HIGHLANDS SCHOOL DISTRICT
ATHLETE HANDBOOK
2026-2027



Dear Families-

Highlands Athletic Department would like to welcome you and your child to another year of Highlands School District Athletics. It is our hope that your child will enjoy all the opportunities that we have to offer!

In order to reduce costs and provide accessibility, the Athletic Handbook is now posted on our website. You can locate the handbook under the athletics tab on the Golden Rams website- www.goldenrams.com. The athletic department would be more than happy to provide you with a printed copy of this handbook at your request.

Each student athlete and their parent or guardian should confirm via the Parent Portal that they have read this posted document.

If you have any questions regarding an athletic program or the handbook, please don't hesitate to send an email or give us a call.

LET'S GO RAMS!

Sincerely,
Katie Jo Stobert

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Brittany Barch- Athletic Secretary
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HIGHLANDS ATHLETIC HANDBOOK

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ADMINISTRATION

I. Highlands School Board of Directors

The Board of Directors, responsible to the residents of the District, is the governing body for the Highlands School District. It is responsible for interpreting the needs of the community, crafting a vision for the District, and formulating strategies to meet those ambitions.
Additional responsibilities include:

1. Developing policies, in accordance with state statutes and mandates
2. Approving means by which professional staff may make these policies effective
3. Engaging the community in public education
4. Evaluating the interscholastic athletic program in terms of their value to the community

Dr. Debra Lehew, Board President
Gene Witt, Vice President
Kristie Babinsack, Member
Ashley Javier, Member
Justin Kipp, Member
Nicole Kocon, Member
Elijah Majocha, Member
Autumn Monaghan, Member
Bobbie Neese, Member
Kate Rich, Board Secretary

II. Superintendent of Schools

The Superintendent is responsible for managing the District in accordance with adopted Board policies and Pennsylvania Department of Education school codes, rules, and regulations. It is his/her duty to annually prepare, approve, and present to the Board for its consideration a program of interscholastic athletics. The Superintendent shall represent the District as Chief Executive Officer and foremost professional educator in its dealings with other school systems, social institutions, and businesses.

Dr. Monique Mawhinney, Superintendent
Dr. Cathleen Cubelic, Assistant Superintendent

III. Athletic Director

The primary responsibility of the Athletic Director is the administration and supervision of the interscholastic athletic program for the Highlands School District. These duties will be described in his/her job description and any others as designated. He/She will provide the leadership necessary for the day-to-day operations of the athletic programs.

Katie Jo Stobert- Athletic Director……724-226-2400 (Ext. 5670)
Kim Hines Administrative Assistant……..724-226-2400 (Ext. 5671)

IV. Head Coaches

All Head Coaches shall be responsible to the Athletic Director for the total operation of their respective sport programs. Head Coaches will be responsible for normal duties required of interscholastic competition, those duties described in their respective job descriptions, and/or any other duties delegated by the Athletic Director.

VI. Additional Contacts
Dr. Michel Toole, High School Principal……724-226-2400 (Ext. 4605)
Rebecca Bragan, Middle School Principal……724-226-2400 (Ext. 3605)
Angela Fogel, UPMC, Athletic Trainer……724-226-2400 (Ext. 4021 or 7602)

MISSION, VISION, and CORE VALUES

I. Mission Statement

The mission of the Highlands School District Athletics program is to provide a comprehensive, competitive, and character-driven athletic program that supports the academic mission of the school and promotes the development of student-athletes. Through dedication, teamwork, and sportsmanship, we aim to build champions in competition and in life—fostering lifelong skills such as leadership, resilience, integrity, and respect.

*Middle School Athletics

In addition, the objective of our Middle School Athletics program is to familiarize our student-athletes with competitive interscholastic sport, introduce them to rules, rewards, and consequences, teach them about the team taking precedence over the individual, demonstrate the importance of learning and practicing fundamentals, and instill a level of discipline that traverses athletics into academics. We believe that winning is measured by more than just a scoreboard and that all participants should have reasonable opportunity to develop and demonstrate their skill in competitive opportunities.

II. Vision

Highlands Athletic programs cultivate a premier high school athletic program that inspires excellence in all areas—on the field, in the classroom, and in the community. We strive to empower student-athletes to reach their full potential by fostering a culture of perseverance, pride, and purpose. Through inclusive participation, high standards, and a commitment to personal and team growth, we aim to be recognized as a model for our District.

III. Core Values

The student-athletes, coaches, and staff of Highlands Athletics will commit themselves to the following core values:

- Integrity
- Respect
- Commitment
- Team Before Self
- Leadership
- Sportsmanship
- Excellence
- Accountability
- Resilience
- Community

STUDENT-ATHLETE CODE of CONDUCT

I. Introduction—Fundamental Principles

Participation in interscholastic sports sponsored or authorized by the Highlands School District (which includes club sports) is a privilege, not a right. Students who desire to participate in these programs are expected to accept the responsibilities granted to them by this privilege.

When participating in interscholastic athletic competition, student-athletes represent not only themselves, but their school, communities, coaches and families. All student-athletes are expected to conform to high standards of conduct which will earn them the honor and respect that participation and competition in interscholastic programs afford. Inappropriate conduct of student-athletes tarnishes the reputation of everyone associated with the athletic program. Thus, student-athletes must refrain from any conduct intended to disparage, degrade, provoke, or otherwise discredit their opponents, game officials or administrators or spectators. Participation in the District's athletic programs is subject to compliance with the rules, expectations, regulations, and policies of the Highlands School District and its Athletics Department and, as applicable, of the Pennsylvania Inter-scholastic Athletic Association (PIAA), Western Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic League (WPIAL) or any similar governing organization.

II. Expectations

- Student-athletes will demonstrate good sportsmanship and always maintain emotional control. Sportsmanship requires one to understand his/her own bias and to not allow the desire to win from interfering with proper judgment and respectful behavior.
- Student-athletes will not use profanity, racial harassing or demeaning comments, obscene gestures or obscene language toward teammates, coaches, opponents, officials, administration, or spectators.
- Disrespectful behavior aimed at opponents, officials, spectators, coaches, administration, and/or team members will not be tolerated. This includes no tolerance for taunting of opponents.
- Student athletes will not purposefully seek to injure opponents.
- Student athletes will respect the integrity and judgment of calls and decisions of game officials. Game officials should be recognized as impartial arbitrators who have been trained to do their job and who can be expected to do it to the best of their ability.
- Student-athletes will win with humility and lose with dignity and will shake hands with opposing team members and coaches after each contest.
- Student-athletes will not engage in and will not be tolerant of violent acts, including assaults on persons or property, hazing, bullying or any other conduct prohibited by law or District policy. If a student-athlete witnesses such acts perpetrated by others, he/she will report them to their coach or another District authority immediately.
- Student-athletes will be held accountable to follow both the District's rules and individual team rules, as communicated by their coaches.

- Student-athletes will adhere to all school district academic standards.

STUDENT-ATHLETE CODE of CONDUCT

III. Consequences

Any student-athlete whose conduct is determined to have been a violation of these principles and expectations shall be subject to disciplinary action as determined by the Head Coach, Athletic Director, and/or Principal according to the nature and degree of the infraction. In addition to any disciplinary action otherwise applicable pursuant to Highlands School District policies, the student-athlete may be suspended from participation in practices and/or competition, removed from the team or prohibited from future participation in any interscholastic athletic activity.

IV. Social Media

As the District has stated, it is a privilege to participate in interscholastic athletics and with that privilege comes certain responsibilities. As an advocate for technology, the District also recognizes the role social media plays in communication and outreach. It is the expectation our student-athletes will use social media platforms in a positive and respectful manner to engage with family, friends, and the community at large. Disrespectful, insulting, abusive, and/or threatening content, be it original, re-posted, “re-tweeted” or “liked”—has no place in Highands Athletics and will not be tolerated. Student-athletes who post offensive commentary or content will be subject to disciplinary action which may include suspension from all team activities. Remember, it is a privilege to represent the Highlands School District in interscholastic competition and we hold our student-athletes to the highest standards for integrity and ethical decisions.

Social Media Tips/Reminders
1. Nothing is really private! Even though you may utilize privacy tools, everything you post is public information.
2. Your content is your thumbprint! Once you post it, it is forever and it is you.
3. Your audience is global. Consider the appropriateness as your audience is young, old, and everywhere. And they are watching!
4. Who is watching? Just a reminder that college coaches and prospective employers often review social media sites to gauge the character of the student.

STUDENT-ATHLETE CODE of CONDUCT

V. Hazing—School Board Policy #247

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to maintain a safe, positive environment for students and staff that is free from hazing. Hazing activities of any type are inconsistent with the educational goals of the district and are prohibited at all times.

Definitions

Hazing occurs when a person intentionally, knowingly or recklessly, for the purpose of initiating, admitting or affiliating a student with an organization, or for the purpose of continuing or enhancing membership or status in an organization, causes, coerces or forces a student to do any of the following:[1]

1. Violate federal or state criminal law.

2. Consume any food, liquid, alcoholic liquid, drug or other substance which subjects the student to a risk of emotional or physical harm.

3. Endure brutality of a physical nature, including whipping, beating, branding, calisthenics or exposure to the elements.

4. Endure brutality of a mental nature, including activity adversely affecting the mental health or dignity of the individual, sleep deprivation, exclusion from social contact or conduct that could result in extreme embarrassment.

5. Endure brutality of a sexual nature.

6. Endure any other activity that creates a reasonable likelihood of bodily injury to the student.

Aggravated hazing occurs when a person commits an act of hazing that results in serious bodily injury or death to the student and:[2]
1. The person acts with reckless indifference to the health and safety of the student; or

2. The person causes, coerces or forces the consumption of an alcoholic liquid or drug by the student.

Organizational hazing occurs when an organization intentionally, knowingly or recklessly promotes or facilitates hazing.[3][4]

Any activity, as described above, shall be deemed a violation of this policy regardless of whether:[5]

1. The consent of the student was sought or obtained, or

2. The conduct was sanctioned or approved by the school or organization.

Student activity or organization means any activity, society, corps, team, club or service, social or similar group, operating under the sanction of or recognized as an organization by the district, whose members are primarily students or alumni of the organization.[6][7]

For purposes of this policy, bodily injury shall mean impairment of physical condition or substantial pain.[8]

For purposes of this policy, serious bodily injury shall mean bodily injury which creates a substantial risk of death or which causes serious, permanent disfigurement, or protracted loss or impairment of the function of any bodily member or organ.[8]

Authority

The Board prohibits hazing in connection with any student activity or organization regardless of whether the conduct occurs on or off school property or outside of school hours.[4][5][7][9][10]

No student, parent/guardian, coach, sponsor, volunteer or district employee shall engage in, condone or ignore any form of hazing.

The Board encourages students who believe they, or others, have been subjected to hazing to promptly report such incidents to the building principal or designee.

Discrimination/Harassment

Every report of alleged hazing that can be interpreted at the outset to fall within the provisions of policies addressing potential violations of laws against discrimination or harassment shall be handled as a joint, concurrent investigation into all allegations and coordinated with the full participation of the Compliance Officer and Title IX Coordinator. If, in the course of a hazing investigation, potential issues of discrimination or harassment are identified, the Title IX Coordinator shall be promptly notified, and the investigation shall be conducted jointly and

concurrently to address the issues of alleged discrimination or harassment as well as the incidents of alleged hazing.[11][12]

Delegation of Responsibility

Students, parents/guardians, coaches, sponsors, volunteers and district employees shall be alert to incidents of hazing and shall report such conduct to the building principal or designee.

When a student's behavior indicates a threat to the safety of the student, other students, school employees, school facilities, the community or others, district staff shall report the student to the threat assessment team, in accordance with applicable law and Board policy.[13][14]

Guidelines

In addition to posting this policy on the district's publicly accessible website, the district shall inform students, parents/guardians, sponsors, volunteers and district employees of the district's policy prohibiting hazing, including district rules, penalties for violations of the policy and the program established by the district for enforcement of the policy by means of publication in handbooks and verbal instructions by the coach or sponsor at the start of the season or program.[4]

This policy, along with other applicable district policies, procedures and Codes of Conduct, shall be provided to all school athletic coaches and all sponsors and volunteers affiliated with a student activity or organization, prior to coaching an athletic activity or serving as a responsible adult supervising, advising, assisting or otherwise participating in a student activity or organization, together with a notice that they are expected to read and abide by the policies, procedures and Codes of Conduct.[7]

Complaint Procedure

A student who believes that they have been subject to hazing is encouraged to promptly report the incident to the building principal or designee.

Students are encouraged to use the district's report form, available from the building principal, or to put the complaint in writing; however, oral complaints shall be accepted and documented. The person accepting the complaint shall handle the report objectively, neutrally and professionally, setting aside personal biases that might favor or disfavor the student filing the complaint or those accused of a violation of this policy.

The Board directs that verbal and written complaints of hazing shall be provided to the building principal or designee, who shall promptly notify the Superintendent or designee of the

allegations and determine who shall conduct the investigation. Allegations of hazing shall be investigated promptly, and appropriate corrective or preventative action be taken when allegations are substantiated. The Board directs that any complaint of hazing brought pursuant to this policy shall also be reviewed for conduct which may not be proven to be hazing under this policy but merits review and possible action under other Board policies.

Interim Measures/Law Enforcement

Upon receipt of a complaint of hazing, the building principal or designee, in consultation with the Superintendent or designee, shall determine what, if any interim measures should be put in place to protect students from further hazing, bullying, discrimination or retaliatory conduct related to the alleged incident and report. Such interim measures may include, but not be limited to, the suspension of an adult who is involved, the separation of alleged victims and perpetrators, and the determination of what the complaining student needs or wants through questioning.

Those receiving the initial report and conducting or overseeing the investigation will assess whether the complaint, if proven, would constitute hazing, aggravated hazing or organizational hazing and shall report it to law enforcement consistent with district practice and, as appropriate, consult with legal counsel about whether to report the matter to law enforcement at every stage of the proceeding. The decision to report a matter to law enforcement should not involve an analysis by district personnel of whether safe harbor provisions might apply to the person being reported, but information on the facts can be shared with law enforcement in this regard.[15]

Referral to Law Enforcement and School Safety and Security Incident Reporting –

For purposes of reporting hazing incidents to law enforcement in accordance with school safety and security reporting, the term incident shall mean an instance involving an act of violence; the possession of a weapon; the possession, use or sale of a controlled substance or drug paraphernalia as defined in the Pennsylvania Controlled Substance, Drug, Device and Cosmetic Act; the possession, use or sale of alcohol or tobacco products; or conduct that constitutes an offense listed in the school safety and security provisions of School Code.[16][17][18]

The Superintendent or designee shall immediately report required incidents and may report discretionary incidents committed by students on school property, at any school-sponsored activity or on a conveyance providing transportation to or from a school or school-sponsored activity to the law enforcement agency that has jurisdiction over the school’s property, in accordance with state law and regulations, the procedures set forth in the memorandum of understanding with law enforcement and Board policies.[16][17][19][20][21][22]

The Superintendent or designee shall notify the parent/guardian of any student directly involved in an incident as a victim or suspect immediately, as soon as practicable. The Superintendent or designee shall inform the parent/guardian whether or not the law enforcement agency that has

jurisdiction over the school property has been or may be notified of the incident. The Superintendent or designee shall document attempts made to reach the parent/guardian.[17][22][23]

In accordance with state law, the Superintendent shall annually, by July 31, report all new incidents to the PA Department of Education on the required form.[16][19][22]

Confidentiality

Confidentiality of all parties, witnesses, the allegations, the filing of a complaint and the investigation shall be handled in accordance with applicable law, regulations, this policy and the district's legal and investigative obligations.

Retaliation

Reprisal or retaliation relating to reports of hazing or participation in an investigation of allegations of hazing is prohibited and shall be subject to disciplinary action.

Consequences for Violations

Safe Harbor –

An individual needing medical attention or seeking medical attention for another shall not be subject to criminal prosecution if the individual complies with the requirements under law, subject to the limitations set forth in law.[15]

Students –

If the investigation results in a substantiated finding of hazing, the investigator shall recommend appropriate disciplinary action up to and including expulsion, as circumstances warrant, in accordance with the Student Code of Conduct. The student may also be subject to disciplinary action by the coach or sponsor, up to and including removal from the activity or organization. The fact of whether a student qualified for and received safe harbor under a criminal investigation shall be considered in assigning discipline.[4][7][15][24][25]

In addition to other authorized discipline, building principals shall have the authority, after providing the student or students an informal hearing, to impose a fine of up to fifty dollars ($50) on each student determined to have engaged in hazing in violation of this policy.[4][24]

When recommended disciplinary action results in a formal hearing before the Board, in addition to other authorized disciplinary consequences, the Board may also impose a fine of up to one

hundred fifty dollars ($150) on each student determined to have engaged in hazing in violation of this policy.[4][25]

When fines have not been paid, the Superintendent shall have the authority to direct that student diplomas and/or transcripts be withheld until payment in full is made or a payment plan is agreed upon. In cases of economic hardship, the Superintendent shall consider whether diplomas and/or transcripts should be released despite an unpaid fine.[4]

Nonstudent Violators/Organizational Hazing -

If the investigation results in a substantiated finding that a coach, sponsor or volunteer affiliated with the student activity or organization engaged in, condoned or ignored any violation of this policy, the coach, sponsor or volunteer shall be disciplined in accordance with Board policy and applicable laws and regulations. Discipline could include, but is not limited to, dismissal from the position as coach, sponsor or volunteer, and/or dismissal from district employment.[26]

If an organization is found to have engaged in organizational hazing, it shall be subject to the imposition of fines and other appropriate penalties. Penalties may include rescission of permission for that organization to operate on school property or to otherwise operate under the sanction or recognition of the district.

Criminal Prosecution –

Any person or organization that causes or participates in hazing may also be subject to criminal prosecution.[4]

STUDENT-ATHLETE CODE of CONDUCT

VI. Bullying/Cyberbullying—School Board Policy #249

Purpose

The Board is committed to providing a safe, positive learning environment for district students. The Board recognizes that bullying creates an atmosphere of fear and intimidation, detracts from the safe environment necessary for student learning and may lead to more serious violence. Therefore, the Board prohibits bullying by district students.

Definitions

Bullying means an intentional electronic, written, verbal or physical act or series of acts directed at another student or students, which occurs in a school setting and/or outside a school setting, that is severe, persistent or pervasive and has the effect of doing any of the following:[1]

1. Substantially interfering with a student's education.

2. Creating a threatening school environment.

3. Substantially disrupting the orderly operation of the school.

Bullying, as defined in this policy, includes cyberbullying.

School setting means in the school, on school grounds, in school vehicles, at a designated bus stop or at any activity sponsored, supervised or sanctioned by the school.[1]

Authority

The Board prohibits all forms of bullying by district students.[1]

The Board encourages students who believe they or others have been bullied to promptly report such incidents to the building principal or designee.

Students are encouraged to use the district's report form, available from the building principal, or to put the complaint in writing; however, oral complaints shall be accepted and documented. The person accepting the complaint shall handle the report objectively, neutrally and professionally, setting aside personal biases that might favor or disfavor the student filing the complaint or those accused of a violation of this policy.

The Board directs that verbal and written complaints of bullying shall be investigated promptly, and appropriate corrective or preventative action be taken when allegations are substantiated. The Board directs that any complaint of bullying brought pursuant to this policy shall also be reviewed for conduct which may not be proven to be bullying under this policy but merits review and possible action under other Board policies.

When a student's behavior indicates a threat to the safety of the student, other students, school employees, school facilities, the community or others, district staff shall report the student to the threat assessment team, in accordance with applicable law and Board policy.[2][3]

Discrimination/Harassment

Every report of alleged bullying that can be interpreted at the outset to fall within the provisions of policies addressing potential violations of laws against discrimination or harassment shall be handled as a joint, concurrent investigation into all allegations and coordinated with the full participation of the Compliance Officer and Title IX Coordinator. If, in the course of a bullying investigation, potential issues of discrimination or harassment are identified, the Title IX Coordinator shall be promptly notified, and the investigation shall be conducted jointly and concurrently to address the issues of alleged discrimination or harassment as well as the incidents of alleged bullying.[4][5]

Confidentiality

Confidentiality of all parties, witnesses, the allegations, the filing of a complaint and the investigation shall be handled in accordance with applicable law, regulations, this policy and the district's legal and investigative obligations.

Retaliation

Reprisal or retaliation relating to reports of bullying or participation in an investigation of allegations of bullying is prohibited and shall be subject to disciplinary action.

Delegation of Responsibility

Each student shall be responsible to respect the rights of others and to ensure an atmosphere free from bullying.

The Superintendent or designee shall develop administrative regulations to implement this policy.

The Superintendent or designee shall ensure that this policy and administrative regulations are reviewed annually with students.[1]

The Superintendent or designee, in cooperation with other appropriate administrators, shall review this policy every three (3) years and recommend necessary revisions to the Board.[1]

District administration shall annually provide the following information with the school safety and security incident report:[1][6]

1. Board's Bullying Policy.

2. Report of bullying incidents.

3. Information on the development and implementation of any bullying prevention, intervention or education programs.

Guidelines

The Student Code of Conduct, which shall contain this policy, shall be disseminated annually to students.[1][7][8]

This policy shall be accessible in every classroom. The policy shall be posted in a prominent location within each school building and on the district website.[1]

Education

The district shall develop, implement and evaluate bullying prevention and intervention programs and activities. Programs and activities shall provide district staff and students with appropriate training for effectively responding to, intervening in and reporting incidents of bullying.[1][9][10][11]

Consequences for Violations

A student who violates this policy shall be subject to appropriate disciplinary action consistent with the Student Code of Conduct, which may include:[1][7][12]

1. Counseling within the school.
2. Parental conference.
3. Loss of school privileges.
4. Exclusion from school-sponsored activities.
5. Detention.
6. Suspension.
7. Expulsion.
8. Counseling/Therapy outside of school.
9. Referral to law enforcement officials.

ELIGIBILITY of STUDENT-ATHLETES

I. Age

A student shall be ineligible for interscholastic athletic competition upon attaining the age of nineteen years, with the following exception:
➢ If the age of 19 is attained on or after July 1, the student shall be eligible, age-wise, to compete through that school year. (Per PIAA Manual)

II. Attendance: School Day

All students are to be in attendance at school on the day of activities. Students who are absent from school or tardy after 11:00am (HS) or 11:30 (MS) will not be eligible to participate in any

extracurricular activities, practices, or games on that day without prior approval from the principal or designee.

For two-hour delays, students must still be in attendance by 11:00am. Students learning remotely are expected to abide by same attendance policy—logged in and attending class virtually.

III. Attendance: Academic Year

A student who has been absent from school during a semester for a total of twenty (20) days shall not be eligible to participate in any athletic contest until he or she has been in attendance for a total of forty five (45) days following his/her twentieth day of absence. Attendance at summer school does not count toward the 45 days. Days absent from school do not count towards the 45 days. (Per PIAA Manual)

IV. Attendance: School Suspension or Expulsion

A student-athlete who is suspended from school may not practice or play in any games during the period of suspension. Accordingly, any student who has been expelled is ineligible for practices and games during the period of expulsion. During this time, students are also not permitted on school property.

V. Academic Eligibility

All students in grades seven through twelve who participate in athletics must be passing a minimum of four (4) core courses. After the grades are processed, the Athletic Office will print out the eligibility report. The student-athlete will be notified by their coach if they are academically ineligible to participate. If a student is ruled ineligible, he/she will not be eligible to participate in competitions and is encouraged to attend after-school tutoring.

Ineligible student athletes will be notified of their status on Friday of each week. The period of ineligibility will begin on the subsequent Sunday and last until the following Saturday.

Tutoring is held Monday-Thursday at both the High School (Grades 9-12) and Middle School (Grades 7-8). A student will be reinstated once he/she is no longer on the eligibility list. Students declared ineligible will not be permitted to play from Sunday through the end of Saturday.

For HVA Classes: The ACTUAL GRADE(s) for all HVA courses will be reported weekly to the Athletic

Department and will factor into eligibility requirements. HVA students must stay on pace with their work each week.

VI. Academic Eligibility—Initial Fall Eligibility

All student athletes must pass at least 4 full-credit classes or the equivalent in order to participate in competition in any fall athletic activity. This calculation will be based on the following final grades:

➢ All year long courses

➢ All second semester courses

Please note that grades for classes that terminate at the end of the first semester are not factored into the formula used to determine initial fall eligibility.

Students from rosters of the previous academic year, who are determined to be academically ineligible based on the final grades of their second semester and full year classes, will be notified.

In cases where a student's initial fall eligibility does not meet the requirements, said student shall be ineligible to compete in any interscholastic athletic scrimmage and/or game through the first fifteen (15) school days of the fall season. This includes scrimmages and/or games played prior to the first day of school. However, they may attend practice. Summer school may be used to correct academic deficiencies.

VII. Curriculum

1. Only full-time students, regardless of age, may participate in scholastic athletics. (Per PIAA Manual)
2. To be eligible for interscholastic athletic competition, a pupil must pursue a curriculum defined and approved by the principal as a full-time curriculum. Where required, this curriculum or its equivalent must be approved by, and conform to, the regulations of the State Board of Education and the Pennsylvania School Code, as well as any local policies established by the local school board. The pupil must maintain an acceptable grade in such approved curriculum, as certified by the principal. (Per PIAA Manual)

ELIGIBILITY of STUDENT-ATHLETES

VIII. Semester Rule

A pupil shall not represent his or her school in interscholastic athletics if he or she has:
➢ Been in attendance more than 8 semesters beyond 8th grade.
➢ Played six seasons beyond the 6th grade or four seasons beyond the 8th grade in any one form of interscholastic athletics.

IX. Physical Examination

No student shall be eligible to participate in practices, inter-school practices, scrimmages, and/or contests unless the
student has completed a Comprehensive Initial Pre-Participation Physical Evaluation ("CIPPE") performed by an Authorized Medical Examiner, and the Authorized Medical Examiner has completed the PIAA Comprehensive Initial Pre-Participation Physical Evaluation Form ("CIPPE Form").

By signing the PIAA CIPPE form, the Authorized Medical Examiner certifies that the student is physically fit to commence practice and participate in inter-school practices, scrimmages, and/or contests in the sport(s) approved by the student's parent. In certifying whether a student is physically fit to participate in practices, inter-school practices, scrimmages, and contests in a particular sport(s), the Authorized Medical Examiner (a) is expected to have or, if not already in possession of it, obtain, a working understanding of the physical requirements of the sport(s) in which the student is to practice and participate; (b) should review a health history of the student; and (c) should perform a CIPPE appropriate for the sport(s) for which certification is being sought.

The CIPPE may not be signed earlier than May 1st (as of the 2025-26 academic year) and shall be effective, regardless of when performed during a school year.

Parents and student-athletes are encouraged to notify the Athletic Trainer of allergies or medical conditions that require monitoring and/or management.

X. Concussion Testing

Any student interested in competing on an interscholastic athletic team must take a concussion baseline test their 7th, 9th, and 11th grade years, as administered by District personnel.

XI. Uniforms/Equipment: District Issued

Any student interested in competing on an interscholastic athletic team must have on record return of any and/or all previously issued District athletic equipment. Failure to do so, will result in compensation for the missing equipment???

STUDENT-ATHLETE WELFARE

I. Injuries

When an injury of consequence occurs that might require medical attention, please notify the coach and the athletic trainer. If medical treatment for an injury is prescribed outside of the District, please notify our athletic trainer immediately so they are aware of such treatments.

Any time a student is seen by a doctor or recommended to be seen by the doctor or athletic trainer as a result of a possible injury, a medical release must be provided to the athletic office—by the treating doctor—indicating student is “cleared to return to full participation with no limitations” before the student may resume participation.

II. Athletic Trainer

The athletic trainer will be responsible for the prevention and treatment of all athletic injuries that occur in district-sponsored athletic events. All injuries must be reported to the trainer immediately.

III. Insurance

All students participating in Highlands School District interscholastic sports, including cheerleaders, student coaches and managers, must be covered by either family hospitalization/medical insurance or by student accident insurance.

Although varsity football team members may not use student accident insurance for coverage, all other participants may take advantage of this opportunity. In the event family accident insurance is unavailable, student accident insurance may be purchased.

Since voluntary participation in extra-curricular activities entails an inherent risk of injury on the part of the participants, it is mandatory that all participants be covered by insurance.

➢ Direct insurance inquiries to: Garman Murray Insurance

525 Perry Way
P.O. Box 520
Zelienople, PA 16063
724/452-4060

IV. Supervision

1. Athletes will not be permitted in any area of the building after school except those areas designated by their coaches or athletic director.
2. No practice arrangements - formal or informal - are permitted without the presence of supervisory coaching personnel.
3. Athletes wearing spikes in a building will be asked to remove shoes promptly. NO spikes or cleats indoors!
4. Athletes are to leave their automobile in the designated student parking areas.
STUDENT-ATHLETE WELFARE

V. Concussion Management Protocol-Rationale, Education, and Awareness

Rationale: With the increased awareness of concussions and the effects they have on student-athletes' physical and cognitive performance, it is imperative that we follow a protocol that will care for our student-athletes. Currently, the Highlands athletic trainer follows a protocol designed by the neuropsychologists for managing a student-athlete's return to competition.

1. Education and Awareness

a. All coaches must annually complete the online certification course for Concussion Management. The certificate of completion will be provided to the Athletic Office.
b. All student-athletes and their parents must review and sign the PIAA CIPPE form Section 3: Understanding of Risk of Concussion and Traumatic Brain Injury.

VI. Concussion Management Protocol—School Sponsored Athletics

1. Student-athlete who sustains a possible concussion during competition (school sponsored game, practice or conditioning session) shall be removed from activity immediately.
a. The state law in Pennsylvania regarding concussions states that any athlete exhibiting the signs and symptoms of a concussion or traumatic brain injury must be removed from the game or practice and must be evaluated by the appropriate medical professional before returning to play.

2. Coach immediately removes the student-athlete from participation and informs the Highlands athletic trainer of injury. If the team is off the Highlands campus, coach shall notify host school district's medical professionals for evaluation.
a. If no medical professional is present on or off campus, coach automatically withholds the athlete from all competition (game, practice) until evaluation by the Highlands athletic trainer takes place.
b. NO student-athlete returns to competition unless cleared by Highlands athletic trainer or host school medical professional.

3. Highlands athletic trainer or host school district's medical professional performs a sideline Head Injury evaluation.

STUDENT-ATHLETE WELFARE

4. If a concussion is suspected:
a. Parents are notified of the injury.
b. Highlands athletic trainer will review with the student-athlete and his/her parent(s) information pertaining to concussions (signs & symptoms, concussion protocol, ER/Physician Referral, etc.).
c. Student-athletes with a suspected or actual concussion or head injury must be evaluated by a licensed physician of medicine or neuropsychologist trained in the management of concussions.
d. Highlands athletic trainer will work closely with the treatment protocol prescribed by a licensed physician of medicine or neuropsychologist trained in the management of concussions, to ensure proper treatment and a gradual, safe return to full activity.
e. Student-athlete is not permitted to return to play until treating physician or neuropsychologist provides a "Return to Full Participation without any limitations" clearance to the athletic director's office.

5. Student-athletes symptomatic of a concussion or traumatic brain injury must be evaluated by a licensed physician of medicine or neuropsychologist trained in the management of concussions.
a. Highlands athletic trainers will follow all protocol as prescribed by treating licensed physician or neuropsychologist.
b. Student-athlete may not return to competition (games, practice) until the Director of Athletics receives a clearance for "Return to Full Activity without any limitations" from treating licensed physician or neuropsychologist.
c. Upon student-athlete's return, Highlands athletic trainers and coaches will work collaboratively to ensure a gradual return to competition (games, practice.)

6. For any concussion or traumatic brain injury sustained from a non-Highlands School District competition/event, all treatment must be prescribed and administered by a licensed physician of medicine or neuropsychologist trained in the management of concussions.
a. Highlands athletic trainers are not responsible for evaluation and/or treatment of any injury, including possible concussions, which occurred at a non-Highlands event.
b. Student-athlete may not return to competition (games, practice) until the Director of Athletics receives a clearance for "Return to Full Activity without any limitations" from treating licensed physician or neuropsychologist.
c. Upon student-athlete's return, Highlands athletic trainers and coaches will work collaboratively to ensure a gradual return to competition (games, practice.)

VII. Concussion Management/Injury Protocol—Academic Accommodations Protocol for all Student-Athletes

It is the expectation of the athletic office that all students are clear of any academic accommodations in order to fully participate in their respective program. When a student is in need of academic accommodations due to a medical reason (i.e., concussion management, ankle sprains), such accommodations should be communicated to all of the following personnel: building principal, building guidance counselor, respective teachers, and the athletic director. Upon receipt, the athletic director will notify the appropriate coaches and athletic trainers that the student should be immediately pulled from all athletic participation, including practices and games, until final full clearance is provided and no academic accommodations remain. These procedures are in place for all student-athletes regardless of the sport they participate in.

Secondly, when a student-athlete is injured and held out of athletic participation for an extended period (i.e., surgery required, concussion management), this information will be communicated by the athletic director to the student's building principal and/or guidance office for determination if any necessary academic accommodations shall be put in place.

ATHLETIC DEPARTMENT PROCEDURES

I. Letter Awards

Requirements for earning an athletic letter will be determined and communicated by the head coach.
Procedures for Awarding Varsity Athletic Letters
Basic rules that apply to all prospective athletic letter award candidates:
➢ All athletic programs must comply with all rules and regulations set forth by the Highlands School District.
➢ Student-athletes must display sportsmanship and proper conduct at all times.
➢ Student-athletes must adhere to all training rules established by the coach for that given sport.
➢ Student-athletes must observe practice and game regulations as established by the coach in that sport.
➢ Student-athletes must return all the equipment issued to the satisfaction of the coach and/or athletic director.
➢ In the event of injury or any other legitimate extenuating circumstance, consideration for letter awards will be at the discretion of the head coach with Athletic Director approval.
➢ If the student-athlete has earned and has been awarded a letter and his/her conduct or behavior has been unbecoming, the award letter can be taken away by the coach or Athletic Director.
➢ Only one letter will be awarded to any given player in attendance at Highlands High School. Letter awards in more than one sport will be designated by a suitable representative pin of that sport to be attached to the letter. Players who have earned a letter in a sport for more than one season will be given a service bar to be attached to the original letter.
➢ Certificates may be awarded with each year of lettering.
➢ Student-athletes must satisfactorily complete the season, including individual/team post-season competition.
➢ Coaches have the right to add their own requirements to the basic letter policy stated above and will communicate such additions to all potential team members and parents.

Junior Varsity / Junior High / Middle School Awards: Each participant of Junior Varsity, Junior High, and Middle School teams may be issued a certificate of participation if the above varsity guidelines are followed by the athlete.

II. Participation Conflict

Student-athletes are required to immediately communicate with coaches any potential conflict of missed practice and/or competition. This expectation of immediate communication includes academic conflicts, choral/band/musical conflicts, and/or family conflicts. As noted previously, missed practices and/or games for non-school athletic conflicts is not an acceptable absence and may result in team discipline, including possible loss of letter award.24

ATHLETIC DEPARTMENT PROCEDURES

III. Poor Weather / Cancellations

Based on a cancellation or early dismissal of school as directed by the Superintendent of Schools due to inclement weather, the following may apply:

➢ All home activities involving spectators may be cancelled.

➢ All away activities may be cancelled.

➢ If an early dismissal occurs, all activities may be cancelled.

➢ All rehearsals/practices/competitions/performances are cancelled unless administrative approval is given.

Administrative consideration will be given to the need for the rehearsal/practice based on the immediacy of the competition/performance and the severity of the weather/road conditions.

➢ All student activities coaches/sponsors may request permission to use school facilities on the day of cancellation. This must be done on a single day basis.

➢ Students cannot be required to attend an approved activity/practice/rehearsal during a school closing. Participation must be voluntary.

IV. Travel / Transportation—Event Pick-Up/Drop-Off

It is the expectation that the District's transportation provider will pick up all athletic participants on the High School or Middle School campus of the Highlands School District and will only drop them off at the same locations. Coaches will discuss with the athletic director extenuating circumstances requiring alternative arrangements. Permission from the athletic director is mandatory to vary from this procedure.

A coach will remain with all students at the Highlands campus until transportation arrives for each student. Students cannot be transported by other students to/from events. No exceptions!

V. Travel / Transportation —Alternative Plans

Students are expected to ride District transportation to and from District scheduled events (scrimmages and/or competitions.) Alternative arrangements are allowed provided plans are pre-approved by both the coach and athletic director.

➢ Parent is taking their son/daughter home directly from the District scheduled event (scrimmages and/or competitions.) Note: Face-to-face contact is required between parent(s) and coach(es).
➢ Parent is transporting their son/daughter along with another student, so long as both sets of parents have communicated such arrangements. Note: Face-to-face contact between the coach and “substitute” parent is required at the time of pick-up.

VI. Conflict Resolution

The purpose of this procedure is to provide a framework for student-athletes and their families to resolve conflicts that may arise in the course of a student's participation in both individual and team interscholastic sports sponsored by the Highlands School District. Such a framework is necessary to ensure a uniform, fair, orderly, and prompt resolution of issues that arise concerning student-athletes and their participation in the sports sponsored by the District. The steps of the process are as follows:

Step 1 - Coach Level

➢ All conflict resolution meetings adhere to a strict 24-hour rule whereby any meeting with a coach shall wait a minimum of 24 hours following any contest ending.
➢ Student-athletes are encouraged to speak directly to their coach regarding any concerns they may have.
➢ Parents may request a meeting with the coach after their son/daughter has spoken directly to their coach.
➢ Meetings involving parent(s) will also include the student-athlete.
➢ Meetings at the coach level will always include at least two coaches.

Step 2 - Athletic Director Level

➢ If a student-athlete or family is not satisfied with the coaches’ proposed resolution, a meeting with the athletic director, parent(s) and student-athlete may be requested. The coach will attend this meeting as well.
➢ Such meetings will occur at the earliest and most convenient time for all parties.
➢ The athletic director will not accept meetings with more than one family at a time.

Step 3– Building Principal Level

➢ If a student-athlete or family is not satisfied with the Athletic Director’s proposed resolution, a meeting with the building principal may be requested. The Athletic Director and/or coach may attend this meeting.
➢ Such meetings will occur at the earliest and most convenient time for all parties.

Step 4 - Superintendent Level

➢ If a student-athlete or family is not satisfied with the building principal's proposed resolution, a meeting with the superintendent may be requested.

➢ Such meetings will occur at the earliest and most convenient time for all parties.

➢ The superintendent may consult with the Board as needed, possibly resulting in extended time prior to resolution.

Step 5- Board Consideration

The purpose of this step-by-step procedure set forth above is to ensure that individuals most familiar with the situation (i.e. coaches and the athletic director) have an opportunity to respond to and resolve inquiries in a satisfactory and timely manner. The Board anticipates that most issues will be successfully resolved through the stated procedure. However, as with all issues about which members of the public have a concern, inquiries that are not resolved to the satisfaction of the family may be presented to the Board. In order to ensure the viability of the problem resolution procedure, the Board will entertain only those inquiries that have been fully processed through the steps of this Conflict Resolution procedure.

Anonymous submissions will not be processed.

APPENDIX A
Highlands School District
Student-Athlete Rules and Regulations

1. Athletes will not possess, use or consume drugs or alcohol. They will not possess any paraphernalia associated with drug use. Any violation of this rule may subject the athlete to consequences similar to those outlined in Highlands School District policy number 227.

2.Hazing is a specific form of harassment. Hazing is a type of harassment used for the purpose of initiation into a group. Hazing of any type will not be tolerated. Any act of hazing or perceived act of hazing must be reported to the coach immediately. Examples of hazing activity and the district definition of hazing can be found in your student athlete manual along with Highlands School District policy #247 that addresses hazing.

3.Bullying of any individual will not be tolerated. Allegations of any form of bullying are to be reported to the head coach immediately. Definitions of bullying can be found in Highlands School District policies #249

4. Horseplay will not be tolerated. Horseplay is defined as a forceful physical action similar to pushing, shoving, wrestling, or shadow boxing that is performed without the intention to do bodily harm. Unfortunately individuals involved in horseplay are often injured or embarrassed by the action. Athletes should not engage in horseplay and should put a stop to any horseplay that they may witness. Any actions of horseplay must be reported to the coach.

5. All athletes are to be in attendance at school the day of the game. Students who are absent from school or do not arrive prior to 11:00am (HS) or 11:30 (MS) will not participate in any co-curricular/extracurricular activities or practices on that day without the written approval of the appropriate building principal or designee.

6. Students who are assigned out-of-school suspension or expulsion may not participate in or attend any practice or game until the student is reinstated in school.

7. Full participation and attendance at all competitions, practices, and events is expected of all participants. Athletes that miss practice or a game for any reason without prior permission from the coach may result in disciplinary action. It is the athlete’s responsibility to obtain advance permission. In the event that absences become habitual the coach has the right to determine if the athlete may finish the season as part of the team.

It is the expectation that all district teams take priority over travel/club team commitments. Missed practices or games as a result of travel/club team commitments subjects the student-athlete to the aforementioned discipline action.

8. Student participants are expected to strive to achieve the highest academic, as well as athletic, achievement. Students are responsible for time management and prioritization of responsibilities so as to maintain their academic standing while participating in athletics. If, during the course of planned season activities, a situation develops which places an academic activity at risk, it is the student's responsibility to bring the issue to the attention of their head coach/athletic director with a proposed resolution prior to the conflict. Students who are excused from class for participation in athletic activities have the responsi-bility to complete work assigned or completed during their absence.

9. While participating in and traveling to/from competitions, practices and activities, the student participant is subject to the student disciplinary policies of the Highlands School District. Conduct in violation of school policies will be promptly reported by coaches to the building principal and/or athletic director for disciplinary action.

10. All student-athletes are held to the expectations of appropriate social media use as outlined in the Code of Conduct section of the Student-Athlete Handbook.