



Dear fellow secondary school athletic trainers:

Some recent statements at district meetings have created a controversy and a torrent of emotional responses. These statements revolve around the use of student aides at the secondary school level.

First, let me say that whenever there is change, there is resistance. I am hoping that if you have strong feelings one way or another, you will give this some serious thought and a period of reflection. Your educated approach concerning this matter will benefit the profession and, ultimately, you.

Minor changes in verbiage were made to the NATA Official Statement on Proper Supervision of Student Aides. The content, which essentially remained the same, still focuses on the proper use of student aides and fostering a positive, safe learning environment. Athletic trainers are a recognized health care profession, acknowledged as leaders in athletic health care. We have regulation in forty-eight states and the District of Columbia, yet there are still health care professionals who are using secondary school students as a work force. We understand that it is not everyone, but enough to catch the attention of administrators, physicians and other athletic trainers.

However, we also know that there needs to be a means to expose students to our profession. This creates interest and increases the visibility of our skill set. In an effort to meet this need, there are many great classes being taught at the secondary school level under various titles, e.g., *Sports Medicine*, *Athletic Training Fundamentals*, *Introduction to Athletic Training*, etc. Some of these courses are within the general course offerings provided locally, which are unregulated. Others are regulated and fall under either the State Department of Education or the state's Career and Technical Education department (CTE). In this case of the latter, these courses are taught separate from the athletic training program. They are strictly academic with no practical experience outside the classroom. They are not to be confused with a student aide program where students actually observe an athletic trainer at work. These classes can be compared to *Introduction to Physics*, *American History* and *Introduction to Literature*, where they teach content and general practical knowledge. This is where the similarities should remain. The physics teacher does not use any students to be a lab assistant or test proctors, so why should we use our students to do our jobs?

It does not go unnoticed that many of us working at the secondary school level are often stretched past our capacity. We feel that administrators do not value our positions, do not understand what we do and, certainly, rarely step into our athletic training rooms to observe what we do. For this reason, it is hard to get them to add a second or third staff member. Another reason the administration won't add an additional position might be because they, along with parents, see a student working a soccer practice or volleyball game while the AT is working at football practice, and the perception is that the student is providing the same services that an athletic trainer does. All of us know that this is truly not the case; however, public perception cannot be stopped. We must all consider whether or not we are following our state practice acts, state regulations and job descriptions.

Hopefully, you are generating statistics on the number of visits, types of treatments, number of rehabilitative procedures, etc. you are performing daily. These statistics help illustrate your value and support the need for an additional staff member. The improper use of students will continue to keep ATs in overworked, underappreciated situations. How can you help the profession or the NATA reach its goals of putting at least one AT in every secondary school? The first thing on the list should be to STOP using students as a workforce. Though some may believe them to be a tremendous help in the now, due to outward perception, it will ultimately hold you and the profession back in the long run.

It is understood that some secondary school ATs teach a class and are comfortable with the knowledge they have shared with their students. Keep in mind, the class is to teach, impart knowledge and share

experiences. Consider the difference between 'on the job training' versus 'job shadowing.' Students can shadow and observe from the sideline, on the court, on the mat, on the field and in the athletic training room. Teach them CPR/ AED or even first aid. It will only benefit them in the future. You can teach them skills like taping, special tests and your RTP procedures. They can practice on each other in the classroom setting. However, they should not be initiating a rehabilitation program, determining return to play, evaluating an injury, etc. on any student athlete under your watch. Any of these would be a violation of most states' practice acts. We know there are exceptions; this is why the statement leaves room for interpretation. The hope is that your interpretation falls within your state's rules and regulations.

School districts can and have faced litigation due to lack of proper supervision of students and student-athletes. Why would we, as an organization, promote anything other than the highest standard of proper supervision and use of students at all times? Our leadership needs to be strong in our message to protect students, instructors and the athletes they come into contact with, even if being prudent might be unpopular.

There are many reasons for the strict supervision standards in an undergraduate or graduate AT education program for non-certified college students. How can it be acceptable to allow 15 - 18 year old high school students more freedom and less supervision than college-age students? If anything, these students should require stricter supervision guidelines, not only for their safety but also for the safety of the student-athletes we, the ATs, are responsible for.

As secondary school athletic trainers, we all face some very unique challenges on a daily basis. While these guidelines may seem too restrictive for some, there are other things that student aides **can** do that are just as helpful and do not involve patient care. Learning about the administrative component is also an important aspect of the field. This can help free up ATs to focus on patient care, while educating students on what it takes to run a facility. This gives them value that may be lost when observing only. This is no different than what teachers have when they get a student aide. Consider the following:

Proper student aide educational practice:

- Field set up and take down
- Hydration specialization
- Cleaning duties
- Performing inventories
- Stocking kits
- Stocking shelves, taping tables, etc.
- Making ice bags
- Eyes and ears-sideline recognition of an athlete struggling with heat illness, head injury, etc. (we teach players to do this for each other)
- Give students a different color shirt that says AIDE on the back.

Sincerely,

Larry Cooper, MS, LAT, ATC
Chair, NATA Secondary School Athletic Trainers'
Committee

Jim Thornton, MA, ATC, CES
President, National Athletic Trainers Association