



The NFHS Voice



Communities Nationwide Benefit from High School Sports, Performing Arts

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What seemed improbable in any state several months ago is closing in on the finish line – the successful implementation of fall sports and activities in high schools across the country.

Never before have we been tasked to track which states are conducting fall activities and whether all the schools in a particular state are able to play football or volleyball – or participate in speech or music activities.

Amazingly, student-athletes in 31 states have had opportunities to participate in all of their usual fall sports, which includes 14 states that have been able to provide fall sports offerings without any scheduling delays.

Participation opportunities were established in 19 other states plus the District of Columbia, although delayed to varying degrees because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Six state associations pushed back fall sports altogether to later in the year, while 14 other states offered some sports this fall but were forced to delay others to winter or spring seasons.

In addition to providing students the opportunity to participate in sports and other activities, and, secondarily, the hope of conducting region and/or state championships, leaders have mainly been driven to keep these programs alive so that students are connected in an education-based setting after the school day.

Re-connecting high school athletes with their coaches, whether that connection is virtually or in-person, has been crucial for so many students. And beyond actual participation in a sport or activity, keeping teams intact has allowed students to continue to experience other benefits of education-based activities, such as service within the community.

Community service is an integral part of a complete educational experience. It continues the extension of education from the classroom to the athletic field or rehearsal hall to the community.

Community service connects students to their communities and provides an opportunity for them to practice and apply their academic and social skills in preparation for their chosen careers. These connections through activity programs are crucial for many students, especially this year with the uncertainties surrounding the pandemic.

Education-based coaches and administrators have used high school athletics and activities as a way of teaching students how to give back to those

individuals in need. Community service projects have provided students a chance to rise to this occasion and assist others.

This year, despite the ever-present challenges of coronavirus within their own programs, some individuals and schools have been helping others in ways directly related to the pandemic.

Skyelar Speck, a three-sport athlete at Union Grove High School in Georgia, has donated time and money to sew more than 2,200 masks and donated them to local health-care providers, the Haven House and other organizations.

At Morton East High School in Cicero, Illinois, National Honor Society members have regularly distributed free hygiene products to the Cicero community.

And the volleyball team at Concordia Academy in Roseville, Minnesota, used the cardboard cutout idea from recent televised sporting events to initiate a fund-raiser for an alumni family in need.

The team established the Beacon Cardboard Crew, an initiative that allows supporters to purchase cutouts of themselves to be placed in the stands at Concordia home matches. The proceeds go to the family of four-year-old Olivia Beekman, who has undergone five rounds of chemotherapy over the past year-and-a-half to treat neuroblastoma.

While the individuals and teams involved in community service projects usually benefit as much or more as the people being served, community leaders become more invested in the school and its athletics and activities programs. And with many schools facing revenue losses from the pandemic, financial support from communities is more important than ever.

The week of **October 25-31 is National Community Service/Youth Awareness Week**. 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 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, 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.