



Spirit Rules Changes - 2025-26

The 2025-26 NFHS Spirit Rules Book has been redesigned to accommodate the unique nature of dance, separate from cheer, in the Spirit Rules. During this redesign, a format has been created for the entire book to make both cheer and dance more user-friendly. The new design includes:

Rule 1: General Risk Management

Rule 2: Cheer

Rule 3: Dance

Individual rules changes are found below.

Rule 1 Definitions: All definitions that were previously found in Rule 1 have been removed and are now incorporated into their respective rules for Cheer (Rule 2) and Dance (Rule 3). Additional cheer-specific definitions including assisted walkover, kip up, and nugget have been added for clarification. Additional dance-specific definitions, such as executing dancer and supporting dancer, have been added for clarification.

2-2-7: New language added to allow an extended single-based stunt supported at the waist as an exception for requiring a spotter.

Rationale: This skill does not increase risk to participants and is a less difficult skill than a chair sit, which is currently allowed as an exception.

2-3-5d: New language added to clarify a bracer may release the top person or move to a load position during a flip inversion when the top is descending and goes to a cradle or the performance surface.

Rationale: Landing on the performing surface with assistance from the catchers is similar to landing in the cradle position. The requirement that the top is not inverted is unnecessary since the top is rotating and would be descending.

2-3-7: Clarified exceptions for when a participant can hold props in hands.

Rationale: This would encompass partner cartwheels on the thighs or assisted walkovers. The risk is very low if the executing dancer has poms/props in her hands since the supporting dancer cannot have poms/props in their hands and can provide the support needed to safely complete the skill.

2-3-9: New language added to prohibit a participant from landing or being caught in an inverted position in a stunt or pyramid from an unassisted airborne position.

Rationale: This rule change clarifies that a performer may not perform a skill such as a back handspring with no hands and be caught by a base or bases in the inverted position. The existing rules all deal with a top person who is already in a skill.

2-5-3e: New language added to clarify restrictions on use of props during tosses to a cradle.

Rationale: This addition clarifies that someone involved in a toss to a cradle should not have any involvement with props.

2-5-3f: New language added to clarify a top person must not be inverted during tosses to cradles.

Rationale: Basket toss flips are currently illegal because they aren't made legal in the inversion section. This addition in the tosses section makes it very clear that skills like prep front flip and basket toss tucks are illegal.

2-5-6d/e: New language added to clarify release from extended vertical position and to permit a release from a vertical position at prep level to land in a vertical or horizontal position.

Rationale: Horizontal stunts like a flatback are allowed as long as the top doesn't go significantly higher than the bases' arms/hands on the catch. The tosses that are allowed go through the prep position to release. This change allows preps to release to the same position with the same restriction.

Rule 3 – Dance rewrite of entire rule: This rule has been rewritten to provide dance/drill-specific language, rather than adapting dance rules from cheer rules. Dance-specific definitions have been added and/or modified, and those definitions are applied throughout this new rule.

Rationale: The Spirit Committee has spent the past year reorganizing the rule book to distinguish between cheerleading and dance/drill more clearly, addressing long-standing concerns about confusion between the two activities. These updates aim to ensure that the language in the dance rules is more specific to dance, rather than adapted from cheer rules. By responding to years of feedback from the dance community, the committee believes this reorganization will reflect the distinct nature of each activity and provide clearer guidance for participants, coaches, and officials.