



# MIDDLE SCHOOL PROGRAMS: CRITICAL TO DEVELOPING OUR STUDENTS

National Federation of State  
High School Associations



**Rhonda Blanford-Green**, Commissioner  
Colorado High School Activities Association

**Julie Cochran**, Director of Sports

National Federation of State High School Associations



## WHY ARE WE HERE

**“The average child today spends less than three years playing a sport and quits by age 11.”**

Aspen Institute and Utah State University new survey of sports parents

**"By high school, as many as 40 to 60% of all students - urban, suburban, and rural - are chronically disengaged from school."**

Klem, A. M., & Connell, J. P. (2004). Relationships matter: Linking teacher support to student engagement and achievement. *Journal of School Health*, 74(7), 262–273.

- With the youth sport industry on the rise it is important to engage students in middle school interscholastic activities to keep them in education-based interscholastic activity setting.
- Studies have found that students are less likely to participate in high school athletics if they didn't participate in middle school athletics.





# WHY WE NEED TO RE-EVALUATE OUR COMMITMENT TO MIDDLE SCHOOL ATHLETICS

- 70% of kids leave sports entirely by the age of 13 (Aspen Institute and Society)
- The National Federation of High School in a November 10, 2019 press release stated that “for the first time in 30 years student participation has declined nationwide.”
- Sports in America for kids between the ages of 6-12 have been separated into the “Haves and Have Nots”
- My belief statement that “the first and most social institution that socializes in his or her life is “SCHOOL”.”





## A CHANGE IN PHILOSOPHY (5 YEARS AGO VS TODAY)

---

- The nations' youth-sport industry has grown by 55% since 2010
- Outside participation is causing a competitive gap between the have and have nots.
  - Leaving little hope for the teams and programs that serve student populations that parents want but can't be fully engaged in the club scene This Directly impacts the mission of HS sport.
- Racial disparities depending on the sport
- Intense specialization creating increase in injuries, burn-out, anxiety, depression and attrition





# NFHS MIDDLE SCHOOL COMMITTEE

**"Although connecting students to school is important at all grade levels, it's especially crucial during the adolescent years. In the last decade, educators and school health professionals have increasingly pointed to school connectedness as an important factor in reducing the likelihood that adolescents will engage in health-compromising behaviors. A connected school environment also increases the likelihood of academic success."**

Blum, R. (2005). A Case for School Connectedness. *The Adolescent Learner*, 62(7), 16-20.

- NFHS Board of Directors took initiative to develop a standing committee on Middle School activities to explore:
  - Sharing Ideas and best practices
  - Assisting schools and state associations in keeping kids in education-based activities
  - How to engage students at the middle school level and keep them engage in high school.





# NFHS MIDDLE SCHOOL BELIEFS

---

- Middle-level education-based activity programs exist to connect students to the fabric and culture of the school.
- Our ultimate purpose behind education-based activities at any level is human growth and development which focuses on behavior, socialization, and self-realization.
- The NFHS is committed to
  - Supporting an inclusive and positive environment for all students
  - Encouraging participation in grades 7-12.
- Our goal is to guide middle-level students, coaches, administrators, and parents, to work together to influence all students to realize their potential in a safe environment.





# VALUE AND BENEFITS

Schools can help students transition to middle school through participating in athletics/activities.

- Students in grades 6-8 are undergoing massive physical, social and emotional changes.
- Cultivating, building and sustaining relationships is not guaranteed in all learning environments, but extracurricular activities can help
  - Promote cooperative environments;
  - Develop communication skills;
  - Fosters inclusion;
  - Help students feel a sense of belonging;
  - Provides a purpose and incentive to attend school daily;
  - Develops a sense of pride and involvement within the school;
  - Teaches individual and group responsibility through both individual and team activity options;
  - Enhances physical and social growth;
  - Improves motor skills and fitness;
  - Creates a baseline for a healthy lifestyle;
  - Builds self-esteem and perception;
  - Improves socialization skills;





# HOW DO WE ENGAGE OUR MIDDLE SCHOOLS

---

Every state could and does look different;

- 24 state high school associations include middle schools in their memberships;
- 19 state high school associations permit students below 9<sup>th</sup> grade to play on high school varsity competitions;
- 2 state high school associations have started conducting middle school tournaments for their membership (Tennessee and Ohio);
- Illinois has an association strictly for middle school activities (IESA). The IESA conducts state tournaments, music contests, speech tournaments and much more for students in grades 5-8 in Illinois.





# WHAT CAN YOU DO AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

---

Middle School is often the first contact with a school-based sport/activity for parents and kids.

- Parents expectations can be unrealistic as their child enters middle school.
- Competitive nature (focusing in on wins) can supersede a school's goals for character development and sportsmanship.





# WHAT CAN YOU DO AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

---

## How to Help

- Utilize your state high school association sportsmanship manual for your middle schools.
  - Get your parents and students started on the expectations of behavior early.
  - Make sure coaches are following your school's core beliefs.
  - Review these core beliefs with students and parents.
- Utilize NFHS Learn course for middle school coaches, students and parents.





# NFHSLEARN.COM

There are over 70 courses available on Learn and many of them are appropriate for middle school students, coaches and parents. A couple of examples:

## Coaches

- Fundamentals of Coaching
- Sport Specific Courses

## Students

- Learning Pro courses.
- Captains Course

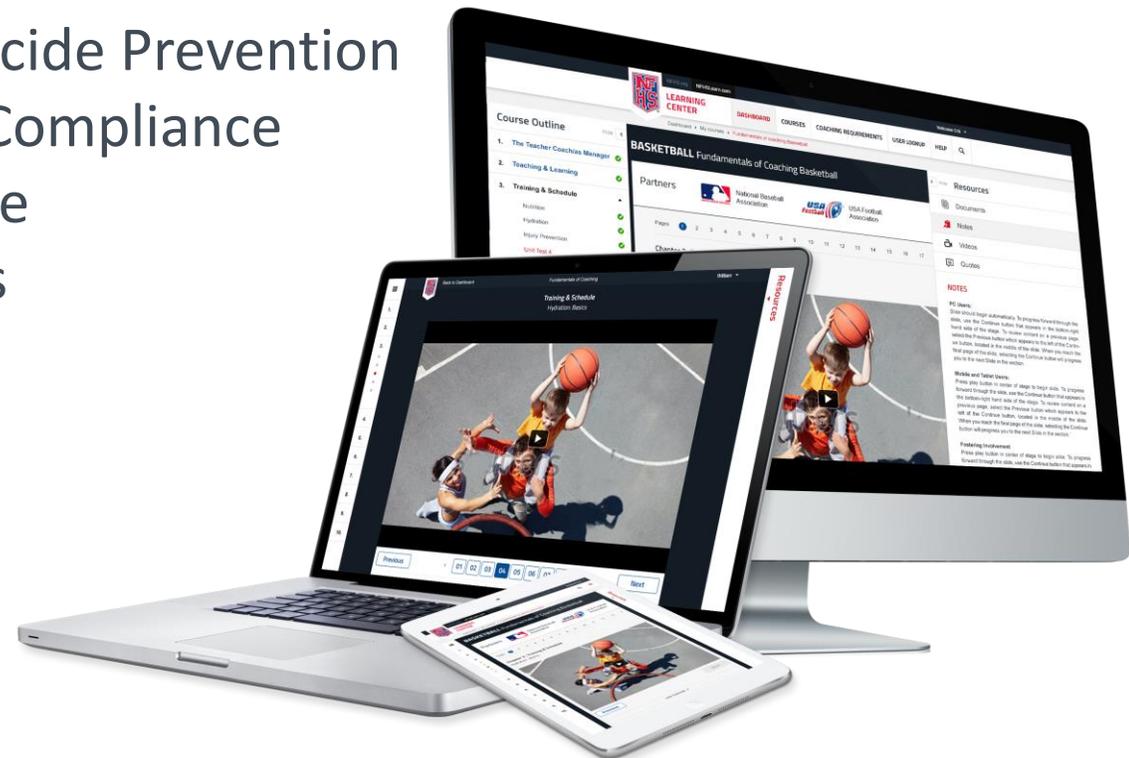
## Parents

- Positive Sport Parenting
- Sportsmanship



# WWW.NFHSLEARN.COM

- FREE courses include:
  - Bullying, Hazing and Inappropriate Behaviors
  - Student Mental Health and Suicide Prevention
  - Understanding Copyright and Compliance
  - Protecting Students from Abuse
  - Hazing Prevention for Students
  - Coaching Unified Sports
  - ACL Injury Prevention
  - Sportsmanship
  - And many more





## WHAT CAN YOU DO

- Host extracurricular day
- Engage your conferences athletic directors to start local leagues at middle school.
- Get your high school coaches and teams to engage with your middle school teams and coaches.
- Get involved in Unified Sports at middle school level
  - Helps build inclusive culture at your schools





# Questions

