

FUNDAMENTALS



Of MHSA

Athletic Regulations

A guide for Administrators, Coaches, Parents and Boosters

- 1 In-Season and Out-of-Season Regulations
- 2 Coaching Rules, Camps & Invitationals
- 3 Eligibility
- 4 Fundraising
- 5 Gender Equity
- 6 Noteworthy Items

Montana High School Association
1 South Dakota Avenue
Helena, MT 59601
(406) 442-6010
www.mhsa.org

A complete electronic copy of the MHSA Handbook is available at www.mhsa.org.

Updated October 2025

1 – In-Season and Out-of-Season Regulations

The separation of school programs from out-of-season contests/teams/leagues should be clear and irrefutable. This section provides definitions of what is considered allowable activity within the season and what is allowed out-of-season.

The starting and ending dates for any season for any MHSA athletic activity are determined by the MHSA Executive Board, and those dates for each school year are published in the MHSA Handbook and on the MHSA website at www.mhsa.org.

In-Season Contest/Activities	Out-of-Season Contest/Activities
<u>Involvement</u> Schools have total control of program.	<u>Involvement</u> Schools or school groups (e.g. Booster Clubs) cannot be involved with out-of-season events in any way (which includes interschool contests/scrimmages during the Summer Coaching Period).
<u>Responsibility</u> Schools are responsible for enforcing all MHSA rules and regulations including equity principles and for funding their sanctioned programs.	<u>Responsibility</u> Participants are not affiliated with your school for these events. The school is not (and cannot) be responsible for any aspect of these events including funding, equity principles etc.
<u>Insurance</u> School insurance and MHSA catastrophic / concussion insurance cover participants.	<u>Insurance</u> Participants are not covered by school insurance or MHSA catastrophic / concussion insurance.
<u>Monies – School Accounts</u> Monies for in-season events are housed in school accounts.	<u>Monies – School Accounts</u> Monies for out-of-season events cannot be housed in school accounts (IRS regulations also apply).
<u>Amateur and Award Rules</u> Participants must follow the MHSA Awards Rule and Amateur Rule.	<u>Amateur and Award Rules</u> Participants must follow the MHSA Awards Rule and Amateur Rule.

Items of note:

- Schools do not have the responsibility or liability for students participating in out-of-season contests or events. Because of this, schools are not responsible to provide funding or to enforce equitable out-of-season events for their student athletes.
- Schools, and coaches for that matter, hopefully are not under pressure to provide for and fund out-of-season events; the responsibility and decision to participate are the parents' and students.
- These rules and regulations strongly support diversified activity participation and negate the risks for student athletes who specialize. These risks include social isolation, overdependence, burnout, manipulation, injury and compromised growth and maturation. (Source: Early Sports Specialization: Roots, Effectiveness, Risks – Robert M. Malina Department of Kinesiology and Health Education, University of Texas at Austin).

2 – Coaching Rules, Camps, Invitational Tournaments & Other Activities

Coaching rules for all MHSA coaches are defined in the MHSA Rules and Regulations. Students ***cannot be required to attend*** out-of-season practices, camps or contests. There are distinct differences between team sport parameters and individual sport parameters.

Team Coaching Rule – Baseball, Basketball, Football, Soccer, Softball and Volleyball

Summer Coaching Period: The MHSA defines the timeframe for the summer coaching period as the Tuesday after Memorial Day until July 31st.

The team coaching rule is suspended from the Tuesday after Memorial Day through July 31st. The team coaching rule for MHSA Baseball coaches is suspended from the Sunday after the State Baseball Tournament through July 31st. This means a coach of a team sport can coach his/her players anytime, anywhere, during this period. During this period a team can scrimmage against another team without violating the out-of-season contest requirements (renting facility etc.). Practice, competition and facility use during the coaching rule suspension are not covered by MHSA insurance (liability, catastrophic, concussion etc.).

For out of district transfers, participation for a MHSA high school will occur after the following:

- 1. The student must finish the current school year.**
- 2. The parent(s) complete registration at the student's selected school.**
- 3. The parent(s) paid the applicable tuition charge.**
- 4. The parent(s) complete a request that cumulative school records be sent to the high school.**

Upon completion of these four criteria, students are eligible to participate in the open team coaching period for that high school during the summer coaching period.

The team coaching rule is in effect from August 1 - Memorial Day. The team coaching rule for MHSA Baseball coaches is in effect from August 1 - the Saturday of the MHSA State Baseball Tournament. This means that there is to be no coaching of one's team sport (team sports being baseball, football, basketball, volleyball, softball and soccer) out of season other than the one-on-one provision allowed presently. Coaches of individual sports (individual sports being cross country, wrestling, track and field, swimming, golf and tennis) are not affected by this rule.

Individual instruction is acceptable out of season on a one-to-one basis [one athlete per coach(es)] if it is voluntary. *Required* instruction on a one-to-one basis out of season cannot be mandated of any student. The intent of allowing one-on-one instruction is to provide the opportunity for a student to improve his/her skills if he/she requests assistance.

Coaching for Individual Sports – Cross Country, Golf, Swimming, Tennis, Track & Field and Wrestling

Coaches of individual sports are not affected by the team coaching rule. However, *required* instruction outside the high school season as defined by MHSA cannot be mandated of any student.

For wrestling, if a school district adopts a policy addressing circumstances under which a female wrestler may practice with or prepare for meets with participants on the boys' team, the girls will be allowed to wrestle boys from the same school in practice and warm-ups. The policy must be aligned with an objective of providing equitable opportunities for participation that assure safety of and meet the interests and abilities of the underrepresented sex in any extracurricular activity. Schools must use the following criteria

in allowing this option:

1. A parent of any participant must be allowed to opt their child out of any practice or preparation for an extracurricular activity with participants of the opposite sex.

Open Gym/Field for MHSA sanctioned sports is an arrangement whereby the school's facilities are scheduled for volunteer play for all the currently enrolled student body or non-secondary students within the school's attendance area who are not enrolled in another district. Open Gym/Field are not covered by any MHSA insurance (liability, catastrophic, concussion etc).

Open gyms do not violate MHSA rules if they are conducted according to the following guidelines:

1. The open gym is open to any currently enrolled student body or non-secondary students within the school's attendance area who are not enrolled in another district who are interested in attending.
2. One on one instruction will be allowed at open gyms as long as it is separate from the group activity. There is NO other instruction allowed during the open gym, whether by a coach or anyone else.
3. Coaches may supervise open gyms, but they cannot instruct more than one individual at a time, organize drills, etc. or participate with the students.
4. There is no organized competition, such as established teams participating in round-robin competition, etc.

There is no such thing as an open gym during a sport-specific season (i.e. no volleyball open gym during volleyball). During the summer coaching period, only the current student body or non-secondary students within the school's attendance area (who are not enrolled in another district) are allowed to participate in open gyms or practices. Coaches who coach AAU clubs or teams with mixed high school students must follow district policy to rent the gym to practice.

Approved co-op students are allowed to participate in each school's open gyms or practices.

Specialized Camps, Invitational Tournaments & Other Events

Any student may participate in specialized camps, invitational tournaments and other events in all sports so long as the program and the student's participation meet the following requirements:

- a. No student shall participate in a specialized sports camp, invitational tournament or other sporting events in which any of his/her coaches are involved except during the summer coaching period of each calendar year. (This rule does not apply to individual sports.)
- b. If a coach employed by the school or a coach who volunteers in the school's athletic program conducts a specialized camp, invitational tournament or other event independent of the school district and uses school district facilities, the coach must follow the district policy on facility use including paying the normal rental fee and providing insurance coverage.
- c. An MHSA member school, its booster club or other school-related group may not sponsor or have any part in any way in financing a specialized camp, invitational tournament or any other event. A school, booster club or other school-related group paying a coach for conducting a specialized camp, invitational tournament or other event would be in violation.

d. The MHSA Award Rule and the MHSA Amateur Rule must be followed.

The following options are in compliance with the specialized camp rule:

- A student's parents pay the camp fee and the expenses for the student's travel and room at the camp.
- A student babysits, mows lawns or holds some other job to earn his/her own money to pay for the camp fee and expenses.
- A student works at a school fundraising opportunity (such as a concession stand) and is paid by the hour, earning his/her own money to pay for the camp fee and expenses. Records which detail the student's earnings should be kept.
- A group of parents conducts a fundraiser to offset expenses for students to attend a camp. NOTE: this is allowable provided the MHSA Amateur Rule is met in its entirety, specifically item d. which states that a student may not knowingly accept payment for excessive expenses. It is not permissible for an athlete to receive money for unidentified or unspecified expenses. Records and documentation should be maintained.

The following are **violations** of the specialized camp rule:

- A booster club pays the camp fee or other expenses for a student or students.
- A local business or individual donates money to pay the camp fee or other expenses for a student or students to the individual or non-school related fundraising group.
- A school supplements the expenses for a camp by providing transportation such as buses or bus drivers, and the expenses for the bus/bus drivers are not reimbursed by assessing a fee to the individual students.
- A school helps sponsor a camp by waiving the rental fees for school facilities or by failing to adhere to district policies regarding use of facilities, equipment, insurance etc. (if there are any).
- A school houses or administers funds that have been raised by outside groups for the purpose of conducting out-of-season events such as invitational tournaments, specialized camps or other similar events.

Items of Note:

- School uniforms/equipment may be used, if the school allows.
- Provided a student's coach(es) are not involved and the school/booster club is not, in any way, sponsoring an invitational tournament or other event and provided all general rules are met, a student may attend an invitational tournament or other event at any time during the year.
- It is strongly recommended that the group organizing the event(s) draft a disclaimer reviewing these points, distribute it to the athletes, secure parental permission to participate, and disavow any sponsorship by any participating players' schools.
- Use of district buses by outside groups must be addressed within the local district policy

3 - Award Rule

NOTE - It is very important to note that if a student received money for any athletic or activity performance/participation or recognition, this will be considered as part of the MHSA Awards Rule. If a student receives money for their Name, Image or Likeness, this is considered NIL money.

Awards Rule

15.1 A student participant may not accept monetary compensation (cash) in recognition of activities performance, participation and/or achievement. A student may accept non-monetary compensation or items of value solely in recognition of activities ability, participation and/or achievement if the total value of such non-monetary compensation or items of value, including the actual value of any gift certificates (so long as they are not convertible to cash), discounts, coupons, etc., does not exceed \$500 retail value annually (July 1 – June 30).

NOTE: For the purposes of this rule, “non-monetary compensation or items of value” does not include customary awards of a symbolic nature without resale value such as:

- a. The school’s athletic letter, medals, ribbons, certificates, plaques, trophies, and other emblems.
- b. The award is purchased and presented by the student’s parents or when the award is purchased by the student with money earned or secured through his/her own individual efforts.
- c. MHSA Sportsmanship Awards

NOTE: For the purposes of this rule, these items which have been a part of the previous awards rule would be included in the “non-monetary compensation or items of value”:

- a. Training apparel for practice and/or workouts provided by the school. These items include but are not limited to the following: practice shirt, practice shorts, spandex, tights and a pair of socks.
- b. Schools may provide warm-up shirts (e.g. shooting shirts) to be worn on the court/field before a contest.
- c. Fundraising activities such as pop hoop shoots, passing accuracy contests etc.
- d. Individual miniature trophies for first and second place MHSA state championship events purchased from the Association’s awards provider.

15.2 This rule does not regulate or prohibit compensation received by a student for ability, participation and/or achievement in a non-MHSA sport or activity, nor does this rule prohibit the acceptance of college scholarships by students.

15.3 A coach or director is responsible for reporting to the school’s athletic/activities director all compensation or items of value received by the students on that coach/director’s team within one month of the receipt of the compensation or items of value. Principals are responsible for verifying to the association, if requested, that the total sum of compensation or items of value received by each student participant at that school does not exceed \$500 retail value for each participant.

15.4 A student participating without compensation as a contestant, coach, or similar participant in athletic or other activities may accept the use of necessary equipment and incidental services customarily furnished amateur participants in such activities, may accept reimbursement for direct and necessary expenses for participation (including mileage where the student must drive), and where participation requires absence from home, may accept necessary meals and lodging.

15.5 When a student is selected by chance or random drawing, to participate in a halftime or pregame contest involving a sport skill (e.g. throwing, kicking, or shooting a basketball), he or she may receive cash or merchandise prize from the contest, without affecting eligibility under MHSA Awards and Amateur rules.

Random drawing of names or lucky numbers in a program determining the participant would not be a

violation. Examples include, but are not limited to, booster club fund-raisers, drawings to shoot a half-court or three point shot, or passing a football to win a prize. During the season of activity, a player from a school team is permitted to participate in such contests, provided the selection occurs randomly.

- 15.6 A student becomes ineligible from the date of the report of the violation to the MHSA office. Penalties for the awards rule apply when:
- Any type of cash is accepted.
 - A student is awarded non-monetary compensation or items of value over \$500 annually (July 1 – June 30).
 - The MHSA Ridgeway Settlement Agreement is not followed by schools.

The Executive Board will follow the same procedure for restoring the eligibility status as provided in the last paragraph of the Amateur Rule, Article II, Section (19) of the By-Laws.

4 - Amateur Rule

- 16.1 All contestants in the Montana High School Association must be amateurs. An amateur is one who engages in athletics for the educational, physical, mental and social benefits he/she derives therefrom, and to whom athletics are nothing more than an avocation. An athlete forfeits amateur status in a sport by:
- Competing for or accepting money or other monetary compensation (it is permissible for a student to accept necessary meals, lodging, and transportation in connection with playing a contest).
 - Play or manage under an assumed name.
 - Receiving any award or prize of monetary value which exceeds the amount that has been approved by the MHSA.
 - Except as provided under By-Law 16.2, permitting the use of name, image, and/or likeness (NIL) as an athlete, in the promotion of a commercial or profit-making event, item, plan, or service
 - A student who becomes a professional in an MHSA-sponsored sport is considered a professional in that sport only and is ineligible for further high school athletic competition in that sport only until such time as returned to amateur status in that sport.
 - Sell a prize won in a competition.
 - Bet on a contest in which he/she is to participate.

5 - NIL Information

NOTE - It is very important to note that if a student received money for any athletic or activity performance/participation or recognition, this will be considered as part of the MHSA Awards Rule. If a student receives money for their Name, Image or Likeness, this is considered NIL money.

- 16.2 Under By-law 16.1d, the term “commercial or profit-making event, item, plan, or service” means any situation in which the person or entity will receive or hopes to receive anything of value, monetary or non-monetary, but does not include student participation in fundraising activities for non-profit organizations. This also does not prohibit a student from participating in any such event, item, plan, or services sponsored by or benefiting the student’s MHSA member school or its activities.

Under By-law 16.1d, the term “as an athlete” shall not include use of the name, image, or likeness of a student of a MHSA member school participating in MHSA-sponsored activities, unless otherwise explicitly permitted or prohibited by state or federal law or the MHSA member school’s policies or rules, within the following limitations:

- a. Students may engage in name, image and/or likeness (NIL) activities subject to the following:
 1. The student's NIL activities may NOT include an image or likeness of the student in uniform or other clothing or gear provided by the MHSA or the member school the student is attending or has attended.
 2. The student shall not use any MHSA or the member school's facilities, proprietary patents, products, copyrights, and/or equipment for the purpose of any NIL activities
 3. The student shall not use any MHSA or the member school's practice and/or game film for the purpose of any NIL activities
 4. The student shall not promote any person or entity, or their services and/or products, during the MHSA member school's scheduled school day or during any team activities.
 5. When required to follow the MHSA or MHSA member school's uniform or dress requirements, the student may not wear any person's or entity's logo, mark, or insignia, or in any other way represent the person or entity with which the student has agreed to an NIL activity.
 6. No compensation (or prospective compensation) for the NIL activity may be provided by the MHSA member school, an agent of the member school (e.g., school booster club, foundation, employee, etc.), a collective or anyone affiliated with the member school in any way attempting to induce the student to attend or participate in any activity of a MHSA member school.

INTERPRETATION

A collective is defined as Individuals and/or companies cooperatively associate together to form an entity whose goal to provide NIL opportunities to student-athletes of one or more specific schools.

7. The student shall not promote activities, services, or products, directly or in any way associated with, but not limited to:
 - i. Alcohol, tobacco, nicotine, or vaping.
 - ii. Controlled substances, including illegal drugs (such as cannabis) or any paraphernalia
 - iii. Any item, activity, or conduct which is prohibited or unlawful for any school-aged student under state or federal law or the policies of the MHSA or the MHSA member school.
 - iv. Gambling of any kind, including sports betting, lottery, or other, even if the entity for whom the student has agreed to engage in NIL activities has the appropriate permits or licenses as required by law.
- b. Violation of by-law 16.2 may result in a determination by the member school and the MHSA of the student's ineligibility for activity participation. Compliance with these rules does not guarantee the student's NIL activity or activities comply with other laws or rules which may affect the student, such as rules established by the NCAA, NAIA, or NJCAA. Students and their parents or guardians are strongly encouraged to contact any such organization which may have separate rules and to consult with their own legal counsel regarding any compliance questions or concerns, including review of any contracts or agreements related to NIL activities of any kind. The MHSA and its staff will consult with MHSA member schools, parents/guardians, and/or students who have questions about the MHSA-specific NIL rules but will not offer advisory opinions that are binding on the MHSA, its staff, or its Board of Directors, and will not review contracts or agreements relating to NIL activities.

16.3 Accepting a nominal standards fee or salary for instructing, supervising or officiating in an organized youth sports program or recreation or playground activities shall not jeopardize amateur standards.

16.4 A student may be reinstated as an amateur by the Executive Board after not less than one calendar year has elapsed since the date he/she was declared a professional, provided his/her high school principal requests in writing the reinstatement as an amateur and certifies that the student has not, during that one

year period, violated the rules of amateurism, and that the student is not now under contract to, or owned by, any professional athletic organization.

6 - Eligibility is a Must!

Students must meet a variety of eligibility requirements in order to participate in MHSA athletic activities.

Here is an Eligibility Quick Check for athletics:

1. Is the student enrolled in at least 20 hours per week (4 classes, ½ credit each) and in attendance (receiving instruction and/or supervision in the bricks and mortar) for at least 10 hours per week?

Exception 1: Students are exempt from the ten hours per week bricks and mortar requirement of Section 2.1 if enrolled and completing personalized learning in accordance with provisions and intent of Section 20-7-1601, MCA, and consistent with policy adopted by the school district Board of Trustees. Students enrolled and competing personalized learning must participate for the district for which they are enrolled. All other eligibility requirements in this handbook apply.

Exception 2: Students enrolled and completing personalized learning in accordance with the provisions and intent of Section 20-7-1601, MCA in districts with more than one high school can participate in extracurricular activities at any high school in their district as established by school board policy. Districts that enforce attendance area restrictions may enforce those restrictions with personalized learning students. Once a student participates in any extracurricular activity in a particular school and the student changes to another school in the district, the MHSA Transfer Rule applies.

Exception 3: Non-public or home school students who meet the requirements of 20-5-109 can participate in MHSA member school extra-curricular activities with the following stipulations:

1. The same standards for participation must be met as those required of full-time students enrolled in the school (besides enrollment).
2. The same rules of the MHSA apply including age, semesters and academics (see #3).
3. The academic eligibility for extracurricular participation for a student attending a nonpublic school must be attested by the head administrator of the nonpublic school. The academic eligibility for extracurricular participation for students attending a home school must be attested in writing by the educator providing the student instruction with verification by the MHSA school principal. Academic eligibility includes provisions 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4.
4. The student may only participate in the school in the student's attendance area and cannot transfer.
5. **For a homeschool student to be able to participate in MHSA sports or activities, the student must be a United States citizen, and he/she must be a Montana resident, as determined under the provisions of MCA 1-1-215.**

Exception 4: Home school or nonpublic school students who resides in a school district with more than one high school can participate in extracurricular activities at any high school in their district if approved by the school district. Districts that enforce attendance area restrictions may enforce those restrictions with home and nonpublic school students. Once a student participates in any extracurricular activity in a particular school and the homeschool or nonpublic student changes to another school in the district, the MHSA Transfer Rule applies.

- 2.2 A grading period is defined as one semester. A semester is defined as one half of a school year (approximately 18 school weeks or 90 school days). This definition is applicable to all schools regardless of the type of class scheduling format utilized (i.e. block, traditional, trimester etc.).
- 2.3 A student must have received a passing grade and received credit in at least twenty periods of prepared class work or its equivalent in the last previous semester, at the school where the student participates;

except that any ninth-grade student enrolled and attending any junior high, in the same school system as the senior high school, may be eligible to participate on that senior high school's athletic teams. If the school prohibits participation by ninth grade students, this action by the local school will not be subject to review by the MHSA or its Executive Board.

- 2.4 A student must have received a passing grade and received credit in at least twenty periods of prepared work per week or its equivalent during the last preceding semester in which he/she was enrolled.
- 2.5 If a student is assigned an "incomplete" or a "condition" in a subject, he/she has not received a passing grade in this subject. The record at the end of the semester is final.
- 2.6 In the case of two or more schools entering into a cooperative sponsorship of activities, a student enrolled as a student and otherwise satisfying eligibility requirements would be eligible to participate in any activity sponsored by the school, regardless of whether the activity is sponsored only by the school or in conjunction and cooperation with another school, without being in violation of Article II, Section 2.
- 2.7 No student may establish eligibility concurrently at two member schools. Dual enrollment is not recognized for the purpose of eligibility in MHSA activities. A home school or nonpublic school student who participates at a MHSA member school is not eligible to concurrently participate in the same sport/activity that he/she participates in at the member school in any other league (nonpublic or home school). This provision protects member schools and nonpublic and home school leagues regarding dual participation.
- 2.8 This rule is not applicable to IDEA '04 and Section 504 students when their individual education plans (IEP) under IDEA or their educational accommodation plans under Section 504 certify that the students are not required to meet this minimum academic to have passed 20 hours of prepared work per week. However, all students must be enrolled in twenty hours per week and in regular attendance in ten hours per week. Special education or Section 504 certification that the student is not required to meet the minimum academic requirements may not be enacted retroactively (after grades have been assigned at the end of the previous semester).
- 2.9 The second semester begins on Monday morning following the week in which the first semester ends. A student who becomes eligible the second semester would then become eligible on Monday morning. A student who becomes ineligible the second semester would become ineligible on Monday morning.
- 2.10 A student attending a state approved Charter school approved by the Montana Board of Public Education is considered eligible for competition if the student a) is academically eligible from the previous semester, b) is enrolled and in regular attendance for twenty hours per week of approved high school classes, c) is eligible to receive a diploma from the high school for which he/she is competing, and d) the principal of the high school verifies that the student meets all other eligibility requirements such as age, semesters etc. and is in good standing. The Charter School student must participate for the district in which student's family resides.

If charter school students reside in a school district with more than one high school, they can participate in extracurricular activities at any high school in their district if approved by the school district. Districts that enforce attendance area restrictions may enforce those restrictions with charter students. Once a student participates in any extracurricular activity in a particular school, and the student changes to another school in the district, the MHSA Transfer Rule applies.

- 2.11 If a State of Montana statute establishes law regarding transgender participation in sports and activities, the MHSA shall adhere to and comply with such state statute.

INTERPRETATIONS

1. A student may not compete “unattached” or “independently.” He/she must compete for and be eligible to represent his/her member high school.
2. Schools may be more stringent in their policies.
3. Twenty hours of prepared class work is defined as four subjects that grant one unit of credit each for the full school year, or their equivalent (e.g., three classes carrying one unit of credit for the school year and two classes carrying one-half unit of credit for the school year) or the equivalency in a block/trimester schedule would meet this requirement.
4. Only school district-approved course work can be used to compute the 20 periods of prepared work.
5. The scholastic record at the end of the semester shall be final and deficiencies may not be made up in any manner. Deficiencies, including incompletes, conditions and failures for the previous semester may not be made up during a subsequent semester, summer session, night school, correspondence, or tutoring for the purpose of establishing or maintaining MHSA eligibility.
6. The intent of the rule prohibiting incomplete grades from being made up is not to prohibit incomplete grades which were given in cases of illness, injury or attending school authorized functions.
7. A student attending an alternative school not housed within the high school is considered eligible for competition if the student a) is academically eligible from the previous semester, b) is enrolled and in regular attendance for twenty hours per week of approved high school classes, c) is eligible to receive a diploma from the high school for which he/she is competing, and d) the principal of the high school verifies that the student meets all other eligibility requirements such as age, semesters etc. and is in good standing.

Please refer to the nonpublic and home school eligibility checklist and the FAQ's posted on the MHSA website.

Here are additional eligibility question that must be asked of incoming students:

1. Is the student academically eligible? Did he/she pass 20 hours of prepared class work the preceding semester? (A first-time eighth or ninth grade (who did not participate as an 8th grader) student is exempt.)
2. Is the student semester eligible? Eligibility consists of eight consecutive semesters after enrolling in the ninth grade (semesters accrue whether enrolled or not).
3. Is the student age eligible? He/she is ineligible if turning 19 before August 31st.
4. Has the student graduated or earned his/her GED or HiSET? If so, the student is not eligible for any level of competition.
5. If the student meets all the above requirements and he/she is a transfer student, will he/she be varsity eligible? Examine each part of the transfer rule, specifically the language which states that a student who transfers without a parental move is ineligible to participate in a varsity Association Contest for half the number of P.I. days in the current school year of the school to which he/she transfers from the date of enrollment (first day he/she attends classes) in the school to which he/she transfers.

EIGHTH GRADE RULE - PARTICIPATION CLARIFICATIONS

Eighth Grade Participation Rule including Transfer Rule Reference

A student who is enrolled in the eighth grade shall be eligible to participate in an Association contest, but must meet the following requirements and parameters:

- a. The eighth-grade student is participating in a contest other than football.
- b. There is no restriction in place for participation of this 8th grade student at his/her middle school and/or high school of which he/she will be participating.
- c. Any eighth-grade student allowed to participate will have eight semesters of high school eligibility remaining.
- d. All eighth-grade students participating must meet the academic requirements.
- e. All eighth-grade students participating must meet the transfer requirements. The official MHSA transfer form must be used.
- f. All eighth-grade students participating in a high school contest must adhere to all other MHSA rules and guidelines. Committed to a contest at the high school level, the eighth-grade student **may also participate in that same sport at a level under high school concurrently**.

TRANSFER RULE

Any student, including eighth grade students allowed high school participation, who transfers from one-member high school, home school, or non-member school to a member high school is ineligible to participate in a varsity Association Contest for half the number of P.I. days in the current school year of the school to which he/she transfers from the date of enrollment (first day he/she attends classes) in the school to which he/she transfers. A student and his/her parents or legal guardians must reside in the attendance area of the school in which he/she is enrolled except for a student enrolling in ninth grade for the first time (see Section (12) Record of Transfer.) This rule applies to a student who transfers after twenty (20) days of enrollment or after he/she participates in an athletic contest while enrolled in grades 9, 10, 11 and 12, EXCEPT the following students may be declared eligible:

Note: This rule does not apply to non-public or home school participants. There is no transfer for non-public or home school participants.

Exception: Home school or nonpublic school students who reside in a school district with more than one high school can participate in extracurricular activities at any high school in their district if approved by the school district. Districts that enforce attendance area restrictions may enforce those restrictions with home and nonpublic school students. Once a student participates in any extracurricular activity in a particular school and the homeschool or nonpublic student changes to another school in the district, the MHSA Transfer Rule applies.

Eighth Grade Participation Clarifications

- The student(s) meet all MHSA eligibility rules, i.e., age, residency and regular enrollment in the school they are attending.
- Students must attend the designated feeder middle school for the high school in which they will participate as 8th graders.
- Once an eighth grader participates on a high school team, the MHSA Transfer Rule is in effect for that student (home school and/or nonpublic school participants cannot transfer).

- Home school and nonpublic school students can participate if they meet all MHSA requirements for home school / nonpublic school participants including their entire family living in their school attendance area. Home school or nonpublic school students are only eligible in the attendance area they live, and they cannot transfer or participate in a school outside their attendance area.
- Eighth Grade participants can participate at any level of play at the discretion of the school.
- Each individual MHSA School District must adopt by school board action policies on whether or not they allow 8th grade participation.

Section (12) RECORD OF TRANSFER

A student received by transfer shall not be eligible to participate in an Association Contest until the principal of the school shall have filed with the Executive Director of the Association a record of the transfer on the official MHSA transfer form. This section does not relieve the student from eligibility requirements arising from his/her change of high schools.

INTERPRETATIONS

A student enrolling in the ninth grade for the first time in high school is not to be considered a transfer student unless:

- a. The student competed as an eighth grader at the high school level
- b. The student as a ninth grader or who did compete as an eighth grader in high school, has been enrolled in another school for twenty school days or more.
- c. The student as a ninth grader or as an eighth grader, who has been enrolled in another school for fewer than 20 school days but has participated in a high school interscholastic athletic contest.

In addition to the By-Law requirements listed above, other rules and regulations affect participation.

Please note the following:

- Before participation in any practice or contest at any level a physical examination must be performed using the MHSA form.
- Before participation in any practice or contest at any level the concussion acknowledgement form with required student-athlete and parent/guardian signatures must be on file.
- The minimum number of practices for the specific sport must be completed, and the initial required practices for each individual must be completed as a comprehensive, regularly scheduled team practice with the full coaching staff.
- If a student transfers to a new school after completing the required days of preseason practices for their sport or activity, the student must complete an additional number of practices (equal to half the # of required practices for that sport or activity) at their new school.
- All contestants in the Montana High School Association must be amateurs. To remain an amateur, the student may not accept remuneration for participation, receive donations or gifts outside of the MHSA awards rule, or knowingly accept excessive expense allowances. See the MHSA Handbook for additional information regarding the **AMATEUR RULE**.

7 – Fundraising

Note – Always remember the importance and differences regarding fundraising for in-season school

sponsored sports and out-of-season activities (See page # 1)

Boosters and booster clubs play an important role in high school activities programs. That role continues to expand, and the MHSA encourages the involvement of local communities. Here are some key issues that schools and boosters should address in order to maintain compliance.

Ultimately, it is the individual member schools that must comply with the MHSA By-Laws, Rules and Regulations. Before beginning any function or event that impacts your local activities programs all applicable rules should be evaluated.

Voluntary Contributions

The soliciting of voluntary contributions is prohibited at any Association contest. Unless approved by the MHSA Executive Board, raffles or similar fundraising are prohibited at playoffs, championship games, post-season tournaments, post-season meets, and/or post-season festivals which are under the direct supervision of the Executive Board.

General Fundraising

Some of the more frequently asked questions received by MHSA concern fundraising for equipment, merchandise and other goods or services.

Schools may offer sports that are self-funded in their school district. All monies and expenditures must go through the school (district account). All expenditures must be 100% accounted for by the school and all school district policies must be followed (i.e., meals, equipment purchases, uniform rotation, etc.). This is allowed if the school follows all requirements of the Ridgeway Settlement Agreement and is sport equitable.

The following scenarios are in compliance:

- Parent/Booster/Donor/School Groups may raise funds to purchase equipment/uniforms for a team if the school agrees to accept and manage such funds, to inventory and maintain possession of the equipment/uniform purchased and it follows the district's policy. (Must be gender and sport equitable)
- Parent/Booster/Donor/School Groups may raise funds to purchase meals while traveling if the school agrees to accept and to manage such funds and meals are part of the district's policy. A district's meal policy may also contain a "cooler clause" which allows parents or others to provide packed meals for the team(s) while traveling. All practices concerning meals while traveling must be addressed in school policy.
- Parent/Booster/Donor/School Groups may conduct fundraisers that allow students to earn money individually, provided that only students who actually work are compensated and the compensation is commensurate with the work completed (i.e. number of cars washed, number of discount cards sold) or with the number of hours worked. The students may choose to utilize the funds for ***training apparel, shooting shirts that are provided by the school***, etc. This does not count towards the MHSA Awards Rule of \$500.
- Schools may provide training apparel for practice and/or workouts that will be fully depreciated and have no intrinsic value at the end of the season. These items may be provided by the school and/or its boosters, including general fundraisers, provided that the items are school- approved and are supplied on a gender / sport-equitable basis. Allowable items are limited to one of each of the following: shooting shirt/warm-up, practice shirt, practice shorts, spandex, tights and a pair of socks. This does not count toward the MHSA Awards Rule of \$500.

- Parent/Booster/Donor/School Groups raise funds to buy travel shirts, jackets, polo shirts or other merchandise that the individual students keep.

Please note: All of the above are permissible contingent upon all gender equity and sport equity rules and standards being met.

The following scenarios are **violations**:

- A member school, its booster club or other school-related group sponsors or finances a specialized camp, invitational tournament or any other event.
- Parent/Booster/Donor/School Groups raise funds in order to give *cash in any amount* to students for any reason, including but not limited to supplementing or providing their meals on the road.
- A member school, its booster club or other school-sanctioned group uses fundraised monies for a pre-game team dinner for the players, coaches and/or families. This is a violation when it is not offered to all genders and sports. If all programs are provided with this opportunity, then it is allowed and will count toward the MHSA Awards Rule of \$500.

8 – Gender Equity

Ridgeway Settlement Agreement

The Ridgeway Settlement Agreement, found in the MHSA Handbook, is the result of federal case law involving the MHSA and all its member schools. The RSA addresses significant issues in achieving and maintaining gender equity, including:

- Number of sports offered
- Coaches and coaching salaries
- Publicity and recognition
- Team support, such as assemblies, spirit squads, pep bands, half-time performances, programs etc.
- Scheduling of contests and practices, including assignment of officials
- Uniforms, equipment and supplies
- Transportation
- Trainer and training facilities
- Boosters and outside resources

All schools must comply with the following:

Booster Clubs. A school district shall affirmatively encourage booster clubs and similar groups of fans to devote comparable attention to the promotion and encouragement of female and male sports. The district shall not give significant assistance to any private organization which aids, benefits, or services athletes in the district on a sex discriminatory manner, unless for each organization which supports the athletes of only one sex, and to which the school district gives assistance, there is a comparable organization which supports the athletes of the other sex to which the school district gives comparable assistance.

Any outside resources, i.e. booster club donations, fundraisers, donations by local businesses, contributions by community members etc., are considered “booster” funds. A school does not have to receive the donations through an organized “booster club” in order to apply this standard of equity. For the purpose of equity, any outside resource that is donated to the athletic fund is considered “booster” support.

Outside resources must be allocated in a comparable fashion. To be considered comparable, the funds don't necessarily have to be exactly equal in dollar amounts. "Comparable" means that the impact on the programs is fair and equitable.

Specific interpretations regarding compliance with the Ridgeway Settlement Agreement are available by contacting the MHSA office.

Additional MHSA Policies

SEXUAL HARASSMENT POLICY

The MHSA believes that all individuals should be treated with respect and dignity. Students should be able to participate in MHSA sponsored activities in an environment that is free from sexual harassment and sexual violence. Each member school is responsible for taking such action and enacting such policies as may be necessary to address incidents of sexual harassment and sexual violence and to ensure that an environment free of such prohibited conduct is maintained. Any member school which sponsors or tolerates such activity is subject to expulsion from the MHSA.

MONTANA OFFICIALS' ASSOCIATION POLICY ON SEXUAL HARASSMENT, INTIMIDATION AND VIOLENCE

The MOA believes that all its members should strive to provide a healthy, safe and appropriate environment for athletic competition. This philosophy dictates that each individual involved with interscholastic competition be treated with respect and dignity. An integral part of a contest official's role is awareness of what behaviors or practices are considered unacceptable. The following information identifies what is considered wrongful conduct, both on and off the contest arena and said conduct is hereby prohibited.

9 – Noteworthy Items

In addition to the previous topics, there are several MHSA regulations to note:

DRUG/ALCOHOL POLICY

The MHSA prohibits any use and/or possession of tobacco, alcohol or other mood-altering drugs during competition. Violation will cause the coach or participant to be disqualified from further participation in that event.

RETURN TO PLAY AFTER INJURY

Return to Play:

In accordance with the Dylan Steigers Protection of Youth Athletes Act, an athletic trainer, coach, or official shall remove a youth athlete from participation in any organized youth athletic activity at the time the youth exhibits signs, symptoms, or behaviors consistent with a concussion. The youth cannot return to play until he/she is evaluated by a licensed health care professional and receives written clearance to return to play from the licensed health care professional.

In addition, the MHSA also requires that an athletic trainer, coach, or official shall remove a student-athlete from participation in any MHSA activity at the time the student exhibits signs, symptoms, or behaviors consistent with a serious injury. The student cannot return to play until he/she is evaluated by a licensed health care professional and is cleared by a licensed health care professional, although written clearance is not required for serious injury other than concussion unless mandated by the local school district.

MHSA Policy in Accordance with State Legislation:

Each (high) school district and all youth organizations in this state offering organized youth athletic

activities shall adopt policies and procedures to inform athletic trainers, coaches, officials, youth athletes and parents or guardians of the nature and risk of brain injuries, including the effects of continuing to play after a concussion.

Coach Education and Concussion Awareness:

Each MHSA coach (head, assistant and school-approved volunteer and including cheer coaches) must complete the “NFHS Concussion in Sports” course each year. The course is through the coaches Arbiter Account or is available at www.nfhslearn.com. The course must be viewed before the coach has contact with student-athletes in his/her respective sport and viewed after May 1st for the subsequent year. The school should restrict any coach from coaching until the course is completed or the school district is in violation of Montana State Law.

Student-Athletes’ and Parents’ Awareness and Notification:

Schools shall distribute to each student-athlete and his/her parents or legal guardians the information provided to the schools by the MHSA (acknowledgement form with required signatures, parent information, athlete information and available resources) before the student participates in an MHSA sport. The student-athlete and parents/legal guardians must sign the acknowledgement form on the front page after verifying they have read and understand the information regarding concussions. The acknowledgement form must be retained on file by each school. The information with signature sheet cannot be distributed and completed until after May 1st for the next school year. The student and parents/guardians only have to complete the information once per year and it must be completed before the student practices or participates for the first time in a given school year.

MHSA SAFETY PRECAUTIONS

The ignition or the discharge of fireworks, firearms, explosives, incendiary devices, or flammable materials of any kind is strictly prohibited at all MHSA regular season and post season events. Event managers are authorized to restrict the use of any material or device(s) deemed a safety risk to students, fans, officials, or personnel.

DRONES

The use of drones (UAS), for any purpose, is strictly prohibited at all MHSA events (regular and post season). This prohibition applies to all fields of play, courts, arenas, mats, gym floors, pools, and includes a ban on the entire facility being used as part of the MHSA event, including stands and parking areas.

The MHSA prohibits the burning of any incense (sweet grass, herbs, candles or other flammable substance) inside any school or venue that hosts MHSA events because of the risk of fire or violation of fire codes. Any pregame rituals/ceremonies may be performed offsite.

MHSA JEWELRY POLICY

Jewelry can be worn if allowed by NFHS rules or the governing body for the sport (USGA or USTA).

Wearable technology is allowed, as long as the device does not allow a team, a participant, and/or a coach to gain a competitive advantage during the MHSA contest. The device must not create a safety risk to the participant or their competitor(s). Schools must have approval from the Executive Director of the Montana High School Association before any use of the technology in an association contest.