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MHSAA Provides Member Schools Services, Resources To Deal With Discussion Of Participation Fees For Athletics

EAST LANSING, Mich. – March 31 – With the topic of participation fees for access to school sports being discussed across the state, the Michigan High School Athletic Association is providing services and resources to assist its member schools in dealing with this issue.

This week, through its member schools only interactive site – MHSAA.NET – schools will be able to engage in an ongoing on-line discussion about the various aspects of participation fees, participate in an informal survey, and also be able to download several support resources to assist them locally.

Schools will be able to access the document, A Participation Fee Primer, and a companion Power Point presentation, which can be utilized in administrative and public meetings. Available soon will be audio messages and print advertisements which schools can utilize with local radio stations and in printed documents to help promote the value of educational athletics and emphasize the need to avoid participation fees.

The services and resources being offered are a revamped effort by the MHSAA to assist schools, an updated approach from its campaign in 1993 following the shift of the primary funding base of public education in the state from property taxes to the sales tax. In 1993, the Association sponsored a statewide teleconference, and also provided printed materials to help schools advocate for fully-funded extracurricular sports programs.

The 1993 effort included a follow-up survey of MHSAA member schools to determine if the shift in funding sources caused an increase in the utilization of participation fees. Surveys taken in the fall of 1993, the last formal survey by the Association, indicated that 96 senior high schools and 51 junior high/middle school programs, had some sort of participation fee assessed. Anecdotal information since then indicates that there has been little change until recently, when the discussion of fees expanded based on economic circumstances statewide. A formal survey of participation fee use is planned by the MHSAA in the Fall.

“We’re hopeful that these services and resources we can provide schools will aid them in their discussions about participation fees, and help them educate their constituents about all the many issues related to such programs,” said John E. “Jack” Roberts, executive director of the MHSAA.

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“We will continue to advocate for school athletic programs that are fully-funded, avoiding the implementation of participation fees,” Roberts continued. “The history of participation fees indicates that they do more harm than good financially in those districts that utilize them, and they exclude young people from participation in school sports. We don’t want our kids locked out of the opportunity of a lifetime, and we hope that as the discussion of participation fees continue, that schools will see the positive impact this extracurricular program has on young people and communities, and the negative pall that will be cast if fees are implemented.”

The MHSAA is a private, not-for-profit corporation of voluntary membership by over 1,300 public and private senior high schools and junior high/middle schools which exists to develop common rules for athletic eligibility and competition. No government funds or tax dollars support the MHSAA, which was the first such association nationally to not accept membership dues or tournament entry fees from schools. Member schools which enforce these rules are permitted to participate in MHSAA tournaments, which attract approximately 1.6 million spectators each year.

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