



2026 – 2027 MSAA CHEERLEADING RULES & REGULATIONS

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COACHES CODE OF ETHICS

The function of a coach is to educate students through participation in interscholastic competition. An interscholastic program should be designed to enhance academic achievement and should never interfere with opportunities for academic success. Each student should be treated with the utmost respect, and his or her welfare should be considered in decisions by the coach at all times. Accordingly, the following guidelines for coaches have been adopted by the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) Board of Directors.

- **Coaches** shall be aware that they have a tremendous influence, for either good or ill, on the education of the student and, thus, shall never place the value of winning above the value of instilling the highest ideals of character.
- **Coaches** shall uphold the honor and dignity of the profession. In all personal contact with students, officials, athletic directors, school administrators and staff, the state high school athletic association, the media, parents, and the public, coaches shall strive to set an example of the highest ethical and moral conduct. Communication with all parties should be wholesome, appropriate and positive.
- **Coaches** shall respect and support contest officials. Coaches shall not indulge in conduct which would incite players or spectators against the officials. Public criticism of officials or players is unethical and inappropriate.
- **Coaches** shall take an active role in the prevention of drug, alcohol, tobacco and other substance abuse.
- **Coaches** shall avoid the use of alcohol and tobacco products when in contact with players.
- **Coaches** shall promote the entire interscholastic program of the school and direct the program in harmony with the total school program.
- **Coaches** shall master the contest rules and shall teach the rules to their team members.
- **Coaches** shall not seek an advantage by circumvention of the spirit or letter of the rules.
- **Coaches** shall utilize their positive influence to enhance sportsmanship by spectators, both directly and by working closely with cheerleaders, other school club sponsors, booster clubs and administrators.
- **Coaches** shall promote a culture that encourages diversity and inclusion.
- **Coaches** shall ensure they familiarize themselves and their teams with their schools' emergency action plans and, where applicable, with concussion and heat illness prevention plans.

2026 ~ 2027 MSAA Cheerleading Rules & Regulations

- **Coaches** should meet and exchange cordial greetings with the opposing coach to set the positive example and correct tone for the event before and after the contest.
- **Coaches** shall not exert pressure on faculty members to give students special consideration.
- **Coaches** shall not scout opponents by any means other than those adopted by the league and/or state high school association.

Each high school coach is first a TEACHER. The student-athlete is participating within the school's activity program because he or she desires to do so. Consequently, that student is often more attentive to a coach's lessons than to those offered by teachers in required courses.

The function of an interscholastic coach is to educate students in "LIFE LESSONS," through their participation in educational athletics. Every student athlete should be treated as though they were the coach's own children. Their welfare must be uppermost at all times. The following abridged guidelines for coaches have been adopted by the National Federation Interscholastic Coaches Association Board of Directors.

1. The coach must be aware that he or she has a tremendous influence, either for good or bad, in the education of the student athlete and, thus, shall never place the value of winning above the value of instilling the highest desirable ideals of character.
2. In all personal contact with student athletes, officials, athletic directors, school administrators, the state high school athletic association, the media, and the public, the coach shall strive to set an example of the highest ethical and moral conduct.
3. The coach shall take an active role in the prevention of drug, alcohol, and tobacco abuse, and under no circumstances should authorize their use.
4. The coach shall promote the entire interscholastic program of the school and direct his or her program in harmony with the total school program.
5. The coach shall be thoroughly acquainted with the contest rules and is responsible for their interpretation to team members. The spirit and letter of rules should be regarded as mutual agreements. The coach shall not try to seek an advantage by circumvention of the spirit or letter of the rules.
6. Coaches shall actively use their influence to enhance sportsmanship in the broadest possible manner.
7. Contest officials shall have the respect and support of the coach. The coach shall not indulge in conduct, which will incite players or spectators against the officials. Public criticism of officials or players is unethical.
8. A coach shall not exert pressure on faculty members to give student athletes special consideration.

1. School Sponsored Team:

A school team must be sponsored by and under the control of the school committee and registered with the MSAA through an annual registration process. A school team must have: a coach(es) appointed by the principal; a regular practice schedule through the season; a meaningful schedule of contests through the season defined for that sport; and school uniforms.

Teams not registered with the Association are not eligible for tournament participation. All school teams must be registered with the Association during the annual Student Activities Registration renewal process.

2. Application of Rules:

As a condition of a high school's participation in cheerleading under MSAA Rules and Regulations, prior to the first fall season contest, each principal or their designee must read entirely, understand, abide by and be prepared to enforce all MSAA cheerleading rules, regulations and policies. Further, the principal and their designee must assure that each member of the school cheerleading coaching staff is knowledgeable of and will enforce all requirements contained therein.

- A. MSAA rules apply to all member school teams and all individuals at all levels of competition. Teams must comply with safety standards in accordance with National Federation rules, guidelines and recommendations at all times and in all aspects of its program.
- B. In order to be eligible to represent a school in all cheerleading competitions, teams must conform to all MSAA rules.
- C. In the case of a postponed event, the eligibility of participants does not carry over. The students who participate in any event must meet all eligibility requirements on the date that the event is actually held.
- D. No special privileges, such as extra examinations, delayed marks, makeup opportunities or other opportunities not granted to every student in the school, are to be granted to cheerleaders.
- E. School cheerleading teams may not compete against teams that do not represent a school.
- F. A principal may not make a private agreement with another school or any other party to evade MSAA or National Federation Interscholastic Spirit Rules and Guidelines. Regarding the participation of an ineligible student, no ineligible high school student can participate in any cheerleading activity (games, competition, etc.) regardless of any proposed agreement between school and competition host school. Schools hosting MSAA sanctioned open invitational competitions must follow the MSAA rules.
- G. Neither schools nor school committees may make rules that are in any way less restrictive than those set by MSAA or National Federation.

- H. A principal or their designee must report suspected rule violations to the principal of the school in question and to the MSAA Executive Officer in charge of cheerleading.

3. Loyalty to the High School Team: Bona Fide Team Members:

A bona fide member of the school team is a student who is consistently present for, and actively participates in, all high school team sessions (e.g. practices, tryouts, competitions). Bona fide members of a school team are precluded from missing a high school practice or competition in order to participate in a non-school athletic activity/event. Students cannot be given special treatment (late arrival, early dismissal, etc.) for non-school athletic programs.

- A student-athlete must be a team member for a minimum of 50% of the regular season schedule for that team to participate in any MSAA Tournament competition.
- A team member is defined as any student-athlete who attends practices or games for their team.
- Bona Fide waiver requests for Saturday and Sunday practices only do not need submission to the MSAA rather approval determined by the High School Principal or principal's designee.
- MSAA Bona Fide waivers are only allowed during the pre-season or regular season. Bona Fide Team Member Waivers (for missing any practice or game) are not permitted during MSSA post-season.

PENALTIES: First Offense: Student-athlete is suspended for one (1) contest and shall not participate in the next scheduled interscholastic competition that is part of their regular season schedule or in tournament play.

Second Offense: Student-athlete is suspended for an additional 25% of the season and is ineligible for tournament play immediately upon confirmation of the violation.

Penalty Carry Over: An unserved portion of the penalty for a violation toward the end of a season will carry over to the very next high school season in which the student is a legitimate participant.

4. Subsidizing Out-Of-Season Activities

A school or a member of that school's coaching staff may not subsidize or support students who might attend any activity outside of the authorized seasonal limits for that sport. In addition, a coach may not provide transportation for candidates of their team to an out-of-season activity/camp.

- A. Student participation in out-of-season activities may be funded by booster clubs or organizations if approved by the school administration.
- B. Students may not wear school uniforms, or be identified as a school team, out-of-season and/or during non-school events.

- C. Schools may issue equipment (but not uniforms) during the out-of-season period, but school districts should review any liability issues that could arise from such issuance.

5. Gender and Participation

No student shall be denied in any implied or explicit manner the opportunity to participate in any interscholastic activity because of gender. A school may establish separate teams for males and females for competition in a sport provided that both teams receive equal instruction, training, coaching, access to available facilities, equipment, opportunities to practice and compete.

If a school offers a single team in a particular sport, it may not restrict eligibility based on gender unless such a restriction is necessary to ensure that the school's gendered designation of athletic opportunities complies with Title IX (either by demonstrating proportionality or the absence of unmet interest among members of the underrepresented sex).

If a school offers a girls' team and a boys' team in a particular sport (including offering the same sport in two different seasons), it may restrict eligibility based on gender.

A student shall not be excluded from participation on a gender-specific sports team that is consistent with the student's bona fide gender identity.

When a school district submits a roster to the MSAA, it is verifying that it has determined that the students listed on a gender-specific sports team are eligible to participate either based on the gender listed on their official birth certificate or based on their bona fide gender identity and that no students are included on the roster solely for the purpose of gaining an unfair advantage in competitive athletics. The MSAA shall defer to the determination of the student and the student's school regarding gender classification.

Nothing in this policy shall be read to entitle a student to selection of any particular team or to permit a student to transfer from one gender-specific team to another team of a different gender during a single sports season.

It is a recommended best practice that schools communicate with their opponents as necessary about the gender-specific needs of their team in order to promote inclusion – e.g., to ensure that appropriate locker room facilities are available, that announcer use athlete's correct pronouns, etc.

6. Private Promoters and Sponsors

In any activity involving one or more MSAA members, schools should not endorse any private promotion and/or sponsorship, which might result in the exploitation of students or direct financial gain to the promoter or sponsor.

Schools should refer to the MSAA Office -- and when appropriate to the Board of Directors -- all outside financial offers for supporting athletic programs among several school districts.

7. Adult Representation:

The principal, headmaster, or director of the school in all cases is responsible to the Association for the acts of school teams and other school organizations. All teams and individual participants must have adult representation present and responsible for them at all times. Such adult representation must be an employee or a designated representative of the school district. If the representative is not the coach of record, then the designee must provide written introduction on school letterhead, signed by the principal, or the student(s) will not be permitted to participate.

8. Medical Coverage:

Each member school should employ a licensed certified athletic trainer. Licensed physicians, athletic trainers, and coaches should receive sport medicine training. For all MSAA sanctioned events/competitions, the host school must employ a licensed physician, licensed athletic trainer or certified EMT for the event. The host site is required to have an AED onsite (and accessible) or with their medical provider.

9. Parental Permission:

Principals should secure from each athlete's parent written consent to participate in interscholastic sports. Eligibility rules and an assumption of risk statement should be part of this form.

10. Missing or Diseased Paired Organ:

To participate in interscholastic athletics, an athlete with a missing or diseased paired organ must provide his/her principal with a parental permission form and a medical specialist's written permission to participate. Such an athlete must wear during all practices and competitions the protective equipment recommended by the specialist.

11. Coaches Education:

Each school must employ a cheerleading coach that is qualified and trained in cheerleading safety. If the administrator finds it necessary to hire a coach that is untrained, training should be provided before the team performs stunts or tumbling. All Cheerleading coaches must meet the same requirements set for other coaches in the school system.

All coaches hired prior to August 1, 1998, are exempt from taking the Fundamentals of Coaching Course. Coaches hired after 8/1/1998 but before 7/1/2005 must complete the NFHS Fundamentals of Coaching Course with the exception of Certified Massachusetts teachers.

All coaches (stipend or volunteer) first serving as an interscholastic coach after July 1, 2005 must complete the NFHS Fundamentals of Coaching Course, and an approved Sports First Aid course INCLUDING CERTIFIED TEACHERS.

- The NFHS Fundamentals of Coaching Course requirement must be met through attending an MIAA/MSAA sponsored Fundamentals of Coaching Class with

2026 ~ 2027 MSAA Cheerleading Rules & Regulations

MIAA/MSAA Certified Instructors. Must be completed and passed prior to coaching a second year.

- The NFHS Sports First Aid may be met by completing on-line courses with the NFHS <http://www.nfhslearn.com>. Must be passed prior to coaching a third year.

Additional requirements for all coaches:

- Massachusetts requires coaches to be certified in CPR per Section 1. Section 47A of chapter 71 of the General Laws. Additionally, AED training is required and will most likely be done in conjunction with the existing mandated CPR training.
- All MSAA member school coaches (paid or volunteer) are required to take annually the on-line National Federation Concussion Course, or other MA Department of Public Health recognized education program, prior to the start of their season.

The MSAA recommends that all coaches (stipend or volunteer) first serving as an interscholastic coach after July 1, 2025 complete a cheer/dance specific course from the NFHS Learn catalog within the first 12 months of hire.

12. Concussion Training Requirements:

In accordance with Massachusetts General Law 105 CMR 201.000, “the following persons annually shall complete one of the head injury safety training programs approved by the Department of Public Health as found on the Department’s website: (1) Coaches; (2) Licensed athletic trainers; (3) Trainers; (4) Volunteers; (5) School and team physicians; (6) School nurses; (7) Athletic Directors; (8) Directors responsible for a school marching band, whether employed by a school or school district or serving in such capacity as a volunteer; (9) Parents of a student who participates in an extracurricular athletic activity; and (10) Students who participate in an extracurricular athletic activity.” Additional information can be referenced here: [Department of Public Health](#) in regard to the Concussion Law.

Each school’s medical person/staff is responsible for the members of that team. In the event of injury, that medical person/staff will make the final judgment as to whether a student-athlete may return to play. Whenever a medical person is on duty at an athletic event, they shall be responsible for both teams (unless the other team has its own medical person present). When a physician is not present at an athletic event, a licensed/certified athletic trainer, if available, shall be considered the higher medical authority on-site when an EMS is providing medical coverage at the same event. Their judgment will be final. Physical disqualification by the medical provider renders the student ineligible.

PENALTY: The penalty for playing an ineligible student, due to physical disqualification specified above, is forfeiture.

Medical Alert Bracelets/Anklets are approved for wearing in all sports, provided they are taped to the body and marked in red.

Any student-athlete who exhibits signs, symptoms or behaviors consistent with a concussion (such as loss of consciousness, headache, dizziness, confusion, or balance problems) shall be immediately removed from the practice or competition and must not

return to practice or competition that day. Refer to Massachusetts General Law 105 CMR 201.000 for mandated concussion management protocols.

13. Cheerleading Safety:

Cheerleading teams should be provided the assistance of all school medical personnel and/or athletic trainers/Certified Athletic Trainer. Cheerleading coaches should be given an equal amount of practice time in a safe environment conducive with cheerleading activity. Cheerleading coaches should be equipped with a team medical kit, which is readily available to them at all practices, games and MSAA sanctioned competitions. MSAA recommends that all cheerleading coaches have some training in First Aid and CPR (See Coaches Education). Cheerleading mats must be provided to all cheerleading teams for practice and/or competition.

14. Physical Examination:

All students must pass a physical examination prior to participation in High School Athletics. A physical exam covers the student for 13 months from the exam date. A student's eligibility will terminate once a physical has reached the 13 month limit.

Physical examinations must be performed by a duly registered Licensed Physician, Physician Assistant or Nurse Practitioner. The MIAA Sports Medicine Committee has recommended the use of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) Preparticipation Physical Evaluation forms. For reporting purposes of the 13-month physical examinations, only the Medical Eligibility Form can be used for submission to the school.

Note: Written doctor medical clearance notes do not take the place of an annual physical

PENALTY: A student in violation shall be suspended for the number of contests in which they participated without a proper physical. Teams do not have to forfeit these contests.

15. Return to Participation:

Subsequent to any serious injury, and prior to further participation in cheerleading, a cheerleader must receive a medical release from a physician. This form should be kept on file at the school.

The assigned athletic trainer at all MSAA sanctioned events will have the final approval for participation of any injured cheerleader.

16. School Attendance Policies:

Each school should establish the same school/class requirements for cheerleaders that are set for other school activities provided that such requirements are not in conflict with MSAA Rules and regulations.

17. Academic Requirements:

Cheerleaders must follow the same requirements established for other school activities.

Academic Awards: The MSAA will provide a certificate to the school for every varsity cheerleading team that achieves a minimum combined GPA of 3.00 (gold) or 2.50 (silver). The school administrator in charge of cheerleading should contact the MSAA office regarding this award when applicable.

18. Equipment:

Each school is to provide their cheerleading team with a suitable practice facility and ascertain that all equipment is in good, safe condition and not defective in any way. Cheerleading mats must be provided for all cheerleading teams for practice/performing purposes.

19. Transportation:

Each school should transport its cheerleading team by common carrier such as bus lines, vans, or taxicabs. The school administrator should discourage the use of any private vehicle to transport cheerleaders to away games or competitions.

20. Registering Cheerleading Team with MSAA:

The school administrator is responsible for Membership Registration for Fall, Winter, and Game Day teams. All teams must be registered by September 30. Teams not registered with the MSAA will NOT be allowed entrance into any MSAA sanctioned competition. Each school must register the Fall, Winter, and Game Day team(s) separately.

21. Team Rosters:

The school administrator must maintain a current roster for each team registered with the MSAA. All participants must be listed on the roster (including alternates). Student-athletes not listed on the roster are ineligible for competition.

A. Competition Rosters – Sanctioned teams are allowed to compete at MSAA sanctioned tournaments. When a coach submits a competition roster for purposes of competing at a sanctioned tournament, they are verifying that all members listed have been actively participating in practices and games throughout the current season. Competition rosters are limited as follows:

- Performance Division = maximum of twenty-four (24) members with no more than twenty (20) athletes on the competition floor
- Game Day Division = maximum of thirty (30) members with no more than twenty-four (24) athletes plus no more than two (2) mascots on the competition floor
- Up to three (3) coaches

Only team members are allowed to enter the competition free of charge. All other members/coaches (including junior varsity members) will be required to proceed to the spectator entrance and pay admission.

22. Baseline Eligibility Requirements

For a student to practice with, or to represent a MSAA member school in athletic competition, the student must be duly enrolled in that school. Additionally, the student must be a candidate for that school's diploma, subject to the jurisdiction of that school's principal (i.e. the principal must have the authority to suspend the student from classes), and under the supervision of that school principal (i.e. the principal must have control and knowledge of the student's daily attendance and achievement).

An ineligible student who is duly enrolled in your school, may practice with team if approved by your school administration.

23. Student Eligibility: Home Educated Students and Commonwealth Virtual School Students Home Educated Students

A home-educated student is eligible to participate in interscholastic athletics if the following conditions are met:

- The local school committee of a MSAA public school member institution has adopted a policy regarding participation of home educated students on the high school teams, and the local building principal has indicated such on the annual MSAA membership form while including all home schoolers in the MSAA enrollment report.
- The Educational Plan for the home-educated student has been approved by the public school Superintendent or designee.
- The principal has determined appropriate high school grade level placement (9-12) for each home educated student in conjunction with chronological age and educational plan.
- The student resides in the school district that serves the high school and is living with their parents or legal guardians in the family residence. In multiple school districts, a home-educated student must be assigned to the school of record in the same manner as other students.
- The principal is satisfied that the student meets the standards for athletic participation required for all other students as defined in the current MSAA Rulebook. This includes, but is not limited to, those rules governing transfers, academic eligibility, age requirements, and the number of consecutive seasons of athletic eligibility beyond grade eight.
- MSAA requirements relative to academic eligibility must be certified by the principal at the same times that all other student-athletes are to be certified as academically eligible.

If the principal determines that all eligibility standards detailed above have been met, the principal may declare the student eligible to participate in interscholastic competition. The rights, privileges, and responsibilities associated with all other student-athletes attending MSAA member schools will apply to home educated students who have satisfied the requirements above.

Note: home school student access to a MSAA member school program is limited to the traditional comprehensive high school within the district in which the student resides. In multi comprehensive high school districts, the home school student access is limited to the school pre-determined by that school district's protocol or process as adopted by that school committee.

Commonwealth Virtual School Students Commonwealth virtual school students residing in Massachusetts are eligible to apply to the Superintendent of Schools of the school district in which the student resides, and if approved, shall be able to participate in interscholastic athletics within the district.

24. Middle School Students on Senior High Teams:

A middle school student is eligible to represent a senior high school on its teams only when the MSAA member high school includes those grades and they are under the direct jurisdiction and supervision of the high school principal.

Note: Consideration can only be given to middle level students when school district residency creates the direct path to a single high school and does not require application for admission or have any other conditions impacting a students' matriculation.

25. Mixed Gender/Coed Teams:

Mixed gender teams are those teams having both male and female participants. A minimum of one opposite gender participant defines a team as coed.

26. Divisional Placement/Enrollment:

Divisions will be re-aligned every two **(2) years** based on total enrollment in grades 9 thru 12. If schools combine for participation in cheerleading, the school with the higher enrollment will determine the divisional placement. Divisional placement of teams in open/invitationals and/or league competitions may be different from those defined in the MSAA Divisional Chart. The MSAA uses its division alignments to determine which teams advance to regional tournaments and the state championship.

27. Try Outs

A. Participants may try out for the fall team in the spring. Tryouts may not be held before the Tuesday following Memorial Day and must be completed by June 30. Spring tryouts may last for no more than five (5) days. Fall teams may continue their tryout process in the fall after the designated start date determined by the MSAA/MIAA. All tryouts must be concluded by September 15th.

B. Participants may try out for the winter team in November. Tryouts may not be held prior to the Monday after Thanksgiving

28. Sanctioned Events:

A multi-school event form must be approved by the Member School Principal and forwarded to the MSAA for approval. MSAA must sanction all local open/invitational and league competitions. It is recommended that all teams entering competitions be placed

into divisions using the MSAA divisional alignments. Only MSAA member sanctioned schools will be allowed entrance into open/invitational, league, regional and state competitions.

29. Definition of School Sponsored Events/Competitions:

- A. **Open or Invitational** – hosted by an MSAA member school – any sanctioned member may participate.
- B. **League Competition** – set up by league administrators for the purpose of naming league champions and advancing teams to regionals and states. Leagues must set the date of their tournament by September 30 for the fall season, and January 30 for the winter season. League competitions must take place at least one (1) week prior to the regional competition. Non-league teams must all qualify at the same designated competition approved by the MSAA. Leagues should be aware that MSAA divisional placements are used to determine which teams advance to the regional tournaments.
- C. **Regional** – held in fall and winter. All eligible member cheerleading teams advancing from league competitions are allowed to compete.
- D. **State Final** - held in fall and winter for both the performance and game day divisions. All eligible member teams advancing from their respective regional tournament are allowed to compete. Teams in the game day division advance directly from their league competition.
- E. **New England Tournament** – held in the winter. Top three (3) teams in performance divisions 1 thru 4 will receive a bid to attend the New England Tournament. For the coed division, the champion from each division (Small and Large) will receive the first two bids. All other coed teams will be grouped together and ranked by final score. If any of the top three teams are unable to attend, the MSAA will allow the next place team to attend in their stead until all of the Massachusetts slots are filled (teams must score a minimum of 70 to be asked to fill the open slots).
- A. In-State Teams Competing Out of State: Out of State competitions listed on the Sanctioned Events list have been approved for participation by Massachusetts sanctioned teams. An out of state host must allow only those Massachusetts teams sanctioned by MSAA to participate. Out of state hosts allowing non-sanctioned Massachusetts teams to compete will not receive MSAA sanctioning. All tournaments must adhere to the NFHS rules.
- B. Out-of-State Teams Competing in MSAA events: Out of state teams may receive a waiver to compete in a MSAA open invitational if the host site director obtains a registration form with written signed approval from the registering school administrator that includes:
 - 1. Total enrollment figures (9-12);
 - 2. Team roster sheet not to exceed twenty (20) competing members and four (4) alternates;
 - 3. Coach's contact information;
 - 4. Signed verification of physicals; and

5. A release of liability to the MSAA and the school hosting the event while competing and/or transporting participants to and from the event.

- C. Exhibition of Non-Sanctioned Teams: Non-sanctioned teams, including but not limited to college teams, all star teams, pop warner and youth teams, are not allowed to exhibition or compete at an MSAA sanctioned cheerleading tournament.

30. Hosting Competitions (Open/Invitationals AND League):

- A. A multi-school event form must be submitted to the MSAA for approval by the member school in order to sponsor an invitational or league competition. Approved events will be posted on the Sanctioned Events section of the MSAA website. Only teams properly registered (sanctioned) will be allowed to compete.
- B. The host school is responsible for verifying the eligibility of the teams that enter the competition. This can be done on the MSAA website. **Non-sanctioned teams (college, all star, youth, pop warner) are not allowed to exhibition or compete at an MSAA sanctioned event.** If the host site allows a team that is not sanctioned to compete or exhibition at its tournament, it will receive a warning letter. If there is a subsequent violation by the host site, the host site will no longer be allowed to host tournaments.
- C. All interstate cheer competitions must be sanctioned by MSAA and abide by all National Federation rules and recommendations.

31. Recognized Activity and Competition Limits:

- A. Cheerleading teams will be allowed entrance into MSAA sanctioned competitions with approval of their school administrator. A team must be actively supporting its school's athletic program in order to be eligible for competition in EACH season it wishes to compete. The number of competitions should be large enough to ensure that the student participants have an opportunity to experience win and loss situations and to learn the values associated with athletic participation such as, commitment, sacrifice, teamwork, leadership, sportsmanship, etc.
- B. Competition Limits: Cheerleading teams are allowed participation in a maximum of seven (7) MSAA sanctioned competitions per season which includes: (a) up to four (4) open or invitational tournaments, (b) league tournament, (c) regional competition and (d) state championship. Teams competing but not advancing from league or regional competitions may choose to attend extra open or invitational tournaments but may not exceed a total of seven competitions per season. **All teams (both performance and game day) must enter and compete in their league competition/qualifier in order to qualify for their respective regional or state tournament.**
- C. Fall Season: The Fall season may begin on the 2nd Monday preceding Labor Day (August 24, 2026). The Fall season must end with completion of the regular varsity season schedule except for a team completing their participation in the MSAA tournament.

D. Winter Season: The winter cheerleading season must not begin before the Monday after Thanksgiving. The Winter season must end with completion of the regular varsity season schedule, except for a team completing their participation in the MSAA tournament.

E. Limitation Exceptions:

1. Approved participation in tournaments sponsored by the Council of New England Secondary School Principals' Associations is allowed.
2. Approved participation in a national competition is allowed subject to the terms and conditions set forth in the National Competition section of this Rulebook.

32. Competition Routine Parameters (Performance Division):

Routines are limited to a maximum of two minutes and thirty seconds (2:30) in the performance division. There is no limit to the amount of music (within the 2:30 minutes) that may be used. **All routines must include a cheer** (before/middle/after/over the music) to be properly judged in the appropriate categories. There is not a minimum time/length requirement.

Timing will begin with the first organized word, movement, or note of music by the team after it is officially announced that they may begin. Coaches are strongly advised to create routines that finish a few seconds under the time limit to ensure that the team does not go over time.

MSAA Category Score Sheets will be used at all MSAA competitions. The score sheet will be divided into 4 categories. Each judge is assigned a category for a total possible score of 100. No scores are dropped.

33. Competition Routine Parameters (Game Day Division):

Routines are limited to a maximum of three minutes (3:00) in the game day division. There are three elements to a Game Day routine. The performance will follow this order: Band Chant, Crowd Leading, Fight Song. With all three elements combined, the performance cannot exceed the 3 minute time limit. Additional skill restrictions are listed on the MSAA website: <https://www.msaa.net/activities/msaa-game-day-cheer>.

Each school must elect whether to enter the MSAA Game Day State Tournament OR the MSAA Regional/State Tournament. A school is permitted to field two (2) teams in order to enter both events. Crossovers of athletes between teams from the same school are NOT permitted during the Game Day State Championship and Regional Championship (i.e. each athlete is only permitted to compete on one team in either the Game Day State Championship or Regional Championship).

34. Interruption of Performance

The Safety Judge or Head Judge reserves the right to stop a routine due to an obvious injury. In the event that an injury causes the team's routine to be interrupted during a Regional or State Competition, the team will have time to regroup before performing their routine again from the beginning. Judging will resume from the point at which the

injury/interruption occurred as determined by the Head Judge. The routine must be performed full-out from the beginning of the routine. All safety deductions accumulated to that point will carry over. If a team prefers not to re-work the routine, then at the coach's discretion, they may take the score they have received up to that point. If a skill has not been performed a "0" will be given in the category.

All other circumstances in which there is an interruption of a team's performance will be under the discretion of the Head Judge or MSAA Tournament Director at Regional and State Championship events. In all instances where a team is allowed to present its routine again, the routine must be performed full-out from the beginning of the routine. All safety deductions accumulated to that point will carry over and judging will resume from the point at which the interruption occurred.

35. State Championship – Video Replay

State Championship events will be recorded. A video replay review may be initiated by the MSAA State Tournament Director who will conduct the review seeking guidance from the head judge and penalty judge(s) that judged the routine.

36. Ties:

If a tie occurs, ties will be broken by adding the following categories:

Performance Division:	Game Day Division:
Partner Stunts – Difficulty	Band Chant – Visual Appeal
Pyramids – Difficulty	Fight Song – Effectiveness & Execution
Tumbling – Difficulty	Crowd Leading – Effectiveness & Execution
Jumps – Difficulty	Crowd Leading – Overall Impression
Motions – Difficulty	
Dance - Difficulty	

If the tie remains, both teams will receive recognition and the tie will stand.

37. Award Ceremonies:

- A. Student athletes should be apprised of the potential risk of injury associated with victory celebrations including activities such as "piling on". This is of particular concern at presentation of awards during cheerleading competitions. Coaches are responsible for discouraging their teams from responding in a manner that could cause injury to others.
- B. During the award ceremony of any MSAA sanctioned event, cheerleading teams and coaches should behave in an appropriate and sportsmanlike manner.
- C. Teams must be in full uniform for award ceremonies.
- D. Score sheets will be distributed to the coach of record only following the conclusion of awards.

38. Qualifying for Regional Competition (Performance Division):

- A. All teams must enter and compete in their league competition/qualifier in order to qualify for their respective regional tournament. Teams not participating in its league competition are not eligible for regional or state competition.
- B. A school may enter only one (1) varsity team in the performance division at its league competition.
- C. The highest scoring team from each division will qualify for regional competition. The MSAA division alignments will be used for determining whether a team has qualified for regionals regardless of league set-up or structure (i.e., small and large; or A, B, C).
- D. All teams obtaining a minimum score of 66 (66% of the total possible score of 100) will qualify for regionals.
- E. For purposes of qualifying, the four (4) all-girl divisions and one (1) coed division will be considered. All coed teams will compete against each other (regardless of their all-girl division) for qualification purposes. If a team qualifies as coed, the team must remain in the coed division for regionals and states of that season.

EXCEPTION: A team that has qualified for regionals from their league competition in the coed division maybe provided the option to move to the all-girl division for regional competition **ONLY** if **ALL** of the following conditions are met:

- 1. The male participant(s) is (are) no longer eligible for competition due a). to an injury/illness documented by a medical professional treating the participant prohibiting participation; or b). the participant no longer meets academic eligibility requirements set forth by the school. Documentation must be provided to the MSAA Tournament Director no less than 48 hours prior to regional competition.

AND

- 2. The team earned a minimum score of 66 (4 judge line) (66% of the total possible score of 100) at their league competition.
- F. Non-league teams must all qualify at the same designated competition approved by the MSAA. Non-league teams must contact the MSAA office for approval of the league qualifier.
- G. Upon qualification, the school administrator must submit an Intent to Enter form and tournament roster. The tournament roster is limited to a maximum of twenty-four (24) athletes and three (3) coaches. The Intent to Enter form can be found on the MSAA website.

When a school administrator submits a roster to the MSAA, it is verifying that it has determined that the students listed are eligible to participate and all coaches meet the requirements set forth in the Coches' Education section of this Rulebook.

39. Coed Division for Regional and State Tournament (Performance Division):

Following the completion of all league competitions, teams that have qualified for Regionals in the coed division will be split into two divisions: **Small School** and **Large School**. Division placement will be based on total school enrollment figures as outlined in the current MSAA Cheer Alignments. In the event of an odd number of participating teams, the middle team will be placed with the division in which their enrollment is more closely aligned.

40. Qualifying for State Championships (Performance Division):

- A. The top 2 teams in each division will qualify for the state championship.
- B. The 3rd place team will qualify providing they obtain a score of 75 (75% of total possible score of 100) or more.
- C. Any team scoring 80 (80% of possible score of 100) or more will qualify for the state championship.
- D. At-Large Bids: Each regional tournament has three bids per division to advance teams to the State Championship. If a division does not advance three teams to the State Championship pursuant to paragraphs A, B and C of this Section, the bids that are not filled shall become At-Large Bids to be awarded to teams in that division from other regions. At-Large Bids shall be awarded following the completion of all regional competitions to teams, based on their score at their respective regional tournament, that have 1) not qualified under paragraphs A, B, or C above; and 2) obtained a minimum score of 75 (75% of total possible score of 100).

41. Qualifying for State Championship (Game Day Division):

- A. All teams must enter and compete in their league competition/qualifier in order to qualify for the Game Day State Championship tournament. Teams not participating in its league competition are not eligible for state competition.
- B. A school may enter only one (1) varsity team in the game day division at its league competition.
- C. All teams in the game day division at the league competition will qualify for the state championship regardless of score.
- D. The MSAA divisional alignments do not apply to the game day division. There will be no differentiation of coed and all-girl in this division.
- E. Upon qualification, the school administrator must submit an Intent to Enter form and tournament roster. The tournament roster is limited to a maximum of thirty (30) athletes/mascots and three (3) coaches. The Intent to Enter form can be found on the MSAA website.

When a school administrator submits a roster to the MSAA, it is verifying that it has determined that the students listed are eligible to participate and all coaches meet the requirements set forth in the Coaches' Education section of this Rulebook.

42. Game Day State Championship Division Splitting Procedure

Following the completion of all league competitions, if twenty-one (21) or more teams have qualified for the Game Day State Championship, the event will be split into two divisions: **Small School** and **Large School**. Division placement will be based on total school enrollment figures as outlined in the current MSAA Cheer Alignments. In the event of an odd number of participating teams, the middle team will be placed with the division in which their enrollment is more closely aligned.

43. National Competition:

Only eligible member varsity cheerleading teams in the earning a bid to attend a National Event in the manner below are allowed to compete. A National Bid may only be used in the academic year and division in which it is earned.

- a. Champions from each division at the State Championship will receive a National Bid.
- b. Any team at the State Championship obtaining a minimum score of 80% of its total possible score (80 for performance division/160 for game day division) will receive a National Bid.

National bids are subject to the approval of school administrators. Once approved, teams must notify the MSAA office in writing of their intention to use a National Bid including where and when the bid will be used.

44. Penalty for Participating if Ineligible:

The school administration of a school that allows a student to cheer who is later found to be ineligible shall notify in writing the MSAA representative and the tournament director of all cheerleading competitions in which they have received award recognition as a team or individuals (trophy for placements, most valuable cheerleading awards, spirit awards, etc.). The team will return all recognition awards to the MSAA office, forfeiting every cheerleading competition in which the ineligible student competed during that season.

45. Out-of-Season Coach-Athlete Contact Limitations:

Unless otherwise permitted in this rule, between seasons a coach may conduct a meeting(s) with team candidates only to elect captains, collect equipment, issue equipment, to provide for physical examinations, to conduct legitimate fund-raising events, or to offer wellness workshops or activities. Teams may participate in school or community events.

- A. A coach is defined as any paid or volunteer member of the athletic staff.
- B. The MSAA considers the last coach of record as holding that position until replaced by the Administration.
- C. A coach may not directly or indirectly require an athlete to participate in a sport or a training program outside of the MSAA defined sport season. Additionally, a coach may not penalize an athlete for not attending an out of season program.

2026 ~ 2027 MSAA Cheerleading Rules & Regulations

- D. Voluntary conditioning sessions open equally to all students in a school and which are entirely devoid of sports-specific activity may be conducted between seasons provided no candidate is either required to participate or penalized for not doing so.
- E. A high school coach may be employed by a park or recreation department or other organization or may volunteer for such a group to teach their sport out-of-season provided the following conditions exist:
 - 1. The coach adheres to all conditions of MSAA Rule 45; and
 - 2. School funds are not used.
- F. A coach's high school candidates must constitute the minority of those taking part in any out-of-season sport's program. Candidates of that high school coach must be fewer than 50% of those participating in the overall program.
- G. A "candidate" is defined as:
 - 1. A varsity or sub-varsity athlete who:
 - i. Is enrolled at the MSAA member school where the coach is employed or volunteers for the specific activity in question;
 - ii. participated in a high school program at some interscholastic level the previous year; and
 - iii. has eligibility remaining; or
 - 2. Students in the grade immediately below the designated structure of the school, such as a sixth-grade student for a 7–12 school, a seventh-grade student for an 8–12 school, or an eighth-grade student for a 9–12 school.

Note: For private, vocational, charter, and school choice schools, all students in the grade immediately below the designated structure of the school are considered candidates.

Students who reside outside the school's established residency admission criteria are not considered candidates under this rule (e.g., for vocational schools that serve a specific group of towns/cities, only students that reside in those towns/cities are considered candidates).

46. Cheerleading Training/Camp:

Coaches may attend one (1) session (no longer than 5 consecutive days – not to be split into separate weeks) of training/camp out-of-season with their team. This training session must be in the interest of learning technique and safety. This session may not be used for the purpose of choreographing competition routines or portions thereof.

47. Definition of Practice:

Practice is a reporting of a group of potential athletes who are under the direct or indirect supervision of a member of the high school coaching staff, and who are receiving instruction in skills or techniques.

48. Captain's Practice:

The term "Captain's Practice" usually refers to a situation in which the team's captain(s) organizes and conducts out-of-season practice for cheerleading without adult supervision. The MSAA does not in any way sanction, encourage, or condone "Captain's Practice." "Captain's Practice", depending on the member school's involvement, may be a violation of MSAA rules. There is also a serious practical consideration. If it can be demonstrated that a school is allowing "Captain's Practice", the liability responsibility for an injured athlete may be quite serious.

49. Sportsmanship/Taunting:

Student-athletes, coaches, administrators, spectators, contest officials and all other persons connected directly or indirectly with a member school shall adhere to the principles of good sportsmanship and the ethics of competition before, during and after all interscholastic events in which they participate and/or attend.

Taunting includes any actions or comments by coaches, participants, or spectators which are intended to bait, anger, embarrass, ridicule, or demean others, whether or not the deeds or words are vulgar or racist. Included is conduct that berates, needles, intimidates, or threatens based on race, gender identity, ethnic origin or background, and conduct that attacks religious beliefs, size, economic status, speech, family, special needs, or personal characteristics.

Examples of taunting include but are not limited to: "trash talk", defined as verbal communication of a personal nature directed by a competitor to an opponent by ridiculing their skills, efforts, sexual orientation, or lack of success, which is likely to provoke an altercation or physical response; and physical intimidation outside the spirit of the game, including, but not limited to "in the face" confrontation by one participant to another. A violation of this rule may result in disciplinary action as outlined in the Violation of Rules and Regulations section of this Rulebook

50. Student (and Coach) Eligibility: Chemical Health/Alcohol/Drugs/Tobacco:

A. From the earliest fall practice date, to the conclusion of the academic year or final athletic event (whichever is latest), a student shall not, regardless of the quantity, use, consume, possess, buy/sell, or give away any beverage containing alcohol; any tobacco product (including e-cigarettes, vape pens and all similar devices); marijuana (including synthetic); steroids; drug paraphernalia; or any controlled substance. This policy includes products such as "NA or near beer," inhalants (defined as any substance that produces a mind-altering effect when inhaled), and misuse of over-the-counter medications and substances used for the purposes of altering one's mental state.. It is not a violation for a student to be in possession of a legally defined drug specifically prescribed for the student's own use by their doctor.

2026 ~ 2027 MSAA Cheerleading Rules & Regulations

This MSAA/MIAA statewide minimum standard is not intended to render “guilt by association”, e.g. many student athletes might be present at a party where only a few violate this standard. This rule represents only a minimum standard upon which schools may develop more stringent requirements.

If a student in violation of this rule is unable to participate in interscholastic sports/activities due to injury or academics, the penalty will not take effect until that student is able to participate again.

If a violation of this rule occurs while the student is serving a school suspension (either in-house or out-of-school), the chemical health violation penalty period will not begin until the school suspension period has concluded.

If on the other hand, the school suspension is directly related to the violation of the Chemical Health Rule, then the suspension and chemical health penalty will be served concurrently.

Minimum PENALTIES:

First violation: When the Principal confirms, following an opportunity for the student to be heard, that a violation occurred, the student shall lose eligibility for the next consecutive interscholastic contests (regular season and tournament) totaling 25% of all interscholastic contests in that sport. No exception is permitted for a student who becomes a participant in a treatment program. It is recommended that the student be allowed to remain at practice for the purpose of rehabilitation. During the suspension the disqualified student may not be in uniform and attendance at the event site as determined by the high school principal. All decimal part of an event will be truncated i.e. All fractional part of an event will be dropped when calculating the 25% of the season.

Second and subsequent violations: When the Principal confirms, following an opportunity for the student to be heard, that a violation occurred, the student shall lose eligibility for the next consecutive interscholastic contests (regular season and tournament) totaling 60% of all interscholastic contests in that sport. All decimal part of an event will be truncated i.e. All fractional part of an event will be dropped when calculating the 60% of the season.

If after the second or subsequent violations the students of their own volition becomes a participant in an approved chemical dependency program or treatment program, the student may be certified for reinstatement in MSAA activities after a minimum of 40% of events provided the student was fully engaged in the program throughout the penalty period.. The high school principal in collaboration with a Chemical Dependency Program or Treatment Program must certify that student is attending or issue certificate of completion. If the student does not complete program, penalty reverts back to 60% of the season.. All decimal part of an event will be truncated i.e. All fractional part of an event will be dropped when calculating the 40% of the season.

Penalties shall be cumulative each academic year, but serving the penalty could carry over for one year. Or, if the penalty period is not completed during the season of

violation, the penalty shall carry over to the student's next season of actual participation, which may affect the eligibility status of the student during the next academic year.

- B. During practice, game or competition, a coach shall not use any tobacco product (penalty: same as students' above).

51. Membership Position on PED:

Anabolic androgenic steroid use and performance enhancing drugs (PED's) are of grave concern. Coaches need to send a clear, unequivocal message that unauthorized steroid use and PED's are not acceptable. This discussion should highlight the fact that the penalties for other substance use apply. Short and long-term health effects can also motivate student athletes to protect their future. Coaches should take a proactive role, learning about steroids, and then providing this information to their athletes.

Steroids can, with proper diet and weight training, increase muscle development; however, as is typical with most "get-rich-quick" schemes, steroid use has serious short and long term consequences.

Normal and equal musculature development can occur without steroid use. Although the natural process takes longer, muscle tone will last longer and does not carry the harmful side effects of steroids.

Most coaches would not promote steroid use intentionally. Total silence by coaches however condones use in some young people's minds. Even though steroids may not be mentioned when it is suggested to an athlete that success is limited only by a lack of weight and/or strength, without a disclaimer the statement can be a motivation to use steroids. The pervasiveness of the drugs that allow for development of increased weight under the aforementioned circumstances are a coercive power that is difficult for young athletes to resist without knowing what the side effects of the drugs may be.

The issue goes beyond protecting the integrity of sport. The use of steroids in sports is cheating. We must oppose the use of steroids for both health and ethical reasons.

52. Good Citizen Rule:

Student-athletes may not represent their school if they are on in-house or out-of-house disciplinary suspension. A suspended student is ineligible for practice or competition for at least the number of days (or partial days) equal to the number of days of the suspension. Individual school policies will determine the actual days of ineligibility. The MSAA suggests that policies be included in local Student Handbooks.

53. Regional Representatives

Each Regional Representative will be chosen by the Cheerleading Committee, and will serve on the Committee for a three (3) year term. There will be eight (8) Regional Representatives, two for each region of the state. Each region has one vote for each action under committee consideration.

54. MSAA Cheerleading Web Site:

www.MSAA.net – check for updates on cheerleading events throughout the season.

55. National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) Web Site:

www.nfhs.net – check for updates on “Spirit Rules” or to order publications.

56. Cheerleading Calendar of Events:

A Cheerleading Calendar of Events will be published at the beginning of each season. This information will be available on the MSAA website (www.MSAA.net).

57. Violation of the Rules and Regulations:

A. A violation of any of the rules contained herein may result in one of the following actions being taken, including but not limited to:

- a. Written warning;
- b. Suspension from competition for the remainder of the school year;
- c. Suspension from competition for one season;
- d. Suspension from competition for one year.