

International Students – F-1 or J-1 visa students including incoming 9th-graders, are only eligible if they meet a residency exception or if they are placed by an Approved International Student Program (AISP). AISP students are eligible immediately for one year and then wait one year (play one, wait one—no eligibility at any level). International students who are not from an AISP program may be eligible at the sub-varsity level after sitting out 90 scheduled school days without any special approval if the school desires. Otherwise, international students are not eligible for varsity sports for up to 8 semesters or 12 trimesters.

Undue Influence – Also known as the anti-recruiting regulation. This rule renders a student who is recruited by a person directly or indirectly associated with a school or athletic program ineligible for up to four years. The offending person could also be suspended from coaching and the school required to disconnect from that person for up to four years. It is against the anti-recruiting rules for any person directly or indirectly associated with a student or school to secure or encourage attendance because of athletics. Coaches have no role in the enrollment of new students and should refer all inquiries to the administration (Int. 105).

Amateur Status and Awards – Participation in school sports is limited to students who are amateurs – to those who have not received money or valuable consideration for involvement with one of the sports that the MHSAA sponsors a tournament in. Amateurs can't sign a pro hockey contract and then play high school baseball. Amateurs can't receive cash, gift certificates, scholarships to camp, or discounts (including those from sporting goods companies). Amateurs can't receive uniforms or equipment for participation in high school sports, nor keep school issued items (they can purchase at season's end for fair/current market value). The amateur's family can't accept these prohibited items in their place. Amateurs can't pose in school uniform to endorse a commercial product. The rule allows for meals, travel, and lodging to be accepted if in kind, not cash to buy food, but the actual meal is OK. The awards provision has a \$40 cap for **symbolic** awards not including engraving which is often confused with a **cash** limit of \$40. Never can a student-athlete receive cash, merchandise or gift certificates for participation in an MHSAA sponsored sport.

Anything done for an athlete that is not done in the same fashion for non-athletes in the school is likely a violation of amateur status. Championship rings, special discounts for equipment, prizes for selling the most items in a fund raiser are all things that must be open to all students not just athletes so as to comply with the Amateur Status and Awards regulations.

Limited Team Membership – There are three parts to this rule. Part A, also known as the Loyalty Rule, states that in MHSAA sports, a student can only **compete** for the school team once the season starts. So in team sports, once practice (including tryouts) begins, a student can only play for the school team in that sport until the season ends. All JH/MS sports except football, ice hockey, and individual sports don't activate the rule until participation by the student in the first contest. In individual sports and all JH/MS sports except football, students are allowed two non-school events after the first contest during the season. An event held on not more than three consecutive calendar days is considered one event under this rule (i.e. a three day non-school tournament). In skiing the rule is activated once the **team** participates in a scrimmage or meet. In tennis, the rule activates on the first day of allowed competition regardless of when the team begins practice or a player joins the team. Once discovered a student is ineligible for, at minimum, the next 3 dates of high school competition, 2 dates for junior high/middle school to a maximum of the entire season. An individual may not knowingly violate the regulations. To be in the MHSAA tournament in golf, ski, hockey or soccer a student must have been a participating team member in that sport in at least four contests with his/her school team against an MHSAA school. Part B indicates that students would be ineligible for one school year if after participating in an MHSAA sport they compete in any event which is or purports to be a National High School Championships or All Star Event. A 12th-grade student may participate (with 30 days advance request from the principal or AD) in one all-star event after his or her season and not lose eligibility in upcoming sports. Part C involves participation in U.S. Olympic Development Programs and National Governing Body teams which both involve special advance allowances that involve school administration.

2025-26 MHSAA[®] HANDBOOK



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Supplement and Teaching Tool

Issue 16 — An Updated Eligibility Summary (2025-26)

The following is intended to provide coaches, administrators and others a better understanding of MHSAA Regulations. Schools should review the MHSAA Handbook using the full text of the rule. This is a teaching tool.

AN ELIGIBILITY SUMMARY

This brochure will touch the surface of Regulations I and III – eligibility for sports in MHSAA member schools. Eligibility is a state of being. A student either is eligible or is not eligible and not knowing the rule does not change this fact. There are several rules that determine eligibility for school sports and over the years they have become increasingly comprehensive. Consult the full context of the rule and school administration and possibly the MHSAA about specific eligibility situations.

Enrollment – The first rule of school sports is that a student may only play for the school they are enrolled in. Enrolled means the student is: 1) on the school records receiving active credit (courses awaiting grades for credit toward graduation or a certificate of completion) for at least 66% of full credit load potential for a full time student (50% for JRH/MS) and 2) in attendance (in person or online as defined previously) for one or more classes – or participation in a scrimmage or contest. Eligible students must be enrolled in a school – any school – for the purposes of this rule – by the 4th Friday after Labor Day and the 4th Friday of February.

Age – Students must be under 19 years old to play school sports except that if students turn 19 on or after Sept. 1 of a current school year, they can finish that school year. 6th graders must be under 13 years of age; 7th-graders must be under 14 years of age, and 8th-graders must be under 15 years old. Those who turn this age on or after Sept. 1 can finish that year. For students who may be too old for their senior year an accommodation is provided called an Eligibility Advancement Application that allows these students to begin high school sports in the 7th or 8th grade and have four years of high school sports. Eligibility advancement may also extend to 6th-graders seeking two years of middle school eligibility.

Physical Exams – Prior to participation in a tryout or practice every student must submit a statement from an MD, DO, Nurse Practitioner or Physicians Assistant that they are physically able to compete in athletic tryouts, practices and contests. Parents and students must also sign an assumption of risk and acknowledgment to receiving concussion awareness material. The physical form also includes consent to disclosure of information otherwise prohibited by HIPAA and FERPA laws. These statements must be on file in the appropriate school office and must be for the current school year, not necessarily in conjunction with the insurance year. The earliest date that a physical can be dated for use in the coming school year is the previous April 15.

Maximum Enrollment and Maximum Competition – Once a student begins the 9th grade, they are allowed eight semesters, or 12 trimesters of enrollment regardless of any participation in athletics (definition above). In addition they are allowed four first semesters and four second semesters, or in trimester schools, four first, four second and four third trimesters. The 7th and 8th semesters or the 10th, 11th and 12th trimesters must be consecutive – no breaks in enrollment. For the purposes of this rule, an academic term “counts” if the student participated in a game or scrimmage or if the student continued to be enrolled after a “4th Friday.” The rule does not apply to 7th and 8th-graders.

Undergraduate Standing – Students who have graduated from high school are not eligible for sports. Students who have enough credits to graduate may continue to play sports provided they are still taking the minimum number of academic classes (66% of full credit load potential for a full time student) and have not yet received their diplomas. A graduate is a student who has accepted a diploma or a certificate of completion, including a GED or a diploma from a foreign country and is not eligible regardless of age or academic term.

Previous Academic Credit Record – A student must have received credit for at least 66% of full credit load potential for a full time student in the previous academic term (either a semester or trimester) in which they were enrolled (e.g. four of five or six classes, five of seven classes) (50% for JRH/MS). Many schools add to the MHSAA minimum eligibility requirement by increasing the number of classes a student must pass or also require a certain GPA to be eligible. In addition to setting the minimum standard, the MHSAA also sets the period of ineligibility: a trimester, or for students not in trimester schools, 60 scheduled school days. Students returning to eligibility under this rule must be passing 66% of credits on the 60th scheduled school day to become eligible. A student’s reinstatement would be when the new credits are posted to the transcript, or if the student is sitting, then on the first day that classes are held in the new trimester or on the 61st scheduled school day provided the student is passing. Students whose eligibility is reinstated for fall sports (either through making up the deficiency or having sat out) would become eligible on the first day of practices for the start of the school year.

Current Academic Credit Record – The same minimum standard, passing 66% of full credit load potential for a full time student (50% for JRH/MS) must be checked periodically by the school before the end of the semester or trimester. Current academic credit checks must occur at least once in 10 weeks for a semester school and once in 7 weeks for a trimester school. Most schools check weekly, biweekly or at the time of their progress reports. When a student is not passing the minimum 66% of full credit load potential for a full time student (or a higher standard which the school may set) the student is not eligible for at least the next Monday through Sunday and so on until the student is passing 66% of classes from the start of the semester or trimester through the most recent eligibility check.

Sport Specific Transfer Regulation – This rule states that the sports a student played in the most recent previous high school year (any level) determines eligibility in the coming school year should the student transfer and not meet one of the 15 stated exceptions (more detail fol-

lows). Participation means actually entering a scrimmage against another school or entering a game or meet for any amount of time (not just practicing). However, a transfer student would be eligible in sports NOT played in the previous school year. A student who does meet one of the 15 stated exceptions would be eligible in sports played in the previous year. The transfer rule does not apply to 6th, 7th and 8th-graders or first time incoming 9th graders. A student who transfers schools during a season would be ineligible for the remainder of that season and the entire season the next school year. Also, students who transfer later in a season and may meet an exception or who are eligible in a sport not played previously will not be eligible for MHSAA tournaments unless their enrollment is prior to Oct. 1 for fall sports, Feb. 1 for winter sports or May 1 for spring sports. Please see the note regarding the eligibility for International Students (including incoming 9th graders) present in the US on a J-1 or F-1 visa.

The 14 Exceptions break down as follows: 7 are residency exceptions which must be full and complete (a very specific definition by interpretation), 5 have to do with the status of the school – school closing, new school opening, and 2 involve the status of the student such as an incoming 9th-grader. In addition, a full and complete residential change which would grant immediate eligibility in any sport played previously, must be from one public school district to another district – regardless of the type of school attended before. When students do change schools and residency under the regulation, they are eligible in a sport played in the previous year only at the school of residence or the closest non-public or charter school to their new residence. Multi school districts like Detroit and Lansing treat each school attendance area like its own school district.

Because family situations have become more complicated, so has the transfer rule. A coach should never play a student new to the school whose eligibility is not clearly determined by school administrators and often verified in writing by the MHSAA via a written interpretation. Four of the more common exceptions all involving some form of residential change which grants immediate eligibility in a previously played sport are summarized below. Again get clarification from school administrators before changing schools and before participating in athletics.

Exception 1 – A student makes a full and complete residential change with all the people they lived with – the family unit - during the previous academic term. The previous residence must be either vacant or sold or rented to non-family and not occupied for any residential purpose by the student, his parents or siblings. More is required to establish a full and complete residential change.

Exception 2 – A student was not living exclusively with either parent and moves to reside with the “parents, single parent if divorced, or only living parent” who already reside in that district. Eligibility is allowed one time under this exception.

Exception 8 – A student whose parents are divorced (not separated) and the student moves with or to one of the divorced parents is eligible only at the public school of residence or the closest non-public or charter school. Under this exception a student must have completed an Educational Transfer Form (ETF) signed by both principals and the MHSAA prior to participation. See ETF Note at end of Exception 12. Eligibility is allowed one time under this exception. This may also apply for students whose parents never married.

Exception 12 – A student who turns 18 and moves unaccompanied by his parents and both principals and the MHSAA complete the Educational Transfer Form (ETF). See ETF Note. Eligibility is allowed one time under this exception. ETF Note: An Educational Transfer Form is signed only when the transfer is not significantly related to or motivated by athletics and no recruiting is involved.

There are many common situations that are not exceptions to the transfer rule and a student is not eligible in a previous year’s sport. Some situations which are not an exception to the transfer rule: School of choice, returning from a “bad” school of choice to my school of residence, financial or transportation hardships, guardianship (ward of the court is an exception however), or moving in with an aunt or uncle or grandparent (students must move with the people they lived with).