**Pioneer Press Article on NCAA Challenge**

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Some people predicted that the NCAA would never listen to a group of frustrated parents and educators. They were wrong. After four years of battling, the National Collegiate Athletic Association has agreed to stop dictating course content to high schools.

For several years, newspapers around the nation have described outstanding high student athletes - some of them class valedictorians or National Merit Scholars - who were told they could not participate in college sports because the NCAA rejected as few as one of their high school courses. For example, a southern Minnesota student with a 3.9 grade point, and high college entrance exam scores, could not play football as a freshman at the Air Force Academy, because the NCAA rejected 1/3 of his required tenth grade English class a Duluth area National Merit Scholar missed much of her college freshman cross country season before the NCAA rejected a couple of Post-Secondary Option courses a Milwaukee suburban student could not accept a track scholarship because the NCAA rejected one high school English class an outstanding Roseville student/hockey player had to delay her college career for a year because the NCAA questioned one of her classes.

These students had strong grade point averages and good test scores. But the NCAA also insisted students had to take a certain number of high school courses it approved. The NCAA asked every high school to describe its English Social Studies, Math and Science courses. The NCAA then decided which courses prepared students for college.

Incidentally, the NCAA does not ask its member universities to submit courses for approval.

After hearing horror stories, Minnesota Senators Larry Pogemiller and Dave Johnson asked NCAA officials to explain themselves at a Senate hearing. One NCAA official admitted rejecting many interdisciplinary courses, and any social studies course spending more than 25 percent of its time studying current issues. The senators were baffled, and praised such courses. It was not the NCAA's finest hour.

In a 1999 Minnesota State Board of Education survey, 117 high school counselors reported spending more than 2600 hours last year filling out NCAA forms, explaining procedures, and arguing about courses.

Those counselors, led by Minnesota State/Mankato professor Walter Roberts questioned NCAA judgments and procedures. They want to counsel students, not battle with the NCAA.

The state board, led by its chair Jeanne Kling and administrator Marsha Gronseth, challenged NCAA procedures. Other state boards followed their lead. A Wisconsin School Boards Association resolution passed the 1999 National School Board convention, urging the NCAA to stop over-ruling high schools.

US Senator Paul Wellstone and then Governor Arne Carlson wrote several letters to NCAA officials, pointing out that they were frustrating high school reform efforts and hurting deserving students.

Finally, at its annual convention three weeks ago, the NCAA changed policies. It will now accept courses school districts or states classify as college prep. NCAA procedures still aren't perfect. But high school educators can now spend more time with students, less battling the NCAA.