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The NFHS Voice



All States Back in Action to Celebrate National High School Activities Month

Dr. Karissa L. Niehoff, NFHS Executive Director

 @KarissaNFHS

High school sports and performing arts are back – everywhere! With the start of the fall season in Hawaii this week, high school students – more than 12 million – in every state are competing in sports, speech, debate, music, band and theatre programs.

A year ago, many schools and states were struggling to conduct activities due to the coronavirus. While mitigation and vaccination strategies continue, the fall sports of football, volleyball, cross country, soccer and others, as well as performing arts activities, are off and running.

The value of these programs was never more apparent than when they were gone – in a flash – in the spring of 2020. Millions of students, parents and other fans began to realize the privilege and importance of these education-based programs. While the NFHS and its member state associations had been touting the significance and necessity of these programs in our nation’s schools for decades, the empty fields and stands said it in a more resounding way. Absence does make the heart grow fonder.

The pause last year also raised awareness of the tremendous service provided by our nation’s high school coaches, many of whom are truly difference-makers. And, in many cases, “hero” would be an appropriate term for those men and women who have worked in relative obscurity – nationally at least – to make a difference in the lives of student-athletes or those involved in other activity programs.

And many coaches were heroes of another sort last year as they kept students connected during the pandemic. Often, a coach is the most significant mentor in a student’s life, so keeping those relationships intact was paramount.

There is no better time to celebrate the great work of high school coaches and others involved in high school activities than during the month of October. Again this year, the NFHS is sponsoring **National High School Activities Month** during the month of October to promote the values of high school activity programs. With everyone back on the fields, courts, rehearsal halls and stages, this year’s celebration will be one of the most triumphant in the 41-year history of the event.

Not only is the weather at its best, activity programs are at their zenith with football games on Friday nights, and cross country meets, volleyball matches, field

hockey games and soccer matches during the week. And then there are millions of students involved in speech, debate, theatre and music programs.

Kicking off the month-long celebration **October 1-10 is National Sportsmanship, Fan Appreciation and Public-Address Announcers Week.**

Prior to the pandemic, it is estimated that more than 300 million fans attended high school sporting events annually. After being grounded last year, it has been great to see parents and other fans back in attendance and supporting their local teams.

Sportsmanship is one of the three tenets of the NFHS rules-writing philosophy and remains one of the most important aspects of high school sports and performing arts.

The week of October 11-17 is National Performing Arts Activities and Local State High School Associations Week.

Thanks in large part to a one-of-a-kind aerosol study led by the NFHS, the College Band Directors National Association and more than 125 performing arts organizations, these vital, year-round cocurricular activities are back in the nation's schools.

While high school sports were adversely affected by the pandemic last year, performing arts programs were devastated. Only six states were able to offer in-person music contests and festivals last year, and only a couple of states were able to conduct in-person speech and debate. However, the remainder continued to compete virtually and were able to conduct season-ending state events in that way.

However, there is nothing like face-to-face, in-person activities, and the mitigation essentials from the aerosol study – and the vigilance of teachers in implementing them – have been the determining factor in many cases.

The week of October 18-24 is National Coaches, Advisors, Officials and Sponsors Week.

In addition to acknowledging the great work of high school coaches noted earlier, this is a week to recognize the hundreds of thousands of individuals who give back to sports and activities through their roles as officials and judges.

And the main tasks at hand for schools and state associations are two-fold: how to recruit more individuals to become officials and how to retain those people currently serving as officials.

The NFHS has been actively recruiting officials for four years through its #BecomeAnOfficial campaign. More than 50,000 individuals have expressed an interest in officiating through this national effort at www.highschoolofficials.com. Most recently, the NFHS has been targeting high school coaches to consider officiating another sport in their off-season after previous campaigns directed to other groups.

Concluding the month-long celebration **October 25-31 is National Community Service/Youth Awareness Week**. This week is designed to encourage individuals to give back to the community by supporting high school sports and performing arts.

High school sports and performing arts are the greatest education-based programs in the country, and our nation's youth need them now more than ever. We encourage your support.

More information on National High School Activities Month will be available on the NFHS website at www.NFHS.org/HSActivitiesMonth.

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