



FALL RIVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

MIDDLE SCHOOL ATHLETICS PROGRAM

STUDENT-ATHLETE HANDBOOK

2026–2027

The Fall River Public Schools do not discriminate on the basis of age, race, color, sex, religion, national origin, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability or any other other class protected by law.

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Fall River Middle School Athletics Program is to create an educational and competitive experience within an atmosphere of sportsmanship. We strive to develop and realize individual and team potential by promoting high standards of competence, character, civility, and citizenship.

STATEMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

The mission of the Fall River Middle School Athletics Program believes that participation in athletics can provide students with the opportunity for personal growth, to promote opportunities for all students to develop skills enabling them to think, communicate and solve problems effectively. We provide all students with a cooperative and rigorous learning environment, utilizing diversified instructional strategies to meet their individual needs.

Teamwork, the mental and physical challenges of training and competition, and the experience of winning and losing graciously and respectfully are important life lessons that will serve students well in the future. Developing good character habits requires time and effort. Coaches and parents can help students develop such habits by discussing, modeling, and reinforcing the desired attitudes and beliefs over time. We also understand that participation on an athletic team demands a commitment that

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involves both dedication and sacrifice. This is required of not only student-athletes, but also of coaches and parents.

PROGRAM GOALS

Offer student-athletes an enjoyable experience; Provide the greatest possible opportunity for athletes to participate in both practices and competitions; Promote personal improvement skills, physical condition and knowledge of the sports; Promote athletic programs of excellence that accomplish the above goals and that lead to success on and off the playing fields.

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MIDDLE SCHOOL ATHLETICS OFFERINGS

FALL

Field Hockey (co-ed)

Boys Soccer

Girls Soccer

Cross Country (co-ed)

Boys Volleyball

WINTER

Boys Basketball

Girls Basketball

Cheer (co-ed)

Wrestling (co-ed) - sites at Morton & Talbot

Wedge Season: (late February-early April)

Competitive Swim (co-ed) - at Durfee

SPRING

Baseball

Softball

7 on 7 Flag Football (co-ed)

Cheer (co-ed)

Track & Field (co-ed)

Girls Volleyball

ATHLETIC PARTICIPATION REQUIREMENTS

Any middle school student who is interested in participating in athletics is required to adhere to the following participation requirements listed below:

1. Must meet all eligibility requirements prior to the first day of try-outs.
2. Must receive a medical examination once every 13 months by a licensed medical physician, physician assistant or family practitioner.

Students will not be allowed to participate without an updated physical. All physicals must be filed in the nurse's office.

**** We offer two free physicals at the middle school level each year****

3. Must have completed and signed all athletic participation forms: Athletic Participation Form, Permission to Treat Form and Student Expectations Contract prior to the first official practice (in Arbiter Registration)
4. Must not participate (practices or games) if academically ineligible.
5. Must not participate (practices or games) in any athletic event if suspended or is actively serving in the In-School Suspension or Saturday School program for that day or days.
6. Must be present in school the entire day in order to participate in practices or on the previous day to participate in games
7. A student upon first entering grade six (6) is academically eligible for competition on middle schools teams during term one (1). All academic requirements must be met at the beginning of term two (2) in order to participate in the winter season.
8. A player must practice a total of two (2) days in order to compete that week.
9. An injured player requiring medical attention and/or absent due to illness must meet participation eligibility requirements. He/she may not participate in practice or

games without a doctor's note. Students absent from athletic practices five (5) or more days due to injury or illness shall require a medical release by a licensed physician before re-admittance to practice or games.

10. If school is not in session or school is canceled or closes early, no practice or games will take place.

11. Can only play for the school they are currently enrolled in. Moving schools during the season requires approval from the Athletic Director)

12. **ALL** middle school students MUST turn in a tracker each week to be eligible to play.

ACADEMIC ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

FOUR CORE ACADEMIC CLASSES

1. English Language Arts (ELA) 2. Math 3. Science 4. Social Studies

ELECTIVE COURSES

1. Physical Education/Health, Music, Art, A student-athlete must pass five (5) out of seven (7) academic courses (four (4) core courses and three (3) elective courses.

If a student-athlete fails more than one (1) course, he/she will be ineligible for athletic participation.

If a student-athlete fails more than one (1) course he/she will be eligible for an academic waiver.

- A grade administrator must agree with this process along with his/hers academic team of teachers.
- Weekly progress reports must be turned in to the grade administrator.
- If academic progress is not taking place the grade administrator has the authority to remove the student from the team.

STUDENT ATHLETE CODE OF CONDUCT

All student-athletes must adhere to the Fall River Middle School Student Athlete Code of Conduct.

CODE OF CONDUCT GUIDELINES

- Be respectful by using appropriate language. Swearing will receive one warning before being removed from the game or practice.
- Treat everyone fairly and with dignity and respect (teammates, opponents, coaches, referees and administrators).
- The use of tobacco/vape products or alcoholic beverages will result in suspension or removal from the team
- Any use of performance-enhancing or mind-altering recreational drugs will result in suspension or removal from the team.
- Any fighting will result in removal from the team
- Arrive on time for all practices, meetings, and contests
- Play by the rules, demonstrating and encouraging good sportsmanship
- Represent your school and self in a manner that reflects self-control
- Comply with all school and team rules and policies
- Report any injury or aggravating condition to the school nurse and coach

Note: Disciplinary actions will be taken for violations of the Fall River Middle School Athletics Program Student-Athlete Handbook. Consequences for violation of student-athlete code of conduct guidelines may also result in suspension or removal from the team.

MIAA RULES & REGULATIONS:

AGE LIMITS: A student must be under fifteen years of age. He/she may compete during the remainder of the school year provided that his/her fifteenth birthday occurs on or after September 1 of that year. An exception to this is if both schools mutually agree prior to competition.

COMPETITION LEVELS: Interscholastic competition in a middle level school will be determined by the Middle School principal and/or Athletic Director

PARTICIPATION IN MORE THAN ONE SPORT: No student shall participate in more than one sport during the same season unless approved by the Athletic Director. If a student violates this rule, he/she will be ineligible for that season and all contests in which he/she participated in may be subject to forfeiture.

This includes students playing on a 7th or 8th grade waiver at the high school regardless of their season ending before another sports' season.

BONA FIDE TEAM MEMBER RULE: MIAA Rule 45 Loyalty to the Middle/High School Team: Bona Team

Members. A bona fide member of the school team is a student who is consistently present for, and actively participates in, all school team sessions (e.g. practices, try-outs and competitions). Bona fide members of a school team are precluded from missing a school practice or competition in order to participate in a non-school athletic activity/event in any sport recognized by the MIAA. Any student who violates this standard is ineligible for the next two contests or two weeks (whichever is greater) immediately upon confirmation of the violation.

PRACTICE TIME: There will be no more than two (2) hours of daily practice in any sport, and teams may not practice on weekends unless approved by the principal or athletic director.

MIXED GENDER TEAM: 6a. No student shall be denied the opportunity in any implied or explicit manner to participate in a co-curricular activity because of the gender of the student, except as provided in part b. 6b. A school may establish separate teams for males and females for interscholastic competition in a particular sport, provided that the requirements of part c. are satisfied. 6c. Teams composed primarily or solely of persons of one gender shall be granted equal instruction, training, coaching, access to available facilities, equipment and opportunities to practice and compete as teams engaged in a similar activity composed primarily or solely of persons of the opposite gender. 6d. A girl may play on a boys' team if that sport is not offered in the school for girls. Also, a boy may play on a girls' team if that sport is not offered in the school for boys.

SEASON LIMITS: The limitation on the start and end of seasons will be determined by the Athletic Director. The following are guidelines: **Fall Season:** First day of school to mid-November. **Winter Season:** The Monday following Thanksgiving to early March.. **Spring Season:** Mid-April to end of May

GOOD CITIZEN RULE: Student-athletes may not represent their school if they are in-school or out-of-school disciplinary suspension. A suspended student is ineligible for practice or competition for at least the number of days/partial days equal to the number of days of the suspension. Local policies will determine the actual days of ineligibility.

JEWELRY: Jewelry shall not be worn. Medical-alert medals are not considered jewelry. A medical-alert medal must be taped and may be visible.

MOUTH GUARDS: The following MIAA sports require mouthguards: field hockey,

football, ice hockey, and lacrosse. In basketball and soccer mouth guards are highly recommended.

PARENT/COACH COMMUNICATION

Parenting and coaching are both extremely difficult vocations. By establishing an understanding of each position, we are better able to accept the actions of the other and provide a greater benefit to children. As parents, when your child is involved in our programs, you have the right to understand what expectations are placed on him/her. This process begins with clear communication from the coach.

COMMUNICATION FROM ATHLETES/PARENTS

- Concerns expressed directly to the coach.
- Notification of any schedule conflicts in advance.
- Notification of illness or injury as soon as possible. As your child becomes involved in his/her athletic programs at the middle school level, he/she will experience some of the most rewarding moments of their lives. It is important to understand that there also may be times when things do not go the way you and your child wish. At these times, discussion with the coach is encouraged. It is the first and most integral step to understanding the resolution.

APPROPRIATE CONCERNS TO DISCUSS WITH COACHES

The following topics are appropriate for discussion:

- The treatment of your child.
- Ways to help your child improve.
- Concerns about your child's behavior It is very difficult to accept your child not playing as much as you hoped. Coaches are professionals. They make decisions based on what they believe to be best for all student-athletes involved. As you have seen from the list above, certain things can and should be discussed with your child's coach.

INAPPROPRIATE CONCERNS TO DISCUSS WITH COACHES

The following three items listed should be left to the discretion of the coach:

- Playing time, positioning, and game entry.
- Team strategies, game tactics, and play calling.
- Any discussion about other student-athletes. There are situations that may require a

conference between the coach and player, or coach and parent. These conferences are encouraged. It is important that all parties involved have a clear understanding of the other person's position. When a conference is necessary, the following procedure should be followed to help resolve any concerns.

Call the coach to schedule an appointment. If the coach cannot be reached, call the grade administrator; he/she will schedule a meeting for you. Please do not attempt to confront a coach before or after a game or practice. These can be emotional times for both the parent and the coach. Meetings of this nature usually do not promote positive resolutions.

NEXT STEP OF RESOLUTION

What can a parent do if the meeting with the coach did not provide a satisfactory resolution?

Call and schedule an appointment with the grade administrator to discuss the situation. At this meeting the appropriate next step can be determined, if necessary.

All communication with coaches and students and/or parents should be through Parent Square. At no time should coaches be using their personal phones to text or call athletes or parents.

HAZING

MASSACHUSETTS STATE LAW

CH. 269, S.17. CRIME OF HAZING; DEFINITION; PENALTY

Whoever is a principal organizer or participant in the crime of hazing as defined herein shall be punished by a fine of not more than three thousand dollars or by imprisonment in a house of correction for not more than one year, or by both such fine and imprisonment.

The term "hazing" as used in this section and in sections eighteen and nineteen, shall mean any conduct or method of initiation into any student organization, whether on public or private property, which willfully or recklessly endangers the physical or mental health of any student or other person. Such conduct shall include beating, branding, forced calisthenics, exposure to the weather, forced consumption of any food, liquor, beverage, drug or other substance, or any other brutal treatment or forced physical activity which is likely to adversely affect the physical health or safety of any such student or other person, or which subjects such student or other person to extreme mental stress, including extended deprivation of sleep or rest or extended isolation. Notwithstanding any other provisions of this section to be contrary, consent shall not be available as a defense to any prosecution under this action.

CH. 269, S.18. DUTY TO REPORT HAZING

Whoever knows that another person is the victim of hazing as defined in section seventeen and is at the scene of such crime shall, to the extent that such person can do so without danger or peril to himself or others, report such crime to an appropriate **law enforcement** official as soon as reasonably practicable. **Whoever fails to report such crime shall be punished by a fine of not more than one thousand dollars.**

CH. 269, S.19. HAZING STATUTES TO BE PROVIDED; STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE AND DISCIPLINE POLICY REQUIRED

Each secondary school and each public and private school or college shall issue to every group or organization under its authority or operating on or in conjunction with its campus or school, and to every member, plebe, pledge or applicant for membership in such group or organization, a copy of this section and sections seventeen and eighteen. An officer of each such group or organization, and each individual receiving a copy of said sections seventeen and eighteen shall sign an acknowledgment stating that such group, organization or individual has received a copy of said sections seventeen and eighteen. Each secondary school and each public or private school or college shall file, at least annually, a report with the regents of higher education and in the case of secondary schools, the Board of Education, certifying that such institution has complied with the provisions of this section and also certifying that said school has adopted a disciplinary policy with regards to the organizers and participants of hazing. The Board of Regents and, in the case of secondary schools, the Board of Education shall promulgate regulations governing the content and frequency of such reports,

and shall forthwith report to the attorney general any such institution which fails to make such a report.

PARENTS GUIDE TO CONCUSSIONS IN SPORTS

WHAT IS A CONCUSSION? A concussion is a brain injury which results in a temporary disruption of normal brain function. A concussion occurs when the brain is violently rocked back and forth or twisted inside the skull as a result of a blow to the head or body. An athlete does not have to lose consciousness (“knocked-out”) to suffer a concussion.

CONCUSSION FACTS

It is estimated that over 140,000 high school athletes across the United States suffer a concussion each year. (Data from NFHS Injury Surveillance System) Concussions occur most frequently in football, but boys/girls' soccer, wrestling and girls' basketball follow closely behind. All athletes are at risk. A concussion is a traumatic injury to the brain. Concussion symptoms may last from a few days to several months. Concussions can cause symptoms which interfere with school, work, and social life. An athlete should not return to sports while still having symptoms from a concussion as they are at risk for prolonging symptoms and further injury. A concussion may cause multiple symptoms. Many symptoms appear immediately after the injury, while others may develop over the next several days or weeks. The symptoms may be subtle and are often difficult to fully recognize.

WHAT ARE THE SIGN OR SYMPTOMS OF A CONCUSSION?

SIGNS OF A CONCUSSION

- Headache
- Appears dazed or stunned is confused about what to do Forgets plays is unsure of game, score, or opponent Moves clumsily Answers questions slowly Loses consciousness Shows behavior or personality changes
- Nausea Balance problems or dizziness Double or fuzzy vision Sensitivity to light or noise Feeling sluggish Feeling foggy or groggy Concentration or memory problems Confusion
- Can't recall events prior to hit Can't recall events after hit

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF MY CHILD HAS A CONCUSSION?

If an athlete is suspected of having a concussion, he or she must be immediately

removed from play, be it a game or practice. Continuing to participate in physical activity after a concussion can lead to worsening concussion symptoms, increasing risk for injury, and even death. Parents and coaches are not expected to be able to “diagnose” a concussion, as that is the job of a medical professional. However, you must be aware of the signs and symptoms of a concussion.

WHEN IN DOUBT, SIT THEM OUT

All athletes who sustain a concussion need to be evaluated by a healthcare professional who is familiar with sports concussions. You should call your child's physician and explain what has happened and follow your physician's instructions. If your child is vomiting, has a severe headache, is having difficulty staying awake or answering simple questions he or she should be taken to the emergency room immediately.

When can an athlete return to play following a concussion?

After suffering a concussion, **no athlete should return to play or practice on that same day**. Studies have shown us that the young brain does not recover quickly enough for an athlete to return to activity in such a short time.

Concerns over athletes returning to play too quickly have led state lawmakers to pass laws stating that **no player shall return to play following a concussion on that same day and the athlete must be cleared by an appropriate health-care professional before he or she is allowed to return to play in games and practices**. The laws also mandate that coaches receive education on recognizing the signs and symptoms of concussions.

If a Middle School student-athlete sustains a concussion the following procedures will take place:

The school nurse, athletic trainer, athletic director, student, parent/guardian, and coach must be notified immediately (if the athletic trainer is not present it is the coaches responsibility to contact the parent/guardian).

The Clinician's Role: Medical Clearance for Return to Play

Only the following clinicians may authorize a student to return to play:

1. A licensed physician
2. A licensed certified athletic trainer in consultation with a licensed physician
3. A licensed nurse practitioner in consultation with a licensed physician; or
4. A licensed neuropsychologist in coordination with the physician managing the student's recovery.

The ultimate return to play decision is a clinical decision that may involve a multidisciplinary approach that includes consultation with parents, the school nurse and teachers as appropriate.

What can I do?

Both you and your child should learn to recognize the "Signs and Symptoms" of concussion as listed **above**. Teach your child to tell the coaching staff if he or she experiences such symptoms. Emphasize to administrators, coaches, teachers, and other parents your concerns and expectations about concussion and safe play. Teach your child to tell the coaching staff if he or she suspects that a teammate has a concussion. Monitor sports equipment for safety, fit, and maintenance. Ask teachers to monitor any decrease in grades or changes in behavior that could indicate concussion. Report concussions that occurred during the school year to appropriate school staff. This will help in monitoring injured athletes as they move to the next season's sport.

What schools are covered by this new law?

The law applies to all public middle and high schools. These schools are required to participate in an interscholastic athletic head injury safety training program. However, because sports related head injuries and concussions can have such serious consequences for students, including long term health and educational issues if they are not properly managed, the law strongly encourages all schools whose students engage in extracurricular athletic activities to include these trainings as part of their athletic programs.

Who needs to participate in an interscholastic athletic head injury safety training program?

The law says that the following people must participate in this training program:

- Coaches
- Athletic Trainers
- Parent volunteers for any extracurricular athletic activity
- Physicians employed by the school or who volunteer for any extracurricular athletic activity
- School nurses or nurses who volunteer for any extracurricular athletic activity
- Athletic Directors
- School Marching Band Directors
- Parents or legal guardians of children who participate in any extracurricular athletic activity. Written materials described below can be used as an

alternative for those individuals without access to the online training or for whom English is not a first language.

- The law also recommends that student athletes themselves participate in such a course or receive printed materials with information about concussions.

Concussion in Sports: What You Need to Know

Course from the National Federation of State High School Associations. This on-line course is available through NFHS. You need to click the "order here" button and complete a brief registration form to take the course. However, you do not need to be a member of NFHS to access this course. Go to <http://www.nfhslearn.com>

Go to: <https://www.miaa.net/about-miaa/sports-medicine>

Where can I get more information about the law?

<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/sports-concussion-regulations-faqs>

STUDENT-ATHLETE AGREEMENT

I acknowledge that I have read and understand the expectations, rules, and guidelines outlined in the Fall River Middle School Athletics Handbook. I agree to follow these expectations and understand that participation in athletics is a privilege that requires responsibility, respect, and good sportsmanship.

I understand that failure to follow these guidelines may result in disciplinary action, including suspension or removal from the athletics program.

Student Name: _____

School: _____

Grade: _____

Student Signature: _____ Date: _____

Parent/Guardian Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

COACH AGREEMENT

I acknowledge that I have reviewed the expectations, rules, and guidelines outlined in the Fall River Middle School Athletics Handbook with my athletes. I have ensured that they understand that participation in athletics is a privilege that requires responsibility, respect, and good sportsmanship.

I further confirm that I have communicated that failure to follow these guidelines may result in disciplinary action, including suspension or removal from the athletics program.

Coach Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

