

Falls Lake Academy Athletic Handbook



2026-2027

FALLS LAKE ACADEMY ADMINISTRATION

Joey Johnson, Executive Director
Jodi Pearson, High School Director
Kelly Herman, Middle School Director

ATHLETIC ADMINISTRATION

Weston Pearson, HS Athletic Director
Karen Teague, MS Athletic Director

HEAD COACHES

FALL

Mike Crews, MS Cross Country
Josh Hudson, MS Boys Soccer
Morgan Newton, MS Volleyball
Lindsay Graham, HS Varsity Cross Country
Mike Graham, HS JV & Varsity Men's Soccer
Tracey Ruffin, HS JV Volleyball
Corrinna Sammons, HS Varsity Volleyball
Chris Teague, HS Varsity Women's Golf

WINTER

Mike Crews, MS Boys Basketball
Alicia DeForge, MS Girls Basketball
Tiffany Henrikson, MS Cheerleading
Erin Rigsbee, HS Cheerleading
Stephen Hicks, HS Bowling
Christian Horton, HS Varsity Men's Basketball
Mike Crews, HS JV Men's Basketball
Brad Thompson, HS Varsity Women's Basketball

SPRING

, MS Baseball
, MS Girls Soccer
Aaron Wheeler, MS Softball
Daniel Schmoyer, MS Golf
Weston Pearson, HS Varsity Baseball
Jody Robinson, HS Varsity Softball
Lindsay Graham, HS Varsity Women's Soccer
Chris Teague, HS Varsity Men's Golf
, HS Men's Volleyball

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WELCOME

Welcome to the Falls Lake Academy Athletic Program!

Falls Lake Academy desires to help our students become better school, community, state and national citizens. Our student-athletes are held to a high standard. We hope your student-athlete's involvement in this program will provide many rewarding and worthwhile experiences.

MISSION STATEMENT

Falls Lake Academy Athletics strives for excellence by providing opportunities for student-athletes to participate in programs that are designed to develop meaningful standards of athletic performance, leadership, scholarship, community service and appropriate conduct within the educational and social environments of our school. Our programs will strive to develop individual and team potential by promoting high standards of competence, character, civility, and citizenship.

PHILOSOPHY

The athletic program should be an integral part of the overall educational process at Falls Lake Academy. Our aim is to develop competitive athletes, but not to lose sight of educational values such as sportsmanship, health, and scholastic attainment. The program should occupy a position in the curriculum comparable to that of other subjects or activities and should aid in promoting school morale.

Athletics are offered to all students who are physically able to participate, who qualify under the eligibility requirements, and who adhere to the rules set forth by the state (NCHSAA) and local school officials (Falls Lake Academy).

GOALS

- *To encourage student-athletes to achieve success by maintaining academic eligibility.
- *To develop good citizenship, honesty, emotional control, dependability, and respect for rules, property and authority.
- *To provide an opportunity to exemplify and observe good sportsmanship.
- *To maintain a high standard of positive performance and conduct on and off the field or court.
- *To teach and emphasize the fundamental skills of the various sports as a necessary ingredient in achieving individual and team success.
- *To provide opportunities to develop lasting friendships with teammates and opponents.
- *To teach athletes to work together as a cohesive unit in order to achieve a common goal.
- *To provide high quality leadership for all athletic programs so as to exemplify to students a desired behavior to be developed from each athletic program.
- *To provide opportunities for the development of a feeling of unity and belonging, team pride, school, spirit, teamwork and commitment.

CODE OF CONDUCT

The opportunity to participate on a Fall Lake Academy team is a privilege afforded to our students. With every privilege comes an inherent responsibility. The following Code of Conduct was developed for athletes with the intent to provide every athlete, parent, and coach a clear set of expectations and rules of behavior for a Falls Lake Academy athlete.

*SPORTSMANSHIP practices are of paramount importance and should be conducted at all times:

- SELF-CONTROL AND RESPECT for teammates, opposing athletes, officials, and spectators at all times. Foul language, game “trash talking” and insulting remarks are not acceptable behavior. Respect the integrity, safety and dignity of others and their property.
- COOPERATION- Athletes and parents are expected to follow the rules and protocol of their sport and should not intentionally violate the integrity of the sport.
- Follow the ideals of SPORTSMANSHIP, ETHICAL CONDUCT, AND FAIR PLAY.
- Stress the values derived from playing a game fairly and to the best of ability.
- Establish POSITIVE RELATIONS with visiting teams and hosts.
- RESPECT THE INTEGRITY and judgment of the game officials.
- ENCOURAGE LEADERSHIP, use of initiative, and good judgment by teammates.
- RECOGNIZE THAT THE PURPOSE of athletics is to promote the physical, moral, social, and emotional well being of the individual player.
- Remember that THE ATHLETIC CONTEST IS ONLY A GAME, not a matter of life or death for the athlete, coach, school, spectator or community.

An athlete may not use alcohol, tobacco or illegal substances at any time. Disciplinary action will be taken and the school policy implemented if such instances occur.

Hazing is a form of harassment and will not be tolerated. Students found to have committed an act of harassment will be subjected to disciplinary action. Team members are encouraged and expected to notify their coach if such behavior occurs. Participating in hazing is in violation of North Carolina State Law (section 14.35)

Athletes are expected to adhere to team rules and directions. Inappropriate behavior may interfere with a coach’s ability to conduct games/ practices and puts the team’s objectives at risk. (Stated on team rules and expectations contract provided by each team head coach)

Students are expected to abide by the team attendance rules established by the coach. (Stated on team rules and expectations contract provided by each team head coach)

Coaches will clearly inform students of their policy so athletes are fully aware of the coach’s expectations. Students are expected to attend every practice and competition. (Stated on team rules and expectations contract provided by each team head coach)

Spectators are welcomed and encouraged to attend. Parents, family, friends, students and community members are an important aspect of the FLA athletic program and enhance the involvement of the athletes. All spectators are expected to conform to the accepted standard and practices of sportsmanship. Lack of sportsmanship, especially from spectators, leads to negative school impressions and will distract athletes.

EVERYONE MUST FOLLOW THESE GUIDELINES:

- ***Respect officials, visiting coaches, visiting players, and visiting spectators. Treat all visitors as guests to our school and community. Represent Firebirds well!***
- ***Booing, whistling, stamping of feet, disrespectful remarks, obscene gestures, calling names or numbers of other team players must be avoided at all times. Positive remarks are encouraged.***
- ***Refrain from any derogatory comments toward any player, coach, official or spectator. This will result in removal from the event and possible indefinite trespass from all Falls Lake Academy events.***

The athletic director and the athletic coach will be responsible for determining the nature of any offense of this Code of Conduct and assign the disciplinary action.

The student athlete and his/her parent/guardian will be given the opportunity to discuss the charges and disciplinary action with the coach, athletic director or school administrator, if requested.

VIOLATIONS OF THE CODE OF CONDUCT

Student-athletes must follow all school, athletic, and team rules. Violations may result in disciplinary action, including suspension or dismissal from the athletic program, determined on a case-by-case basis.

Any school suspension also suspends the athlete from athletics; a second OSS in the school year removes the student from all athletics for the remainder of the year. Repeated school violations may lead to full suspension or dismissal from sports. Participation in athletics is a privilege for students in good academic and behavioral standing.

Along with the general policies in this handbook, each team has its own rules and contract, which may be stricter but does not replace anything listed in this handbook.

Athletes that agreed to join the team are responsible for knowing and following all team rules and accepting the consequences for violations.

DISCIPLINE PROCEDURES

Coaches may immediately discipline players for violating athletic or team rules. If suspension or dismissal is necessary, the coach will consult the athletic director, document the action, meet with the athlete, and notify parents in writing; a follow-up meeting with the AD may occur.

Any athletic suspension or dismissal—including ejections or academic probation—makes the athlete ineligible for awards or postseason honors. School suspensions also trigger mandatory athletic suspension and loss of awards eligibility. Repeated athletic or school suspensions is dismissal from the team.

Quitting: A student who quits after making a team may not play another sport or serve as a manager for the rest of the school year (spring quitters are ineligible for the following fall). Injured players remain part of the team and must attend practices and games.

High School Lettering

Varsity athletes who remain as members of the team in good standing throughout the full season are eligible to earn a varsity letter. Good standing is defined as attending 60% of matches or games throughout the season, have no ejections, no academic probation periods and have excellent behavior on and off the field of play. Injured athletes who meet the “playing time” criteria for the contests held up to the time of the injury may receive a letter.

Managers who have held the position for at least three seasons in the same sport may earn a letter. Only those who, in the judgment of the coach, have made a significant commitment of time and effort shall be awarded the letter. In cases of extenuating circumstances, exceptions to the standards listed below are permitted with the approval of the athletic director.

Chenille letter and a sports specific pin will be given one time only during their High School sports career. Athletes that play recurring years on the same team will receive a bar for each additional year.

ELIGIBILITY

Participation in athletics is a privilege. All students in grades 6–12 may try out. Middle school teams include grades 6–8, JV teams are primarily grades 9–10 (with some 11th), and varsity teams include grades 9–12.

Students may not try out or participate until all required Dragonfly paperwork is submitted, including the:

- NCHSAA Student-Athlete Preparticipation Physical Evaluation (PPE):
 - PPE History Form completed and signed by the parent or legal guardian
 - PPE Physical Examination Form signed and dated by the Licensed Medical Professional who performed the examination
 - PPE Medical Eligibility Form also signed and dated by the Licensed Medical Professional
- Gfeller-Waller Concussion Statement Form
- NCHSAA Eligibility, Consent to Participate and Release Form
- FLA Player Waiver and FLA Spectator Waiver

To be eligible, students must meet Falls Lake Academy's academic and promotion standards.

- Students in grades 6-8, must pass at least one less course than the number of required core courses each semester and meet promotion standards established by Falls Lake Academy.
- Students in grades 9-12, to be eligible to participate in interscholastic athletics, a student must be in good academic standing and meet promotion standards established by Falls Lake Academy.

*A student shall be deemed to be in good academic standing under the following circumstances:

- The student attended at least 85 percent of the total number of instructional days in the PSU during the previous semester
- The student passed at least seventy (70) percent of the courses taken in the preceding semester; and
- The student is on track to advance to the next grade level or graduate within the next calendar year.
- A student who is promoted from grade 8 to grade 9 shall be deemed to have satisfied the requirements set forth in this Paragraph to participate in the first semester of grade 9)

GRADES

Any student with a grade below a 69.5 in any class will not be allowed to participate in athletic tryouts (includes pre/post season workouts). Student-athletes must maintain a 69.5 average or higher in all classes during the season in order to remain eligible. A grade check will be conducted by the athletic director(s) on the dates listed below. At the time of the grade check, any student-athlete who has a grade below a 69.5 will be put on Athletic Academic Probation until his/her grade comes up to at least a 69.5 and/or until the following grade check. Any student-athlete placed on academic probation will not be allowed to participate in games or practices while on probation. (Capstone Project deadlines must be met during grade checks)

- 1st offense - Athletic Academic Probation until grade comes up to at least a 69.5
- 2nd offense - Athletic Academic Probation until grade comes up to at least a 69.5 plus a 1 game suspension
- 3rd offense - Removed from his/her team roster to help focus on academics

***GRADE CHECKS:**

All grade checks will be conducted at 8:00am by the Athletic director on the days provided below:

Fall Grade Check Schedule

- Thursday, September 3, 2026
- Thursday, September 24, 2026
- Thursday, October 8, 2026

Winter Grade Check Schedule:

- Thursday, November 5, 2026
- Thursday, December 3, 2026
- Thursday, December 17, 2026
- Thursday, January 28, 2027
- Thursday, February 18, 2027 (only HS Winter Sports)

Spring Grade Check Schedule:

- Thursday, March 11, 2027
- Thursday, April 8, 2027
- Thursday, April 29, 2027
- Thursday, May 13, 2027 (only HS Spring Sports)

PRACTICE & GAME REGULATIONS

***OFF-SEASON & SUMMER PRACTICE:**

The sports season for a school is defined as that period of time that begins with the opening date of practice (as called for by each individual school) and goes through the last regular season or playoff game in a particular sport. By defining the length of each sport's season, an attempt has been made to provide balance to the athletic calendar so that students have an opportunity to compete in a variety of sports throughout the school year.

Falls Lake Academy follows NCHSAA guidelines for off-season skill development practices in all sports. Skill development sessions are allowed but shall not be held during any try-out period of an in-season sport, this includes the weight room. Sessions are not allowed during Dead Periods as defined by the NCHSAA each year. Sessions are also not allowed during the last five student days of 1st semester and the last ten student days of the 2nd semester. All skill development sessions must be voluntary and open to all eligible students. At no time may a coach require students of any off-season skill development sessions as a measure of continued participation on a team. Any coach who promotes the idea that taking part in off-season practice is required, is blatantly out of compliance with the intent and purpose of this rule.

A student must be eligible under NCHSAA guidelines to take part in out-of-season sessions, and those involved in out-of-season sessions are not covered by the NCHSAA catastrophic insurance policy. Student insurance is strongly recommended for all those involved in athletics, in-season or out-of-season.

Facilities may be used for out-of-season athletic play on a strictly voluntary basis, open to all students and required of none. For safety purposes, school administrators or other school personnel should be present as supervisors of this free play. While facilities are being used for out-of-season play, they may not be used for individual skill development sessions.

Any individual who coaches at an NCHSAA member high school, head or assistant, paid or non-paid, faculty or non-faculty, parent volunteer, etc., must abide by the skill development, out-of-season workout rules. If a high school coach, regardless of the sport he or she coaches at the high school, also coaches an “outside” or “club” team, whether head or assistant, and has any athletes from the high school on that outside team, he cannot work with any of them during a dead period, and is limited to no more than the sport-specified limit of them per day in an out-of-season workout.

During the summer, coaches are free to work with individual or multiple players, from their school or their feeder schools, conduct practices, etc. On July 29th, the fall sports season begins, and those restrictions are in place.

Note that the sports in season should always take precedence for facility use, etc., over those not in season, in keeping with the philosophy of the sports season concept.

***PRE-SEASON, PRACTICE AND GAME ATTENDANCE:**

Fall sport seasons typically begin the last week of July or first week in August. At the varsity level, teams may conduct two-a-day sessions. These practices are essential for individual conditioning and team selection. **Attendance is mandatory and the only exceptions allowed are late enrollees to FLA or athletes rehabilitating injuries.**

Practice and game attendance are mandatory, and it should be noted that optional and required practices or games may be scheduled on weekends and holidays. Illness and extra academic assistance are acceptable reasons for missing practices and games with prior communication with the coach. Any participant who tries out and is selected for an FLA team at any level is required to fully commit to that team. FLA teams take precedence over all outside & other extracurricular programs; therefore, team members are required to attend all practices, and games. Student-athletes are responsible for punctuality and preparedness for all practice and games. Tardiness or unexcused absences will not be tolerated. Practices are also closed to spectators.

***MISSED CLASSES:**

Student-athletes and support personnel are responsible for pre-arranging with their teachers to make up work including homework, tests, quizzes, and papers due in classes missed for athletics. It is the student-athlete’s responsibility to inform the teacher that he/she will miss class at least one full day before the absence so that adequate arrangements for completing all assignments can be made.

***SCHOOL ATTENDANCE & ATHLETIC PARTICIPATION:**

Students must be in school and in class for no less than half of the academic day, or in any co-curricular school activity (i.e. field trip), in order to participate in the activity. Excuses involving illnesses, doctor appointments, and family emergencies will be considered on an individual basis.

All athletes who are registered in Physical Education class must dress out & participate in that class on the day of the game. If the student-athlete fails to dress, he/she is ineligible for game participation that day. Exceptions & emergencies will be considered on an individual basis.

***ATHLETE MISSED TRY-OUT POLICY:**

Middle School & High School Teams: Injured, sick, bereavement of an immediate family member (parents or siblings), or suspended athletes unable to try-out for a team with limited roster spaces will have ten (10) days following the conclusion of the team's tryout period in which to make the team, unless determined otherwise by the coach, athletic director, and/or principal. Should the athlete be selected for the team, the roster will be expanded to accommodate the addition of that player. This does not include individuals who failed to have a physical turned in on time.

For All MS & HS: If unable to attend tryouts on the specified dates, communicate with the Head Coach prior to the tryout date. *Athletes participating in Fall Sports cannot participate in Winter tryouts or sports until their season is completed. The same applies for Winter to Spring sports as well. If tryouts are held before your sport is finished, communicate with the coach about a future tryout date.* The Head Coach will decide on an appropriate time for an extended tryout with consultation with the AD.

***PARTICIPATION IN MULTIPLE SPORTS:**

Falls Lake Academy encourages students to participate in multiple athletic programs whenever possible. Student-athletes are expected to honor their commitment to their current team through the completion of that sport's season.

A student-athlete **may not participate in tryouts, practices, or contests for a subsequent sport until their current sport season has officially concluded.** For example, a student participating in a fall sport may not participate in winter sport tryouts or practices until the fall season has ended. Likewise, a student participating in a winter sport may not participate in spring sport tryouts or practices until the winter season has concluded.

Exception: Student-athletes may participate in voluntary offseason workouts or conditioning for another sport during their current season, **provided that:**

- Participation does not interfere with the athlete's current sport practices, competitions, or team responsibilities; and
- The current season head coach approves the participation.

If seasons overlap, the student-athlete's commitment remains with the current in-season sport until that season has officially ended. Any exceptions to this policy must be approved jointly by the Athletic Director and the head coaches involved.

***CUTS:**

Coaches at both the middle school and varsity levels select teams based on student-athlete skills, abilities, and team dynamics. The process is selective and may require cuts to select student-athletes who best gel and fit within the team dynamics. This may mean that the best athlete does not always make a team if they are unable to gel within a team framework. Clear expectations regarding school programs, team goals, and team selection will be shared openly with student-athletes, parents, and the community. However, coaches will not discuss any student-athletes with parents other than their own child. The selection process will be based on school participation/experience, and not on other youth programs or recreational league experience. Playing time is based on coaching judgment with a focus on the student-athlete's skills, ability, teamwork, and character. It may also be unique from game-to-game, be determined by game conditions, matchups, and competitiveness of teams.

PARENT/COACH COMMUNICATION

By establishing an understanding of each position as a parent/coach, we are better able to accept the actions of the other and provide greater benefit to our student-athletes. As parents, when your child becomes involved with athletics, you have a right to understand what expectations are placed on your child. This should begin with clear communication from the coach of your child's team.

***COMMUNICATION YOU CAN EXPECT FROM YOUR CHILD'S COACH:**

- Philosophy of the coach
- Expectations the coach has for your child as well as all the players on the team.
- Location and time frame for practices and games.
- Team rules and policies. Note: These team policies may be different from team to team and sport to sport.
- Special requirements including equipment, fees, off-season conditioning, etc.
- Discipline that could result in denial of your child's participation.

***COMMUNICATION COACHES CAN EXPECT FROM PARENTS:**

- Concerns expressed directly to the coach personally, not through other people.
- Notification of any schedule conflicts well in advance.
- Specific concern in regard to a coach's philosophy and/or expectation.

There are many positive and rewarding benefits of being involved in athletics in middle and high school. It can, at times, become stressful. It is important to understand that there are times when things do not go the way that you or your child wishes. Being a part of a team requires that one give up some "self" in favor of the "team". It is difficult to accept that your child may not be playing as much as you or they would like. Coaches make their decisions based on what they believe to be the best for all students involved.

***APPROPRIATE CONCERNS TO DISCUSS WITH COACHES:**

- The treatment of your child, mentally and physically.
- Ways to help your child improve
- Academic progress
- Concerns about your child's behavior, both in class and in athletics.

***ISSUES NOT APPROPRIATE TO DISCUSS WITH COACHES:**

- Playing time
- Team strategy
- Play calling
- Other student-athletes

Please encourage your child to communicate with his/ her coach first. However, there are certainly situations that may require a conference between the coach and the parent. These are encouraged. It is important that both parties involved have a clear understanding of the other's position. When these conferences are necessary, please use the following procedures to help promote a resolution to issue of concern:

- Call or email the coach to set up an appointment. This contact information will be provided to parents. Assistance with setting up an appointment can be arranged through the Athletic Director.
- Please do NOT attempt to confront a coach before or after a game. These can be stressful, intense, and emotional times for both parents and coaches. (24 hour rule after a game)

CONCLUSION

The importance of adherence to all regulations in this book should be apparent. The community, school administrators, coaching staff, and athletic director feel strongly that high standards of conduct and citizenship are essential in maintaining a solid program of athletics. It is our intent to preserve rules that reasonably pertain to the health and safety of the individual and the orderly conduct of sports.

We are glad that you are allowing your child to be a part of the athletic program at Falls Lake Academy. We will endeavor to make this a positive experience for your child.

GO FIREBIRDS!!!