This year is an election year for the NATA membership. Leading up to voting this summer, *NATA News* has featured information about the two presidential candidates: Kathy Dieringer, EdD, LAT, ATC, and Katie Walsh Flanagan, EdD, LAT, ATC.

Voting will take place July 1-31. Be on the look out for more information to come about this year’s election process.

The new president will take office during the 72nd NATA Clinical Symposia & AT Expo in 2021 and will serve a three-year term. Learn more about this year’s election in the *NATA News*, on NATA’s social media channels and on the presidential candidate webpage at [www.nata.org/nata-presidential-election](http://www.nata.org/nata-presidential-election).
1. IF ELECTED, HOW WILL YOU CONTINUE NATA'S EFFORTS TO INCREASE PUBLIC AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE ATHLETIC TRAINING PROFESSION?

NATA, in general, and many ATs have done a tremendous job advocating for the profession. These efforts have had far-reaching results and must not only be continued, but amplified. This can be accomplished in a few ways:

1. Increase the number and types of organizations with whom we collaborate. We have done a great job with the NCAA, National Federation of State High School Associations and our physician partner groups. These relationships are vital and must continue to be fostered and advanced as the impact we have had with these groups has been phenomenal. Lately, the NATA ECE solidified a position on the National Association of Advisors for the Health Professions that puts us at the table with 900 other health care professions, a substantial accomplishment. To increase our presence in all of health care, it’s time to establish relationships with the decision-makers, such as the Medical Group Management Association, American Association of Orthopedic Executives, American Hospital Association, American Family Physicians, National Parent Teacher Association, National Academy Practice, American College of Emergency Physicians and more. By establishing relationships with health care decision-makers, we increase our credibility across all settings.

2. Maximize self-advocacy in every setting, especially in secondary schools, middle schools and youth sports where athletes and parents are exposed to ATs for typically the first time. Secondary and middle school ATs are the first line of advocacy for the profession and must be given every resource to promote and advance athletic training to their employers, athletes and community. We must continue to increase the number of ATs in the secondary school setting – 67% access (35% FT) isn't enough. My own recruitment to work as a contract secondary school AT was the result of an athlete’s near-death spleen injury. Only then did the high school appreciate the need of an AT. It should not take that kind of crisis to make that happen. Deciphering what will encourage a school district to hire an AT before such an incident is critical to these efforts. Every athlete deserves an athletic trainer! As the Secondary School Athletic Trainers’ Committee continues to work diligently to improve the professional lives of the secondary school AT, NATA must continue to support interagency relationships, national advocacy efforts to parent and athletic associations and support the committee’s efforts. This includes expanding the committee, as ICSM and COPA have already done, to ensure the voice of the secondary school AT is maximized. As the first opportunity of advocacy for young athletes, the importance of the secondary school AT’s success cannot be overstated.

3. NATA has done a tremendous job assisting with these public relation efforts, especially through At Your Own Risk. Additionally, through Gather, ATs can share their own advocacy resources, ideas and successes with their peers. These types of advocacy efforts are essential, and I look forward to future initiatives that promote our profession to the public. Both of these examples are just the start, as advocacy continues to be about relationships with our patients, communities and decision-makers.

2. HOW WILL YOU ENSURE THAT NATA’S STRATEGY FOCUSES EQUALLY ON ALL PRACTICE SETTINGS?

Communication and collaboration are the most important qualities of any leader. My leadership style has always been...
to listen first, understand the perspective and move forward with that shared perspective firmly appreciated in order to consider and make any decisions. In order to function in this realm, there must be enhanced communication between the leadership of all our settings and the leadership in the board room. As president, I will engage in monthly phone calls with the chairs of all the settings committees and their respective board liaisons in order to share and understand the needs and strategic vision of those committees, and collaboratively work toward that vision. Seeking first to understand is paramount to effective action. No leader can understand the needs of all settings without such consistent input, and to adequately serve the needs of all members, this must occur.

Additionally, there will also be regular meetings and collaboration with the presidents of the professional sports AT organizations to ensure those settings are equally represented and their voices heard. Because professional sports ATs have a unique ability to advocate for the profession due to their visibility and notoriety, they represent opportunity to raise the status of the AT across every setting in the profession. We must enhance the engagement of the professional sports ATs in these efforts.

As an AT, I have worked in the Division I and Division II collegiate setting (13 years), secondary schools (seven years), clinical and youth sports settings (15 years) and, additionally, as an AT educator in various adjunct positions (15 years). When I was asked by NATA to serve as the NATA representative to the CAATE, I was interested because I wanted to learn more about education and, specifically, the accreditation arm of our profession, while bringing a clinical perspective to the commission. I enjoy learning about areas in which I have little or no experience, as I want to appreciate a global view of the issue.

Because of my diverse experiences, I have an appreciation for the challenges and rewards of many settings, and I continue to learn more every day. Still, my focus will be on listening to understand and appreciate, and to ensure that resources are equally disseminated among all the settings in order to collectively address the strategic plan of NATA. Of course, if we have learned anything from COVID-19, we must be nimble to respond and react when needed. Should a critical event occur in any one setting, NATA must be ready to take advantage of that opportunity to the benefit of the entire membership. As a business owner, this is second nature to me.

Finally, when one setting benefits from an initiative, the entire profession benefits. We should not have tunnel vision for one setting over another, but we must be able to capitalize on any opportunities that present themselves and provide resources to every setting to ensure success. Every setting is important, and every AT’s advocacy efforts are important.

3. WHAT DO YOU THINK NATA’S ROLE AT THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL SHOULD BE?

As a membership organization, NATA is responsible for promoting athletic training internally and externally, and that definitely includes our international interests. The internationalization of our profession is an exciting development, one that must not be taken lightly as it presents an incredible opportunity for our profession. To begin, it is crucial that NATA continues to support and rely on the International Committee as it produces resources to help ATs who travel oversees for work, such as the International Ambassador Program.

When I was a young professional, I worked and travelled with USA Gymnastics and USA Volleyball, at times internationally. I recall being introduced to the “physios” of other countries and wondered about the difference in educational background between myself and them. “Different, but similar” was the answer I received, and I always wondered why athletic training was not known as such in other countries. As our profession has gained notoriety around the world, CAATE has indeed had interest from other countries to start accredited athletic training programs, the first last year and many more interested in doing the same in the future. This is a huge accomplishment, not only for CAATE, but for the entire profession. Athletic training students graduating from these international programs will take the certification exam, become, and hopefully remain, NATA members and likely engage the NATA Research & Education Foundation, so the success of international accreditation is as important to NATA as it is to all four members of the Strategic Alliance. NATA’s role of engaging these students and promoting the benefits of NATA membership is one of many steps with these international programs that will strengthen the alliance and the profession.

I view the Strategic Alliance as a family. We may disagree (as siblings often do), but in the end, we do what is best for the family. While the missions of the Strategic Alliance are very different, and each Strategic Alliance member has separate and independent responsibilities to their stakeholders that they must address, the overarching goal is to advance the profession of athletic training. There is no issue that exemplifies this as much as internationalization. Respecting each other’s missions while working together is vital, as is true of so many athletic training issues, our collaborative response to COVID-19 being a prime example. Our committees, task forces and workgroups should include representation from all members of the Strategic Alliance as an organizational activity, designed to work together to the benefit of all our stakeholders. To maximize the impact of internationalization to the profession of athletic training, the Strategic Alliance must collaborate and communicate, while still maintaining each member’s autonomy.
1. IF ELECTED, HOW WILL YOU CONTINUE NATA’S EFFORTS TO INCREASE PUBLIC AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE ATHLETIC TRAINING PROFESSION?

Increasing public awareness for athletic training is not a passive event, but a continued active, participatory initiative. President Tory Lindley, MA, ATC, has called upon the membership for years for individual ownership of our forward movement, and I will do the same. The Own Your Impact and Health Care in Action campaigns, as well as the value models for secondary school and collegiate settings, were created to help members call attention to their skill sets and worth, and will be an on-going effort for members to empower themselves. As with my first speech in January, I will motivate ATs to rise up to the levels of their credentialing and training, to keep growing in knowledge and skills and to step from behind the spotlight and shine bright in front of it. The repurposing of athletic trainers from the fields and courts to health care facilities during COVID-19 is one example of the power and flexibility of our training. We became front line testers and worked alongside our sister allied health professions. Public awareness begins inside with each of us as individuals. I will seek to engage members and find opportunities to illuminate athletic trainers in a positive fashion on the national level.

As I mentioned in the May NATA News, securing a seat at the Advisory Council of the National Association of Advisors of Health Professions, which provides messaging to all high school advisors in the U.S., was a critical step in a broader awareness of athletic training. Scholastic advisors will be empowered with the knowledge of another health care field, athletic training, in addition to their list of better-known health care professions. We just started this relationship last year, but I expect public awareness to increase over the years as more high school students become cognizant of AT as a designation health care career. I intend to foster this relationship and assure we have a visible presence at their four regional and one national meetings annually. Additionally, I will gather the right people, research and mindful strategy to meet with the U.S. News and World Report to seek and secure a place for athletic training in their annual reports on health care jobs, schools and salaries. Currently, this popular publication does not list athletic training at all. I believe this two-prong approach of empowering secondary school advisors with knowledge of our field and listing athletic training alongside other, more known, health care professions is the beginning of my campaign for public awareness and understanding of our place in allied health.

Finally, on a personal level, I do believe the NATA president needs to continue to be visible, approachable and accessible, especially when attending athletic training meetings. As an
AT educator, and practicing athletic trainer, I have 40 years of experience in emergency on-field incidents, necessary education and I have contemporary first-hand knowledge of many of the challenges we all face on a daily basis. As president, I want to meet you and hear you.

2. HOW WILL YOU ENSURE THAT NATA’S STRATEGY FOCUSES EQUALLY ON ALL PRACTICE SETTINGS?
The (so called) traditional athletic trainer, those who work with secondary school, collegiate and professional sports, are the very foundation of the NATA membership and must continue to be recognized as critical to the profession. The challenging part is honoring this group while equally recognizing athletic trainers who practice in other settings, but it can be accomplished.

At our genesis, we are the same: The CAATE assures we have standardized educational and clinical experiences, whereas BOC validates we all possess an entry level education to begin practice. From there, we take our proverbial bucket of knowledge and skills and get to work gaining experiences. We have to acknowledge this similar beginning, and respect the vast settings where athletic trainers work and practice, even it if is greatly different from our own employment.

These past several years, the NATA Board of Directors has brought changes to the depiction of job settings, and we have voted on expansion of representation. The NATA Council on Practice Advancement has expanded exponentially during my time on the board of directors, and is still growing today. The many subcommittees (I’m a board liaison on one) work independently within the committee and work setting to answer the concerns of the whole council as it relates specifically to their work site. Likewise, the former College and University Athletic Trainers’ Committee has had an overhaul during this time (now called the Intercollegiate Council for Sports Medicine), and we voted to disband purely District-based members, and include representatives from all levels of collegiate athletics, junior colleges to NCAA Division I, while still affording representation of all districts. As with COPA, ICSM’s subcommittees work on issues related to collegiate sports, but specific to their unique setting. This model could be effective in other committees, and I’m looking forward to creating more inclusion and importance of all the settings in which we practice.

All athletic trainers who educate, teach or precept athletic training students now have a voice with the AT EducaTIONalist Community. Prior to last year, this large subset of our members didn’t have a say as a group, but only as individual members. There was no mechanism of representation, and the board recognized this, acted to correct the need and empowered this community to find its voice and be heard. I will encourage all committees and councils to assure they continue practice advancement and not focus on only certain aspects of athletic training, but respect the importance of all ATs. No doubt more venues will arise where athletic trainers can use their competence, and when this does happen, I’ll recognize and embrace their initiatives as important to our membership as a whole.

A side benefit of honoring all the career possibilities of athletic trainers is that graduating ATs will have a much bigger world in which they can use their capabilities, and regulation to practice at their highest level. We all have a role in supporting our fellow ATs as we drive the profession forward and continue to be inclusive.

3. WHAT DO YOU THINK NATA’S ROLE AT THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL SHOULD BE?
The role of NATA on the international level is important, but not to the detriment of the fantastic initiatives and projects we currently have on the national level. I do believe we should keep a strong international presence and continue to work at securing wonderful relationships, as we do with the Japan Athletic Trainers’ Organization. NATA President Kent Falb initiated this effort during his reign, but it was not until 2014 that the rapport with Japan was officially recognized as an affiliate partnership with NATA. This underscores the magnitude of purposeful and steady work toward common goals, and the time and energy one international relationship took to reach its current status. We do have other countries of interest, and will continue steady progress with them in the future.

What is critical on a national level is raising the involvement of all types of people and increasing diversity in not only athletic training, but in leadership roles in athletic training as well. In the past 20 years, NATA membership has nearly tripled, male and female members exchanged lead (there are now 56 percent females to 43.8 percent males as members), but ethnic diversity only rose 3 percent overall. This is an area that I intend to investigate, as diversity matters, and different views and backgrounds are necessary for good, inclusive, forward growth. For me, increasing diversity at all aspects in NATA membership and leadership is important, and will be a focus. International involvement will still get the attention it deserves, but I want more inclusion on the home front first.