



# Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Newsletter



## Leveraging Athletics to Strengthen Service Leadership

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At the conclusion of most athletic seasons, students and families gather at end-of-season ceremonies to retell their greatest moments. It's a time to relive great games as students strengthen bonds of friendship that sometimes last entire lifetimes. Many of these shared memories revolve around specific contests, but on occasion, students may talk about the impact they made in a service leadership activity.

Students are drawn to athletic programs for many reasons including making friends, having fun, strengthening physical and psychological well-being, and finding a positive mentor coach. It is this enthusiasm that coaches can leverage to teach and promote good citizenship by finding ways for teams to take part in service leadership.

Initially, starting service leadership opportunities may seem challenging, but such activities give students a stronger sense of community and a deeper appreciation of the challenges others face, and they can strengthen individual leadership and empathy. When service leadership opportunities are incorporated into athletic programs, students are better able to develop character and envision a post-high school life where they understand the importance of helping others. School sports or performing arts.

### **Athletes Need Student Leadership Opportunities**

During any given day, students will engage in academic development in their classes followed by physical development in athletics. This balance helps develop healthy behaviors, but students may benefit from having opportunities to develop empathy and perspective. Time and again, we hear about high school contests where students have unfortunately demonstrated poor sportsmanship or conduct. These occurrences usually manifest under stressful conditions and almost always occur because students lose perspective.

Coaches can help support appropriate perspective growth when they find ways for athletes to give back to the community. Activities such as a facility clean-up day, making a team appearance at a school library to read favorite children's books to elementary students, or even participating in a parent day where the students can share the rules and tactics of an athletic sport can be great ways to promote character development. Regardless of the service activity, when athletes are put in a position to lead the community, they discover that they have a unique opportunity to leverage their leadership to help others.



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## **Find Collective Student Passion and Creatively Raise Funds**

Service leadership can emerge from a variety of outlets, and sometimes opportunities may arise to raise funds for specific causes. Athletic coaches play a key role in developing relationships with participants, parents and the community, and thus they may encounter organizations that may be in need.

For example, soccer or basketball teams may see an opportunity to host games or a tournament and simultaneously raise funds for a specific type of cancer research, or a school may give discounted or free entry to a game if individuals bring gently used jackets to donate to homeless shelters. Athletic participants may feel motivated and empowered if they understand that part of game revenue on a specific date is donated to a cause and these types of fundraising events allow students to practice creativity and be a part of solving broad community and even worldwide challenges.

With a little more planning, athletic directors and school leaders can create and meet with Student Athletic Leadership Teams. Such teams may have participants who represent every sport and are empowered when they engage in student discussions on the importance of service leadership. Furthermore, such groups can recommend department-wide activities to better leverage entire schools and communities to join in helping others.

For instance, schools may designate one week of their athletic season as “Pink Week” where students collect donations to fight breast cancer and athletes wear pink on their uniforms as a visible reminder while spectators may choose to unify around each other by wearing pink bracelets sold by student leadership.

## **Connect to Unified Sports**

Another area where school leaders can explore to develop service leadership is through targeted growth of Unified Sports programs. There has been tremendous expansion of Special Olympics Unified Sports throughout the nation as schools try to create more inclusive environments for all.

Whether schools have an established Unified or Adapted program, working with such programs can be extraordinarily rewarding for all participants and participation promotes service leadership. For example, basketball teams may choose to showcase a Unified event before a game or during halftime or in a more coordinated community example. The varsity basketball team with the Unified basketball team may combine to participate in a game against school staff, local police or fire departments to raise funds for expanded Unified Sports growth. Such activities promote not only better inclusive practices, but also create stronger community bonds with all participants.





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## Promoting School Culture through Service Leadership

Service leadership opportunities can also be designed in ways that improve and teach school culture. It's no secret that when elementary students get the opportunity to attend high school athletic events, they want to find ways to be more like the older students they see. In many cases, these elementary students grow up to attend high school and can reach back to a specific memory of when they were impacted by a high school athlete and how such an experience motivated them to try to become the next great teammate.

To leverage this excitement, coaches can hold youth camps where high school athletes serve as teachers and mentors. From the outside, such camps may appear to focus on only specific athletic skill development; however, when coaches emphasize that such development must occur in an environment where high school teammates focus on making sure elementary students also have fun, they set the stage for success. Whether the camp lasts for one day, a week or part of a summer, it gives high school athletes an opportunity to better understand their role and responsibility as a community leader and share school and program values with the next generation of students.

## Final Thoughts

Not every service leadership opportunity may be right for all athletic programs, but every team can find a way to give back to their community. When students find meaningful ways to contribute, they gain a deeper understanding of their role and how they fit within their community and society. High school athletics and activities programs are transformative experiences that can be leveraged to give students an opportunity to participate in service leadership. When school leaders empower students to lead communities, they provide an opportunity for students to not only learn more about themselves, but set foundations for being our future leaders who can realize a more inclusive, caring world.

## Service Opportunities in Oregon:

[Oregon Department of Human Services](#)  
[The Nonprofit Association of Oregon](#)  
[Oregon Serves](#)



**BE THE ONE WHO MAKES A DIFFERENCE**



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## OSAA Foundation Student Assistance Program

### Volunteer Opportunity

Is your organization looking for a fun team building opportunity? Volunteer to help shop for students throughout the year through the Individual Student Assistance Program. The number of events is dependent on the amount of money available but if your organization wishes to make a donation, we can also provide a fun engagement opportunity for a group.

### Donate

The OSAA Foundation is a private non-profit 501(c)3. 95% of all monetary donations go directly back to the schools of the OSAA. The OSAA Foundation has immense flexibility in taking donation and making sure your donation goes to school in need. The OSAA Foundation can geotarget schools in your local community or spread the opportunity statewide. If you are interested in supporting the Student Assistance Program please donate at [www.osaafoundation.org/donate](http://www.osaafoundation.org/donate). If your company has a mass donation they would like to provide please contact [Kyle Stanfield](#).

#### Contact the OSAA

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