




The NFHS Voice



Celebrating Return to Play During National High School Activities Month

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The COVID-19 pandemic has caused everyone to hit the pause button on life. During the stoppage and forced time away from routines, many people have come to appreciate the important things in life – family, friends and faith among others.

Still, the loss of some routines and regular activities hurt worse than others, namely last spring when high school sports and performing arts were shut down. Millions of students, coaches, parents and fans quickly began to realize the privilege of involvement in these education-based programs in schools.

Now, slowly but surely, high school sports and performing arts are on their way back into schools across the country. While things are different – with social

distancing, masks and hygiene protocols in place – there is a resounding feeling of thankfulness that some degree of normalcy is returning.

As a result, this year's celebration of **National High School Activities Month** will be like none other in the 40-year history of the event. Since 1980, the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) and its member state associations have promoted the values of high school activity programs during the month of October, but this year will be extra special.

Kicking off the month-long focus **October 4-10 is National Sportsmanship, Fan Appreciation and Public-Address Announcers Week.**

Hopefully, one of the silver linings of the pandemic is that parents and other fans are more grateful for any opportunity to attend contests this year and positively support student participants. At this time last year, there were numerous incidents of inappropriate adult behavior at high school events – mostly directed at officials.

This year, in addition to being respectful of officials, being a good fan involves supporting participants by social distancing and wearing a mask. Attending a high school contest is even more of a privilege, and players, coaches and officials need positive and encouraging support.

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

More than four million high school students are involved in speech, debate, music, band and theatre activities each year. And the results of an [aerosol study](#) conducted by the NFHS and 125 other organizations show that if schools are in session, these activities can be safely conducted by implementing a mitigation strategy focused on Masks-Distance-Time-Air Flow-Hygiene.

Competing on the debate team or playing in the marching band or acting on stage as a part of the theatre team help students develop critical-thinking skills. They also learn to be better communicators and tend to be good listeners – qualities that are essential for success in life and in their chosen careers.

This week is also set aside to recognize the 51 NFHS member state associations, which have been working overtime for the past seven months with state government, health and education leaders to outline a safe return to activities.

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

High school coaches are playing an even larger role this year in connecting with their athletes – whether that connection is virtual or in-person. In some situations, a coach may be the most significant mentor in a student-athlete's life, so keeping that relationship intact is paramount.

The nationwide shortage of officials has been exacerbated by the pandemic as some officials have decided not to return. To help with this critical situation, the NFHS is continuing its **#BecomeAnOfficial campaign**. Individuals can get started on a career in officiating by clicking on the following link:

www.highschoolofficials.com

The week of **October 25-31 is National Community Service/Youth Awareness Week.** Schools across the country need financial support from communities due to loss of revenue from the pandemic.

Whether as a participant, parent, coach, official, teacher, administrator, community supporter or general fan, millions are invested in the greatest education-based programs in the country – high school sports and performing

arts. We encourage support of these programs in communities across the nation more than ever this year during National High School Activities Month.

More information on National High School Activities Month is available on the NFHS website at www.NFHS.org/hsactivitiesmonth.

Dr. Karissa L. Niehoff is starting 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.