



NFHS Strategic Plan 2025 – 2029 DRAFT

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Timeline for Implementation

- February 5, 2025 – Feedback provided by Strategic Planning Committee to Chair
- February 9, 2025 – Strategic Planning Committee Draft provided to NFHS Staff
- March 7, 2025 – Draft from NFHS Staff provided to Strategic Planning Committee
- March 14, 2025 – Feedback from Strategic Planning Committee to NFHS Staff
- March 28, 2025 – Draft from NFHS Staff provided to membership
- April 14, 2025 – Draft presented to NFHS Board of Directors
- April 15, 2025 – Strategic Plan status update presented at NFHS Summit
- June 2025 – NFHS Strategic Plan delivered to membership at NFHS Summer Meeting
- August 1, 2025 – 2025-2029 NFHS Strategic Plan takes effect

NFHS Strategic Plan 2025 – 2029

Summary

The NFHS is the national leader and advocate for education-based athletics and activities. Within its 51-member state associations, the NFHS serves 19,800 high schools and over 12 million young people. The top priority of the NFHS is to develop resources to support state associations and those working with young people as they provide opportunities for students to participate in education-based athletics and activities in a manner that is safe, developmental and positive.

This strategic plan has been developed to provide a structured approach to addressing the priorities of the NFHS, state associations, and relevant stakeholders. The five identified strategic directions outline key initiatives aimed at enhancing collaboration, promoting innovation, and advocating for the value of education-based activities. Each strategic direction is supported by a rationale, expected outcomes and focus areas that underscore the NFHS's commitment to driving measurable progress, fostering a culture of continuous improvement, and empowering state associations to achieve their shared mission of enriching the educational experience through education-based athletics and performing arts.

The following five strategic directions have been identified:

- 1. Establish the NFHS as the leading voice in advocating for the enduring relevance and importance of education-based athletics and activities, ensuring their continued prominence and valued integration into the educational experience.**
- 2. Advance and promote student physical, mental and emotional wellness through targeted initiatives that support education-based athletics and activities.**
- 3. Expand the role of the NFHS as a connector and collaborative entity for state associations and relevant stakeholders through multiple digital and in-person growth opportunities.**
- 4. Strengthen the position of the NFHS as the data leader in education-based athletics and activities by developing an ecosystem for data collection, analysis, and dissemination to support the core needs of the NFHS, state associations, and relevant stakeholders.**
- 5. Evaluate the NFHS rules-making and workflow process to assess committee efficiencies, data collection processes, engagement and participation of the membership, and production delivery platforms.**

These strategic directions, essential outcomes and focus areas provide a comprehensive roadmap for the NFHS, state associations, and relevant stakeholders to strengthen and advocate for programs, support the well-being of students, and measure programmatic impact across the nation.

Strategic Direction 1:

Establish the NFHS as the leading voice in advocating for the enduring relevance and importance of education-based athletics and activities, ensuring their continued prominence and valued integration into the educational experience.

Rationale:

In recent years, there has been a dramatic increase in challenges to the work of state associations posed by state legislatures, special interest groups, legal entities and individuals in the general public. These challenges have often led to legislatively driven changes to state association by-laws and regulations. In addition to increased external pressures on state associations, there has been a sharp rise in the number of competition-based youth sport models, drastic changes in collegiate athletic landscape, an emphasis on Name, Image and Likeness at the professional and college levels, and public interest in modeling a high school experience after one at the higher elite levels.

There is a need to establish stronger advocacy efforts to elevate the relevance and uniqueness of education-based athletics and activities, and the work of NFHS member state associations.

Strategic Priorities:

- **Develop the Case for Education-Based Athletics and Activities**
 - Create compelling, research-based advocacy materials that outline the academic, social, emotional, and physical benefits of student participation.
 - Include real-world success stories, data-driven outcomes, and testimonials from students, educators, and parents to personalize and strengthen the message.
- **Develop the Case for State High School Associations**
 - Describe the critical role of state associations in supporting and governing high school activities, ensuring safety, equity, and opportunity for all participants.
 - Showcase the associations' impact on policy development, professional development, and resource allocation at the state and national levels.
 - Provide a detailed summary of the economic, cultural, and community benefits of high school athletics and arts programs.
- **Engage Key Stakeholders**
 - Collaborate with external organizations, educational institutions, and policymakers to highlight the message and build coalitions of support.
- **Enhance Legislative Relationships**
 - Provide training programs for state associations to build capacity in legislative processes, stakeholder engagement, and effective communication.
 - Offer resources to help associations navigate policy shifts, funding changes, or regulatory developments.

- **Advocate Through Multiple Channels**
 - Leverage digital platforms, social media, toolkits and traditional media to distribute information.
 - Develop a campaign that reinforces the value of participation in education-based athletics and activities.
- **Monitor and Respond to Emerging Issues**
 - Establish a system for addressing legislative and societal trends that may affect education-based athletics and activities.
 - Be proactive in addressing misconceptions or policy proposals that could undermine the relevance of programs.
- **Empower Membership with Advocacy Skills**
 - Offer resources such as talking points, presentations, and toolkits to support advocacy efforts.

Expected Outcomes:

- **National Awareness:** Increased awareness among policymakers, educators, and communities about the benefits and value of education-based athletics and activities.
- **Support and Funding:** Stronger support and funding for programs, ensuring their sustainability and growth.
- **Credibility of State Associations:** Enhanced recognition of state associations as essential partners in education and student development.
- **National Narrative:** A unified message that reinforces the importance of participation and state associations' role in providing equitable and high-quality opportunities.

Actionable Timeline:

2025-2027:

- The NFHS will enhance its efforts to capture research and collect data to support “The Case for High School Athletics and Performing Arts”, and “The Case for State Associations”.
- Research and data will be used to develop a variety of advocacy materials for use by state associations, including data summaries, success stories and testimonials.
- The NFHS will engage additional external partners in collaborative advocacy work to support state associations (e.g., education groups, policymakers, national coalitions).
- The NFHS will enhance training for state associations on advocacy techniques and engagement.

2027-2029:

- Informed by improved monitoring of legislative trends and emerging challenges, the NFHS will continue to expand advocacy efforts through targeted campaigns, toolkits, and media outreach.

- The NFHS will provide the membership with advocacy updates and success stories.
- The NFHS will engage in ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness of advocacy efforts and refine materials and strategies as needed.

Strategic Direction 2:

Advance and promote student physical, mental and emotional wellness through targeted initiatives that support education-based athletics and activities.

Rationale:

Education-based athletics and activities are critical in shaping students' physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Participation in these activities provide opportunities for personal growth, being part of a team or group, developing leadership skills, and enhancing many life skills which are essential for students' overall development and future success. As students face the challenges of academic expectations, social influences, behavioral health risks, and performance pressures, it is vital that schools create a supportive environment that fosters a culture of well-being, belonging and personal growth through education-based activities.

Strategic Priorities:

- **Foster Student Leadership**
 - Provide resources and leadership initiatives for use by state associations.
 - Utilize students' feedback to support the positive impact of participation in activities and the Case for Education-Based Athletics and Activities.
 - Continue to review resources for relevance in leadership and life skills development.
- **Promote Physical Health and Risk Minimization**
 - Provide best practices and resources for overall wellness, injury prevention and risk minimization.
 - Utilize technology to improve data collection and research that will support decision-making by the NFHS.
- **Sportsmanship**
 - Emphasize the ideals of good sportsmanship through character education and leadership training.
 - Develop initiatives that promote respect for the playing rules of the game, other participants, coaches and officials.

Expected Outcomes:

- **Enhanced Student Well-Being:** Access to mental, physical, and emotional health resources and increased awareness of risk minimization strategies.

- **Empowered Leadership Programs:** Enhanced leadership programs for state associations and relevant stakeholders that strengthen life skills, and character development for students.
- **Enforced Standards of Behavior:** A culture of respect and sportsmanship fostered through education, engagement and accountability.
- **Elevated Student Voice** - Greater utilization of student voice and perspective in consideration of NFHS initiatives.

Actionable Timeline:

2025-2027:

- The NFHS will continue to assess existing wellness programs and resources within state associations, including the NSAC and state-based student leadership groups, to gather input on current wellness challenges and leadership opportunities.
- Using this feedback the NFHS will continue to update wellness and leadership resources for state associations, including digital and in-person opportunities.
- With the guidance of the NFHS Sports Medicine Advisory Council, the NFHS will seek to provide best-practice materials on injury prevention, mental health, and risk minimization.

2027-2029:

- The NFHS will continue to support state association student leadership experiences, the National Student Advisory Council and the National Student Leadership Summit. As a part of these experiences, the NFHS will enhance its efforts to gather impact data and offer related training to state associations.
- Through an improved participation data and other data mechanisms, the NFHS will seek wellness-related data (e.g., participation in leadership programs, sportsmanship trends, injury reports) from state associations.
- The NFHS will continue to highlight success stories and case studies to showcase wellness improvements.
- Formalize ongoing professional development on wellness, leadership, and safety for State Associations.
- Conduct a full review of programs and adjust based on feedback and data.

This strategic direction ensures that NFHS and its member associations actively champion the complete health of students, creating environments where participants thrive both on and off the field or stage.

Strategic Direction 3:

Expand the role of the NFHS as a relationship builder and collaborative entity for state associations and relevant stakeholders through multiple digital and in-person growth opportunities.

Rationale:

It is important that the NFHS serve as a catalyst for collaboration among state associations and relevant stakeholders. Collaboration and engagement offer the opportunity to share knowledge, expertise,

challenges and best practices. The NFHS should expand its role in the identification of emerging trends, state associations needs and challenges to state association work. In response, the NFHS can create an enhanced variety of professional development experiences and opportunities to connect as an NFHS community- technology driven and in-person- to support the work of state associations.

Strategic Priorities:

- **Design and Build a Digital Hub for State Association Collaboration.**
 - Develop a centralized digital platform tailored to the needs of state associations.
 - Include easy navigation, a strong search feature, and tools to upload, organize, and access resources.
 - Ensure security protocols are in place to protect sensitive information and allow controlled access.
 - Develop a collaborative space, such as an online portal or forum, where state associations can discuss emerging issues, share insights, and learn from each other's experiences.
- **Support Collaboration Between State Associations**
 - Introduce forums and discussion boards where state associations can engage in real-time discussions on challenging issues and important topics.
 - Host workshops, webinars, and roundtables focused on current issues, featuring expert speakers, case studies, and interactive discussions.
 - Organize an annual current issues summit to bring together state associations and policymakers for networking and education.
- **Enhance and Develop Professional Growth Opportunities for All State Association Needs**
 - Expand onboarding and NFHS introduction for new staff members beyond NFHS member state association executive directors.
 - Use personal and digital means to create support networks for state association staff job duties and responsibilities.
 - Engage NFHS Directors at state level events and conferences.

Expected Outcomes:

- **Mission Alignment:** A strengthened sense of community and shared purpose among state associations, and between state associations and the NFHS.
- **Strategy Alignment:** Increased collaboration on key topics, shared challenges, and solutions-oriented results.
- **Resource Alignment:** Access to an assortment of resources, and collaborative opportunities to address the business of state associations and emerging issues.

Actionable Timeline:

2025-2027:

- The NFHS will execute surveys and meetings with state associations to gather input on collaboration needs and challenges; considering both in-person and digital needs and opportunities.
- Using this information, the NFHS will begin mapping out a professional development and engagement strategy utilizing both personal and digital connections.
- The NFHS will conduct pilot forums for early user feedback and initial workshops or webinars focused on common challenges and leadership development.

2027-2029:

- Current technology upgrades including digital platforms, the NFHS website and MyGroups potential will be launched featuring information and learning resources, and secure access.
- The NFHS will offer regular roundtables and online events to promote engagement within the membership and within NFHS associations.
- The NFHS will offer improved peer-support networks to connect staff by roles (e.g., operations, compliance, marketing) as well as onboarding programs.
- Through a variety of networking and communication opportunities, the NFHS will collect and share success stories showing improved collaboration and problem-solving across states.

By strengthening its role as a connector, the NFHS will foster a more unified network of state associations, enhance collaboration on shared challenges, and increase its effectiveness in addressing the evolving needs of education-based athletics and activities.

Strategic Direction 4:

Strengthen the position of the NFHS as the data leader in education-based athletics and activities by developing an ecosystem for data collection, analysis, and dissemination to support the core needs of the NFHS, state associations, and relevant stakeholders.

Rationale:

A centralized, data-driven approach will empower the NFHS, state associations, and relevant stakeholders with evidence-based data that demonstrates the measurable impact of education-based athletics and activities. A data collection and analytics plan will help the 51 state associations work more efficiently; connect better with stakeholders; and show real, measurable results in supporting education-based athletics, performing arts, and activities. This will strengthen advocacy efforts by showcasing data-backed successes and fostering a culture of continuous improvement.

Strategic Priorities:

- **Build Infrastructure for Data Collection**

- Develop standardized protocols and tools for data collection across associations to ensure consistency, accuracy, and comparability.
- Implement a secure, centralized data management system to collect and store association-wide data while maintaining privacy and compliance standards.
- **Identify Key Data Metrics**
 - Collaborate with state associations to determine the most impactful data points (e.g., participation rates, program effectiveness, equity measures, and student outcomes).
 - Prioritize metrics that align with organizational goals and stakeholder needs.
- **Enhance Data Accessibility and Transparency**
 - Provide state associations with user-friendly dashboards and reporting tools to access, interpret, and apply data insights.
 - Share data to encourage the adoption of best practices.
- **Support Data-Driven Decision-Making**
 - Facilitate the use of data insights to shape policy recommendations, improve resource allocation, and measure program success.
- **Promote the Value of Data to Stakeholders**
 - Highlight the impact of data-driven initiatives through success stories and case studies.
 - Engage schools, administrators, and other stakeholders in conversations about the benefits of data collection, fostering a culture of accountability and continuous improvement.

Expected Outcomes:

- **Improved Decision-Making:** Access to timely and accurate data will enhance strategic planning and decision-making.
- **Program Effectiveness:** Access to data will improve program outcomes, enhance participation growth, and provide equitable access to education-based athletics and activities.
- **Stronger Advocacy:** Access to data will provide data-backed insights that will strengthen stakeholder support and inform policy considerations.
- **Operational Efficiencies:** Access to data will streamline processes resulting in better coordination at state and national levels.

Actionable Timeline:

2025-2027:

- NFHS staff are engaged in analysis of data needs and development of strategies to gather data.

- As new and current data needs are identified, the NFHS will consider hiring or outsourcing services to support data collection and management. This work will likely coincide with targeted research initiatives.
- Identification of the most important data points (e.g., participation rates, program outcomes) as well as research questions will occur alongside the development of data and research collection methods.

2027-2029

- Data currently gathered from state associations will be collected through revised methods.
- Research initiatives and data reports will be shared with state associations and larger audiences as appropriate through an upgraded reporting system.
- NFHS staff will continue to share results, best practices and success stories.

By leading this advocacy effort, the NFHS will solidify its position as the champion of high school athletics, activities and performing and fine arts, ensuring their relevance

By positioning itself as the data leader, the NFHS will strengthen its role as a trusted resource, enhance its capacity to support State Associations with evidence-based solutions, and solidify its leadership in advancing education-based athletics and performing arts.

Strategic Direction 5:

Evaluate the NFHS rules-making and workflow process to assess committee efficiencies, data collection processes, engagement and participation of the membership, and production delivery platforms.

Rationale:

The NFHS has long maintained a thorough and comprehensive rules-making process that incorporates a multi-layered approval structure. Evolving expectations, reduction in print sales, advancements in technology, and production challenges necessitate a fresh evaluation. There is a need to assess the overall efficiency of the rules-making process while maintaining the integrity of that process.

Strategic Priorities:

- **Assess Stakeholder Needs and Preferences**
 - Evaluate all aspects of the NFHS rules-making process, including communication.
 - Engage state associations, officials, coaches, and administrators to understand their preferences and requirements for rules publication access.
 - Identify potential barriers to accessing digital or non-printed formats, including technology gaps in certain regions or among specific user groups.
 - Develop strategies to ensure all stakeholders have equitable access to rules publications, regardless of format.
- **Evaluate Costs, Sustainability and Risk Minimization**

- Subject to ongoing risk assessment, analyze the financial impact of the rules-making process, to include rules publications and rules committee meetings.
- Consider the potential cost savings and efficiency gains associated with digital or hybrid models.
- Assess the feasibility of incorporating multimedia enhancements, such as video explanations and interactive diagrams, to improve rules comprehension.

Expected Outcomes:

- **Efficient Rules-Making Process:** Streamline workflows to reduce any identified inefficiencies in the rules-making process.
- **Increased Use of Data to Support Rules Changes:** Expand data collection and analysis to support rules that enhance risk minimization, competitive balance, consideration of emerging trends, and the overall experience of participants.
- **Innovative, Accessible, and Secure Rules Publications:** Provide rules materials in multiple formats, including interactive digital guides, video explanations, and mobile-friendly content, to improve accessibility, rules comprehension. Enforce secure distribution methods to ensure appropriate use of NFHS intellectual property.
- **Stronger Membership Engagement and Education:** Enhance strategies for membership engagement throughout the rules-making process. Expand resources that serve to educate the membership on the rules-making process and associated responsibilities.

Actionable Timeline:

2025-2027:

- The NFHS will conduct a full review of the current NFHS rule-making process through surveys of stakeholders (state associations, coaches, officials, administrators) to gather feedback on current publications, communication, and accessibility.
- Using data gathered from stakeholders, the NFHS will create draft recommendations for the potential modernization of rule-making workflows (e.g., data collection, committee meetings, publications process).
- The NFHS is currently developing more technology-based rules access methods and learning opportunities.

2027-2029:

- Based on recommendations for refinements to the rules-making process, the NFHS will roll out improvements alongside learning opportunities for stakeholders.
- The NFHS will continue collecting feedback from stakeholders through regular review cycles to assess ongoing efficiency in the development process, stakeholder satisfaction, and adaptability to emerging technologies.

The NFHS will achieve a more efficient, transparent, and accessible rule-making process that enhances stakeholder satisfaction, reduces costs, and positions the organization as a leader in innovation and equity in high school athletics.