

Aligning School Communities Around WHY WE PLAY



By Jody Redman, Associate Director

In an effort to align school communities around the purpose of education-based athletic and activity programs, the League's Board of Directors will require local school boards to complete a short training on WHY WE PLAY—Defining the Purpose of Education-Based Athletic and Activity Programs for the 2015-2016 school year. The training must be completed before approving the Minnesota State High School League's Membership Resolution. The intent of this requirement is to assist schools and their communities in aligning around a shared common language, where every stakeholder clearly understands the purpose of education-based athletic and activity programs.

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The purpose of education-based programs is the human growth and development of students who participate and connecting them to caring adults in their learning community. Fewer than 3% of the students who participate in high school athletics will play at the collegiate level and less than 1% will go on to play professionally. This means 97% of the students involved in high school sports will have a terminal experience—they will never again participate in sports at the same organized level in their lifetime. So what are we really giving students if we are only concerned with winning? We must provide students with growth that will sustain them beyond physical skill development and the ability to play and win a game. For this to happen, we must align school communities around a deeper purpose.

WHY WE PLAY is a national initiative, whose intent is to reclaim the educational purpose of sports. Sports in America engage more individuals, families, and

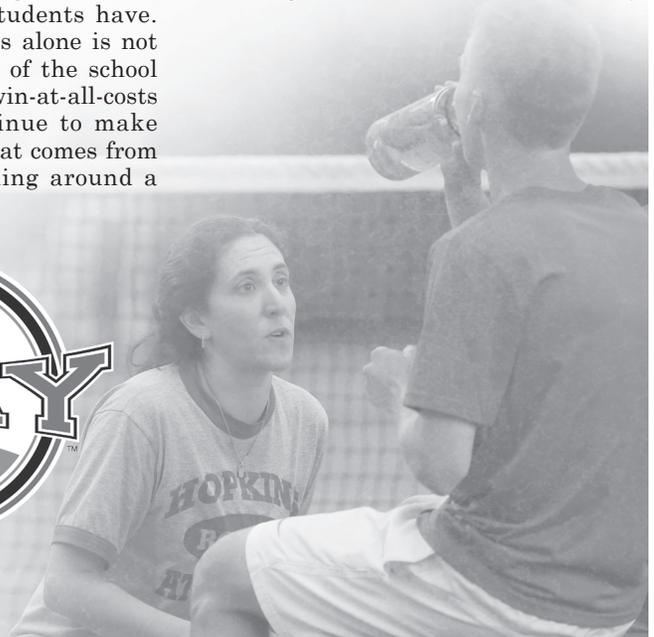
communities in a shared experience than any other cultural activity, organization or religion and have significant perceived value. We value sports because we believe the students who are involved acquire something meaningful through their participation. Sports provide countless teachable moments where core ethical values such as caring, honesty, fairness, responsibility, and respect for self and others can be developed. With that said, one of the great myths in our culture is that participation alone builds and develops this character, as if doing a handstand, running a race, hitting a curveball, or simply suiting up are sufficient to strengthen a young person's moral fiber. Unless a coach teaches and models character and encourages its development in student-athletes, it is more likely organized sports will spoil play and undermine the development of the very character and virtue it claims to build. The potential for the growth and development of character in students only exists if the adults who are in charge of and oversee these experiences are aware of and intentional about this significant role.

Coaches clearly play a significant role in the experience that students have. However, training coaches alone is not enough. Without support of the school community, the current win-at-all-costs sports culture will continue to make winning the only value that comes from participation. This training around a

shared common language will provide an effective response to the demands and pressures of the current win-at-all-cost sports culture.

In an effort to support school leaders around the purpose of education-based programs, the Minnesota School Boards Association (MSBA) has endorsed the WHY WE PLAY initiative that clearly defines the purpose of sports in an educational setting. The initiative will provide school boards with the same shared common language that is being delivered to athletic administrators, coaches, parents, officials, and students around the value of these programs.

By providing school boards across the state with brief but dynamic video training that clearly defines the purpose of education-based athletic and activity programs, we will align school communities across the state around a shared purpose. We will also provide support so coaches can function from an education-based mindset instead of a win-at-all-cost mindset. This initiative will ultimately provide students with a richer experience; one that fosters learning, growth, fun, and a connection to caring adults in the school community.



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