



The NFHS Voice



Parents: Cheer for Your Student's Teams – Not Against Officials or Opponents

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One of the keys to a successful high school sports – or performing arts – season is for coaches, athletic directors and other school administrators to establish a positive connection with parents of student participants.

If expectations are given to parents at the start of the school year, it enhances the chances that they will be contributing members of the school's teams and lessens the risk they will be an embarrassment to their children and other members of the community at school-sponsored events.

As we noted several weeks ago, the shortage of officials continues to be a major issue across the country – and more supportive parents who are encouraging their sons and daughters from the stands rather than questioning

the officials' calls would go a long way toward retaining more individuals to officiate contests.

In a recent issue of *High School Today* magazine, Kevin Murphy, athletic director at Washington Township High School in New Jersey, noted that at preseason meetings, he lets parents know they are part of the team and everyone has a role. Parents should be supportive of both the players and coaches, appreciate their child's effort and not let the scoreboard determine their feelings.

The goal is for parents to cheer for their kids' teams, not against their team's opponents. School leaders must help parents realize it is their role to support their sons and daughter – not coach, officiate or administrate.

In another *High School Today* article, William O'Neil, a principal in Ohio, said, "parents should keep a healthy perspective on sports and enjoy their children's participation. They should attend games, get to know the names of the other players, introduce themselves to other parents and, win or lose, support the team's progress through the season. Of course, everyone wants their team to win, but in the end, what is important is the child's education, family and the opportunity to spend time together."

In an effort to offer more tools and resources for parents and, in turn, correct negative behavior at events, the NFHS has established the National Parent Credential composed of two free online courses through the NFHS Learning Center. The two free courses – *The Parent Seat* and *Positive Parenting Within School Programs* – are available at www.NFHSLearn.com.

[The Parent Seat](#) course, which bears the same title as the Learning Center's first parent video resource, blends together key takeaways from its namesake, as well as elements from two other videos: *Beyond the Scoreboard* and *A Lasting Relationship*. By incorporating themes from [all three videos](#) in the series, "The

Parent Seat” course helps parents understand the importance of participation in school programs, expectations of parents at school events, how parents’ behavior affects their child, and how parents can use their child’s high school experience as a way to grow a healthy relationship.

[Positive Parenting Within School Programs](#) focuses on the fact that parents need to understand that their behavior in the stands, how they talk to their student after a practice or game, and the way they interact with the coaches and officials, makes all the difference in the enjoyment of their children’s experience.

Parents have a tremendous impact on the competitive environment, and it is imperative that school leaders reinforce the ways parents can do that in a positive manner. The last thing that students participating in a game or contest want to hear is their parents yelling at the officials or coaches from the stands. Rather, students want the positive support and encouragement from their parents.

Similar to encouraging coaches to take professional development courses to become certified, school leaders should issue a challenge to all parents of student participants to take these two courses and earn the [National Parent Credential](#). It could be a significant step toward improving the entire education-based activities experience.

There is a big difference between fans and fanatics. **Fans** support the officials, the players and the coaches, unlike the **fanatics** who tear down and do harm to the participants, the school and the community. Let’s make sure we provide all the necessary resources for parents of high school student-athletes so that our stadiums, gymnasiums and auditoriums are filled with **FANS**.

Dr. Karissa L. Niehoff is in her fourth year as chief executive officer 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. She previously was executive director of the Connecticut Association of Schools-Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference for seven years.