Vermont Principals' Association

High School Policies 2026–2027

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This document contains editorial comments from a policy review. Comments are visible in the right margin.

1 Commitment to Racial, Gender-Fair, and Disability Awareness

The Vermont Principals' Association believes that all individuals should be treated with dignity, fairness, and respect. Students must be able to participate in Association-sponsored activities in an environment that is free of sexual harassment, prejudice, and discrimination.

The Vermont Principals' Association and its member schools are committed to creating an environment in our activities and programs that promotes respect for and appreciation of racial, gender, sexual orientation, religious and ethnic differences, and is disability aware. Preventing prejudice and discrimination begins with every individual.

Resources & Reporting

- Report a Concern: vpaonline.org/report-a-concern
- Pregame Statement & Recommendations: vpaonline.org/pregame-statement
- Procedures for Hate Speech During Events: vpaonline.org/hate-speech-procedures

2 Policy on Gender Identity

The Vermont Principals' Association (VPA) recognizes the value of participation in interscholastic sports for all student-athletes. The VPA is committed to providing all students with the opportunity to participate in VPA activities in a manner consistent with their gender identity, as outlined in the Vermont Agency of Education Best Practices For Schools For Transgender And Gender Nonconforming Students.

Vermont's Public Accommodations Act (9 V.S.A. 4502) and VPA policies prohibit discrimination and/or harassment of students on school property or at school functions. The prohibition against discrimination includes discrimination based on a student's actual or perceived sex and gender identity.

Definitions

Assigned Sex at Birth	The sex designation, usually male or female, assigned to a person when they are born.
Gender Expression	How a person represents or expresses gender to others, often through behavior, clothing, hairstyles, activities, voice, or mannerisms.
Gender Identity	An individual's actual or perceived gender identity, or gender-related characteristics intrinsically related to an individual's gender or gender identity, regardless of the individual's assigned sex at birth. (1 V.S.A. 144)
Gender Non-Conforming	A term used to describe people whose gender expressions differ from stereotypic expectations. Gender non-conforming individuals may identify as male, female, some combination of both, or neither.
Sexual Orientation	A person's sexual attraction to other people based on the gender of the other person. Sexual orientation is not the same as gender identity.
Transgender	An adjective describing a person whose sex assigned at birth does not correspond to their gender identity.
Transition	The process in which a person goes from living and identifying as one gender to living and identifying as another.

Privacy Policy

All discussions and documentation shall be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law unless the student and the family make a specific request in writing.

Procedures

1. The student and parent(s)/guardians shall notify the Superintendent (or designee) that the student would like to participate in interscholastic athletics consistent with their gender identity.
2. The student's home school will determine the eligibility of a student seeking to participate consistent with their gender identity.
3. The Superintendent (or designee) will confirm the gender identity asserted through documentation from the parent, guardian, guidance counselor, or a medical/psychological professional. A medical diagnosis shall not be required.
4. Once eligibility is granted, it applies for the duration of the student's participation in interscholastic athletics. The student shall petition should their gender identity change. The student must meet all school and VPA standards for eligibility.
5. The school's Athletic Director should notify the VPA if any accommodations are needed.

Appeals

All appeals concerning a school's determination as to the eligibility of a gender non-conforming student to participate in interscholastic sports will go directly to the VPA for consideration and action.

3 VPA Non-Binary Policy

Goal

The VPA is committed to providing opportunities for LGBTQ+, Nonbinary, and Gender Nonconforming student-athletes to participate, belong, contribute, and find lifelong healthy habits for social and emotional well-being.

Nonbinary Participation in Individual Sports

i NOTE

Individual sports for purposes of this policy are: golf, gymnastics, skiing, snowboarding, cross-country, track (indoor and outdoor), and wrestling.

- A nonbinary student-athlete is a student-athlete who does not exclusively identify as male or female.
- A nonbinary division shall be offered and available in each VPA Individual Sport.
- Student-athletes who identify as nonbinary may choose to participate in a nonbinary division and record their scores as nonbinary.
- Student-athletes shall choose the gendered event they wish to compete in should a nonbinary-specific event not be available.
- All student-athletes are required to compete in whichever gendered division they elect at the beginning of the season for the duration of that season.

Championship Requirements

Nonbinary student-athletes must meet the qualifying standards for the gendered division in which they have elected to compete for that season. Records and rankings will be tracked separately in the nonbinary division. Where no nonbinary-specific qualifying standard exists, the student-athlete and school athletic director should contact the VPA for guidance.

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4 Policy on a Coach's Code of Ethics

The responsibility of a coach is to teach attitudes, proper habits, knowledge, and skills. The athletic program is designed to enhance academic achievement and should never interfere with opportunities for academic success. Each student-athlete should be treated as an individual whose welfare shall be primary at all times. The coach shall never place the value of winning above the value of sportsmanship, health, and safety.

Core Coaching Beliefs

- In all personal contact with student-athletes, officials, athletic directors, school administrators, the state high school athletic association, the media, and the public, the coach shall strive to set an example of the highest ethical and professional conduct.

- The coach shall support and enforce school rules for the prevention of substance use and abuse.
- The coach shall promote the entire interscholastic program of the school and direct their team in alignment with the total school program.
- The coach shall be thoroughly acquainted with contest, state, league, and local rules, and is responsible for their interpretation to team members. The coach shall abide by the letter and spirit of these rules at all times.
- Coaches shall actively use their influence to enhance sportsmanship among their spectators.
- Contest officials shall have the respect and support of the coach. The coach shall not engage in conduct that incites players or spectators against the officials or each other. Public criticism of officials or players is unethical.
- Before and after contests, all coaches should meet and exchange friendly greetings to set the correct tone for the event.
- A coach shall not exert pressure on faculty members to give student-athletes special consideration.
- It is unethical for coaches to scout opponents by any means other than those adopted by the state high school athletic association and the league.

Reporting Violations

Violations of this Code of Ethics may be reported to the school's Athletic Director or Principal. Confirmed violations are subject to the Disciplinary Action Procedures outlined in Section 20. Persistent or egregious violations may be referred to the VPA Activities Standards Committee.

5 Policy on Principal's Responsibilities Regarding Student Activities

Schools that hold a voluntary membership in the Vermont Principals' Association may participate in interscholastic activities only with other VPA member schools or schools that have been approved by the VPA. No member school may participate in interscholastic activities with an out-of-state school unless that school is a member in good standing of its state association or permission is given by the VPA.

It shall be the responsibility of the principal (or designee) of each member school to determine that all opponents in interscholastic athletic contests are members in good standing of their state athletic association.

Schedule Changes

No game shall be canceled nor dates changed except by mutual consent of the principals concerned or their designees, or by procedures approved by a league.

Fundraising at VPA Events

50/50 raffles are permitted at any VPA Finals (championships) and semi-final contests. Raffles must be organized by the host school or an approved school organization. All proceeds must be documented and handled in accordance with school financial policies and applicable Vermont gaming laws.

6 Policy for Scheduling VPA Tournaments

It is not within the province of the Vermont Principals' Association to oversee the calendar of its member schools or the leagues/conferences they may belong to. In planning state activities, the VPA attempts to avoid conflicts of state-wide importance.

Postseason Minimum Games Requirement

To be seeded according to the standard VPA seeding criteria, a team must play at least 60% of its [scheduled regular season games / the maximum number of regular season games allowed for its sport in Section 28]. Teams that play fewer than 60% remain eligible for the VPA postseason tournament but will receive the lowest seed in their division.

Only regular season games against approved opponents count toward this requirement. An approved opponent is a VPA member school, a school approved by the VPA, or an out-of-state school that is a member in good standing of its state association or has been approved by the VPA (Section 5). Scrimmages and jamborees (Section 36) do not count.

ℹ NOTE This is a team requirement. It is separate from the individual 60% participation requirements for transfer students (Section 13) and 8th grade student-athletes (Section 10).

Appeals

Schools may request an exception for extenuating circumstances by submitting a written request to the VPA Office [by date / before final seedings are released]. Requests denied by the VPA Office may be appealed to the Activity Standards Committee.

7 Policy on Student Eligibility

The definition of co-curricular activities in this document shall include all interscholastic and extra-curricular activities sanctioned by the VPA.

Assurance of Eligibility

The principal of each member school assures the VPA that all participants representing that school in interscholastic activities shall meet all eligibility requirements of the school and the VPA. Eligibility rules apply to

all students in grades 7–12 in affiliated schools, and to all VPA-sanctioned activities, both athletic and non-athletic.

Home Study Program Eligibility

A home study student who wishes to participate in a public school co-curricular program shall be an eligible student if:

- The student is enrolled in a home-study program in compliance with Title 16 V.S.A, Section 166(b).
- The student has a legal residence in the school district or is a legal resident of a district that does not maintain a school and pays tuition on behalf of its students.
- A copy of the Vermont Agency of Education Enrollment Letter is presented to the principal before participation begins.
- The student's academic program will be reviewed by the parent or guardian at appropriate intervals to determine academic progress, certified in writing to the principal.
- The student complies with the same physical examination, insurance, age, and other requirements all enrolled students.

Home Study Notification Requirement

Before the start of a sports season or fine arts and performance activities in which a home study student wishes to participate, the parent or guardian and student must notify the principal in writing. This notification must be provided before the season begins.

i NOTE

Late notification will not automatically disqualify a student from participating, but may delay participation while enrollment verification is completed.

8 Eligibility Limitations and Amateur Status

Contestants must be enrolled in their school and meet the school's prescribed academic and eligibility rules. Students may only compete on school teams sponsored by their school during the season, and may only compete for the one school in which they are officially enrolled.

i NOTE

Complete Amateur Status rules — including the full list of disqualifying activities — are consolidated in Section 17. See Section 17 for the definitive Amateur Status policy.

9 Vermont Name, Image and Likeness (NIL) Policy

In June 2021, the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously ruled that NCAA rules limiting education-related benefits violated federal antitrust laws (NCAA v. Alston, 141 S.Ct. 2141). This ruling has generated expansion of name, image, and likeness (NIL) opportunities for high school students. The VPA issues the following guidance to clarify how student-athletes may engage in NIL activities while remaining eligible.

Permissible NIL Activities for Student-Athletes

- Commercial endorsements
- Promotional activities
- Social media presence
- Product or service advertisements
- Non-fungible tokens (NFTs)

Prohibited NIL Activities

Student-athletes may not reference a VPA member school or the VPA when engaging in NIL activity, wear school-issued uniforms or display school logos/mascots in NIL marketing, or endorse third-party products during school-based team activities.

Student-athletes are prohibited from NIL activities involving: adult entertainment, alcohol, tobacco/nicotine/vape, cannabis, controlled substances, prescription pharmaceuticals, gambling (including the Vermont State Lottery), and weapons/firearms/ammunition.

NIL Violations and Appeals Process

Failure to comply with this NIL guidance may constitute a violation of the VPA Amateur Rule. If a violation is determined, the following process applies:

6. The Local Education Agency (LEA) determines whether the student-athlete has lost amateur status.
7. If found ineligible, the student must wait 60 school days before reinstatement.
8. The member school may appeal directly to the VPA Office.
9. Requests denied by the VPA Office may be appealed to the Activity Standards Committee.
10. Requests denied by the Activity Standards Committee may be appealed to the VPA Appeals Committee.

10 Use of 8th Grade Students on High School Teams

General Eligibility Requirements

- No student-athlete below grade eight will be allowed in any VPA sanctioned sports at any level (varsity, JV, freshman) unless approved by the VPA.

- Grade eight student-athletes participating in a high school sports program fall under the same academic and behavioral expectations as high school students.
- Determination must be made by the school's principal to ensure the grade eight student-athlete is physically, mentally, and socially prepared to participate at the high school level.

> ⚠ **IMPORTANT**
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> ELIGIBILITY PERIOD: Grade eight student-athletes who participate on a high school sports team will not begin their four-year (8-semester) VPA eligibility clock. Their 8th grade year does not count towards their four-year (8-semester) eligibility.

Sport-Specific Participation Rules

Baseball, Basketball, Soccer, Field Hockey, and Softball:

- Divisions 1, 2, and 3: Grade eight participation is possible by waiver request only, and only at the lowest level of team offering at the school.
- Division 4: Grade eight student-athletes may be used on a sub-varsity team if needed to maintain the school's sub-varsity team, or if no sub-varsity team is available they may participate on a varsity team if a waiver has been granted and no student in grades 9–12 has been cut from the program.

Girls' Ice Hockey (Special Exception)

Grade eight students may only be used if: 1 the high school program has demonstrated a need for athletes to maintain their program.

Individual Sports — 8th Graders Not Eligible

Grade eight student-athletes are NOT eligible to participate in high school individual sports, including:

> **i NOTE**
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> Track, Cross-Country, Wrestling, Golf, Nordic Ski, Alpine Ski, Snowboarding, and Gymnastics.

8th Grade Waiver Criteria

For all waiver requests, the following criteria must be met: (1) the grade eight student-athlete is necessary for the school to field a team; (2) the student does not displace a student in grades 9–12; (3) the student meets all VPA eligibility requirements; (4) the student is a bona fide student in the same school district; (5) the student's participation does not eliminate or unduly impact a middle school team; (6) if from a sending school, both sending and receiving administrators agree.

*Consistent with the transfer policy, a grade eight student-athlete is eligible for postseason play only if, in the absence of a junior varsity team, the student has been rostered for at least 60% of the regular season.

Sport	Minimum Players for Waiver	Max #
Soccer	Fewer than 13 players	4

Basketball	Fewer than 9 players	2
Baseball	Fewer than 11 players	4
Softball	Fewer than 11 players	4
Field Hockey	Fewer than 13 players	4

11 Participation for School Choice and Home Study Students

This policy outlines eligibility and participation guidelines for students enrolled in school choice programs and home study (homeschool) programs concerning extracurricular activities in Vermont middle and high schools.

School Choice Students

Students participating in school choice programs are eligible to participate in extracurricular activities offered by the school in which they are actively enrolled. In the case of Technical Centers, students can access activities through their sending school. These students must meet the same eligibility criteria as all enrolled students.

Home Study Students

In accordance with 16 V.S.A. § 563(24) and State Board of Education Rules 4403–4405, home study students are eligible to enroll part-time in academic courses and participate in extracurricular activities at the public school operated by their district of residence. Should the home study student have school of choice, they must participate at the program closest to their home address.

School Commitment — One School Per Year

Once a home study or school choice student participates in an extracurricular activity at a particular school, that student must remain with that same school for ALL extracurricular activities for the duration of the academic year. Students may not choose different schools for different sports or activities within the same academic year.

i NOTE

This School Commitment requirement applies for the full academic year and supersedes the season-by-season framework of the Loyalty Clause (Section 23) for home study and school choice students.

Limitations

Participation is subject to space availability. When capacity is limited, preference shall be given to full-time enrolled students. Schools must publish clear criteria for admitting non-enrolled students to activities with limited spaces.

12 Non-School Competition Rules

A member of a school team is a student-athlete who is regularly present for, and actively participates in, all team tryouts, practices, and competitions. Bona fide members of a school team are prevented from missing a high school practice or competition to compete with an out-of-school team, practice, or competition including tournaments, showcases, combines, or other athletic events.

Whenever a conflict arises between the high school team practice/competition and an out-of-school event on the same day, the high school team practice/competition shall be honored by the student-athlete.

i NOTE

It is highly recommended that schools include this policy in all athletic handbooks and that Athletic Directors/Coaches review it with athletes and parents at pre-season meetings.

13 Transfer Student Eligibility

Immediate Eligibility

Transfer students are immediately eligible provided: (1) they were bona fide students in good standing at their previous school; and (2) there is a bona fide change in residence, meaning a change of primary legal domicile supported by documentation such as a lease, deed, or utility bills in the new address.

Transfers Without Change of Residence

If there is no bona fide change in residence, students are eligible to participate immediately if they transfer before the first play date of that sports season. If a student transfers after the first play date without changing residence, the student must wait 20 calendar days after the transfer and must participate in at least 60% of the regular season competitions to be eligible for postseason competition.

Transfers Due to Recruiting or Coercion

If a transfer is the result of any coercion, recruiting, or inducement to move to participate in interscholastic activities, the student will be ineligible for 365 calendar days from the date of the infraction and the school will be subject to meeting with Activity Standards Committee.

Investigation Process for Suspected Recruiting

When a school or the VPA suspects a transfer may have been influenced by recruiting, the following process applies:

11. The school where the student has enrolled must submit a written account of the transfer circumstances to the VPA.
12. The VPA will review all relevant documentation, including correspondence, enrollment records, and witness statements.
13. A determination will be made within 30 calendar days of the submission.
14. Schools may appeal any determination to the Activity Standards Committee.

Waivers

The VPA may grant a waiver of the 20-day waiting period, the 60% eligibility requirement, or the 365-day waiting period if the school establishes that the transfer was made for reasons not related to activities.

Recruitment Prohibition

A school shall be deemed in violation of the recruitment rule if any representative, agent, or individual associated with the school's athletic program directly or indirectly attempts to persuade or induce a student-athlete at another school to enroll. A school may also violate this rule by failing to take adequate steps to control third-party recruitment.

14 Age Rule

A student who competes in any VPA sanctioned activity must be under nineteen (19) years of age. A student whose nineteenth (19th) birthday occurs on or after August 1 is eligible for all activities in the ensuing school year. Students who have attained the age of nineteen (19) before August 1 shall be ineligible for all VPA sanctioned activities.

15 Diplomas

Students are ineligible if they have graduated from any course of study in a secondary school comparable to the Vermont system. The initial determination of whether a secondary school is comparable shall be made by the school's principal. Waivers of this eligibility rule may be granted under these bylaws.

16 Length of High School Eligibility

Students have four (4) consecutive years or eight (8) consecutive semesters of eligibility for participation in school activities. Attendance of thirty (30) school days of any semester shall be regarded as a semester.

i NOTE

Attendance is defined as being officially enrolled and included in school records for at least 30 school days of a semester, regardless of physical presence in a classroom. This includes students on approved medical or educational leave, remote learning, or other approved absences, provided enrollment is maintained.

A student enrolled in their eighth and final semester of eligibility during the fall-winter term may complete the winter sports season as long as they are an eligible student and have not graduated.

Years of Participation in the Same Sport

No student may participate in the same sport for more than four seasons.

17 Amateur Status

Students are ineligible if they have lost their amateur standing under any of the following qualifications:

- They have received remuneration, gifts, or donations directly or indirectly for participation in an athletic contest or as a prize for being an outstanding player.
- They have participated under an assumed name.
- They have competed on a team on which some player was paid for their participation.
- They have entered into a playing contract with a professional club or agent.

i NOTE

Reference to "gifts or donations" is not intended to preclude the acceptance of playing apparel and equipment provided by a sponsoring organization. Students who lose amateur status in one sport do not lose it in other sports. Amateurs may participate against a team of professionals, but may not participate on a professional team.

18 Eligibility for International Exchange and International Students

International Exchange Students (J-1 Visa)

An international exchange student must: (1) be under the auspices of a CSIET-listed exchange program accepted by the U.S. Department of State; (2) be placed with a U.S. host family by a method that ensures no student is placed due to athletic interests or abilities; (3) possess a current J-1 visa; (4) comply with all VPA eligibility requirements; (5) not be a graduate of a secondary school comparable to a Vermont secondary school.

i NOTE

No member of the school's coaching staff, paid or voluntary, shall serve as the host family for an international exchange student.

International Students (F-1 Visa)

An international student not under a CSIET-listed exchange program must: (1) possess a current F-1 visa; (2) provide official transcripts translated into English; (3) pay tuition to the high school attended as prescribed in Section 625 of U.S. Public Law 104-208; (4) comply with all VPA eligibility requirements.

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19 Waivers — Grounds for and Hardship Rule

Waivers of eligibility rules may be granted as an exercise of discretion by the Activities Standards Committee after considering all relevant information. All eligibility waiver requests must fall into one of the following three categories:

Medical	Waivers related to illness, injury, or medical treatment that directly caused non-compliance with an eligibility rule.
Situational	Waivers related to extraordinary family or school circumstances such as relocation, school closure, or other events beyond the student's control.
Refugee	Waivers for students with refugee or asylum status whose circumstances do not fit standard eligibility timelines.

Hardship Waiver Rule

The Activities Standards Committee interprets undue hardship as a situation severe enough to prevent the normal application of VPA eligibility rules. Circumstances involving choice on the part of the student or parents/guardians do not necessarily constitute undue hardship.

How to Apply

Schools file for hardship waivers on behalf of their students using the Hardship Application available at vpaonline.org/waivers. The packet must include:

- A copy of the student's transcript
- A letter from the school administrator supporting the waiver request
- A letter from the parent and/or student describing the circumstances
- Any other pertinent supporting documentation

Appeals Process

15. Schools may appeal directly to the VPA Office and discussed with Activity Standards Committee
16. Requests denied by the Activity Standards Committee may be appealed to the VPA Appeals Committee.

Local School Policy Appeals

Appeals of local school policies (not VPA policies) follow these steps:

17. Meet with the school's Athletic Director.
18. If unresolved, meet with the school's Principal.
19. If unresolved, meet with the district Superintendent.
20. If unresolved, present to the local School Board (final step). Note: local school policy appeals cannot be appealed to the VPA.

20 Disciplinary Action Procedures

i NOTE

This section applies to appeals of VPA policies, not local school district policies or procedures.

Investigation

When alleged violations of VPA policies are reported, the Executive Director or designee shall investigate through in-person review or a designated representative (e.g., local school administrators).

Local Investigations

Violations that occur at or about interscholastic athletic events should be reported to and handled by local school officials first. This includes student misconduct, hate speech, hazing, harassment, bullying, and Title IX matters. Incidents may also be reported directly to the VPA via the online reporting form at vpaonline.org/report.

Notice of Probable Violation

If the Executive Director or designee determines that a probable violation has occurred, the alleged violator shall receive written notice containing: the charges, a recommended penalty, and a copy of the preliminary investigation report. The notice shall also advise the alleged violator of their right to be heard before the Activities Standards Committee.

Temporary Suspensions

The Executive Director or designee may temporarily suspend schools, students, or VPA Tournament officials from participation before a final determination. Temporary suspensions shall not exceed 14 calendar days unless a hearing has been formally scheduled. Written notice shall be provided within 48 hours of any suspension.

Hearing Procedures

The alleged violator may accept the recommended penalty or file an appeal within seven (7) calendar days of the Notice of Probable Violation. A hearing will be set within fourteen (14) school days of the written request. The alleged violator may introduce evidence and may be represented by counsel.

Who May Appeal

Only schools shall have the right to challenge discipline assessed against a school or team.

Possible Sanctions

The Activities Standards Committee may assess: warnings, forfeitures, prohibitions from competitions, suspension, expulsion from VPA membership, and individual bans or suspensions.

21 Legal Action Against Association by Member Schools

The VPA is a voluntary association, democratically governed. VPA member schools agree to abide by the final decisions of the VPA. Any VPA member school which is party to unsuccessful legal action to overturn or stay a final VPA decision shall be liable for the Association's reasonable costs and attorney's fees.

22 Enforcement of Rules by Schools

Schools are expected to comply with and enforce the eligibility standards set out in the VPA bylaws and policies. Violations of the eligibility standards by schools shall result in one or more of the following penalties:

21. A written warning to the principal
22. Forfeiture of the game
23. Prohibition from postseason competition or state-wide non-athletic activity
24. Suspension or exclusion of institutional membership in the VPA

23 General Rules for Organized Vermont 7–12 Sports

State-wide interscholastic sports are organized, supervised, and regulated by school leaders. Competitors are expected to display a high standard of sportsmanship at all times. Unsportsmanlike acts will not be tolerated.

General Rules

25. Schools will organize formal practices for each athletic activity following the definition of the appropriate season.
26. No school will schedule more than two (2) games per week, Monday through Friday, exclusive of rescheduled games or sanctioned tournaments. A third game may be scheduled on Saturday.
27. In all sports except baseball and softball, schools shall schedule no more than one contest per day per team.
28. Sunday competition is only allowed when: weather or venue issues caused postponement, and both principals agree.

29. When scheduling with out-of-state schools, each school shall observe its state regulations on eligibility. No member school shall host or participate in an interstate tournament involving more than two (2) schools without approval from all interested state associations, initiated at least 30 days before the event.
30. Playing rules for interscholastic contests shall be prescribed by the committee responsible for that activity.
31. No member school involved in varsity, junior varsity, or organized school-unit competition shall compete in a tournament not sanctioned by the VPA.
32. Participants in all interscholastic athletic activities must have a minimum of ten (10) practice sessions before competing in interscholastic contests. No more than two practice sessions in a day shall count toward the minimum of ten. Participants must be allowed one day without any practice or game in each calendar week.
33. Participants must have a minimum seven (7) days rest period before starting practice for the succeeding sports season. This rest period is mandatory and may not be waived by local schedule considerations.
34. No student may participate in any VPA-sanctioned activity without providing evidence of coverage under a private or public health insurance program for medical care for injuries suffered during participation.
35. Mixed (boys/girls) competition is prohibited except where a member school does not offer equivalent activities for girls. Girls shall be eligible to try out any activity in such circumstances. Note: Students governed by the VPA Gender Identity Policy (Section 2) are exempt from this rule — see Section 2 for guidance.

Taunting and Unsportsmanlike Behavior

Taunting is defined as any action or comment by coaches, players, or spectators intended to bait, anger, embarrass, ridicule, or demean others, whether or not the words are vulgar or racist. This includes contact that berates, needles, intimidates, or threatens based on race, gender, ethnicity, origin, background, religious beliefs, size, economic status, speech, family, special needs, or personal matters.

Taunting in all sports is a flagrant unsportsmanlike foul that will result in a game ejection as outlined in Section 24.

24 Student/Coach Ejection Rule

Any student or coach ejected for unsportsmanlike conduct or a flagrant foul shall be suspended from the next two contests (except for football, skiing, and gymnastics, for which the suspension shall be one contest).

End-of-Season Ejections

If the ejection occurs in the last contest of the season, the suspension carries over to the next sport in which the student or coach participates, as follows:

- First ejection in last game of season: next two contests in the next sport (one for football, skiing, gymnastics).

Second Ejection — Season Suspension

A student or coach ejected for the second time in a season shall be suspended for the remainder of the season in that sport.

Coach-Specific Rules

A coach ejected for unsportsmanlike conduct receives the same suspension as a student-athlete. A suspended coach may NOT attend the contest. Coaches ejected a second time in a season shall be suspended for the remainder of the season.

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25 Assault Upon Officials and Coaches

Assault Upon Officials by Coaches

A coach who intentionally strikes, shoves, kicks, or makes aggressive physical contact with an official before, during, or after an interscholastic contest shall be disqualified immediately and their coaching eligibility may be suspended for up to one full calendar year pending a hearing before the Activities Standards Committee.

Assault Upon Officials by Students

Any member of the team (including players, managers, scorekeepers, timers, and statisticians) who intentionally strikes, shoves, kicks, or makes aggressive physical contact with an official shall be disqualified immediately and may be ineligible to participate in all sports for up to one full calendar year pending a hearing.

Assault Upon Coaches by Coaches

A coach who intentionally strikes, shoves, kicks, or makes aggressive physical contact with another coach shall be disqualified immediately and their coaching eligibility may be suspended for up to one calendar year pending a hearing before the Activities Standards Committee.

Enforcement

It is the responsibility of the local school to ensure this regulation is enforced. When a suspended student or coach is allowed to participate, forfeiture of the contest is mandatory. This regulation applies to all regular season and tournament contests.

Appeals

Judgment calls by officials ordering ejection shall be final. The only grounds for appeal from a suspension under this section are that the ejection was caused by gross misconduct by the official, or that the official filed a written report stating the ejection was erroneous.

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26 Sanctioning a New Activity

The VPA is open to the development of new sports and activities that would benefit students in VPA member schools. To present a new sport/activity:

36. A petition shall be brought to the VPA Activity Standards Committee with evidence of a minimum of 9 schools willing to offer the sport/activity on an "exhibition" basis for two years.
37. A meeting with the VPA Activity Standards Committee will be held, at which written evidence from interested schools and a general description of the sport/activity shall be provided.
38. If approved, a committee will be formed to write the guide for the new sport/activity and serve as the official VPA committee for two years.
39. At the end of the two-year exhibition period, the ASC will vote on whether to formally sanction the activity.

27 Coach Replacement During a Contest

Before the start of any athletic contest, the head coach must identify the adult designated to replace them in the event they are unable to complete the contest due to illness, ejection, or other reasons. When a coach is unable to continue and no replacement was named before the start of the contest, their team shall forfeit the contest.

28 Individual Student Participation Limits

Sport	Max Games/Matches	Max Units
Baseball	14 games	14 × 7 innings = 98 innings
Basketball	20 games	20 × 5 quarters = 100 quarters. No player shall play more than 5 quarters in any day (overtime is an extension of the 4th quarter).
Esports	See Sport Guide	Contact VPA for current limits
Field Hockey	14 games	14 × 2 halves = 28 halves
Football	9 games	9 × 4 quarters = 36 quarters
Ice Hockey	20 games	20 × 3 periods = 60 periods
Lacrosse	14 games	14 × 4 periods = 56 periods
Soccer	14 games	14 × 2 halves = 28 halves
Softball	14 games	14 × 7 innings = 98 innings
Tennis	See Sport Guide	Contact VPA for current limits

29 Fine for Submitting Late or Inaccurate Pairings

VPA schools that submit inaccurate pairing forms shall be subject to the following:

- 1st submission: Written warning to the principal; no fine.
- 2nd submission and beyond: $200.00 per occurrence for activities requiring applications.
- $100.00 per occurrence for required non-application materials (participation surveys, etc.).
- The member school principal shall be notified each time an inaccurate pairing form is submitted.

30 VPA Lightning Rule

When thunder is heard or lightning is seen, students and spectators must leave the field and go inside immediately. Once lightning has been recognized or thunder heard, teams must wait at least thirty (30) minutes before resuming activities. Any subsequent lightning or thunder resets the 30-minute clock.

31 Individual/Team Activities — Master List

i NOTE

MASTER LIST OF INDIVIDUAL SPORTS (referenced throughout this document):Golf, Gymnastics, Alpine Skiing, Nordic Skiing, Snowboarding, Cross-Country, Indoor Track, Outdoor Track, and Wrestling.This master list applies to: Section 3 (Nonbinary Policy), Section 10 (8th Grade Restrictions), and Section 32 (Individual Competition Rules).

Traditionally, the VPA has allowed student-athletes who want to participate in individual sports but attend schools that do not sponsor teams, to practice with and participate through schools with teams. These student-athletes participate as individuals only — they may win individual awards, but their scoring does not count for any team.

32 Rules Governing Participation in Individual Competitions

- To participate under this rule, a student-athlete must be enrolled in a VPA member school or a qualifying home study program.
- Participation is limited to the individual sports listed in the Master List in Section 31.
- Student-athletes under this program may practice and travel with the school team.
- Student-athletes only participate as individuals — they may win individual awards but their scoring does not count for any team.
- A student is ineligible for this program if their school maintains a team in that sport.

- If the student's district does not have a team, the student-athlete must participate on the team geographically closest to their residence.
- The participating student must comply with all VPA regulations and adhere to the same standards of behavior and performance as team members.
- Both the school where the student is enrolled and the school sponsoring the team must consent to the student's participation.

33 Sports Seasons

FALL	Cross-Country, Golf, Field Hockey, Football, Soccer, Volleyball, Bass Fishing
WINTER	Basketball, Cheerleading, Dance, Ice Hockey, Wrestling, Gymnastics, Skiing, Snowboarding, Indoor Track, Bowling, Esports
SPRING	Baseball, Softball, Track & Field, Tennis, Lacrosse, Ultimate

Season Break Requirements

The following rest periods between seasons are mandatory and may not be waived by local schedule considerations:

- There shall be at least a one-week break between the end of the Fall Sports Season and the start of the Winter Sports Season.
- There shall be at least a one-week break between the end of the Winter Sports Season and the start of the Spring Sports Season.
- These breaks are required to ensure compliance with the minimum seven-day rest period in Section 23, Rule 9.

i NOTE

The current VPA Sports Calendar, including official start and end dates for each sport, is published annually at vpaonline.org/sports-calendar. Schools should distribute this calendar to coaches and families at the start of each school year.

No school shall permit students to enroll in a winter activity until the fall activity in which they are participating is concluded and they have had the required rest period. The same applies between winter and spring activities. Students participating in state tournaments are exempt from this rule if compliance would prevent their participation.

34 Loyalty Clause and School Team Priority

A member of a school team is a student-athlete who is regularly present for, and actively participates in, ALL team tryouts, practices, and competitions. Bona fide members of a school team are prevented from missing a

high school practice or competition to compete with an out-of-school team, practice, or competition — including tournaments, showcases, combines, or other athletic events.

Whenever a conflict arises between the high school team practice/competition and an out-of-school event on the same day, the high school practice/competition shall be honored. Priority MUST be given at all times to the high school team unless permission has been granted by the school in extraordinary circumstances only.

i NOTE

This Loyalty Clause and the Non-School Competition Rules (Section 12) together establish the school team priority standard. The threshold for exceptions is 'extraordinary circumstances' — meaning a rare, one-time event (such as a national championship) that cannot be rescheduled. Routine club or travel team conflicts do not meet this standard.

35 Out-of-Season Coaching Policy 2026

Policy Purpose

This policy establishes guidelines for: supporting multi-sport participation, defining appropriate out-of-season contact between coaches and student-athletes, ensuring equitable opportunities across all schools, and establishing clear boundaries and expectations for coaches.

Key Definitions

Out-of-Season Period	Any time outside a sport's official VPA-designated season, excluding summer recess.
Summer Recess	The period between the last day of school and the Sunday before the first fall practice date per the VPA calendar (vpaonline.org/sports-calendar).
Skills and Drills Instruction	Any organized activity focused on sport-specific skill development.
Voluntary Activity	Athletic activity where participation is entirely optional, with no consequences for non-participation.

Year-Round Principles

40. Multi-sport participation must be actively encouraged and supported.
41. No activity may be mandatory outside the official sport season.
42. Participation or non-participation in out-of-season activities shall never impact team selection, playing time, or standing.
43. No coach may pressure or incentivize sport specialization.
44. In-season sports always take priority over out-of-season activities.

School-Year Out-of-Season Guidelines

During the academic year (outside summer recess), coaches may provide voluntary skills and drills instruction if:

- Activities are open to all eligible students.
- No school uniforms, logos, or branding are used.
- No school transportation is provided.
- No formal rosters are maintained.
- Activities are approved by the Athletic Director.
- For contact sports: no contact drills or scrimmages are permitted.

Summer Recess Guidelines

During summer recess, coaching restrictions are lifted, allowing for organized team activities. All activities must remain strictly voluntary. Participation shall not influence team selection or playing time during the regular season.

Prohibited Practices

- Using out-of-season participation as a factor in team selection or playing time.
- Excluding athletes based on skill demonstrated in out-of-season activities.
- Making statements implying athletes should prioritize one sport over another.
- Creating consequences for non-participation in out-of-season activities.
- Scheduling out-of-season activities that conflict with in-season sports.

Accountability

Each school must submit an annual Assurance Form signed by both the Principal and Athletic Director. Egregious or repeated violations will be reviewed by the VPA Activity Standards Committee.

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36 Scrimmages and Jamborees

Scrimmages

A scrimmage is a practice situation, not a competitive event. Scrimmages have unlimited timeouts during which coaches may provide instruction. Rules:

- A team cannot play more than 20% of the maximum number of regular season games as scrimmages up to the conclusion of the regular season. Scrimmages in the postseason are not counted toward the 20%.
- No admission shall be charged.
- Scrimmages are not bound by length of game regulations; however, individual players cannot exceed the playing time of a regular season game.
- A score is kept only by the quarter/period/inning/half and not as a regular game.

Jamborees

A jamboree (or Round Robin) is a scrimmage in which a team engages two or more other teams. Schools are allowed to use the equivalent of 2 scrimmages at a jamboree/round robin. Soccer has specific language in the the guide to discuss implementation.

37 Canceled Season Rule

A school that cancels a sport after the official schedule has been established must forfeit wins to its remaining scheduled opponents unless the cancellation takes place ninety (90) days before the start of the activity.

38 Divisional Alignments

The Association may establish divisional alignments within the various activities. When a divisional alignment is being reviewed, member schools must submit enrolled student counts as of October 15 each year. The Activities Standards Committee shall endeavor to establish divisional classifications by February 1 for use in the following school year.

Final classifications shall be employed in the following two school years. Within fifteen days of receipt of notice of new divisional alignments, member institutions may submit a request for adjustment. Requests to reduce classification will be granted only in extraordinary circumstances.

39 Protest Procedures

⚠ **IMPORTANT**

QUICK REFERENCE — VPA TOURNAMENT PROTESTS:Notify the chief official immediately during the game. Contact the VPA office within 24 hours by phone or email. Failure to protest within 24 hours waives the right to appeal.

A. School-Sponsored Activity Protests

45. Principals/Headmasters of the schools involved should first attempt to resolve the issue between themselves.
46. If unresolved, the principal shall notify the President of the league in writing, filing a copy with the VPA Assistant Executive Director.
47. If the dispute is not league-related, the VPA Assistant Executive Director (or designee) will be available to mediate.

B. VPA-Sponsored Tournament Protests

48. Any protest related to an aspect other than the actual activity shall be settled by the observer. If no observer is present, the host administrator makes the necessary decisions.
49. Any protest related to the activity itself shall be settled by the chief official.
50. The coach desiring to protest must notify the chief official, referee/umpire, and opposing coach that the contest is proceeding under protest.
51. To appeal a ruling based on misapplication of a rule, the Principal must contact the VPA office within 24 hours.
52. The protest committee consists of: the President of the Association, the President-elect, the Executive Director or designee, the Chairman of the Activities Standards Committee, and the Chair of the Sports Specific Committee involved.
53. The decision of the protest committee shall be final.

40 Coaches Eligibility and Coaches Training Program

The VPA believes that coaches should obtain proper training. Coaches play a critical role in the overall quality of the interscholastic activity program, the safety of student-athletes, and the education of our children.

Required Training for Contracted Coaches

A person shall be eligible to be employed as a coach if they satisfy all of the following:

- Appointment must be approved by the local school district.
- The coach must be at least 18 years of age or a high school graduate at the commencement of the sports season.
- The coach must sign a statement acknowledging that they have read, understood, and agree to comply with all VPA bylaws and policies.
- The coach must complete the NFHS Interscholastic Coaching Principles course, the NFHS Sports First Aid course, and the NFHS Concussion Education course (concussion course must be completed before the first practice).
- The coach must complete the NFHS Interscholastic Implicit Bias course (required as of Winter 2021).
- All required training must be completed within one year of employment as a coach, except the concussion education course which must be completed immediately.

Volunteer Assistant Coaches

Volunteer assistant coaches must complete, at minimum, the NFHS Concussion in Sports course before their first practice. It is strongly recommended that all coaches — including volunteers — complete the full Coaches Education Program. Volunteer coaches who work directly with student-athletes share responsibility for student safety and are expected to uphold all VPA standards of conduct.

⚠ **IMPORTANT**

The training requirements above apply to coaches under contract with a school or school district. Volunteer assistants must complete at minimum the NFHS Concussion Education course before their first practice.

41 Allowing Member School Students to Participate on Other Member School Teams (Member to Member Program)

The Member to Member Program provides a short-term solution for schools with low participation and an opportunity for students to participate on a team their own school does not offer.

Application Deadline

Member high schools must submit a written request to the VPA Assistant Executive Director at least 60 days before the start of the applicable sports season. Late submissions will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis; however, the VPA cannot guarantee timely processing for submissions received after this deadline. Schools with urgent circumstances should contact the VPA directly.

Substantive Requirements

- This program only applies to team sports: Baseball, Basketball, Bowling, Cheerleading, Dance, Esports, Field Hockey, Football, Hockey, Lacrosse, Soccer, Softball, Tennis, Ultimate, and Volleyball.
- No student-athletes may have been cut at any level in that sport.
- The athlete must meet all VPA eligibility and student conduct requirements.
- There must be no athletic recruitment of the student-athlete.
- The sending school may not offer the team sport in which the student wishes to participate, and must have not offered the sport for at least two years if they previously dropped it.
- There must be no displacement of student-athletes from the receiving school.
- Students from sending schools shall comprise no more than 20% of the normal complement or team roster.

42 Cooperative Team Rule

Any proposal to form a new cooperative team must be submitted in complete form to the VPA Activities Standards Committee at least six (6) months in advance of the beginning practice date for that sport.

Key Requirements

54. The proposal must demonstrate that cumulative student participation in the combining schools will be greater under the cooperative program than during each of the previous two years.

55. The proposal must demonstrate that students who participated in the previous year are guaranteed the opportunity to continue under the cooperative proposal.
56. Cooperative proposals will only be considered if they increase the number of student participants and will not be considered if they are driven by the desire to reduce costs.
57. In evaluating whether a proposal is financially motivated, the ASC will consider: participation data from the past two seasons, budget documentation, and statements from each school's administration. Decisions may be appealed under Section 20.
58. No consideration will be given to proposals resulting from the elimination of the sport due to financial cuts during the two years immediately before the request.
59. The division for the cooperative team is determined by the combined enrollment of the schools involved.
60. A school may not send students to two different cooperative programs in a single sport.
61. Cooperative proposals must be limited to VPA member schools and will be granted for two years.

Appendix A: Emergency Action Plans (EAPs)

Each member school is required to ensure that there is an emergency action plan (EAP) in place that includes a venue-specific EAP for each venue. The EAP must address: airway blockage, severe bleeding, broken bones, head/neck/spine injuries, loss of consciousness, heat stroke, severe asthma, and severe allergic reactions.

Every School EAP Must:

- Be reviewed and rehearsed each year with pertinent school staff and local EMS.
- Be developed and coordinated with local EMS, school public safety officials, on-site medical personnel, and school administrators.
- Be distributed to all athletics staff members and healthcare professionals providing medical coverage.
- List all on-site emergency equipment and identify personnel with a designated chain of command.
- Include appropriate EMS contact information, documentation actions post-emergency, and venue-specific maps.
- Have the venue-specific EAP posted at each venue.

Appendix B: Participation in the Heat

Exercise in a hot environment can lead to dehydration, heat exhaustion, exertional heat stroke, and death. Exertional Heat Stroke is currently the leading cause of preventable deaths related to athletic activity. The following mandatory procedure provides critical standards to protect athletes.

Monitoring Requirements

- Weather shall be monitored by designated athletic department personnel (Athletic Trainer if present).
- Athletic Department officials are required to use an on-site Wet Bulb Globe Temperature (WBGT) Measuring Device. This is the gold standard measurement tool.
- Weather readings must be taken at the practice/game site at least 1 hour prior to the event and every 30 minutes thereafter if in the moderate to extreme risk category.
- An on-site Cold Water Immersion (CWI) tub is required whenever there is a risk of high heat/humidity.

Activity Modification Table

Risk Level	Temperature	Color Code	Required Modifications
Low Risk	Below 80°F WBGT	■	Outside participation allowed with appropriate clothing
Moderate Risk	80–84°F WBGT	■	Mandate water breaks every 30 min; provide shaded rest areas
High Risk	85–87°F WBGT	■	Limit practice to 60 min; cold towels mandatory; CWI tub on standby
Extreme Risk	88°F+ WBGT	■	Cancel or move all outdoor activities indoors

Exertional Heat Stroke Treatment

⚠ **IMPORTANT**

HEAT STROKE IS LIFE-THREATENING AND PREVENTABLE. In the event of suspected Exertional Heat Stroke: initiate Cold Water Immersion (CWI) immediately AND contact EMS concurrently. The goal is to cool the athlete to 102°F (via rectal thermometry) within 30 minutes of collapse. Cool first, transport second.

Appendix C: AEDs

i NOTE

AED requirements took effect Fall 2025 and remain in effect for 2026-27.

Each VPA member school with an interscholastic athletics program is required to have at least one functional AED on site at all times, easily accessible during any school-related function including practices, competitions, and other events.

AED Placement Requirements

- The AED must be located within three minutes of the location of any athletic activity at all times.
- AEDs must be registered with Emergency Medical Services in accordance with Vermont state law.

- All athletic trainers, coaches, administrators, school nurses, and physical education teachers should have access to an AED.
- The AED location must be well-marked, publicized, accessible, and known among all trained staff.
- AEDs must be inspected regularly following manufacturer guidelines (batteries, wires, electrodes).

Off-Campus and Away Game Requirements

For outdoor athletic activities at locations without a permanent structure within three minutes, a portable AED must be brought to the venue by the host school. At away competitions, either the host or visiting school must ensure an AED is on-site. Schools are encouraged to confirm AED availability with host schools before traveling to away competitions.

All coaches are required to have current CPR/AED certification before coaching.

Appendix D: Heat Acclimatization

Days 1–5: Heat Acclimatization Phase

During the first five (5) days of any athlete's participation — including athletes who join a team after official practice has begun — the following requirements apply:

- No more than one practice per day during Days 1–5.
- Each practice shall be no more than three (3) hours in length.
- A walk-through is permitted during Days 1–5 only if separated from practice by at least 3 continuous hours of rest.

Days 6–14: Full Practice Phase (Football-Specific Contact Rules)

Beginning Day 6, double practice days are permitted every other day. On double-practice days: each practice must be separated by at least 3 continuous hours of rest; no two consecutive days of double practices are permitted.

Football Contact Progression

- Days 1–2: Helmets only.
- Days 3–5: Helmets and shoulder pads with shorts; no body-to-body contact.
- Day 6 and beyond: Full gear; body-to-body contact permitted.

Late-Joining Athletes

Student-athletes who begin practice with a team after the start of official practice must complete the full 5-day heat acclimatization protocol before joining regular practices. Football players joining late must additionally

complete the 6-day contact introduction protocol before participating in full-contact drills. These are two distinct requirements that may run concurrently.

Appendix E: Cold Weather Participation

Cold weather is defined as any temperature that can negatively affect the body's thermoregulatory system. Individuals engaged in sports activities in cold, wet, and/or windy conditions are at risk for environmental cold injuries. Wind and wet conditions reduce body temperature 3–5 times more quickly.

Cold Weather Activity Modification Table

Risk Level	Temp/Windchill	Required Modifications
Low Risk	30°F and below	Outside participation allowed with appropriate clothing
Moderate Risk	25°F and below	Mandate hat, gloves, layers; limit practice to 60–90 min with 15-min rewarm
High Risk	15°F and below	Cover all exposed skin; limit outside time to 45 min with 15-min rewarm; provide rewarming facilities
Extreme Risk	0°F or below	Terminate all outside activities

i NOTE

Nordic ski teams, Alpine ski teams, and snowboard teams are subject to coach's and venue discretion, as the nature of their sport dictates necessary equipment. Venues issue warnings and wind holds.

Appendix F: Sports Guides

Sport-specific guides are available at vpaonline.org/sports-guides. Each guide contains sport-specific rules, schedules, and tournament information.

- Alpine Skiing
- Baseball
- Basketball
- Bowling
- Cheer
- Dance
- Esports
- Gymnastics
- Ice Hockey
- Indoor Track
- Lacrosse
- Nordic Skiing
- Outdoor Track
- Snowboarding

- Field Hockey
- Football
- Golf
- Soccer
- Softball
- Tennis
- Ultimate
- Unified
- Volleyball
- Wrestling