

Gary Musselman – Activities Association

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

School is back in session and fall sports are gearing up. Have you ever wondered: Who coaches the coaches? Who officiates the officials? Who records the records? And for that matter, who leads the youth leaders? It is essential that there is a state high school activities association which leads and regulates these activities. In our state, that association is led by an executive who will now be serving at the national level as well. He comes from rural Kansas. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Gary Musselman is Executive Director of the Kansas State High School Activities Association. The Kansas State High School Activities Association is a state-wide, self-funded, non-profit association which organizes, governs, and regulates interscholastic activities. In Kansas, the activities association has more than 750 member schools including middle and high schools, public and private.

Gary Musselman has rural roots, having grown up at Ness City. He was actually born in the nearby community of Ransom, population 326 people. Now, that's rural.

From the time he was a sophomore in high school, Gary knew he wanted to be a teacher and a coach. He went to K-State for his secondary education degree and later earned a master's in secondary school administration from Wichita State. Through the years, Gary served as a teacher and coach at Independence, Andover, Beloit, and Halstead. He was the high school principal at La Crosse before joining the staff of the Kansas State High School Activities Association in 1988 and becoming Executive Director in 1996.

So what are the functions of the Kansas State High School Activities Association? Some of the organizations' activities are highly visible, such as the state tournaments for high school sports. Others are less well known such as the scholars bowl, music festivals, or debate programs. The activities association keeps a list of state winners and state records in athletics and also supports the KAY organization and student councils.

“Annually, more than 105,000 kids are in school athletics across Kansas,” Gary said. “Another 30 to 50,000 participate in competitions such as music or debate.” Each of these activities needs a common set of rules which the activities association provides.

“We have a legislative board of 78 elected representatives of schools across the state which makes the rules,” Gary said. “Then we have an executive committee and a separate appeals board to which a parent may appeal a ruling. Only a small fraction of the work we do involves rules enforcement,” he said.

Gary believes that school activities should be a laboratory for learning, a place to learn sportsmanship and citizenship in a way that reflects the educational values of Kansas.

“A 2008 University of Kansas study showed that 94 percent of the 2,000 kids who dropped out were not involved in school sports,” Gary said. “When kids are engaged (in activities), it is very meaningful to their educational success. School activities help kids learn life skills.”

The activities association operates a leadership program named KAY (Kansas Association for Youth) and a student council summer workshop. For coaches, the association offers mandatory rules tests which coaches must pass with 90 percent proficiency. For officials, the association offers registration, testing, and training for nearly 5,000 men and women. For schools, the association offers the opportunity for fair student competition, plus specific benefits such as catastrophic insurance coverage for student-athletes.

Now Gary's leadership is being taken to the national level. In 2013, he was selected to serve a four-year term on the Board of Directors of the National Federation of State High School Associations based in Indianapolis.

"I am blessed and honored," Gary said. "We are planting seeds. It is rewarding being involved with things that help kids develop." For more information, go to www.kshsaa.org.

School is back in session, and so are fall sports. So who officiates the officials? Who coaches the coaches? And who leads the student leaders? The Kansas State High School Activities Association. We commend Gary Musselman and all those at the activities association, plus all those involved in our schools and our teams. They are making a difference by supporting these activities which keep our kids active.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.