



The NFHS Voice



Shout-out to Health-Care Workers and State High School Associations

Dr. Karissa L. Niehoff, NFHS Executive Director

We are living in unprecedented times. We are all in this together. We will get through this.

These lines are repeated every day as our nation takes on one its biggest challenges ever. As many of us have found solace in our homes to guard against the spread of COVID-19, and we pray for our brave health-care workers on the front line, we have more time each day to reflect on what is important in life.

With schools closed throughout the country and high school sports and performing arts on hold, we realize more than ever the importance of these programs and how much we miss the daily busyness of school activities. While some people long for the daily MLB or NBA box scores or the excitement of the NCAA basketball tournament, from a pure numbers standpoint, more people –

students, coaches, parents, administrators and fans – are realizing the huge void in life without high school activity programs.

During these difficult days in our nation, it is hard to concentrate on our normal daily tasks as reports on the national health crisis blare across our television screens 24 hours a day. But permit us as we pause to thank the doctors, nurses and other health-care workers who are helping to save lives every day, to also remember some important individuals who play significant roles in leading high school sports and activities in our nation.

We want to give a big shout-out to the organizations that help make high school sports and performing arts happen on a day-to-day basis: the 51 state high school associations that are members of the NFHS which, like all of us, are on the sidelines waiting for the opportunity to spring into action.

These education-based associations establish eligibility, participation, academic and transfer rules for schools in their states, in addition to conducting state-culminating tournaments in numerous sports and – in those associations that govern non-athletics programs – performing arts activities.

These associations work tirelessly to stage numerous state championships in several sports for boys and girls, and these events are truly the highlight of the year – for the state associations, the schools in those states, and the many athletes who are able to play in these tournaments.

Except for this year, of course. About two-thirds of our associations were unable to complete their winter series of championships, and although only seven states have cancelled spring state championships as of April 1, that number undoubtedly will rise as more states elect not to re-open this school year.

In addition to the millions of high school student participants who have expressed disappointment in not being able to compete in state tournaments this year, the cancellation of these events has been devastating to our member state associations, which rely on revenue from these events to fund other educational programs throughout the year.

While we pray daily for those who are hospitalized with COVID-19 as well as the thousands of medical professionals who are risking their own lives each and every day, we look forward to the end of this pandemic and the opportunity for these 51 leadership groups to help restore excitement in communities throughout their states.

It will indeed be a great day when headlines carry acronyms like MHSAA, CHSAA, IHSAA, WIAA, CIF and the 46 others rather than COVID.

Dr. Karissa L. Niehoff is in her second 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.