



NATIONAL FEDERATION OF STATE HIGH SCHOOL ASSOCIATIONS

BIOGRAPHY

Dr. Karissa L. Niehoff

NFHS Chief Executive Officer

Leader of National High School Sports and Activities

Dr. Karissa Niehoff has worked in public education and education-based athletics since 1989 as a teacher, coach, athletic director, principal, state association executive director and, since August 2018, as chief executive officer (CEO) of the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS).

Prior to becoming the first female CEO of the NFHS, Niehoff served eight years with the Connecticut Association of Schools-Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference (CAS-CIAC), first as deputy executive director for six months and as executive director from January 2011 until joining the NFHS in 2018.

Niehoff began her career in Connecticut public education in 1989 as a physical education instructor at Greenwich High School. She was a highly successful field hockey coach at Litchfield High School and Joel Barlow High School with four conference titles and one state championship. She also coached high school volleyball, softball, basketball and track.

In 2000, Niehoff was appointed assistant principal of Har-Bur Middle School in Burlington. Four years later, she assumed the position of principal of Lewis Mills High School, a post she held until joining the Connecticut association.

At the national level, Niehoff served on the NFHS Board of Directors for three years prior to joining the staff, including a term as president-elect. She was chair of the NFHS Field Hockey Rules Committee and served a term on the NFHS Student Services Committee. Niehoff also served 10 years on the United States Field Hockey Association Board of Ethics and was the field hockey program leader in 1996 at the International Youth Camp during the Olympic Games in Atlanta.

Niehoff served on the Education Committee of the United States Olympic Committee, authoring the "OlympiKids School Celebration Guide," acting as U.S. delegate to International Olympic Academies in Greece and Canada, and representing the USOC at numerous national conventions, conferences and educational

programs. She was co-founder and dean of the “Passing The Torch” Academy For Youth Sport Leadership, a USOC initiative to promote leadership and the spirit of Olympism within the realm of youth sport. In 1997, she coached a girls basketball team at the World Scholar Athlete Games, which involved more than 2,000 coaches and athletes from 150 countries.

Ironically, her first year as CEO of the NFHS involved leading the organization through a year-long celebration of its Centennial, culminated by the 100th Summer Meeting in 2019 in Indianapolis. After the 2019 Summer Meeting, a new logo and branding initiatives were launched, and Niehoff has led the organization to a more prominent position as the national leadership organization for high school sports and performing arts programs.

Through more aggressive marketing and communications strategies, the NFHS has been able to share its messages about the benefits of high school activity programs to more groups through a heightened presence in the mainstream media and social media. In August 2019, she implemented a weekly op-ed entitled “The NFHS Voice” which continues to gain traction with national media as well as the NFHS membership. In her time as NFHS CEO, Niehoff has opened the door to relationships with many outside groups, including National Governing Bodies, the NCAA, national coaches organizations and youth sports groups.

As a champion of life-long learning, collaborative thinking and teamwork, Niehoff has created ongoing professional development opportunities for the NFHS staff. Her collaborative mindset has brought value to employees at all levels within the national office and has created more of a “thought partnership” culture.

Three years ago, she led the implementation of the NFHS Center for Officials Services (COS) as a service for high school contest officials and led the organization as it assisted and guided member associations through the shutdown of activity programs due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the return of programs in 2020.

In 2020, her efforts to ensure the long-term viability of high school football paid dividends with the announcement of a first-ever partnership between the NFHS and National Football League (NFL). As a part of the partnership funded by the NFL, the NFHS – with the help of a newly hired senior consultant – will work to develop and execute a strategic plan intended to identify, inform and educate participants, partners, associations, government and media around the benefits and values of participating in high school football.