



The NFHS Voice



Communication Skills, Mental Health/Wellness Issues Addressed at National Student Leadership Summit

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The future leaders of our country? We believe those individuals can be found among the millions of high school students involved in athletics and other activity programs such as speech, debate, music and theatre.

In addition to about eight million participants in high school sports, it is estimated that an equal number of students are involved in speech, debate, music, theatre and many other afterschool programs offered through our nation's high schools.

In surveys conducted by the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) through the years, participation in these programs in many cases leads to success in college and a career, and becoming leaders in other endeavors.

Only about three percent of the participants in high school sports will earn a college scholarship for their athletic potential, and an even smaller number will play sports professionally, while the majority – 97 percent or more – will use the valuable lessons learned through these programs to lead productive and successful lives in their chosen professions.

Teamwork, problem-solving, handling competitive situations, building self-discipline and self-confidence, overcoming obstacles and losses – all of these things that are learned beyond the classroom in athletic and other activity programs are vital ingredients to becoming a successful leader.

In its role as the national leader and advocate for high school athletics and performing arts programs, the NFHS is providing opportunities this summer for student participants to acquire additional leadership skills beyond those learned on the field, court, classroom or stage.

As a part of its Vision Statement which is to “prepare tomorrow’s leaders for the next level of life through innovative programs, healthy participation, achievement and development of positive relationships,” the NFHS is sponsoring two national leadership conferences this summer – one held virtually as well as one in-person in Indianapolis.

For the third consecutive year, the NFHS is hosting – in a virtual format – the nation’s only National Student Leadership Summit (NSLS) for high school student-athletes and participants in performing arts programs. After hosting more than 22,000 students over three days two years ago, and another highly successful online event last year, the NFHS will continue with its virtual format this year **July 12-14**. The Summit was changed to a Tuesday-Thursday format this year in an effort to make it accessible to more students. The NSLS is free on the NFHS Network but requires registration through the following link:

<https://www.nfhs.org/resources/conferences-meetings/national-student-leadership-summit/>

A survey in the spring of 2020 determined that the shutdown of high school activity programs during the pandemic affected the mental health of high school students. Although high school sports and performing arts have resumed across the country, we know the effects of the pandemic continue.

The virtual attendees will learn new leadership skills, build relationships and deal with current challenges – such as mental health issues – confronting participants today in high school sports and performing arts.

Returning to the Summit to help students address these important issues is **Ivy Watts**, a dedicated advocate for mental wellness who strives to reduce stigmas surrounding mental illness and who has empowered thousands of students, parents and administrators across the country. She has developed Athletes' Minds Matter, an all-in-one mental health platform for student-athletes to help with success on and off the field.

Additionally, we are pleased that our in-person National Student Leadership Summit will return to Indianapolis July 18-20 after a two-year hiatus due to the pandemic. More than 150 students and adult leaders from NFHS member state associations will hear from some of the same leaders slated to speak at the virtual conference.

Many of the issues facing high school students today will be addressed at these conferences – emotional and social wellness, conflict resolution, perspective and inclusion, reacting to situations and making good decisions, and developing and maintaining healthy relationships.

The virtual National Student Leadership Summit will enhance students' ability to build relationships with one another, as summit attendees will once

again have the opportunity to interact on the BAND group communication app. During the previous conferences, the BAND app served as a conduit to the formation of several subgroups on other social media platforms.

With the conference held during the week this year, we would encourage coaches to bring team members together to participate in the Summit collectively.

Students involved in athletics and other activities such as speech, debate, music and theatre are the leaders in schools nationwide, and this one-of-a-kind National Student Leadership Summit will provide these individuals with energy and confidence for the year ahead. High school student leaders can click on the following link to register for the July 12-14 virtual NFHS National Student Leadership Summit:

<https://www.nfhs.org/resources/conferences-meetings/national-student-leadership-summit/>

Dr. Karissa L. Niehoff is in her fourth year as chief executive officer 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.