

Model Athletic Assessment Tool

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The goal is to create a program assessment for the Department of Athletics. Some philosophies of local, state, and national organizations were examined before beginning the development phase. Procedures for implementing the program assessment were established. Forms were developed to assist in implementing and managing the assessments. Components of program assessment focus on philosophical foundations, procedures for measuring performance, instilling good citizenship in student athletes, and utilizing self-reflection for assessment. These components are essential to any athletic program, and athletic directors and other school personnel who can competently scrutinize each aspect and formulate assessments, policies, protocols, and procedures can help an athletic program grow and reach its full potential.

Philosophical Foundations

At Independence High School (IHS), athletic employees strive to follow the mission statement of the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS, n.d.):

The National Federation of State High School Associations serves its members, related professional organizations and students by providing leadership for the administration of education-based interscholastic activities, which support

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academic achievement, good citizenship and equitable opportunity. (para. 1)

Additionally, athletic employees follow the mission statement of the IHS Athletic Department, as it reads in the coach's handbook:

The goal of every sport will be to develop our student-athletes into productive, contributing citizens of our community and society. We will emphasize focus on establishing sportsmanship as well as a positive feeling of school spirit. All athletic programs will be conducted in accordance with the rules, regulations, and policies of Independence High School, the Raleigh County Board of Education, and the West Virginia Secondary Schools Activities Commission. (Moore, n.d., p. 10)

IHS is also under the guidance and jurisdiction of the West Virginia Secondary School Activities Commission (Commission). The Commission's mission statement reads,

The Commission believes that a controlled activities program is a strong factor in the development of courage, personality, cooperation, and leadership. The Commission believes that representatives of a school should be good citizens of that school, hence the need for requirements and regulations governing eligibility that have been standardized. The Commission is designed to provide means for the unbiased and amicable settlement of disputes regarding activities. The Commission seeks to present proper ideals of sportsmanship so that coaches, players, school authorities, game officials, and spectators may combine to make any activity enjoyable and productive of physical and social benefits to both sides involved in the contest, with partisanship and prejudice eliminated as far as possible. To accomplish these objectives the Commission asks the cooperation of its members, all lovers of clean, wholesome activities, and all fans, young and old, who believe in our American system of interscholastic. (Commission, n.d., p. 1)

The Raleigh County School District (RCSD, n.d.) also sets forth core beliefs that IHS is required to adhere to:

We believe leadership for all matters; we believe all students must be provided a safe, caring and nurturing environment conducive to learning. We believe all students must be actively engaged in a robust curriculum embedded with high quality expectations. We believe all students must be provided explicit instruction from highly effective educators. We believe all students must be provided a variety of strategic resources to be successful. (p. 1)

There is no lack of organizations that have specially tailored mission statements, goals, objectives, and beliefs. In each case and at every level, I am sure a significant amount of time was spent specially crafting and wording these statements. In the cases of local boards of education and state boards of education, there is no mention of athletics, because athletics are not legally mandated to exist. So, as an athletic director, I feel that it is prudent to have a comprehensive way to assess my program and show the educational values that lie within it. Being able to quantitatively show that athletics provides a benefit to education would therefore be essential to continue its existence.

There is a clear relationship between athletics and academic achievement. Multiple studies have been conducted showing a link between physical exertion and achievement in the classroom. In general, it has been scientifically demonstrated time and again that physical exercise is tightly correlated with mental acuity. Several research articles that support this statement have been provided (see Berstein, 2010; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010; Robinson, n.d.).

The experiences of student athletes are highly compatible with the educational missions and the beliefs and objectives of local and state boards of education. Leadership and character building are a part of both of IHS's governing boards, and athletics directly targets character building and leadership. There is no better place to learn, practice, and display leadership than on a sports team. It is easy for me to see growth from underclassmen to upperclassmen every year as my student athletes mature and learn these skills. How better to

quantify character education than by seeing two opposing teams shake hands and hug at the end of a hotly contested athletic event?

Academic and personal conduct standards are also inherent and required for students to participate in athletics in many schools, including mine. Students are required to have a minimum GPA of 2.0 on a 4.0 scale to participate in athletics or even be a part of an athletic program in West Virginia. IHS requires attendance at school on the day of a game for students to be eligible to participate in the contest. So athletics has academic and attendance requirements built in. There have been multiple student athletes who probably would not have graduated if it had not been for education-based athletics at my school. Simply being enrolled in school and attending within the building daily require a certain minimum behavior conduct expectation. Education-based athletics inherently requires this for students to be allowed to participate. IHS and RCSD do not allow athletic participation by student athletes who are under suspension or expulsion or even attendance by students who only want to watch the event who are under suspension or expulsion.

Procedures for Measuring Performance of an Athletic Program

How can an administrator manage what he or she does not measure? To better evaluate the athletic program, a system to measure performance and achievement was created. The steps for accomplishing this are

- understanding what goals or outcomes the department needs to accomplish,
- observing performance over time,
- evaluating the overall department, and
- making corrections to adjust behaviors to increase performance.

The goals set by the IHS Department of Athletics are a part of its mission statement:

The goal of every sport will be to develop our student-athletes into productive, contributing citizens of our community and society. We will emphasize focus on establishing

sportsmanship as well as a positive feeling of school spirit. All athletic programs will be conducted in accordance with the rules, regulations, and policies of Independence High School, the Raleigh County Board of Education, and the West Virginia Secondary Schools Activities Commission. (Moore, n.d., p. 10)

IHS coaches are evaluated three times per season. Two evaluations are performed during the season and a final evaluation at the end of the season. The West Virginia Department of Education provides IHS with a form to use to evaluate coaches on each of the three occasions. To have these goals followed and accomplished by the coaching staff, they must first be made aware of them and their importance. A preseason meeting with the coaches before each season is an effective way of communicating this. During this meeting, the *IHS Coaching Handbook* is reviewed. The handbook illustrates that these are the values IHS wants to emphasize and wants its coaches to accomplish on an individual level throughout the season.

The next step requires the assistance of the school administration. The administrative staff must work together to observe coaches, programs, and all other aspects of athletics to evaluate the athletic department adequately. As with all high schools, at IHS the principal is the boss. The principal is ultimately responsible for all activities on campus. Having a positive working relationship with the sole building administrator is essential to making the whole plan work and for growth to occur. The IHS school principal signs all evaluations and oversees me as well. Therefore, all members of the administrative team must communicate well and be on the same page to ensure fairness and consistency in evaluation. Observation is not a once or twice occurrence. Performance should be measured over time to be sure that judgments are not rushed and conclusions are not drawn too quickly. Consistent observation of teams and programs is required for the most accurate measurement. Additionally, those who are being monitored should not be kept in the dark about observations. Feedback should be provided as needed to both coaches and student athletes. Sometimes, these conversations clarify what is going on and assist with the observation process. Additionally, providing feedback allows for errors to be corrected preemptively. The person providing feedback should be as specific as possible. Giving

vague references to general ideas is not effective communication. Giving concise expectations to the coaching staff allows them to correct issues on their own and allows positive corrections to occur.

Input from a variety of sources can be used to evaluate movement toward the desired goals. According to Bowers (2013), “Measurements can be obtained through statistics, player and parent surveys, coaches’ comments, and perceived attitudes from all relevant parties within the program” (p. 105). Perspective and perception of relevant parties is an imprecise mode of measurement, but sometimes the needed information can be found through this method. I like to utilize an end-of-the-year survey to assess the attitudes of the entire student body toward the sports programs. This information is not used to evaluate the performance of the coaches, but to gather general attitudes toward sport participation, sport offerings, and school spirit in general. Having informal conversations with parents before and during sporting events is a great way to gather information regarding attitudes toward a sport or coach, especially if the attitudes are negative. Parents typically do not hold back opinions they have about the way their child is treated, the way the sport is conducted by the coach, and their general feelings about the school. Sometimes it is challenging to peel through parents’ emotional layers, but insight can be derived from their opinions in some cases.

There are many processes for correcting insufficiencies in coaches or the program. It could be as simple as setting a series of new goals for the coach to show minor improvement or as serious as implementing an improvement plan through the central office. In extreme cases, termination may be necessary, but that is not always the athletic director’s decision. One tool that can be utilized is the NFHS Learning Center website. The NFHS offers many opportunities in coaching education. It provides many free online classes in a variety of coaching scenarios.

Instilling Good Citizenship in Student Athletes

As an athletic director, I find that promoting good citizenship is a lifelong lesson that needs be handed down to my student athletes. Sport is a natural arena to build character and citizenship in a young person. The platform that sport provides allows for values, morals, ethics, and appropriate conduct to thrive. It is important

that coaches understand that it is not all about winning and losing. Education-based athletics conveys innumerable opportunities for student athletes to make decisions on and off the field. Sometimes they make the wrong choice, but luckily for them they have a support network of coaches, teachers, and school administrators to catch them when they fall. Good sportsmanship is directly related to good citizenship. Promoting good sportsmanship is a foundation of building a quality athletic department.

A sincere effort should be made to educate students on character building, sportsmanship, and citizenship. Education to students about the dangers of drugs, alcohol, and prescription medicine abuse is readily available and posted in all corners of the school, field house, and weight training facilities. Primarily, education can be a deterrent for students facing difficult choices from their friends regarding the use of illicit substances. Coaches must also be educated to recognize and notice early warning signs of substance abuse. Once again, the NFHS provides online classes in coaching that assist coaches in recognizing changes in student behavior. Additionally, the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) offers the Leadership Training Institute (LTI), a class covering substance abuse signs and designed specifically for coaches and athletic directors. These classes are readily available to coaches and at IHS are paid for by the Department of Athletics. All people involved in student-athletes' lives must make an ongoing effort to educate students about these topics.

Lessons such as teamwork, hard work, and leadership can be learned through athletic participation. With each passing year, students graduate and are sent out into the world to make their own way. These young people will hopefully be armed with the lessons and values that they have gained from the people that they have been exposed to at school.

Knowing all this, I find that it is difficult to assess and evaluate how well students are learning these values. Quantifying citizenship is not an easy task. For athletic directors, coaches, and school administrators, it is always heartbreaking to hear about the death of a young person or imprisonment of a student who walked the halls of the building a few years ago. Unfortunately, it is a natural reality that not all the lessons that these professionals impart are going to

stay with all students. It is such stories that always stick in the minds of not only the school personnel, but also the community in general. Altering these negative attitudes is part of the athletic director's responsibility.

Self-Reflection for Coaches

School administrators can receive usable information by soliciting a self-reflection from their coaching staff. Self-reflection provides coaches a nonverbal opportunity to suggest to the evaluator how they think they performed in each season or even on a specific task assigned to them, and thus the evaluation becomes a dual notion in which the coach's opinion counts. Self-evaluations can be as specific or as broad as administrators want them to be. Self-reflections can be as formal as a document to attach to the coach's final evaluation or as informal as a conversation between the coach and athletic director in which the athletic director asks a question such as "What would you have done differently if you had a second opportunity?" or "How do you think that went?"

Once the self-evaluations are complete, the athletic director must read them and compile them by sport. According to Hoch (2013),

In the evaluation process, it's necessary to use a standard form for all the coaches. Although it is natural for many athletic directors to want to find the best possible form or to improve upon the one they use, it is more important to remember the purpose for evaluations. It should be about the process, not the tool that is used. (p. 65).

Self-Reflection for Athletic Directors

By title, the athletic director is the head of the athletic department. Ultimately, the perceptions on the efficiency, performance, and quality of the sports programs at a school fall within the athletic director's responsibilities. According to Williams (2014),

The process of self-assessment gives athletic administrators multiple sources of feedback that allows them to validate a student-centered, education-based philosophy of interscholastic athletics. At the same time, using both formal and informal methods of assessment appropriately,

professional development of the athletic administrator can be an integral part of the continuous improvement of personnel and program. (para. 22)

Having multiple sources of feedback is valuable for athletic directors to evaluate themselves. The principal, parents, and students are stakeholders in the performance of an athletic director. Their feedback can prove worthwhile. Being a good listener to what they say and internalizing it during a period of self-reflection can help an athletic director become more of a transformative leader.

Athletic directors must have their finger on the pulse of all their school's programs so they can sufficiently diagnose problems within any department at any given time. However, because of their deep involvement with school programs, sometimes athletic directors need to remember to think about how coaches, student athletes, and community members perceive them. Sometimes, the feedback received is less than positive. Having the ability to accept poor feedback can be frightening to many athletic directors. Being able to rationally accept it, think about it, and adjust to it is essential to the athletic director's self-evaluation. Eventually, the person or group that offered the criticism will see the change and potentially recognize that the athletic director is listening to them. Having a community that trusts the athletic director will help the athletic director to garner support and that is important in a job for which public perception is so important. Just as with coaches' performance, the athletic director's performance should not be based upon wins and losses, but how well am the athletic director is preparing coaches for success and the athletic director's ability to delegate good sportsmanship, character, and leadership to student athletes.

The purpose of having athletic directors evaluate themselves is for them to examine their own insufficiencies as well as strengths. The blueprint for an athletic director's success is not much different from that of the coaches' success. It is all student athlete driven. Informally, an athletic director should ask, "Am I doing what is best for our students?" That is the essential question. Doing what is right for children can never be wrong

Understanding and wisdom do not come from simply working hard or putting in long hours at work away from family. They come

from a deep recognition of the important things. The responsibility that an athletic director has to the student athletes is great. It is paramount for the athletic director to be able to delegate responsibility to coaches for the betterment of education, character building, citizenship, sportsmanship, and leadership. Assessing one's own performance can be a difficult task because many times people see themselves through rose-colored glasses. Peeling through the layers of one's own ego takes time and great effort. However, the internal reward and growth that come from self-reflection are worthwhile.

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