



The NFHS Voice



## **NCHSAA Best Fit to Run High School Sports in North Carolina**

**Dr. Karissa L. Niehoff, NFHS Executive Director**

 @KarissaNFHS

Beginning with the formation of the Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association in 1896 and the Illinois High School Association in 1900, state high school associations have been successfully governing education-based high school sports in our nation's schools for 125 years.

These education-focused associations, most of which were formed by the mid-1940s, were started by school-based people in an attempt to establish eligibility standards and halt the process of colleges and universities controlling meets and tournaments involving high school athletes.

While the structure of the 51 autonomous NFHS member state associations varies – some govern athletics and fine arts, others are athletics-only as an

example – all have the same mission: to regulate/direct sports and/or other activities, to provide educational opportunities for high school students in their state and to provide equitable, fair and safety-focused competition.

Many of these associations have recently celebrated 100 years of successfully providing opportunities for students to compete in education-based athletics and activities programs. These associations are governed by Board of Directors and committees composed of individuals within member schools – superintendents, principals, athletic directors, coaches and others – who have an educational focus to enforcing eligibility, playing and academic rules.

In some cases over the years, individuals outside the school setting have been added to governing boards of state associations to provide different perspectives. Many of the NFHS member associations seek to have collaborative relationships with state legislatures to monitor pending legislation, striving to keep the communication channels open and remain educationally – and not politically – connected and focused.

Unfortunately, this week there has been an attempt by a Senate committee in the North Carolina General Assembly to form a separate commission under the administration of the state government to govern high school sports in the state, thereby stripping the North Carolina High School Athletic Association (NCHSAA) and its Board of Directors of power – the organization that has successfully provided education-based programs for millions of students for more than 105 years.

The NCHSAA has been one of the most respected associations in the NFHS for many years – developing programs with sustainability to ensure that participation opportunities remain available for generations of students to come.

With visionary leaders in the past such as Charlie Adams (1984-2010), to its current executive director Que Tucker, the NCHSAA has crafted innovative programming such as its Student Services and Endowment Programs that have been emulated by other associations across the country.

The programs of the association have been directed by the member schools in a fair and equitable manner – free from politically motivated initiatives – for the past century. The NCHSAA has established programs to ensure that the privilege of competing in high school sports is available to everyone in their member schools – and that everyone is treated in a fair and equitable manner.

In its current structure, the NCHSAA Board of Directors makes decisions that are fair and equitable for the majority of student-athletes in its 427 member schools. We believe that a state government commission empowered to run education-based sports would have different and less educationally sound motives. For the benefit of the 200,000 participants in high school sports in North Carolina, we believe the NCHSAA and its Board of Directors are best served for directing these vital programs for high school student-athletes.

*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.*