

MENTAL HEALTH TRAINING REQUIREMENTS FOR HIGH SCHOOL COACHES

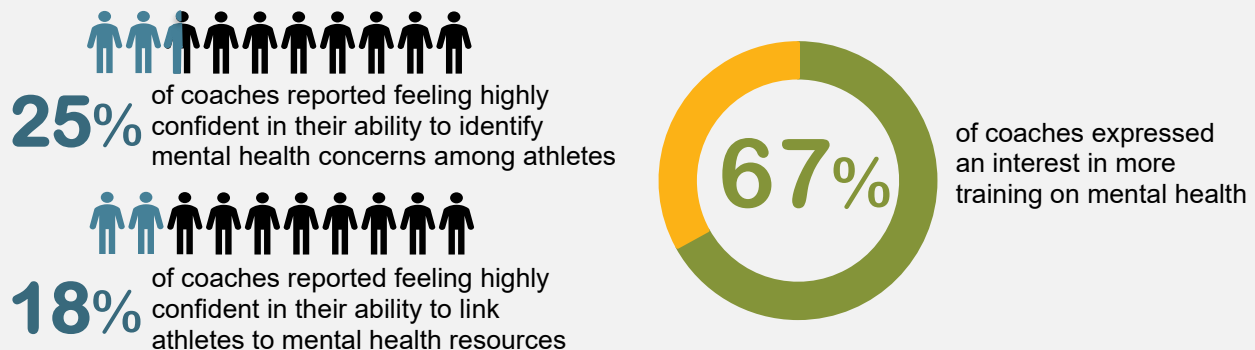


A CSCH Brief by Kathleen M. Williamson, Kimmia Lyon, and Sandra M. Chafouleas

Background

The nation is currently experiencing a mental health crisis among adolescents and children.¹ According to the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS), approximately 7.8 million high school students participated in sports in the 2022-2023 school year.² Research demonstrates that youth sports can have a positive role in promoting health and mental health outcomes.³ Given the high participation rate, youth sports have the potential to impact positive adolescent development, and coaches can play a key role. Research indicates that training coaches in social-emotional learning strategies may improve youth's motivation and satisfaction.³ In 2022, several organizations partnered to conduct the [National Coach Survey](#) with more than 10,000 youth sport coaches. The findings suggest that youth sport coaches at all levels want and need more training to support the mental health of their athletes.

Box 1. Youth Sport Coaches: Confidence and Interest in Student Mental Health³



Purpose

The NFHS is the leading organization in the country for high school athletics and fine arts and performing arts programs.⁴ The NFHS writes playing rules for high school sports and offers online educational training for coaches on a variety of topics. However, training requirements for high school coaches are determined at the state-level and vary greatly across NFHS member state associations. Researchers from the University of Connecticut undertook a study to explore the current mental health training requirements for interscholastic high school coaches in the United States by analyzing NFHS member state association coaching policies.

The study addressed two questions:

- How many states require high school coaches to participate in dedicated mental health training?
- In what ways do the parameters of required mental health training vary across states?

Coding Process

Policies related to coaching education, requirements for coaches, coach qualifications and coach training were collected for each NFHS member state association (n=51) in September and October of 2023. Based on information available on member state association websites, policies were reviewed and coded for the presence of mental health training requirements using a researcher-created coding scheme consistent with the framework analysis approach.⁵

- In part one of the scheme, coders examined requirements for mental health training for an individual to serve as a coach in a member state association (e.g., 1 = training is required, 0 = training is not required).
- When training was required, details about the training, including what content is required, for whom it is required, and when it is required were collected.

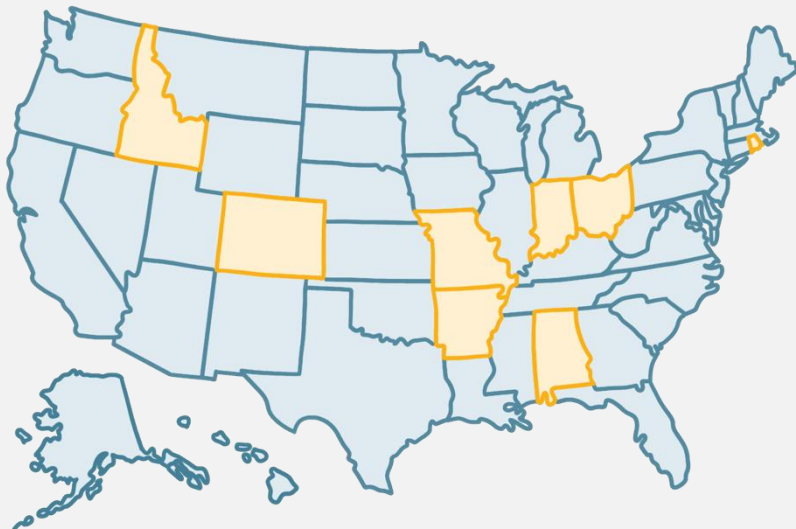
Key Findings

Based on the policies obtained on NFHS member state association's websites, eight states require mental health training for high school coaches. Of those states, five specifically require the NFHS Student Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Course. The other three states require the NFHS course or an equivalent training. See Box 3 for the NFHS course outline.⁶

Box 2. States Requiring Mental Health Training for Coaches

8 states require student mental health training for coaches:

- Alabama
- Arkansas
- Colorado
- Idaho
- Indiana
- Missouri
- Ohio
- Rhode Island



Among the eight states, the requirement for who must complete training in student mental health varies. Most states require all coaches to be trained while Arkansas and Missouri require training for a subset of coaches.

Variation was also seen in the timeframe coaches have to complete training requirement, and the frequency with which the training must be repeated (if at all).

For example, Idaho was found to require coaches to complete training prior to the first day of their coaching and bi-annually thereafter.

Box 3. NFHS Student Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Course Outline

- A Wellness Framework: Developmental Considerations
- Maintaining a Healthy Lifestyle
- Strategies for Coping with Stress and Anxiety
- Dealing with Depression
- Suicide Prevention: Recognizing the Signs and Getting Help

Case Study

To address the desire for and need of additional training for youth coaches in student mental health, the state of Ohio took legislative action. In the Spring of 2023, Ohio passed a law requiring all athletic coaches to complete a student mental health training course approved by the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. This requirement is aimed at providing youth coaches with the tools they need to support student wellness on and off the field, and went into effect in October 2023 (see Box 4 for specific requirements of training).⁷ Trainings meeting the listed requirements can be found on the [Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services website](#).



Box 4. Ohio Training Curriculum Requirements:

Trainings do not have to be specifically targeted to coaches, but must be targeted to professionals who work with youth and meet the following requirements:

- Learners who complete a training must be able to:
 - Define mental health and share information on underlying causes of mental illness
 - Explain risk factors
 - Describe protective factors that support mental health
 - Dispel misconceptions related to mental illness
 - Share signs and symptoms to recognize common mental health concerns
 - Recognize the signs and symptoms of suicidal ideation
 - Offer health promotion strategies
 - Provide resources/referrals for youths who may need help
- Must be a competency-based training
- Must provide learners with proof of completion
- Must have point of contact if learners need help

Summary & Future Directions

Findings indicate that eight states require mental health training for high school coaches, with the majority (5 of 8 states) requiring the NFHS Student Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Course.

Given the national youth mental health crisis and the call for additional training in student mental health by high school coaches, continued advocacy for increased mental health training for coaches is warranted. As states begin to expand their coaching requirements, state policies may be revisited and recoded (per the coding procedure) to explore policy changes over time. Additional evaluation of the impact of such training requirements may encourage policymakers to adopt policies that require specific training in student mental health.

To cite this brief: Williamson, K. M., Lyon, K. & Chafouleas, S. M. (2024, May). *Mental Health Training for High School Coaches: An Exploration of the State of the Field*. Storrs, CT: UConn Collaboratory on School and Child Health. Available from: <http://csch.uconn.edu/>.

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¹ Bitsko, R. H., Claussen, A. H., & Lichstein, J., et al. (2022, February 24). *Mental Health Surveillance Among Children — United States, 2013–2019*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/71/su/su7102a1.htm?s_cid=su7102a1_w

² NFHS. (2023, September 21). High school sports participation continues rebound toward pre-pandemic levels. NFHS News. <https://www.nfhs.org/articles/high-school-sports-participation-continues-rebound-toward-pre-pandemic-levels?ArtId=904282>

³ Anderson-Butcher, D., & Bates, S. (2022). National coach survey final report. The Ohio State University LiFEsports Initiative. Columbus, OH. Retrieved from <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/national-coach-survey-report-preliminary-analysis.pdf>

⁴ *Who we are - NFHS*. National Federation of State High School Associations. <https://www.nfhs.org/who-we-are/>

⁵ Gale, N. K., Heath, G., Cameron, E., Rashid, S., & Redwood, S. (2013). Using the framework method for the analysis of qualitative data in multi-disciplinary health research. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 13(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2288-13-117>

⁶ *Student Mental Health and Suicide Prevention*. NFHS LEARN. <https://nfhslearn.com/courses/student-mental-health-and-suicide-prevention>

⁷ Mental health training for ODE's coaching permits. <https://mha.ohio.gov/supporting-providers/training-and-resources/mental-health-training-for-odes-coaching-permits>