined the NFHS School Honor Roll recently with the American International School in Vienna, Austria, earning Level 1 status.

Likewise, the active support of parents as schools face ever-changing plans is crucial in this stress-filled year. While it is understandable that parents want

their kids participating in sports and performing arts, leading by example and supporting the school's program can serve as a life-changing teachable moment.

In an effort to help parents support high school activity programs, the NFHS has added new content on the NFHS Learning Center and provided a way for parents to achieve **NFHS National Parent Credential certification**.

The curriculum for the National Parent Credential is comprised of two free courses – “The Parent Seat” and “Positive Parenting Within School Programs.” Parents who achieve the National Parent Credential receive a certificate and a badge to be displayed on their Learning Center dashboard.

Regardless of the differences in competition right now, there are brighter days ahead as we look to 2021. We thank coaches and parents across the country helping education-based sports and performing arts continue that trek to the finish line.

Dr. Karissa L. Niehoff is in her third year as executive director of the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) in Indianapolis, Indiana. She is the first female to head the national leadership organization for high school athletics and performing arts activities and the sixth full-time executive director of the NFHS, which celebrated its 100th year of service during the 2018-19 school year. She previously was executive director of the Connecticut Association of Schools-Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference for seven years.