

IHSA and Mary Kate Callahan Enter Into Settlement Agreement for 2012 Swimming Season

The Illinois High School Association (IHSA), a voluntary not-for-profit association consisting of 794 high schools across the State of Illinois, and Mary Kate Callahan, a Senior at Oak Park Fenwick High School, entered into a Settlement Agreement on September 10, 2012 to resolve issues in a pending Motion for Preliminary Injunction filed by Equip for Equality in a federal lawsuit in Chicago. The agreement sets forth mutually agreed upon guidelines that will be used to conduct the Association's Girls Swimming & Diving events to include student athletes with disabilities in integrated meets beginning with the current school year.

The IHSA Board of Directors approved the Settlement Agreement at its meeting on September 10, 2012. The agreement provides that IHSA will offer four events for athletes with disabilities, including the 50-yard freestyle, 100-yard freestyle, 200-yard freestyle and the 100-yard breaststroke for the IHSA post-season Sectional and State meets. Each student athlete who is entered by a member school can compete in as many as four individual events in the Sectionals. Each student athlete who qualifies is guaranteed to swim in at least two events in the State Finals, and may swim in four events if there is more than one swimmer in the individual's third and fourth events.

There will be two qualification standards for student athletes with disabilities, Class A and Class B. Competitors who hold a classification between S1 and S7 as classified by the International Paralympic Committee classification system will participate in Class A. Individuals who fall between S8 and S13 will compete in Class B. Interested students must register and provide their classification information to IHSA by October 10, 2012.

Athletes who enter to compete in the IHSA State Series will begin competition at the Sectional level. The first-place winner in each event will advance to the State Final meet. The IHSA will then utilize the WASUSA U16/18 standards by gender in determining what other individuals qualify to advance from the Sectional level to the State Final meet. Competing athletes shall receive official times, medallions and records, but will not earn points toward their team scores at either the Sectional or State Final level. Individual athletes with disabilities can earn points during regular season meets if so agreed upon by each school participating in a meet.

IHSA will also implement procedures by which member schools can request reasonable accommodations and/or modifications for student athletes with disabilities. IHSA's website will be used to disseminate detailed information about this program to its member schools.

Equip for Equality is an independent, private, not-for-profit organization designated by the governor to protect and advocate for people with disabilities in the State of Illinois and represents Mary Kate Callahan in the litigation. "We are pleased that the parties have been able to reach an agreement so that Mary Kate Callahan and other swimmers with disabilities will have the opportunity to participate in this year's high school season and post season meets, including the State Finals", said Barry Taylor, Vice President of Civil Rights and Systemic Advocacy at Equip for Equality.

"We appreciate the time and resources that Equip for Equality dedicated in the development of this new IHSA program," said IHSA Executive Director Marty Hickman. "Since our Board adopted programs for students athletes with disabilities on June 11, 2012, the goal has been to work towards instituting meaningful programs. We are confident we have achieved that goal with Girls' Swimming and Diving."

IHSA and Mary Kate Callahan are continuing discussions regarding the remaining issues in the lawsuit, including the 2013 Track and Field Season.