



Position Paper

School Athletics

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Introduction

School athletics programs are a significant aspect of a student's total education program. They provide opportunities for highly athletic students to further develop and use their skills in organized competition with students of similar ability from other schools.

The philosophy that should guide school athletics programs is that they must provide experiences that will help students grow physically, mentally, emotionally, socially and morally. The fundamental objectives of school athletics are educational, and all other objectives must be considered secondary and should not conflict with the stated educational objectives of schools.

From their very beginnings through several stages of development and approval, school athletics programs have received varying degrees of acceptance: from opposition to tolerance, to recognition and capitalization, to—most recently—a degree of exploitation.

If athletics programs are to continue to be considered an integral part of the physical education program and of education in general, they must be kept in proper perspective, providing opportunities for students to compete in a wholesome environment and to develop a level of maturity that will help them function in later life.

It must be understood and accepted by all those involved in education that athletics programs, in concert with curricular and other extracurricular programs, must receive the full support of a school's administrative team, professional and support staffs, and students and community. Although primary responsibility for an athletics program rests with physical educators, the total school family shares responsibility for the success and productivity of this program.

Position

An increasing number of concerns is being presented about the place of school athletics in the total education of students. The most frequently expressed concerns are the following:

- the amount of school time lost by students and teacher-coaches for travel to competitions
- the distance traveled to competitions

- the high cost of the athletic program in general and of such specific activities or parts of activities as officials; transportation; outlay, maintenance and replacement of equipment and uniforms; and rental of facilities
- use of non-teacher coaches without direct supervision of such persons by school-based personnel
- length of season and number of games, matches, tournaments and other events participated in by the competitors and teacher-coaches.

Well-directed programs of activities would do much to dispel these concerns. The role of physical education is to see that such programs of activities are developed and maintained and to ensure that programs are understood and accepted.

Well-directed programs of activities must be designed to meet the needs, interests and capabilities of participating students. Individuals who organize programs should keep in mind the following points:

1. School athletic programs should be regarded as integral parts of the total education program and should be conducted in such a way as to remain worthy of such status.
2. School athletic programs should be a supplement rather than a substitute for basic physical education, recreation and intramural athletics programs.
3. School athletic programs should be conducted so that the physical welfare and the safety of the participants are protected and maintained.
4. School athletic programs should be conducted under the same rules and regulations as the total education program.
5. Schools athletic programs should be conducted in an environment of fairness and good sportsmanship and in accordance with the rules and regulations of the leagues, conferences or associations in which these programs are offered.
6. School athletic programs should provide maximal and equal opportunities for both boys and girls to participate in a variety of activities—individual, dual and team—which can be conducted within the parameters of available resources and which will provide for differing levels of age, size, ability and interest.

Well-directed programs will be balanced within the total program of activities. All programs of participation should be treated equally in terms of finances, time use of facilities, publicity, length of season and use of staff personnel.

Rationale

School athletics programs rank among the most effective means within the total educational program through which many of the objectives of education are realized (Ruffin). A primary aim of education is to help boys and girls achieve the highest degree of individual development of which they are capable (Irwin 1983). Crucial in this process

is the distinction between encouraging students to do their best and have fun doing it and pushing them beyond their capabilities and interest levels. The overall philosophy and structure of the competition, the types of activities and the rules of the competition should be compatible with the developmental needs of the participants (Valeriotte 1984).

Competition in sports teaches students to function within a team, to develop self-confidence, to appreciate and respect the skills of others, to develop self-discipline, to cooperate and to win and lose gracefully (Dubois 1980, Hayden 1983). It also promotes a sense of self-worth. The responsibility of all physical educators is to conduct competitive sports programs in a fashion that brings added dignity to the system and the profession (Raffin).

Wienberg (1981) states the major reason for dropping out of athletic activities is an overemphasis, on competition, which leads to feelings of unworthiness and failure on the part of the participants. Students want to play and adults want to win (Valeriotte 1984). In many cases, winning has been overemphasized, and teaching the value of sportsmanship has been relegated to less important status (Simon 1979, Maxwell 1985, Hayden 1983, Valeriotte 1984).

Students enjoy themselves best and continue their involvement in sports when they feel competent and in harmony with the sports environment. Students have the most positive experiences when they feel that they can meet the physical requirements of the specific sport situation and when they can meet their personal goals and successfully demonstrate their ability to perform (Duda 1985). Emphasis should be on fun and learning. Improvement and skill mastery should be stressed as the most significant criteria of success (Duda 1985)

The limits of athletics programs should be clearly defined by our educational goals (Mendez 1984). Playing seasons should be of reasonable length and be preceded by an adequate period of conditioning and of teaching fundamentals. Practices should be of reasonable length and related to the physical condition of the participants. Coaches should understand and recognize the physical capabilities and psychological characteristics of each participant.

Policies should be established to protect all participants and should be based on the best and most recent sports medical information and knowledge. Satisfactory annual medical examinations and ongoing medical supervision of all participants should be encouraged. Participants who have temporary disabilities should be encouraged to participate to the level permitted by their condition. Continued examinations of such students should be required after any serious injury or illness, and return to full participation should be permitted only after receipt of approval from an attending physician. High-quality protective equipment required by a sport should be provided and carefully fitted for all participants.

School athletics programs should be organized and conducted as follows.

Elementary Programs

1. Competition between schools should be limited to activities of low intensity, such as informal games between two schools or friendly and informal competition on sports days when several schools meet.
2. Emphasis should be on participation by all students (Valeriotte 1984, Baumgarten 1984, Dubois 1980, Simon 1979, Duda 1985).
3. All competitions should be confined to small geographic areas.
4. High-pressure programs of school athletics should not be allowed under any circumstances.
5. All activities should be conducted within the environment of the school and surrounding grounds.

Junior High Programs

1. While some of the literature states that excessive competition should be avoided in programs for Grades 7 and 8 children, there is a consensus that the primary thrust should again be one of maximal participation, having fun, improving fundamental skills and maintaining participants' levels of interest (Potter and Wandzilak 1981).
2. The programs offered must be directed to the capacities and needs of participants. The physical and emotional levels of the participants require that such programs be directed with extreme care to ensure that primary emphasis is placed on providing educational experiences for the participants rather than on producing only winning teams.
3. The physical welfare of all participants should be emphasized.
4. The distances traveled between schools for competitions could be greater than those traveled by elementary students. However, normal travel distances should be established and loss of school time controlled.
5. When possible, activities should be conducted in the environment of the school and surrounding grounds.

Senior High Programs

1. Programs of activities should be an extension of the elementary and junior high programs.
2. New activities, not recommended for elementary and/or junior high school participants should be introduced. However, these activities should be those that

meet the needs, interests and capabilities of the participants and that can be accommodated without creating unwarranted pressure on the available school resources.

3. Because of the high-risk nature of some activities, the physical welfare of all participants should be emphasized.
4. Competition should be restricted to the existing league organization, and participation in tournament or exhibition contests should be limited both in frequency and in distance traveled.
5. Given that school athletics are educational in nature, it is important that they follow a school's stated educational objectives. Further, games and tournaments should be planned so as to interfere as little as possible with the school's regular program of instruction.

Athletics at every level should be conducted by professionally prepared personnel. Coaches should be certified teachers and members of the school staff. The responsibility of these people is not to produce professional athletes but to contribute to the physiological, psychological, sociological, intellectual and moral development of the individuals involved (Valeriotte 1984, Foster 1978, Hayden 1983, Holyoak 1985).

Conclusion

The purpose of school athletics programs is to provide opportunities for highly skilled students to participate in programs of activities that will enhance their development. These programs of activities involve players, coaches, officials, spectators and administrators. It is clear that programs should offer students sound, constructive experiences and that adults involved in the programs should be responsible for supporting and encouraging these opportunities and for ensuring that negative and destructive experiences are kept to a minimum.

The Health and Physical Education Council therefore recommends that school athletics programs continue to be a part of a balanced program of physical activities consisting of core curriculum instruction, intramurals and interscholastic athletics. Programs of school athletics should coexist with all other educational programs in schools and should not in any way become a case of "the tail wagging the dog." The teaching-learning program for which schools exist to meet the needs of all students should be the prime focus. School athletics programs should exist only to help educate young people through athletics. When athletics fail to be educational, they cannot continue as part of the educational program.

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