

**National Federation of State High School Associations
2016 Winter Meeting**

Overarching Recommendations

Members of the National Federation of State High School Associations met for two three-hour sessions as part of their 2016 Winter Meeting to engage in facilitated dialogue on the future direction of the NFHS. The discussion and conclusions were not circumscribed by current limitations on the jurisdiction and authority of the NFHS and its members. Rather, the process was open and aspirational. The sessions included eight preliminary dialogues on a variety of issues, and culminated in a final dialogue to answer this Focus Question:

*What is the story we want to tell about
school-based sports and activities in the United States?*

The small groups generated 34 answers to this question, which were organized into seven clusters with the following headings:

1. Life Lessons
2. Benefits of Participation
3. Inclusion and Equity
4. Education-Based Activity
5. Building the Future
6. Strengthening Communities
7. Promoting Wellness

On the following pages, the seven clusters have been summarized as findings from the facilitated dialogue.

The findings from the eight preliminary dialogues may be found in the full report on the sessions.

1. LIFE LESSONS: High school athletics and activities build a foundation for lifelong success.

In addition to building important skills like communication, cooperation, and concentration, high school athletics and activities give students the invaluable experience of learning to deal with both success and failure. For students who have grown up in adversity, this can be life-changing, and offer a path into the future that they might otherwise never imagine. NFHS is fundamentally about preparing kids for life by teaching them how to be inclusive, how to treat people equitably, and how to build community.

2. BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION: Participation in high school athletics and activities shows students that they belong to something bigger than themselves, and reinforces values that are important to lifelong civic involvement.

The current slogan of the NFHS emphasizes participation, but it needs refreshing. It needs to reflect the benefits of participation in the context of today's world. It also needs to reflect both the values that our programs instill in students, and the financial value of the programs themselves.

Participation in education-based athletics promotes scholarship, sportsmanship, leadership, safety, wellness, and fun. They are also a bargain, reinforcing these values to all students in the community, including many who could never afford to participate in private or club sports.

3. INCLUSION AND EQUITY: The NFHS has always been a model for inclusion, and for providing all students equitable opportunities.

The growing cultural awareness of economic and social inequity in the United States over the past decade offers NFHS an opportunity to play a catalytic role in advancing equity and inclusion. School-based athletics and activities provide opportunities for all students, and explicitly seek to level the playing field for those who would otherwise be denied a chance to participate. In telling the story of the NFHS, it is important to emphasize that our programs intentionally seek to engage students of lower socio-economic status, students of color, students with all levels of ability, and students expressing any sexual orientation or gender identity.

4. EDUCATION-BASED ACTIVITY: From its inception, the core of the NFHS's mission is *education* through school-based athletics and activities.

Education is the point of origin of everything that the NFHS does. This has been evident throughout the federation's history, and should be emphasized in telling our story today. This can be done by showing the rigor of academic training that coaches and teachers of athletics undergo, and programs that reinforce this emphasis throughout their careers. Moreover, this is the factor that distinguishes the NFHS from other sports-oriented national organizations, and what distinguishes school-based athletics and activities from other athletic programs offered at the community level.

5. BUILDING THE FUTURE: School-based athletics and activities offer unified, collective pathway to a brighter future.

NFHS programs not only improve the futures of individual students—they collectively represent a brighter future for the country as a whole. This is an especially important message to deliver when the United States appears to be fractured in so many ways, i.e. economically, politically, and racially. The NFHS should be portrayed as positively building a more promising future that everyone can participate in.

6. STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES: School-based athletics and activities can unite and heal fractured communities.

In addition to improving the future of the nation as a whole, NFHS programs can be authentically portrayed as a unifying force for communities, bringing all parts of a community together to foster a positive culture. This part of the NFHS story is probably most effectively illustrated by showing the positive influence of our programs on a community that would otherwise be divided by circumstance or inequity. School-based athletics and activities can be shown to empower and unify individuals, schools, and communities as a whole.

7. PROMOTING WELLNESS: School-based athletics and activities promote both physical and emotional wellness.

The positive impact of NFHS programs on the physical health of individuals is self-evident, but in telling our story we also need to show the positive impact on emotional health, and the promotion of healthy lifestyles in communities as a whole. Safety is another important part of this message, given the current widespread concern about injuries resulting from participation in certain sports. The high priority that the NFHS places on risk minimization—again, both physical and emotional—should be emphasized as part of its wellness message.