



The NFHS Voice



NFHS Learning Center is Education Gold Mine for All Groups in High School Sports, Performing Arts

Dr. Karissa L. Niehoff, NFHS Executive Director

 @KarissaNFHS

One of the most challenging yet fulfilling years in the history of education-based athletics and performing arts is drawing to a close. A few states that were unable to stage basketball championships during the normal winter season, along with a few others that had spring sports pushed back are about to bring one of the most interesting, significant – and longest – years to an end.

While the past few months have seen a number of victory celebrations, the outlook for the 2021-22 year of school activity programs looms even brighter. Unlike last summer when many states were facing the prospect of remote learning and no activities, we believe all states will have the green light this fall.

Among the many things that we learned during the pandemic is the importance of participation in sports, music, speech, debate, theatre and other activities – and that the mental and emotional health of students is tied to participation.

With full activities set to return in the less than two months, now is the time for student participants, coaches, officials, administrators, parents and others to prepare for the coming season. With so many opportunities lost last year, it is essential that everyone is set to go for successful seasons this year.

In the case of student participants, coaches, officials, administrators, performing arts educators and parents, there is no better place to begin preparations for the coming year than the NFHS Learning Center (www.NFHSLearn.com). And for coaches and administrators, the time is right to become involved in the NFHS School Honor Roll Program.

This national recognition program is designed to promote professional development for high school coaches by completing specific online education courses on the NFHS Learning Center.

To earn Level 1 status, 90 percent of a school's coaches must complete four of the Learning Center's most important courses – "Fundamentals of Coaching," "Concussion in Sports," "Sudden Cardiac Arrest" and "Protecting Students from Abuse." Schools receive a large banner to display in their gymnasium as a physical sign of their commitment to professional development.

With the singular focus on COVID-19 this past year, school leaders must ensure that these important topics continue to be addressed – and joining the School Honor Roll and receiving a display banner provide a competitive spirit to a goal worth achieving.

Schools also can achieve Level 2 and Level 3 status when 90 percent of their coaches complete additional courses on the Learning Center. Level 2 addresses three significant sports medicine issues – “First Aid, Health and Safety,” “Heat Illness Prevention” and “Student Mental Health and Suicide Prevention” – as well as sport-specific courses.

Courses involved in Level 3 status are “Sportsmanship,” “Strength and Conditioning,” “Teaching and Modeling Behavior,” “Engaging Effectively with Parents” and “Bullying, Hazing and Inappropriate Behavior.” Almost 100 schools in 16 states, along with two international schools, already have taken this significant step toward professional development.

Contest officials can also prepare for the upcoming season thanks to a continuation of the free officiating courses on the Learning Center. Last spring, the NFHS Learning Center began to offer its 11 officiating courses free of charge – and that generous offer continues and now covers 13 sport-specific courses in field hockey, soccer, basketball, football, swimming and diving, track and field, volleyball, wrestling and softball.

One of the more encouraging developments in the Learning Center the past few years has been the growing interest in education courses on the part of students and parents. And the Learning Center has responded!

The most recent new course for students is “The Student Experience,” which describes how participation benefits students and how involvement in activities can make a positive impact on their lives. It will be a required course for the upcoming NFHS National Student Credential.

The other free core course available for students is the “Captains Course,” along with 20 suggested elective courses.

As activity programs resume this fall, parents and other fans will be returning to games and contests to support their students. We missed the support of these individuals during the pandemic, but their support must be positive and uplifting – for the sake of students, men and women officiating games, and the future of high school activity programs.

With that goal in mind, the Learning Center has a free course – “Positive Parenting Within School Programs,” which serves as a core course for the NFHS Parent Credential.

Another area of rising interest is in the performing arts. Currently, there are eight courses specifically targeted to coaches and educators in the performing arts, including “Adjudicating Speech and Debate,” “Band Safety,” “Theater Safety,” “Interscholastic Music Event Management,” “Introduction to Interscholastic Music,” “Music Adjudication,” “Understanding Copyright and Compliance” and one just released – “Speech and Debate Event Management.”

With more than 80 courses, including more than 50 that are free, the NFHS Learning Center is an educational gold mine. We believe many of these online education courses can help schools enjoy a successful return to high school sports and performing arts this fall.

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. She previously was executive director of the Connecticut Association of Schools-Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference for seven years.