

## Youth Sports Position Paper

### *Background*

The Board of Education believes that a significant amount of learning occurs through student participation in athletics. Athletic participation provides a forum for developing communication skills, sportsmanship, the ability to work with others, and the sacrifice of putting the needs of others ahead of one's own, the opportunity to learn from success and failure, a setting where discipline, leadership, and respect are developed, a low-risk opportunity to learn how to cope with difficult situations, and an outlet for enjoyable physical activity. We further believe that athletic programs enhance the district's indicators of success (competency, character, culture, and community).

Recognizing the contributions athletics can bring to student achievement, the District offers a wide range of opportunities for participation in interscholastic athletics for students in grades 7-12. In addition, our community is fortunate to have a number of youth sports programs that supplement the programs offered by the District. Ten youth sports programs currently exist in Oregon, offering students participation in extended seasons or at age levels younger than what the District offers. Many of the practices and games offered by these programs are held on school grounds or in school buildings.

The Board believes that each family has the right to choose athletic activities appropriate for their children, based upon interests, physical maturity, and skill level. Between the sports offered by the District, the community, and other regional and state groups, sufficient activities exist for students of nearly every grade, skill, and maturity level.

Despite the positive impact athletics can bring, recent years have seen an alarming national increase in trends that run counter to the values that are successfully cultivated in a sound athletic program. Physical and verbal attacks by parents on officials, coaches, and other parents and athletes have become increasingly common. Incidents of burnout by young athletes have increased, as have repetitive stress injuries. Premature use of "select" teams, a focus on the individual rather than the team, and excessive attention on winning and losing are examples of other trends that diminish the educational benefits and enjoyment of youth sports. A positive athletic experience in the early years increases the willingness of young people to stay engaged and proceed with confidence as they pursue their athletic goals.

The Board of Education believes that our community should take a leadership position in developing youth sports programs that realize the benefits of participation without the disturbing side effects described above. In Spring 2004, the Board convened a Youth Sports Task Force to generate a belief statement about appropriate goals for the youth sports (K-8) programs in the community, along with guidelines for expected behaviors by those involved in athletics (coaches, parents, educators, and athletes) and a model for coordinating the operation of youth sports programs in alignment with best practices. The Task Force completed its work and submitted to the Board of Education in October 2004 a set of belief statements, commitment statements, and guidelines for an advisory board.

### *Position and Next Steps*

The Board affirms the work of the Youth Sports Task Force, and supports both its recommendations and the framework upon which those recommendations are based. We believe that our community should provide a model for what a youth sports program can be, and we direct the following steps:

*Creation of an Oregon Youth Sports Program Advisory Board.* This Board will have three primary roles. First, it will serve as the oversight and coordinating body for the youth sports programs in the community. In addition, the YSPAB will be responsible for ensuring adherence to the principles and philosophy outlined in this document and the Task Force report. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the YSPAB will serve as a clearinghouse for best practices and a forum for discussing how the youth sports programs in our community can continue to improve.

*Develop an on-going education program about best practices in youth sports.* The Sports Administrator for the District will, in conjunction with the appropriate high school coaching staff, develop sport and age specific coaching training opportunities on at least an annual basis. Such training will include both sport-specific fundamentals and best practices in coaching youth. In addition, the District will regularly offer sessions for parents, coaches, and players about appropriate behaviors and the philosophy and research behind them.

*Implement a commitment sheet, to be signed by every player, parent, and coach.* The commitment statements would be taken from the report of the Task Force. This step ensures that each of these vital participants in youth sports are clear about the behaviors expected of them and should increase understanding about how these positive behaviors can contribute to student achievement and enjoyment.

*Align facilities use policies with the philosophy and guidelines of this paper and the Task Force report.* The District's facilities are meant primarily to meet the educational needs of our young people. The principles and recommendations of the Task Force also aim to achieve that end. It follows that the policies governing the use of school facilities would be in alignment with the best practices in youth sports. Accordingly, we encourage use of our facilities by youth sports programs that operate in line with our philosophy and will not make those facilities available to those programs not aligned with this set of beliefs.

### *Conclusion*

Young people can learn a great deal about themselves, others, and life lessons through participation in athletics. The Board of Education believes that the District, in partnership with the youth sports programs of the community, must take a leadership role to ensure that this learning, above all, is the focus of our athletic programs. It is our belief that a program of continuing education for coaches, parents, and students, along with clear

expectations of behavior and appropriate use of school facilities, can make Oregon a model of excellence in youth sports.