

CIAC Guidelines for Middle School Athletic Programs  
(Revised 10/17/2022)

**Introduction**

Providing all young adolescents with opportunities to participate, develop skill levels, and experience the positive outcomes that result from well-planned, developmentally appropriate sports programs is vital to middle level education. Athletics are fundamental in creating worthwhile and enjoyable experiences for students, while broadening their education in the areas of physical fitness, sportsmanship, leadership, citizenship, socialization and participation in activities that will develop positive character traits for life.

**Purpose**

The Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference has created guidelines to assist school districts in developing philosophy and regulations designed to provide positive athletic experiences for all middle level students. The CIAC does not regulate middle level athletics; rather this document should be viewed as a resource to guide local districts in the development of regulations and policies that are in the best interest of student-athletes and member schools.

**Interscholastic Athletics**

Interscholastic athletics for middle school students in Connecticut are considered to be an integral part of the total educational program. It goes without saying that they should supplement, rather than serve as a substitute for, the traditional physical education and intramural programs in our member schools. The purposes of the interscholastic guidelines are as follows:

1. To recommend interscholastic athletic guidelines in Connecticut middle schools so that they make the maximum contribution to the physical, mental, emotional, social, and moral growth of member school participants;
2. To develop recognition of the proper place of interscholastic athletics in the education of our youth;
3. To nurture cordial relationships among member schools, coaches and officials by encouraging optimum standards of sportsmanship and citizenship;
4. To promote a program of interscholastic athletics that will provide for equitable competition among schools;
5. To use interscholastic athletics as an extracurricular activity and not for credit in physical education;

**Belief Statements and Recommendations**

- 1) All middle level students should be afforded opportunities to participate in interscholastic or intramural sports programs. Schools should:
  - Offer sports programs that include a continuum from informal to formal participation;
  - Provide adequate and equitably balanced human and financial resources for all middle level sports programs. Primary goals of athletic programs at this level are: enjoyment, sportsmanship, skill development and the teaching of fundamentals.
  - Operate sports programs in ways that maximize enjoyment for participants;
  - Help students learn to win and lose with grace and dignity;

- Provide student-athletes with a successful experience;
- Promote life skills, such as teamwork, respect, leadership commitment and decision-making;
- Promote the highest level of participation possible balanced against a practical number of opportunities;
- Organize and administer programs in ways that encourage young adolescents to explore multiple sports rather than specialize in one sport at the exclusion of others. Middle school is exploratory in nature and a training ground for future choices.
- Coop programs in sports where the schools don't have enough kids in a particular sport should be supported. Coops should not be formed if it prohibits kids from one of the schools from participating because the other school brings in too many kids. There should be no cuts in coop teams.

2) Clear guidelines for eligibility participation in athletics should be established to articulate expectations for academics, citizenship and sportsmanship and be congruent with expectations for all students at the school. Schools should:

- Reinforce that playing sports at school is a privilege not a right;
- Establish guidelines for cuts and communicate that cuts in some sports are necessary to maintain proper supervision, safety, playing time, and instruction. And that these decisions are the responsibility and purview of the coach;
- Establish policies that are developmentally appropriate with flexibility and support;
- Create consequences for disciplinary infractions that are age appropriate;
- Establish policies for gender equality in offerings and cross gender participation.

3) Assign a top priority to assuring that middle level sports programs are as safe as possible. Schools should:

- Require appropriate medical evaluations for all student-athletes to determine that they are physically fit to play;
- Establish policies that appropriately match athletes regarding practice, length of athletic contests, age, and physical maturity;
- Ensure safe, well-maintained equipment, playing fields and facilities for all athletic competitions and practice.

4) Coaches, parents and other adults associated with middle level athletics should be positive role models for student-athletes. Schools should:

- Employ middle level coaches who are fully certified per CT State law;
- Employ coaches who are knowledgeable about the nature of developmentally responsive middle level sports programs and committed to implementing them;
  - Provide opportunities to help parents understand productive and appropriate ways they can be involved in supporting their children;
- Communicate expectations to parents.

### **Required Administrative Practices for Middle Level Athletics**

Schools should:

- Require pre-participation physical evaluations for all participants in interscholastic sports (per local district) for a term of 13 months;

- Require coaching permits according to state law. A coach (regardless of coaching assignment) of intramural or interscholastic athletics in kindergarten through grade 12, including volunteer coaches, is required to hold one of the following (per CT State law):

1. Five-Year Renewable Coaching Permit
2. Temporary Emergency Coaching Permit

- Evaluate all athletic coaches on an annual basis, and provide coaches with a copy of their evaluation;
- Use fully insured conveyance for transportation;
- Require proper safety and first aid equipment for all contests and practices;
- All equipment used or worn by the athlete must meet all National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) standards and, where appropriate, meet the Standards of the National Operating Committee on Standards for Athletic Equipment (NOCSAE).

### **General Eligibility Guidelines for Middle Level Interscholastic Athletics**

Only members of the school's student body, or those enrolled in authorized public schools of choice, such as state authorized charter, magnet, regional cooperative, inter-district satellite schools, are eligible to participate in interscholastic athletics. Eligibility to participate is extended to those attending from the sending school or school from which they would normally matriculate when the school of choice does not provide interscholastic programs. The alternative schools must be authorized by the local education agency. Eligibility guidelines should include:

1. Student-athletes must meet the scholastic requirements of their own school in order to participate in interscholastic athletics;
2. Student-athletes must meet the school's requirement for good citizenship;
3. Student-athletes may play on outside teams while playing on a school team; however, consideration should be given in order to preserve time for academics and prevent injuries from overuse;
4. Girls are permitted to participate on either a girls' team or a boys' team in a given sport, but not both, in the same school year. Schools should exclude girls from boys teams when they can demonstrate that there are comparable opportunities for girls. Schools may include girls on boys teams when they are unable to demonstrate that there are comparable opportunities with the limits of safety protocols;
5. Boys are prohibited from playing on girls teams;
6. It is recommended that the student-athlete shall not have reached their sixteenth (16th) birthday. A student athlete will not be allowed to start a season or compete during a season in which their sixteenth birthday falls;

### **Physical Examinations for Student-Athletes**

Every athlete who participates in any school sanctioned interscholastic activity (practice and/or contest) must be determined physically fit through a pre-participation physical evaluation performed within the past 13 months in accordance with reasonable and prudent written medical protocol as determined by their board of education or governing body.

#### **Q: Is it necessary that a physical examination be performed each year?**

A: A pre-participation physical evaluation must be performed within 13 months prior to the start of the season. As has been past practice, the scope of that evaluation is determined by the local board of education or, in the case of private schools, the governing body. It is the responsibility of the school

medical authority to determine, in accordance with board of education (governing board) policy, whether or not a student is physically fit to participate in school sanctioned activities.

**Q: Who may administer the pre-participatory examination/physical examination?**

A: The administration of pre-participation physical evaluations may be performed by any individual who has been authorized to do so under local board of education policy. The responsibility of administering physical evaluations is under local control as long as such policy is not in violation of any state statutes regarding physical examinations.

**Medical Services and Equipment at Athletic Contests**

The provision of medical services and equipment at athletic contests during the regular season is the responsibility of the local school district. While the CIAC accepts no jurisdiction in this matter, all member schools are strongly encouraged to consult the [CIAC Medical Handbook](#).

**Recommended Administrative Practices for Middle Level Athletics**

- Require parent consent for:
  1. A waiver to participate
  2. Cardiac consent
  3. Concussion consent
  4. Heat illness consent

(See the links below)

- Employ certified and approved officials for all interscholastic athletic contests where available;
- Secure financial support from the board of education for all athletic programs;
- Match competitors with consideration for maturity, skill, age, size and speed;
- Adopt school rules for participation in athletics;
- Develop and publish protocols for dealing with disciplinary infractions by student-athletes during athletic competition;
- Educate parents and students regarding the benefits of playing a variety of sports;
- Schedule athletic contests on weekday afternoons with no Sunday contests or practices;
- Limit Publicity;
- Present trophies and awards on a modest scale;
- Establish academic standards for participants.
- Be mindful of appropriate time commitment for middle level student athletes;
- Communicate with school administration prior to enacting schedule changes;
- Minimize loss of school time for travel and contests;

**Intramural Athletics**

Intramural refers to a formally organized program of activities, games, and sports designed to meet the needs of the entire student body. Intramural programs normally provide opportunities for voluntary participation and/or competition among members of the same school, and also for occasional competition between intramural groups at other schools. Because participation is voluntary and open to all, intramural activities allow all students to experience the positive outcomes normally reserved for interscholastic athletics. There are many varied benefits, which have led to the goal of providing educational experiences through physical activity. Several objectives related to this goal are as follows:

- Physical development – personal fitness programs can help produce happier, healthier individuals;
- Mental development – many sports provide stress relief and require and enhance decision-making, interpretation, and concentration;
- Social development – being part of a team requires and fosters teamwork cooperation, and sportsmanship;
- Skill development – intramural activities provide an opportunity to refine specific physical skills, and opportunity that may not have been available previously;
- Leisure-time development – these activities encourage a positive choice for filling free time, which may carry over to healthful life decisions.

### **Unified Sports**

All middle schools are encouraged to offer Unified Sports programs for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities along with typical peer partners. Schools with limited numbers of athletes (students with disabilities) may join together with one or more neighboring schools in order to field Unified Sports Teams. Unified Sports is a registered program of Special Olympics that combines approximately equal numbers of students with and without disabilities on sports teams for training and competition. The programs are coed and athletes and partners are of similar ages and are grouped by ability for competition against other schools. The CIAC/Special Olympics Unified Sports program helps to foster an inclusive school community where the values of inclusion, patience, and sensitivity are cornerstones. The program provides a forum for positive social interaction between and among students with and without disabilities. As students train and compete together they foster ties that develop into friendships beyond the athletic arena, leading to new friendships, improved self-esteem, and positive changes in attitude, behavior, and performance. For questions and/or further information contact Robert Hale, Director of Unified Sports at [rhale@casciac.org](mailto:rhale@casciac.org)

### **Sportsmanship Standards Introduction**

The love of sports is so deeply rooted in our national consciousness that the values of millions of people, participants and spectators, are directly and dramatically affected by the values conveyed by organized sports at all levels of competition. This places significant responsibility on those who influence sports – school administrators, coaches, athletes, officials – to ensure that athletic competition helps build the character and ethics of participants and spectators and to promote the value of school-based athletics. The CIAC Sportsmanship Committee believes that athletic excellence and sportsmanship are achieved through respect, honor, and fair play. To that end, the committee has developed the following set of standards for sportsmanship for all Connecticut middle and high schools with the expectation that all schools will promote and implement these standards at their events. The effective implementation of these standards and the promotion of good sportsmanship is everyone's responsibility!

### **General Sportsmanship Guidelines**

- The school's sportsmanship standards should be as widely disseminated as possible using the student-parent handbook, student-athlete permission form, parent newsletter, school website and school social media.
- The sportsmanship standards of conduct should be prominently posted at all sports venues.
- Recommend having the athletes and parents or guardians sign an acknowledgement which would show that they have read the school's statement on sportsmanship standards.

- Conduct a pre-season meeting with student-athletes, coaches and parents to review the sportsmanship standards.
- Member schools hosting a game should designate specific seating areas for students, bands, adults and visitors. If possible, opposing student bodies should be separated.
- Member schools should take measures to prevent fans from getting near or on the playing area and around the players benches. After the contest, prevents fans from going onto the playing area.
- Member schools should provide for adequate supervision of students and facilities.

Athletes should:

- Accept the responsibility and privilege the student-athlete has in representing their school and community by learning and showing teamwork, sportsmanship and discipline in all aspects of the game;
- Demonstrate respect for self, coach, teammates, opponents, officials and spectators by exhibiting good character and conducting themselves as positive role models;
- Demonstrate respect for your opponents, their fans and the game officials;
- Work for the good of your team at all times;
- Be gracious in victory and accept defeat with dignity;
- Refrain from the use of illegal substances to gain an unfair advantage;
- Abide by all the rules of the game;
- Be positive and courteous;
- Lead by example;
- Maintain self-control;
- Know, understand, appreciate, and observe the rules of the game;
- Display modesty in winning and graciousness in defeat;
- Show respect for all;
- Always play fair;
- Cheer for your team, not against your opponent;
- Congratulate opponents in a sincere manner following either victory or defeat;

Coaches should:

- Exemplify high moral character, behavior and leadership, lead by example, and set a standard for players and spectators to follow both on and off the athletic arena;
- Always set a good example for your team and fans to follow;
- Maintain dignity and self-control and pursue victory with honor;
- Abide by the rules of the game in letter and spirit;
- Treat opposing coaches, teams, and their fans with respect;
- Develop and enforce penalties for participants who do not display good sportsmanship;
- Teach players the rules of the game and to respect the game, and will take action when athletes exhibit poor sportsmanship;
- Respect the integrity and judgment of officials and don't publicly criticize or question the decisions of officials;
- Be aware of the competitive balance of contests and will manage the score in a manner that is sportsmanlike and respectful of opponents.

Parents and Spectators should

- Help develop a community reputation for good sportsmanship;
- Show respect for all players, coaches, game officials and visiting team spectators;
- Be a positive role model for other spectators and your child;
- Respect the judgment and strategy of the coach;
- Recognize and show appreciation for an outstanding play by either team;
- Cheer positively to support their team; don't cheer negatively against the opponent;
- Show respect for all during the playing of the National Anthem;
- Any signs displayed must be positive in nature, reference only the school supported by the sign maker, and must be pre-approved by the site director or administrator of the school;
- No air horns nor horns of any kind nor whistles will be used, and any other noisemakers will be allowed without the host athletic director's approval and only be used during "dead ball" situations to celebrate good play;
- During indoor sports, no noise makers will be used;
- Pep bands are allowable at a home contest if the school provides adult supervision and the band only plays during "dead ball" situations.

Administrators should:

- Develop a plan to teach good sportsmanship within your school;
- Work to assure that parents and student-athletes thoroughly understand the school's expectations for sportsmanship;
- Recognize and celebrate good sportsmanship and address inappropriate behavior;
- Develop a positive sportsmanship plan for all activities, coaches and spectators to follow.

Officials should:

- Be fair and impartial at all times;
- Keep calm and poised and do not argue with players or coaches;
- Encourage and enforce good sportsmanship;
- Accept your role in an unassuming manner;
- Do not tolerate unsportsmanlike behavior from players or coaches.

Announcers should:

- Never show favoritism;
- Always use proper language;
- Never criticize an official's decision;
- Be enthusiastic but keep calm;
- Be aware of the influence you have over the tone of the contest.

Cheerleaders should:

- Show respect for opposing cheerleaders/bands;
- Show respect for the game officials, opponents and spectators;
- Model exemplary behavior and sportsmanship as a representative of your school;
- Lead positive cheers which praise your team without antagonizing your opponent;
- Cheer for your team and not against your opponent.

## CERTIFICATIONS/COACHING CERTIFICATIONS/MEDICAL RESOURCES

- Coaching Education Overview - Required coaching certifications, including medical certifications, can be found at this link: <http://www.ctcoachinged.org/>
- Information on Coaching Permit Renewal for the State of Connecticut can be found at: <https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Certification/Coaching-Permit-First-Time-Issuance>
- Temporary coaching permit application can be found at this link: [https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Certification/Forms/ed\\_186.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Certification/Forms/ed_186.pdf)
- 5 Year coaching permit application can be found at this link: [https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Certification/Forms/ed\\_185.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Certification/Forms/ed_185.pdf)
- Coaching Course Registration: <http://ctcoachinged.org/Permit.html>
- Sudden Cardiac Arrest Renewal: [https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Certification/Coaching/coaches\\_sudden\\_cardiac\\_arrest\\_awareness\\_annual\\_review.pdf?la=en](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Certification/Coaching/coaches_sudden_cardiac_arrest_awareness_annual_review.pdf?la=en)
- Information on concussion training and certification can be found at this link: <http://www.ctcoachinged.org/concussionpage.html>
- Concussion Renewal Form for Coaches: [https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Certification/Coaching/Concussion\\_and\\_Head\\_Injury\\_Annual\\_Review\\_for\\_Coaches\\_2022-23.pdf?la=en](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Certification/Coaching/Concussion_and_Head_Injury_Annual_Review_for_Coaches_2022-23.pdf?la=en)
- Mandated Reporter Training: <https://portal.ct.gov/DCF/Mandated-Reporter-Training/Home>
- EpiPen Training: <https://www.redcross.org/take-a-class/preview-kits/anaphylaxis-epinephrine-auto-injector>
- Coaches Guide to Dehydration and Other heat Illnesses: <https://www.nata.org/practice-patient-care/health-issues/heat-illness>
- Heat Illness Legislation for Coaches, Parents and Students: <https://www.cga.ct.gov/2021/ACT/PA/PDF/2021PA-00087-R00HB-06492-PA.PDF>
- Exertional Heat Illness Review for Coaches: <http://www.casciac.org/pdfs/22-23HeatIllnessReview.docx>
- NFHS Sports Medicine Resources <https://www.nfhs.org/resources/sports-medicine/>

**Volunteer Coaches** – The State of Connecticut Department of Education does not distinguish between volunteer or paid coaches when considering certifications or responsibilities. All coaches who are responsible for, or instruct students in any way must follow Connecticut State Law for certifications and responsibilities. Therefore, volunteer coaches are required to obtain the same certifications as all other coaches.

### For Parents

- Parent and guardian cardiac consent form: [https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Certification/Coaching/parent\\_and\\_legal\\_guardian\\_sudden\\_cardiac\\_arrest\\_awareness\\_informed\\_consent\\_form.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Certification/Coaching/parent_and_legal_guardian_sudden_cardiac_arrest_awareness_informed_consent_form.pdf)
- Concussion Student and Parent Consent Form: [https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Certification/Coaching/student\\_and\\_parent\\_concussion\\_informed\\_consent\\_form.pdf?la=en](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Certification/Coaching/student_and_parent_concussion_informed_consent_form.pdf?la=en)
- Parents and Coaches Guide to Dehydration and Other Heat Illnesses in Children: <https://www.nata.org/sites/default/files/heat-illness-parent-coach-guide.pdf>
- Parents Guide to Concussion <https://www.nfhs.org/media/1020398/a-parents-guardians-guide-to-concussion-april-2019-final.pdf>

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