

# The Hernando County School District

**2026-2027**

## **ATHLETIC HANDBOOK**

*A GUIDE FOR STUDENT-ATHLETES, PARENTS, GUARDIANS  
AND THE ATHLETIC COMMUNITY*



**HERNANDO  
SCHOOL DISTRICT**

**Learn it. Love it. Live it.**

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Ray Pinder

**School Board**

Kayce Hawkins – Chairperson

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Mark Johnson – Member

Michelle Bonczek – Member

**District Athletic Director**

Dustin Kupcik, CMAA

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If you do not have access to a computer and need a copy of this handbook, please contact your school's Athletic Director.

## **Vision:**

*To inspire and support the pursuit of individual greatness.*

### **Mission:**

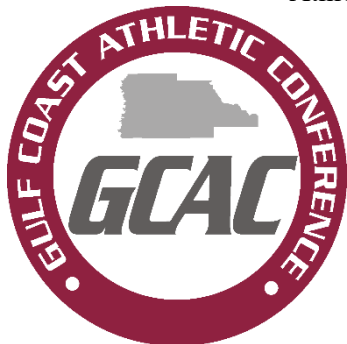
The Hernando County School District collaborates with students, parents and other community stakeholders to effectively prepare all students for a successful transition into a diverse and changing world.

### **Guiding Principles:**

#### **We believe:**

- ◆ Education is the foundation for a better future.
- ◆ Family and community involvement are critical to a high-quality educational system.
- ◆ Diverse individuals, ideas, talents, and learning styles strengthen our communities.
- ◆ All stakeholders share in the responsibility and decision-making as part of supporting student success and school improvement.
- ◆ Individuals and organizations are accountable for their behaviors and actions.
- ◆ Commitment to teaching methodologies that foster student engagement, critical thinking, and content mastery will prepare all students to graduate ready for work and postsecondary education.
- ◆ Shared purpose, collaboration, commitment to continuous improvement, and an innovative spirit are essential in effective teaching cultures.
- ◆ Safe, caring environments are essential for learning and the well-being of all students.
- ◆ High expectations and recognition empower individuals and lead to improved performance.
- ◆ Aligned expectations and policies that reflect best business practices are essential for success.

All Hernando School District High School Athletic Departments are members of the Gulf Coast Athletic Conference and all Hernando School District Schools competing in interscholastic athletics are members of the Florida High School Athletic Association (FHSAA)



## 1. Foreword:

This handbook has been prepared to present in brief form, the purpose and content of the athletic program and its compliance with state governing body rules. It includes those general areas that will help the reader become acquainted with the rules and regulations of the program. Specific rules and regulations will differ from sport to sport. Its intent is to lay a standard foundation so that parents/guardians and student-athletes will know what is expected regardless of what sport in which the student-athlete participates. Final interpretation of the rules will be made by the coach, athletic director and principal of the school. This handbook is designed to set forth minimum standards for student-athletes in all of the Hernando County Schools. A complete copy of all state governing body regulations is available online via the <http://www.fhsaa.com/> website.

## 2. Athletic Philosophy:

The philosophy of athletics in Hernando County is such that athletics is considered an integral part of the school's educational program that provides experiences which are beneficial to boys and girls physically, mentally, socially and emotionally. The element of competition and winning, though it exists, is controlled to the point that it does not determine the nature of the program. This is considered to be educationally and psychologically sound because of the training it offers for living in a competitive society. Students are stimulated to want to win and excel, but the elements of good sportsmanship prevail, at all times, to enhance the fun and educational values of competition.

## 3. Objectives of the athletic program are:

### *Lead, Compete, Excel*

#### *Lead:*

We believe in the power of interscholastic sports. We believe in building leaders of today and tomorrow by fostering positive character traits, leadership and life skills through the vehicle of school-based athletic competition.

It is the goal of Hernando School District Athletics to develop the following:

- Teamwork
- Critical Thinking Skills
- Communication Skills
- Stress Management Skills
- Better Total Health & Physical Fitness
- The Desire & Drive to Succeed
- Moral & Ethical Standards
- Self-Discipline
- Accountability
- Emotional Maturity
- Hard Work & Commitment
- Social Competence
- Respect For Others & For Authority
- Perseverance
- The Ability to Win with Humility & To Lose with Dignity

We expect ALL of our Hernando School District student-athletes to be leaders in their school, in their sport and in their community.

***Compete:***

We expect ALL of our student-athletes and athletic programs to compete with pride, sportsmanship and in accordance with all Hernando School District & FHSAA Policies and Bylaws.

We expect ALL of our student-athletes and athletic programs to compete with respect for the officials and their opponents, as well as for love of the game.

We expect ALL of our student-athletes to compete to the best of their own abilities. Nothing more, nothing less.

We expect ALL of our athletic programs to strive to be competitive at the county, conference, district and state levels.

***Excel:***

We are dedicated to creating an environment that provides opportunities for student-athletes to strive for excellence. It is the goal of Hernando School District Athletics for each and every student-athlete to excel in the classroom, in their sport and ultimately in life.

In the classroom...

- Provide student-athletes with support systems to promote academic success and on-time graduation.
- Provide those student-athletes interested in advancing their academic and athletic careers beyond high school, the resources and guidance to do so.
- Support school and district based academic initiatives.

In their sport...

- Employ athletic staff that encompasses integrity, knowledge, skill and leadership qualities that enable programs of mental, moral, and physical benefit to student-athletes.
- Provide student-athletes with adequate practice and competition facilities and equipment as well as proper medical supervision.
- Provide a variety of athletic opportunities to compete at the county, conference, district and state level.
- Run a program that is in compliance with Hernando School District & FHSAA policies and bylaws.

In life...

- Enhance community within the general student body, faculty and staff.
- Strengthen the relationship between our school-based athletic programs, alumni and our community.
- Coach the whole student-athlete (mentally, physically, emotionally and socially) while stressing the importance of respect, teamwork, perseverance, character, integrity, hard work and commitment.
- Provide opportunities to lead and to serve in their sport, on their campus and in their community.

## Requirements of This Handbook:

**The provisions stated in this Student Athletic Handbook are in effect on a 24-hours per day, 7-days per week basis all year.** Additional procedures and guidelines governing sports may be developed by the principal and/or their designee. Individual coaches' specific rules must be submitted to the principal and athletic director for approval. These additional procedures, guidelines and/or rules may be more stringent with administrative approval but cannot be more lenient.

Coaches are required to schedule a parent/guardian meeting before each season begins and communicate the date, time and location of the meeting to their onsite AD. Parents/guardians are encouraged to ask for interpretation of the material in this handbook and the coach's expectations. Copies of practice schedules and athletic contests will be distributed to parents/guardians. These meetings will be scheduled at times for the largest attendance possible and advertised by the coach.

# General Rules for Participation and Athletic Eligibility

All interscholastic athletics are meant to contribute to the overall academic excellence achieved by a student participant. The following rules and consequences are seen as the basic conditions that must be met by a student who wishes to represent his or her school through interscholastic competitions:

1. Athletic Eligibility/Transfers: Current information relative to athletic eligibility and transfers, including good cause, can be found on the FHSAA website at <http://www.fhsaa.com/>. Other provisions regarding eligibility shall be as provided by applicable Board Policy, the Code of Student Conduct, the Student Progression Plan and Florida Statute.
2. All high school student-athletes must maintain an overall cumulative, unweighted 2.0 GPA. This is based off of the previous semester's final, posted cumulative, unweighted GPA. For the first semester, whatever cumulative unweighted GPA is posted by the district on the first day of school will be what a student-athlete's first semester academic eligibility will be based off of. Second semester academic eligibility is based off of the cumulative unweighted GPA that is posted by the district after grades are finalized in January. All incoming 9<sup>th</sup> graders are academically eligible for their first semester. See FHSAA Policy 9.4.1
3. All middle school student-athletes must maintain a 2.0 GPA each semester. This is based off of the previous semester's final, posted, unweighted GPA. For the first semester, the unweighted GPA that is posted by the district on the first day of school will be what a student-athlete's first semester academic eligibility will be based off of. Second semester academic eligibility is based off of the unweighted GPA that is posted by the district after grades are finalized in January. All incoming 6<sup>th</sup> graders are academically eligible for their first semester. See FHSAA Policy 9.4.1
4. If a student-athlete is making up credits and/or trying to improve their GPA over the summer, all coursework must be 100% completed and submitted prior to the first day of school in order for it to be calculated into the first semester's posted GPA for FHSAA academic eligibility purposes. See FHSAA Policies 9.4.3 and 9.4.5.
5. If a student-athlete starts a semester off academically ineligible or eligible, they will remain as such for that entire semester. See FHSAA Policy 9.4.6 as it pertains to a change in eligibility status.
6. A student must be reported as present for the entire school day (all class periods) in order to participate in interscholastic competitions and practices. Exceptions may only be approved by the principal or principal's designee.
7. Per the Student Progression Plan, based on the number of unexcused absences, Middle School Students grade (6-8) and High School Students grade (9 – 12) must not have more than 9 unexcused absences per semester, or more than 4 unexcused absences per semester for schools that utilize block scheduling (in each class period) in order to maintain privileges and participate in extracurricular events, including athletics. Students may attend practices if they become ineligible due to attendance but may not compete until HCSD attendance eligibility requirements are met.
8. Per the Student Progression Plan, based on the number of combined unexcused late arrivals to school and/or unexcused early dismissals from school, a student must have a combined 9 or less unexcused late arrivals to schools and/or unexcused early dismissal from schools per semester, in order to maintain privileges and participate in extracurricular events, including athletics. Students may attend practices if they become ineligible due to this attendance requirement but may not compete until HCSD attendance eligibility requirements are met.

9. If a student is assigned to In-School Suspension (ISS) for the entire school day or during the school day for a referable offense, he or she will be unable to participate in interscholastic competitions on the day(s) on which he or she is assigned. If the assignment to ISS includes a Friday and Monday, the student will be unable to participate in interscholastic competitions on the weekend. Students may attend practices while assigned to In-School Suspension (ISS) with approval of school administration. Therefore, if a student-athlete competes on the day(s) they are assigned to ISS, the individual and/or team will forfeit the game(s)/competition(s) in which the ineligible student competed.
10. Students assigned to Out-of-School Suspension (OSS) will be ineligible to participate in practices and interscholastic competitions on the day(s) on which he or she is assigned. If the assignment to OSS includes a Friday and Monday, the student will be unable to participate in interscholastic competitions and/or practices on the weekend. Students assigned to OSS are not allowed to be on schoolboard property on the day(s) on which he or she is assigned, per HCSD Student Code of Conduct. Therefore, if a student-athlete competes on the day(s) they are assigned to OSS, the individual and/or team will forfeit the game(s)/competition(s) in which that ineligible student-athlete competed.
  - a. Middle School students who miss tryouts due to serving OSS stemming from a Level 3 SESIR coded offence or higher, will not be afforded an alternate tryout.
11. Students placed on 45 days home instruction through an IEP committee, will be ineligible to participate in practices and interscholastic competitions during the 45 days home instruction. Students placed on 45 days home instruction are not allowed to be on school board property. Students may not return to practice and/or competition until their 45 days home instruction is completed. An IEP meeting must be held to return them from home instruction to their assigned school. Therefore, if a student-athlete competes during their 45 days home instruction, the individual and/or team will forfeit the game(s)/competition(s) in which that ineligible student-athlete competed.
12. If a student is arrested on or off campus and/or charged with a felony, or a delinquent act that would be a felony if committed by an adult, the student will be suspended from and deemed ineligible to participate in extracurricular activities, including athletics, for no less than 90 school days from the date the school becomes aware of the violation. The suspension may be lifted if the charges are dropped or a not guilty finding is entered into the court record. Hernando County School officials will complete an investigation per HCSD Student Code of Conduct and rule on further participation. If a student is arrested for any other offense, they will be suspended pending a determination by administration at the school.
13. A student-athlete found in possession, using, or buying tobacco, vaping products, alcohol, or drugs in any form will be suspended from all interscholastic practices, competitions or performances for a length of time corresponding to the HCSD Student Code of Conduct.
  - a. Per Student Code of Conduct, the student-athlete must be enrolled and complete the approved substance abuse or tobacco abuse program (depending on nature of offense) through the HCSD's Substance Abuse Educator. **Failure to complete the substance or tobacco abuse program will result in dismissal from all athletics for the remainder of the school year.** (Please note, if scheduled time for student-athlete's attendance to Substance Abuse Education Program is after the minimum suspension has been served, the student-athlete may return to practice, competition. However, the above consequences do apply for student's failure to attend the Substance Program at the scheduled time. These programs are not rescheduled, and the student-athlete must attend on scheduled dates).
  - b. A second offence in the same school year, will result in a student's dismissal from all athletics for the remainder of the school year. The student will not be allowed to continue to be a part of the athletic program or a team in any capacity.

- c. Students caught selling or distributing tobacco/vaping products will be removed from athletic participation for 90 school days. These days will be carried over to the next school if the time frame calls for it. This suspension does not apply to summer workouts/conditioning.
  - d. **Students caught selling or distributing drugs/alcohol products will be removed from athletic participation for one calendar year.**
14. A student-athlete who checks out school equipment and/or uniform(s) is responsible for the equipment and/or uniform(s). The student-athlete is expected to keep equipment and/or uniform(s) clean and in good condition. Loss of any equipment and/or uniform(s) is the student-athlete's financial obligation. Failure to pay for any lost or damaged equipment and/or uniform(s) will result in the issuance of a notice of obligation. In high school, said notice(s) of obligation must be satisfied by the end of the current school year. If left unsatisfied, student-athletes may not be allowed to compete the following school year. If the student-athlete is a senior, they may not be able to participate in graduation activities. In middle school, said notice(s) of obligation must be satisfied before starting their next sport. If left unsatisfied, student-athletes may not be allowed to compete in their next sport.
15. Student-athletes participating in 11-man football, are required to wear school-issued football helmets in practice and in games unless a parent/guardian personally supplies a football helmet that meets the criteria below and agrees to the following:
- a. For initial use and approval, the parent/guardian must provide documentation that the helmet is brand new and has never been used.
  - b. The helmet must meet all NFHS, FHSAA and NOCSAE rules and standards.
  - c. Before each season, the helmet must be fitted on the student-athlete and inspected by a coach or appropriate school-based personnel.
    - i. A coach or other appropriate school-based personnel may deny use of personal equipment at any time should he/she determine the equipment does not fit correctly, is unsafe or out of compliance with any NFHS, FHSAA or NOCSAE rules and standards.
  - d. After each FHSAA sanctioned season of use, the helmet must be reconditioned by the school and follow the same rigorous reconditioning timeline, process and standards as all the other school issued helmets.
  - e. Failure to meet any of the above criteria will result in denial of the use of the personal helmet.
- NOTE: All school issued or personally supplied sports related safety equipment(including but not limited to helmets, head gear, mouth pieces, shin guards and other protective padding) utilized by a student-athlete in practice or games, must meet all NFHS, FHSAA and NOCSAE rules and standards.
16. If a student-athlete quits a team or is removed from a team for disciplinary reasons, said student-athlete must return all checked out equipment and/or uniform(s) before they will be allowed to participate in another sport. Said student-athlete must also be approved to start another sport by both the vacated sport's coach and the receiving sport's coach. The Athletic Director and Principal reserve the right to make the final decision on said student-athlete's ability to start a new sport.
17. Student-athletes competing in a respective sport's season are expected to finish out said season and fulfill their obligations to that team through the postseason. Said student-athletes must be afforded a tryout at the conclusion of the proceeding sport's season. (For example, a fall sport student-athlete finishing their fall season, must be afforded a tryout for a winter sport regardless of when their fall sport's season concluded).

18. While we recognize the significance and importance of club/travel teams (including, but not limited to AAU, USSSA, etc.), we strongly discourage the participation in such teams during the respective sport's sanctioned FHSAA season(s). Doing so can often lead to overuse injuries, unreported injuries, unnecessary stress and burnout, technique and scheme confusion, as well as major scheduling conflicts. If a student-athlete chooses to participate in a club/travel team during the same time as their sanctioned, FHSAA school affiliated season, the school team shall take priority for the entirety of the sanctioned season. If there is a conflict of a practice or game between the club/travel team and the school team, the school team shall take priority. Any absence from the student -athlete's school team practice or a competition (because of their participation in a club/travel team), will be considered an unexcused absence. Unexcused absences or chronic absenteeism may result in, but not limited to, forfeited, or diminished playing time or potential dismissal from the team.
19. Student-athletes, parents and/or guardians should refrain from using social media of any kind to post any negative or inappropriate comments about a team, specific players, coaches, opponents, officials or school personnel. Doing so may result in disciplinary action and/or removal from the team.
20. Non-traditional student-athletes must adhere to all FHSAA policies, meet the same proof of residency requirements as traditional student-athletes and will be required to submit additional non-traditional student-specific paperwork prior to any interscholastic athletic participation per FHSAA Policy.
21. A student will be ineligible until deemed eligible by administration and/or FHSAA when it is found that the student or parent falsifies documents or accepts a prohibited benefit. Hernando County School officials reserve the right to verify residence and investigate allegations.
22. Per FHSAA Policy 9.9.4, Student-athletes may profit off of their Name, Image and Likeness(NIL) and engage in NIL agreements. However, these agreements must be reported to the FHSAA within five business days of signing a NIL agreement. Student-athletes are prohibited from making any reference to and will not otherwise use or authorize others to use the uniforms, logos, mascots, insignia, or identifying marks of a member school, the FHSAA, the NFHS, and/or any FHSAA, NFHS, or member school event, game, or championship when engaging in any NIL activity. Student-athletes will be prohibited from monetizing their Name, Image, and Likeness with the use of their school's uniform, equipment, logo, name, proprietary patents, products, and/or copyrights associated with an FHSAA member school, NFHS, and/or school district, either in public, print, or social media platforms, unless granted authorization by prior written consent from the superintendent.
23. sportsYou is the official communication app for all HCS D athletic programs. sportsYou is the only district approved platform for coaches to communicate with student-athletes and parents/guardians. Use of any other communication app is prohibited.

**College Bound Student-Athletes:** Student-athletes that aspire to further their academic and athletic careers at the collegiate level must meet rigorous academic requirements to be eligible for scholarship opportunities, some of which may be above and beyond normal graduation requirements. For information on the requirements, please visit the links below:

NCAA – DI, DII and DIII

<https://web1.ncaa.org/hsportal/exec/links?linksSubmit=ShowActiveLinks>

NAIA

<https://play.mynaia.org/>

NJCAA – Junior College

<https://www.njcaa.org/eligibility/index>

Students-athletes, along with their parents/guardians, can also utilize their HonestGame profile to monitor their NCAA Academic Eligibility and progress.

**NOTE:** The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) schools through which students receive athletic scholarships, do not recognize courses, credits, or grades that were earned based on less than the full completion of a semester course. Therefore, Edgenuity and/or similar credit recovery programs may not be recognized by the NCAA.

**Adding Sanctioned Sports** - Should a school or schools have the desire and backing to add a new, additional sport for FHSAA sanctioned competition, it must first submit a request to the District Athletic Director and then be approved in order to submit for FHSAA sanctioned competition.

**Sideline Cheer** - While sideline cheer is not a recognized, sanctioned FHSAA sport and is considered a school club, it is overseen by each school's AD. All sideline cheerleaders must meet the same requirements and expectations as all other student-athletes of FHSAA sanctioned sports. This includes but is not limited to the entire Athletic Clearance process as well as academic, attendance and behavioral requirements and expectations. Participation or non-participation in Sideline Cheer shall not be used as a prerequisite for participation in Competitive Cheer. Sideline Cheer and Competitive Cheer are two separate teams.

**Sideline Cheer Try Outs** – May take place on or after April 1<sup>st</sup>. Tryouts can include current students, non-traditional students who would be eligible per FHSAA policies to compete at said school, as well as incoming 9<sup>th</sup> graders whose school path is that of the school in which they are trying out for. Students who are transferring to a new school the following school year cannot try out until the summer, if an alternate tryout is offered. Practices may not take place until the start of the FHSAA Spring Football window.

- Students are prohibited from leaving their Middle School early to attend high school tryouts and/or practices.

**Sideline Cheer Team Game Attendance Expectations:**

Football - All JV and Varsity football games\*

Basketball – All in county home games for boys and girls\*

\*Unless previously agreed upon by the principal or designee and the AD.

NOTE: These are minimum expectations, sideline cheer teams are strongly encouraged to attend more games and events.

**Sideline Cheer Sponsors** – If a sideline cheer sponsor would like to have their sideline cheerleaders stunt, they must complete the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) “Cheer and Dance Safety Certification” course once every four years. The course completion certificate must be submitted to the onsite Athletic Director and provided upon request.

# Transportation

## Bus/Van Departure and Procedures:

1. Student-athletes must conduct themselves in a proper manner while on the provided transportation. Hands and arms shall stay inside the windows, there shall be no littering, athletes will stay in designated seats, and there shall be no clowning or boisterous behavior or other lewd or inappropriate behavior i.e., mooning, flashing, etc. Changing of clothes will not be allowed on the provided transportation.
2. Student-athletes must ride the team provided transportation to all away games. A parent/guardian may request permission for a student-athlete to ride home from an event they were provided transportation for with an individual listed on the student's emergency contact form. The parent/guardian must notify the coach in advance. The individual providing transportation must present valid identification to verify they are listed as an approved emergency contact and must sign the student-athlete out with the coach prior to departure. If for some reason, it is necessary for a student-athlete to ride to and from an away event with their parent/guardian in which district transportation is provided, a written request from the parent/guardian must be brought to the attention of and approved by the principal or designee.
3. All student-athletes must have transportation home within 30 minutes after the end of the game, after practice, or upon arrival back from an away game. Student-athletes should discuss this requirement with parents/guardians. Students who attend a game or competition as fans must also have transportation home within 30 minutes after the end of the game or competition. If this is a continuous problem a student-athlete may be dismissed from the team and student fans may not be allowed to attend after school games or competitions. Coaches are responsible for supervising their student-athletes waiting for pick-up, while an Administrator or designee is responsible for supervising the fans.
4. Student-athletes will not be allowed to utilize private transportation to or from athletic events or competitions without a completed, notarized and submitted Consent for Private Transport form and the proper approval from the principal or designee.
5. If for any reason a parent/guardian finds it necessary to utilize a ride share company such as Uber or Lyft, to provide transportation for a student-athlete, written prior consent must be submitted to and acknowledged by the coach and AD. If a parent/guardian gives permission for their child to take a ride share company, the parent/guardian assumes all responsibility.
6. Coaches are required to follow HCSD policies and procedures on transportation of student-athletes including but not limited to completing the proper bus/van requests, athletic field trip forms within the deadlines requested, the HCSD Safe Driver Plan and/or private vehicle use forms.

## Athletic Fees and Ticket Prices for Secondary Schools

Middle School		
Varsity Football	All Other Sports	
\$6.00	\$5.00	
High School		
Varsity Football	All Other Sports	
\$10.00	\$6.00	
High School Student Ticket (Digital Only) - \$8.00		
<p>(Children in grades K-4 are free accompanied by their parent/guardian)</p> <p>ALL HERNANDO COUNTY SCHOOL EMPLOYEES ARE ADMITTED FREE WITH THEIR COUNTY IDENTIFICATION BADGE (Current Employees only)</p> <p>HCSD Retirees can register with the District Athletic Director for a free county wide sports pass. This pass must be renewed every school year. Fraudulent use of this pass will result in permanent loss of this privilege.</p>		
<p><b>NOTE:</b> Processing and/or Digital Ticketing platform fees may be added on to ticket and/or pass prices.</p>		
Athletic Fees		
	Middle School	High School
First Sport	\$50.00	\$60.00
Second Sport	\$30.00	\$40.00
Third Sport	\$10.00	\$20.00
Family (Same School)	\$160.00	\$200.00
Individual Cap	\$90.00	\$120.00
<p><b>Note:</b> Current (6/8/26) Non-Traditional Type 4 Students (Private School) will have an Athletic Fee of \$400 per student-athlete, per sport.</p>		

- 100% of the money collected will go to the respective school’s general athletic internal account.
- **Athletic Fees must be paid prior to competing in interscholastic competition.**
- Student-athletes and families who are unable to pay the athletic fees may submit a hardship request to the Athletic Director and Administration.
- If for any reason, a student-athlete fails to pay all of the athletic fees by the conclusion of the season, the Coach and/or Athletic Director reserve the right to issue a notice of obligation for the remaining amount owed.
- Paying the athletic fees does not guarantee playing time, only the opportunity to be on the team when an eligible student is selected.
- If a student-athlete has participated in a practice, game or competition for any length of time, and then decides to quit or is removed from the team for disciplinary reasons, the athletic fees will not be refunded.

**General Provisions:**

District, Region, Section and State events, including ticket prices and digital ticketing platforms, are subject to the rules of the FHSAA, which is the state governing body to which all HCSD schools belong.

Schools hosting preseason and/or regular season tournaments or competitions reserve the right to set different ticket price points due to the unique nature of these events.

# Sports Media

To ensure the safety of our student-athletes and coaches as well as ensuring legitimate media members and outlets are identified and granted appropriate media access, the Hernando County School District (HCS D) has a sports media vetting and credentialing process. To be admitted to athletic events, practices and/or competitions free of charge and granted media access, approval by HCS D is required prior to the visit, said approval is subject to the following HCS D Athletics Protocols for Media Credentials:

- Credentialing requests must be made at least 10 school/business days prior to the requested visit date.
- Same Day and/or Walk-up requests will not be considered.
- The HCS D Athletics Credential Request Form must be submitted online, approval granted, and badge issued prior to visiting a campus or facility to cover a practice, competition or event.
  - Must meet eligible media criteria (see below)
  - Credential applications must be submitted by each member of an outlet's media team that plans on attending.
  - Once the online form is completed, if a media member requesting credentials is working for a qualified and recognized media outlet, they will be run through our Safe Visitor Solutions platform at no cost. If the requesting media member does not work for a qualified and recognized media outlet, they must go through the Level 1 volunteer process via the link provided below. There is a \$9.95 cost associated with this application. (<https://www.hernandoschools.org/volunteer-applications>)
  - Each media member will also be required to submit a high-resolution photo, similar to that of a passport photo, to be placed on their HCS D Athletics media credential badge if approved.
  - This entire process is at no cost to the media members.

## Eligibility Requirements for Media Credentials:

- **Credentials may be issued to working members of the media representing recognized outlets in the business of news and/or sports gathering as their primary source of revenue for the purpose of informing the general public or school-specific audiences.** This includes a daily or weekly publication, cable system, radio station or network, television station or television network, or reputable online entity providing coverage.
- Reporters, photographers, and couriers from national publications, online entities, broadcast networks, and wire services that consistently cover youth sports.
- The designated representative or crew of a television, cable system, radio network, or a radio station that originates a daily "sports talk" program.
- Credentials will not be issued to spouses, guests or children of media members.
- Individuals or a crew, gathering content on behalf of the Florida High School Athletic Association (FHSAA)
- Full-time reporters representing international agencies that regularly cover the sport.
- Athlete profile promoters or video/photography professionals working for recruiting purposes are not considered media providing coverage of an event to inform the general or school-specific audiences. Requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis.
- Membership in a journalism or broadcasting association and/or FHSAA media credentials does not automatically qualify an individual for credentials.
- Media credentials are only valid for one school year and will expire every June 30<sup>th</sup>, therefore media credentials must be renewed each school year.

## Upon Arrival to a School Site:

- If asked to pay for parking by staff/volunteers, please identify yourself as media and show them your media credential pass. You will not have to pay for parking.
- Each campus, facility and event are unique but more often than not there will not be designated media parking spot(s).
- At the gate or entrance to a facility, media members will be asked to display their media credential pass and may be asked to display government issued ID at school sites.
- If you arrive during the school day, you must check in at the front office.

- Equipment bag(s) may be subject to a search for security purposes.
- Media representatives are expected to dress in appropriate professional attire, preferably wearing clothing or a hat clearly identifying your media outlet.

### **Expectations For Working Media at HCSD Athletic Events:**

- Entering the locker room area under any circumstances will not be tolerated and are grounds for not being credentialed for future events.
- Entering the team bench area without prior permission will not be tolerated and are grounds for not being credentialed for future events.
- Not bringing guests who are not credentialed media to the event with the expectation that they will receive free admission and/or privileges offered to the media.
- Not blocking the view of the fans.
- Refraining from cheering for specific a player, coach or team while attending an event in an official media capacity.
- Being respectful and professional to those around you including but not limited to student-athletes, coaches, officials, fans, support staff, administrators and fellow media members. This includes not distracting the stakeholders listed above as well.
- Being mindful of the workspaces, including taking care of food and beverage containers and/or taking up too much space.
- **Per FHSAA Media Policies, the host school principal, contest manager, and/or the officials assigned to work the event will have the authority to require the repositioning of photographers if they believe their placement or use of equipment may threaten the safety of the participants or interfere with the conduct of the competition.**

### **Sport Specific Guidelines:**

Ultimately, access to the “sidelines” is left to the discretion of the host school administration or contest manager, who should guard against the overcrowding of the sideline areas which may threaten the safety of the media personnel, the participants, and the contest officials.

- **CROSS COUNTRY:** Photographers may not be in the way of timing equipment, officials, coaches, or student-athletes.
- **BASEBALL:** Photographers are not allowed on the field of play and must be outside the fence and field of play. Some facilities may have a safe, designated and marked spot for media members inside the fence. Use of this is at the discretion of the administrator and coach.
- **BASKETBALL:** Photographers are not allowed on the court (including the painted baseline area and behind the basket/lane) and cannot shoot in front of or behind team benches and the scorer’s table. Photographers should not affect the view of fans.
- **FOOTBALL:** Photographers are not permitted on the sidelines between the 25-yard lines and must remain outside the restraining hashed lines surrounding the field.
- **GOLF:** Photographers are not allowed in any areas in which they are in the line of play or could interfere with officials, coaches, or student-athletes.
- **SOCCER:** Photographers are permitted on the sideline but should avoid blocking spectators’ sight lines. Photographers should also avoid the endline areas.
- **SOFTBALL:** Photographers are not allowed on the field of play and must be outside the fence and field of play. Some facilities may have a safe, designated and marked spot for media members inside the fence. Use of this is at the discretion of the administrator and coach.
- **SWIMMING:** Photographers are allowed on the pool deck but may not be in the way of the timing equipment, officials, coaches, or student-athletes. No photography is allowed behind the starting blocks.
- **TENNIS:** Photographers must be outside of the fence and may not be in the way of coaches. Photographers should not obstruct the view of fans.
- **TRACK:** Photographers are not allowed in any areas in which they would interfere with the running of an event and must be out of the way of timing equipment, officials, coaches, and student-athletes.

- VOLLEYBALL: Photographers are not allowed on the court (including the painted baseline area) and are not allowed to shoot in front of or behind team benches or the scorer's table. Photographers should not affect the view of fans.
- WEIGHTLIFTING: Photographers are not allowed on the mat/platform and are not allowed to be in the way of officials, coaches, or student-athletes. Photographers should not affect the view of fans.
- WRESTLING: Photographers are not allowed on the mat and are not allowed to be in the way of officials, coaches, or student-athletes. Photographer access/positioning may vary from tournament to tournament and facility to facility, ultimately access is left to the discretion of the host school administration, contest manager and/or official, who should guard against the overcrowding of the mat area which may threaten the safety of the media personnel, the participants, and the contest officials. Photographers should not affect the view of fans.

**Specific to Still and Video Photographers:**

- Photographers are not allowed in the line of play and may not be in the way of officials, coaches, or student-athletes.
- The use of flash photography is not allowed.
- Drones are not allowed anywhere on HCSD property.

**NOTE:** Violation of HCSD Protocols for Media Credentials and/or Sport Specific Guidelines may result in removal from the school site at the discretion of school administration and/or game manager.

**NOTE:** There is to be no rebroadcasting in its entirety of any HCSD athletic event or contest without expressed consent from the respective school's athletic director and/or administration.

**NOTE:** For those requesting media members needing the Level 1 Volunteer clearance, in meeting the criteria of Florida Statute 943.04.351, each individual whose criminal background screening would make them ineligible for employment with the HCSD will be ineligible to volunteer in any District school in any capacity as well as be ineligible to be granted sports media access. Individuals must self-report any violation(s) of this statute, failure to do so will result in sports media credentials being revoked.

Thank you for taking time to familiarize yourself with these protocols and for your work informing the public about the student-athletes, coaches, teams and schools who make up the Hernando County School District.

# General Forms and Paperwork Needed for Participation

All HCSD schools that offer interscholastic athletics must utilize the FHSAA student-athlete registrar and scheduling platform, Home Campus. In conjunction with Home Campus, all HCSD schools that offer interscholastic athletics must utilize the Athletic Clearance student-athlete registration platform for FHSAA and HCSD athletic paperwork collection and housing. Student-athletes and parents/guardians must upload, submit and digitally sign all of the below items and forms in order to be eligible to participate in any interscholastic sport's activities in or out of season. Student-athletes will not be allowed to participate or compete in any form or fashion until they are 100% cleared through the Athletic Clearance platform.

The paperwork, certifications and information below is the minimum required to register a student-athlete in the HCSD.

- **ECG Screening** – FHSAA Form EL1 – Revised 2/26
  - [FHSAA EL1 Form](#)
- **Physical Evaluation** - FHSAA Form EL2 - Revised 2/26 – Pre-participation Physical Examination (Only the fully executed and signed EL2 Page 4 needs to be uploaded).
  - [FHSAA EL2 Form](#)
- **Consent and Release** - FHSAA Form EL3 – Revised 1/26 – Digitally signed Consent and Release from Liability Certificate pages 1-5.
  - [FHSAA EL3 Form](#)
- **NFHS Courses** - Student-athletes must watch all FHSAA required NFHS videos (Concussion for Students, Sudden Cardiac Arrest, Heat Illness Prevention and Sportsmanship), upload and submit completion certificates as proof of course completion. The student-athlete's name must be on the certificate.
  - [Concussion For Students](#)
  - [Sudden Cardiac Arrest](#)
  - [Heat Illness Prevention](#)
  - [Sportsmanship](#)
- **Proof of Health Insurance** - Parents/guardians must upload a copy of their health insurance card to provide proof of private health insurance. If a student-athlete does not have private health insurance, or would like to add supplemental insurance, it can be purchased through the link below. If purchasing supplemental insurance, please be sure to purchase supplemental insurance that covers the specific sport(s) your child is planning on participating in.
  - <https://schoolinsuranceofflorida.com/pages/parent/1081/9067/student-accident-insurance>
- **Acknowledgement of the HCSD Athletic Handbook** – Digitally signed acknowledgement of receiving and reviewing the HCSD Athletic Handbook.
- **Student Media Permission for Athletic Purposes Form**
- **Academic Records Release for Athletic Purposes Form**
- **Consent for Private Transport Form** (Hernando County School Board SEC-Adm-021) (May not be required for all levels and sports)

**All forms may be found online at:**

<http://www.fhsaa.com> and <https://athleticclearance.fhsaahome.org/>

**Other forms may be needed, and the collection of those additional forms may vary from school to school. Please speak with your coach or Athletic Director.**

# Parent/Coach Relationship

Both parenting and coaching are extremely challenging vocations. By establishing an understanding of each position, we are better able to accept the actions of each other, providing greater benefit to our student-athletes. As parents/guardians, when your child becomes involved in our athletic programs, you have the right to understand what expectations are placed on your child. This begins with clear communication from the coach of your child's program.

As your child becomes involved in their school's athletic program, they will experience some of the most rewarding moments of their lives. It is important to understand there may also be times when things do not go the way you or your child wishes. At these times, discussion with the coach is encouraged. Communication is the key to a successful resolution, as well as support of the coach.

## 1) Preseason Meeting Communication Expected from The Coach:

- Philosophy of the coach
- Tryout expectations/evaluations
- Locations and times of all practices and contests
- Team requirements (fees, special equipment, off-season, etc.)
- Procedure should your child be injured during participation
- Duty to warn
- Behavior that could result in the denial of your child's participation

## 2) Appropriate Methods of Communication:

Situations may arise in which concerns need to be expressed directly to the coach. These types of conferences or conversations are encouraged as they provide a clear understanding of the situation from both the coach and the parent/guardian perspective. Below are the best steps of communication to follow for most situations. We recognize that there are some situations in which skipping the first step may be warranted.

- Student-athlete to Coach – set up a time before or after practice
- Parent/Guardian to Coach – with an appointment
- Parent/Guardian to Athletic Director and Coach – with an appointment
- Parent/Guardian to Principal, Athletic Director and Coach – with an appointment
- Parent/Guardian to District Athletic Director – with an appointment

Please contact the school or coach to set up an appointment. If the coach does not return your call in a timely fashion, contact the Athletic Director to set up an appointment.

### A) Appropriate Concerns to Discuss with a Coach:

- The treatment of your child – mentally, physically, emotionally and socially
- Ways to help your child improve
- Concerns about your child's behavior
- Concerns regarding injury

### B) Issues Not Appropriate to Discuss with a Coach:

- Questioning playing time
- Strategy and/or personnel
- Play Calling
- Other student-athletes and/or parents

It is very difficult to accept that your child may not be playing as much as you had hoped. Coaches are professionals and they make decisions based on what they view is the best for the team and all student-athletes involved. Playing time is the decision of the Coach.

**Do not attempt to confront a coach before, during or right after a contest or practice. A 24 hour "cool off" period is the expectation for all parties involved. Scheduled meetings or conferences are best practice and designed for resolution of any concerns that may exist.**

# Sportsmanship

## The Dedicated Student-Athlete:

A student who participates in interscholastic competitions and/or performance groups should demonstrate high standards of ethics and promote the development of good character and other life skills. A model student participant should exhibit a high degree of decorum demonstrating respect for self, family, and all people regardless of ethnicity, race, religion, gender, or physical condition. As a representative of Hernando County Public Schools, students are asked to commit to the following pledge:

I understand it is a privilege to join a team and wear the uniform. Therefore, I will represent the school in a positive way.

I accept the responsibility to show pride in the traditions of my team, maintain a safe and healthy lifestyle, and model appropriate behavior on and off the fields/courts.

I recognize that academics come first. Therefore, I commit to studying by budgeting my time and maintaining a minimum of a 2.0 GPA.

I will work hard to build strength and improve skills each year I participate.

I will always put the team ahead of myself. I am willing to obey the training rules and raise the status of the team.

I will show respect for my teammates, opponents, officials and coaches.

I will take care of all equipment and facilities.

I will THINK SAFETY FIRST!

I am thankful to my parents/guardians for all of their support during the athletic seasons.

## 1) Conduct – Behavior on The Playing Field:

- A. Athletics requires good sportsmanship and conduct; this is a must! If unsportsmanlike conduct is observed and reported to the coach, appropriate athletic based disciplinary action will be taken by the coach.
- B. When a game official officially files an unsportsmanlike conduct and/or ejection report to the FHSAA, the coach, AD, and principal will be informed. Appropriate athletic based disciplinary action will be taken. Additional school based disciplinary action may be taken by administration at the school for said unsportsmanlike and/or eject-able behaviors.
- C. The FHSAA may enact a Level 1 to Level 4 suspension per Policy 30. Student-athletes and coaches may be held financially responsible for any fines levied by the FHSAA for ejection from a contest.
- D. Per FHSAA Policy 10.4.2, a student-athlete who qualifies in a FHSAA state series competition as an individual, is expected to compete on successive levels of the FHSAA state series unless ill, injured, suspended due to disciplinary action, or for any other reason acceptable to the Executive Director. A school must submit in writing to the FHSAA office the name of the student-athlete and an explanation for the inability to compete in advance of the competition whenever situations make it possible to do so. If an individual student-athlete fails to communicate to their coach and/or AD a valid and acceptable reason in a timely fashion for failing to appear/compete in a state series event, they may be held financially responsible for fines levied by the FHSAA for failing to appear/compete at the state series event.

## 2) Hazing:

Hazing, as defined in the HCSD Student Code of Conduct, will not be tolerated in any form or manner and will be referred to a local law enforcement agency for prosecution. The person(s) responsible will be removed immediately from the sport in which the hazing occurred for the remainder of the season. Additional disciplinary action(s), such as loss of privilege to participate in extracurricular activities, may be taken by administration per the HCSD Student Code of Conduct.

## 3) Disciplinary Action:

The Hernando County Schools Student Code of Conduct is hereby incorporated into this handbook. With the exception of the areas noted above, disciplinary action will follow the guidelines therein.

## 4) Procedure on Crowd Control:

FHSAA policy requires the home school administration be responsible for the control of spectators during athletic contests and recommends that the home schools secure uniformed security to assist with this responsibility. However, the assigned officials are responsible for the conduct of the contest.

Since athletics must operate within the framework of sound educational principles, it follows that athletic teams at each school come under the jurisdiction of and are required to abide by the rules of the FHSAA, so that all student-athletes may compete under identical standards. Those who take advantage of the privilege of athletics either as a participant or spectator are expected to conduct themselves in a manner that does not detract from the educational principles which direct the basic organization. Student-athletes and officials are human beings; they are not perfect and never will be. Everyone involved in a contest may make a mistake. Competitors, coaches, officials, and spectators enter into competition knowing that errors are a normal part of an activity and are likely to happen. Even though winning is certainly an admirable goal, it is hollow if it comes at the expense of morals, ethics, and just plain common sense.

When followed, these expectations and protocols enhance the interscholastic experience for our students and ensures the safest environment for our student-athletes, coaches, referees, and our families and fans. Our goal is always to provide the absolute best and safest experience possible for our student-athletes, coaches and fans, and with your help, we can achieve that. As the preceding points are kept in mind, the following spectator behavior will be adhered to:

- Good sportsmanship is always the expectation of all spectators. Repetitive and/or egregious unsportsmanlike behavior can result in the stoppage of a contest. This behavior can and will result in the spectator(s) being removed from the event with the potential for the spectator(s) to be issued a trespass warning.
- Fans or spectators that are intoxicated or show other signs of alcohol or drug impairment that results in irresponsible and/or inappropriate behavior will be removed and may be issued a trespass warning.
- No spectators are allowed into the locker room or competition areas. Spectators are prohibited from entering the playing surface before, during or after a game. Interfering with the progress of the game (including throwing objects onto the playing surface) is prohibited. Those who violate the rule will be removed and may be issued a trespass warning.
- “Storming” the playing surface creates a dangerous situation for our student-athletes, coaches and officials. The FHSAA will also fine schools for such behaviors. “Storming” of the playing surface at any time is prohibited.
- Parents, fans, or spectators are not to confront a coach before, during or immediately after a contest or practice. Follow the “24 Hour Rule” and allow time to gather information and most importantly, for cooler heads to prevail. If there is an issue that needs to be addressed, please schedule an appointment with the coach the next day.
- Coaches, student-athletes and spectators will have a maximum of 15 minutes following the conclusion of the game/competition to exit the facility.
  - **NOTE:** Special time considerations should be made for special events including, but not limited to, homecoming, senior night, state series contests and/or other championship events.

### **Fans and Spectators are Expected To:**

1. Stand during the National Anthem.
2. Cheer *for* their team rather than against their opponents.
3. Maintain self-control at all times while conducting themselves as responsible citizens.
4. Show *respect* for opponents in every way possible.
5. Always be *positive* in support of their teams.
6. Recognize and acknowledge good performances made by *both* teams.
7. Respect officials and coaches, and accept their decisions.
8. Be humble and not boastful in victory and gracious and not bitter in defeat.
9. Leave the site of an activity--including the parking lot--as soon as possible after the activity is completed.

**NOTE:** Disruptive fans will be asked to leave the game and may be subject to being barred from future school events. Ejected fans may not receive a refund on their tickets purchase.

**NOTE:** Officials and/or School Administration reserve the right to clear the stands if necessary.

**NOTE:** Fans and spectators may be subject to a weapons detection system/metal detector prior to entering a game and/or athletic facility, pursuant to HCSD Policy po7440.

### **5) Hernando County School District Athletic Event Bag Procedures and Expectations:**

- Bags of any type, with the exception of small, clutch type 4.5”x 6.5” purses, will be prohibited at all HCSD athletic events.
- Coolers are not permitted.
- Binoculars or cameras will be allowed into games if carried by hand.
- Blankets are allowed during cold weather but should not be placed in a bag nor used to conceal other items.
- Seat cushions are allowed, but subject to search.
- For outdoor events only, foldable/camping chairs are allowed.
- Spectators with unapproved bags or items will not be allowed entry and must return the belongings to a vehicle. NO BAGS WILL BE LEFT AT THE GATE OR UNATTENDED.
- There will be exceptions for bags required for medical needs, diaper bags, pre-approved members of the media, and essential gameday personnel (school staff, security/emergency personnel, administration, student-athletes, coaches and officials).
- All bags and items are subject to search. Refusal of search will result in denied entry.
- No Re-entry

### **6) Prohibited items for spectators include, but are not limited to the following:**

- Firearms or weapons of any kind
- Knives
- Any item that could be used as a missile
- Fireworks
- Aerosols or spray bottles
- Glass
- Horns or lasers
- Illegal drugs
- Alcoholic beverages of any kind
- Pets (exceptions will be made for service animals per HCSD policy)
- Coolers (except for medical purposes and essential gameday personnel)
- Unmanned Aircraft Systems and Radio-Controlled Model Aircraft/ Drones
- Propane tanks and/or portable heaters

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Name of Student Athlete (Print): \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_

Sport(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Parent/Guardian: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Parent/Guardian: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Parent/Guardian  
(*PRINT*): \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Parent/Guardian  
(*PRINT*): \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# **THE POLICY OF NONDISCRIMINATION OF THE SCHOOL BOARD OF HERNANDO COUNTY**

**GENERAL:** It is the policy of the Hernando County School Board not to illegally discriminate or to allow its employees to illegally discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, age, sex, marital status, disability or other legally protected status in its educational programs or employment practice.

**EMPLOYMENT:** Neither the Hernando County School Board nor its employees shall illegally discriminate in its employment policies and practices on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, age, sex, marital status, disability or other legally protected status as defined by applicable law.

**STUDENTS:** The Hernando County School Board prohibits exclusion of any student from participation in or the denial of the benefits of any educational program or activity as well as any and all forms of illegal discrimination against any student on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, age, sex, marital status, disability or other legally protected status as provided by applicable law.

**PRECEDENCE:** This policy shall take precedence over any other statement in the policies, procedures, rules and regulations of the Hernando County School Board wherever such may appear unless in conflict with any collective bargaining agreement.

*Any questions concerning compliance should be addressed to:*

Jill Kolasa, Director of Student Services  
The School Board of Hernando County, Florida  
919 North Broad Street  
Brooksville, Florida 34601

**Statutory Authority: Florida Statute 1001.42; Florida Statute 1001.43;  
Florida Statute 1000.05; Florida Statute 1001.01;  
Article 1, Section 2 Florida Constitution, F.A.C. 6A-19001 et.seq.**