

Athletic Directors: Getting on the School Board Agenda Year-Round

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It is a Tuesday evening. The school board meeting is underway. Parents are voicing concerns, principals are outlining test scores, and financial reports are being reviewed. But something is missing, something that deeply affects thousands of students every year: interscholastic athletics. Too often, athletic directors are absent from these crucial conversations. Not because they don't care, but because they are not on the agenda. That needs to change.



Elevating the Voice of Athletics

Ask any student who is part of a team, and they will tell you that athletics is life-changing. The lessons learned on the field, the court or in the pool such as resilience, teamwork, sacrifice and discipline often last longer than anything taught in the classroom. But the people making decisions about funding, scheduling and policy do not always see that firsthand. That is why it is critical that the athletic director regularly speaks to their school board and not just during budget season or after a headline-making event.

School boards need to understand that interscholastic athletics are not just extracurricular; they are essential to student growth, school culture and community engagement. The person who can articulate the value and importance of education-based athletics is the school's athletic director.

When the athletic director gets on the school board agenda, they translate the daily grind of coaching, planning and mentoring into strategic insight. They connect the dots between what happens at practice and what happens in the classroom. Think about the occurrences that happen every day; the senior who stayed eligible due to the coach holding the player accountable in algebra, the JV player who became confident after months of quiet struggle, or the community rallying around a Friday night game after a tough week at school. These are the stories that matter, and the school board needs to hear them.

What Should the School Board Hear?

Getting on the school board agenda is not about making noise; it is about making an impact. School boards need to hear more from the athletic director, and not only during budget cuts or when a complaint surfaces. The school board needs to hear the athletic director's insights, athletic metrics, the vision of the athletic program, and most importantly, the stories that impact the school.

Listed are a few examples of key talking points:

- **Lay the Groundwork:** Schedule a meeting with the superintendent, school board president and vice president before the school year begins to request that an "athletic department report" be included on the board meeting agenda each month. In this conversation the athletic director should share accomplishments, areas for growth, future plans and how the board can best support the school's athletic program. Thanking the administration and school board for what they have already done will also go a long way.
- **Participation and Inclusion:** Highlight the athletic department's work toward Title IX compliance, inclusive programming and access for all students, including those with disabilities.
- **Success Beyond the Scoreboard:** Show the school board how athletics contribute to the broader mission of the

school. Share participation data, GPA comparisons, graduation rates of student-athletes, behavior data, and college scholarship numbers.

- **Professional Development for Coaches:** Show the investment that is being made in the coaching staff to ensure they are mentors, educators and role models.
- **Academic Integration:** Emphasize how coaches support academic standards, tutoring and eligibility. Interscholastic athletics is not a distraction; it is a partner in academic success.
- **Budget Transparency:** Be clear about the athletic department's needs and how funds are used. Explain how the athletic department manages money, leverages community partnerships, or generates revenue and the return on investment in the school's interscholastic athletic program.
- **Facility Needs and Safety:** Do not wait for an emergency to happen before discussing facility needs. Discuss long-term planning, preventative maintenance and safety upgrades with rationale and timelines.
- **Needs and Wants:** Be honest about what is needed from field repairs to mental health support; however, balance that with vision. Inspire the school board to dream with the vision of the athletic department.
- **Extracurricular Committee of the Board:** Having a school board committee that supports extracurricular activities helps school board members and administration make connections with coaches, student-athletes and the athletic department that may not normally occur in the function of a school district. The extracurricular committee of the board allows committee members and others in attendance learn about the school's athletic programs and reminds every one of the importance of education-based athletics programs.

When in front of the school board, the athletic director should not come to deliver a speech. He or she should come to build a relationship. Ask questions, offer solutions, listen to the school board's concerns and show how athletics can be part of the answer. Bring student-athletes and coaches to the meeting. Let the school board hear directly from the people most affected by their decisions. A two-minute story can be more persuasive than a 20-slide presentation.

Make It Routine

Once on the agenda, the athletic director should not disappear. One presentation is not enough. The athletic director should advocate for a standing quarterly update slot on the agenda. This regular cadence allows the athletic director to share progress, address challenges early and celebrate student-athlete success. The more consistently the athletic director is present at school board meetings, the more the school board will see the athletic director as a vital part of the leadership team. And when the difficult questions are being asked and the tough conversations take place, the trust and credibility will have been built in order to be heard.

Build the Relationship, Not Just the Presentation

A school's athletic director must be mindful that school boards

are elected local officials who are community members committed to improving schools. They contribute many volunteer hours fulfilling their school-related responsibilities and duties. They are committed individuals who serve their school district and seek out the best for their students, parents, stakeholders and communities. School board members may not have the foundational background of a school's athletic program and be aware of the time, energy and emotional commitment invested by athletic directors and coaches in the lives of the student-athletes entrusted in their care.

The Ripple Effect

When the athletic department is represented at the board level, everyone benefits; students feel supported, coaches are empowered, and the community sees the athletic program as a respected pillar of education. It sets a tone that the school values the whole student: mind, body and character.

The school board meeting may seem like a place for policy work and budget debates, but it is also where the future of the school's interscholastic athletic program is decided. If the athletic director cares about their student-athletes, coaches and the community, they must show up. It is not just about being in the bleachers or on the sidelines, but in the boardroom. It is time for athletic directors to get on the agenda and stay there. **HST**

Resources:

- The "Why" of High School Athletics and Activities Programs <https://www.nfhs.org/articles/the-why-of-high-school-athletics-and-activities-programs>
- Title IX Compliance – Part IV: Frequently Asked Questions <https://www.nfhs.org/articles/title-ix-compliance-part-iv-frequently-asked-questions>
- Participation in High School Athletics Has Long-lasting Benefits <https://www.nfhs.org/articles/participation-in-high-school-athletics-has-long-lasting-benefits>
- How Do Sports Help Students Academically? <https://www.bridgeport.edu/news/how-do-sports-help-students-academically>
- Benefits of Sports in Schools <https://westerntoledoprep.org/2023/03/23/benefits-of-sports-in-schools>

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