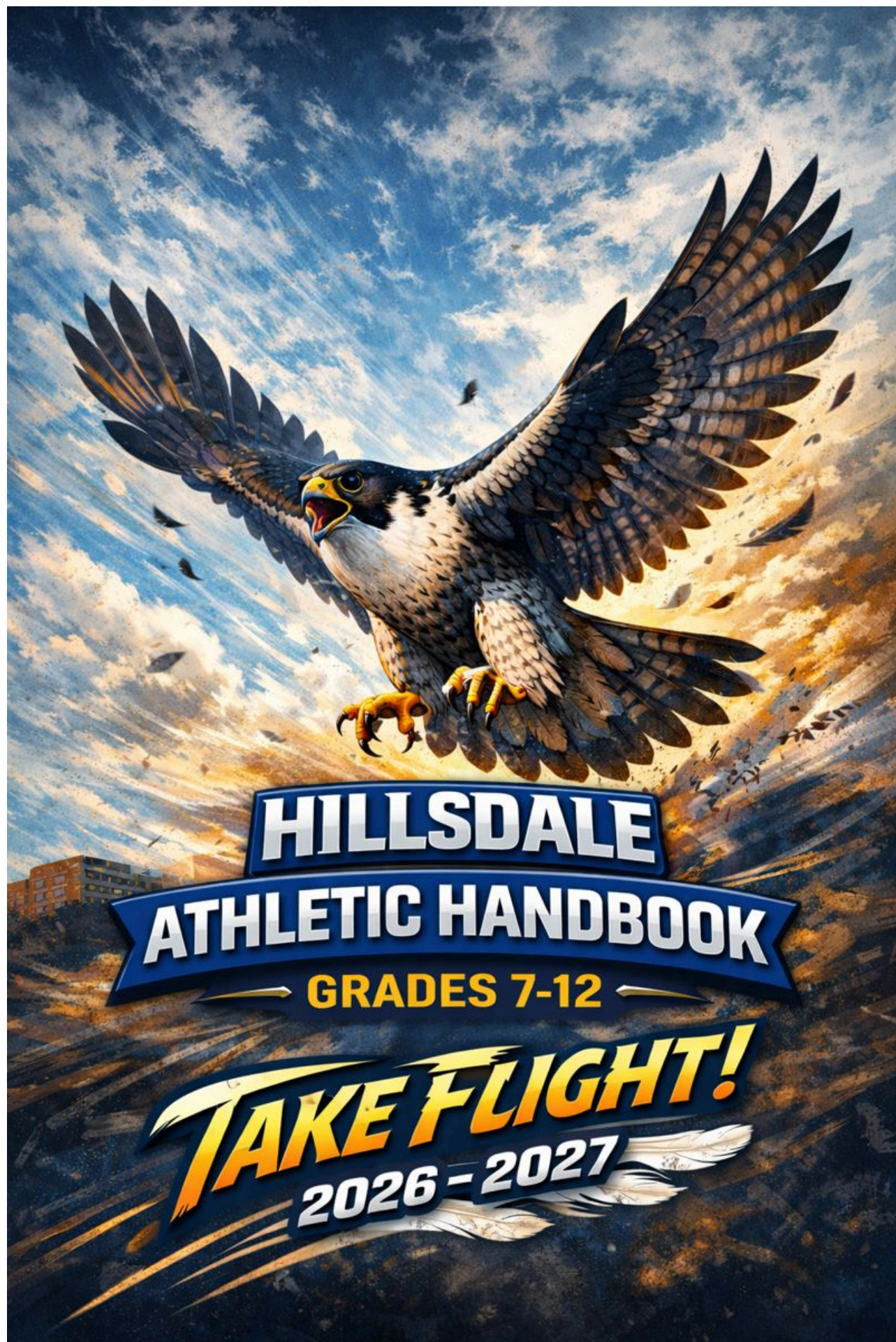




HILLSDALE

ATHLETIC HANDBOOK

GRADES 7-12

TAKE FLIGHT!
2026 - 2027

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Welcome to Hillsdale Athletics: 2026–2027

Dear Student-Athletes and Families,

Welcome to another exciting year of Hillsdale Athletics! I am proud to serve as Athletic Director and to support the student-athletes, coaches, families, and community members who make our athletic programs such an important part of the Hillsdale experience.

At Hillsdale, athletics are about much more than competition. Participation in sports provides students with meaningful opportunities to build character, develop leadership skills, and learn the value of teamwork, discipline, and perseverance. The lessons learned through athletics, such as commitment, accountability, resilience, and respect, extend far beyond the playing field and help prepare our students for success in school, careers, and life.

As a Hillsdale student-athlete, you represent more than yourself. You represent your team, your school, and your community. We expect our athletes to be positive role models at all times, demonstrating integrity, responsibility, and respect in the classroom, during competition, and in the community. Exemplary sportsmanship is a cornerstone of our athletic program. Winning is important, but how we compete, how we treat others, and how we respond to both success and adversity matter even more.

We are grateful for the dedication of our coaches, who work tirelessly to teach not only sport-specific skills, but also leadership, teamwork, and personal responsibility. We appreciate the support of our families and community, whose encouragement and partnership are essential to the success of our programs.

This Athletic Handbook outlines expectations, policies, and guidelines to ensure a positive and rewarding experience for all student-athletes. I encourage you to review it carefully and to reach out with any questions.

I look forward to a great year of growth, competition, and Falcon pride. Together, we will continue to build strong athletes, strong leaders, and strong character both on and off the field.

Best wishes for a successful 2026–2027 athletic season,

Mrs. Long

Mrs. Long
Athletic Director
Hillsdale Local Schools



Mission, Vision, Motto



Hillsdale Mission

Focused on success through innovation,
empowerment, and collaboration

Vision:

The Hillsdale Local Schools, in partnership with the
community, will build character and expect excellence by
providing a safe and challenging environment that
prepares students to be successful in life.

Hillsdale Motto

Building Character. Expecting Excellence.

Contact Information

Hillsdale Grades 7-12 Main Office: 419-368-6841

479 Township Road 1902, Jeromesville, OH 44840

District Website: www.hillsdalelocalschools.org

Position	Name	Extension	Email Address
Athletic Director	Mrs. Jodi Long	Ext. 8516	jlong@hillsdalelocalschools.org
Principal 7-12	Mr. Tim Keib	Ext. 8600	tkeib@hillsdalelocalschools.org
School Secretary	Mrs. Janet Mowery	Ext. 8508	jmowery@hillsdalelocalschools.org
School Nurse	Mrs. Char Patterson	Ext. 8522	cpatterson@hillsdalelocalschools.org
Athletic Trainer	Mr. Jamie Best	Ext. 8021	James.Best@uhhospitals.org

(Additional contacts such as teachers, support staff, and board office contacts can be found on the district website or by request.)

Alma Mater, Hillsdale High School Fight Song



HILLSDALE LOCAL SCHOOLS

Alma Mater

*Alma Mater, hear us
Sing our praise to you.
Forever faithful we will be
To our proud **Gold and Blue**.*

*Memories we cherish
Of the days we knew.
We always will stand by you
Loyal, firm, and true.*

*Years from now will find us
In places far and wide,
But ever nearer to our hearts
Is our dear Hillsdale High.*

Hillsdale High School Fight Song

*Fight, fight for Hillsdale High
Fight for our colors bright and bold.*

*Fight, fight for Hillsdale High
We're going to win this game tonight,*

Rah! Rah! Rah!

*Fight, fight for Hillsdale High
For the **Falcons** are the best,
For the **Blue** and the **Gold** and
The honor they hold for Hillsdale High.*

Purpose of the Athletic Handbook

The purpose of the Hillsdale Local School District Athletic Handbook is to provide student-athletes and their families with a clear understanding of the expectations, policies, procedures, and standards that govern participation in interscholastic athletics. This handbook serves as a guide to promote sportsmanship, integrity, personal responsibility, and respect for others while supporting a safe and positive athletic environment.

Participation in athletics is a privilege that carries responsibilities both on and off the field. This handbook outlines behavioral expectations for student-athletes, families, coaches, and spectators and helps ensure that all participants understand their roles in supporting education-based athletics.

The Athletic Handbook also exists to:

- Promote consistency and fairness in the administration of athletic programs.
- Support compliance with Hillsdale Local School District Board policy and Ohio High School Athletic Association (OHSA) regulations.
- Encourage positive communication and collaboration among students, families, coaches, and administrators.
- Reinforce the district's commitment to character development, teamwork, leadership, and accountability.

While this handbook is intended to provide guidance and clarity, it is not all-inclusive. The district reserves the right to interpret, modify, or apply its provisions as necessary to maintain the integrity, safety, and educational mission of the athletic program.

Sports for the 26-27 School Year



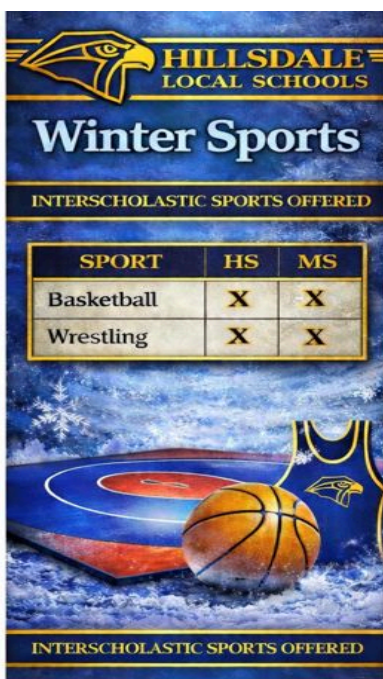
HILLSDALE LOCAL SCHOOLS

Fall Sports

INTERSCHOLASTIC SPORTS OFFERED

SPORT	HS	MS
Cross Country	X	X
Golf	X	
Football	X	X
Volleyball	X	X
Soccer	X	

INTERSCHOLASTIC SPORTS OFFERED



HILLSDALE LOCAL SCHOOLS

Winter Sports

INTERSCHOLASTIC SPORTS OFFERED

SPORT	HS	MS
Basketball	X	X
Wrestling	X	X

INTERSCHOLASTIC SPORTS OFFERED



HILLSDALE LOCAL SCHOOLS

Spring Sports

INTERSCHOLASTIC SPORTS OFFERED

SPORT	HS	MS
Baseball	X	
Softball	X	
Track	X	X

INTERSCHOLASTIC SPORTS OFFERED

Age/Enrollment Requirements

All student-athletes must meet OHSAA age and enrollment eligibility standards:

- **High School (Grades 9–12):** If a student turns 20 years old, he/she is no longer eligible to participate in high school athletics. Once a student is enrolled in grade 9, he/she has 8 semesters of athletic eligibility (4 years). After 8 semesters of enrollment, the student is ineligible.
- **Middle School (Grades 7–8):** If a student turns 15 before August 1 of the school year, he/she is ineligible for middle school sports (the student would be required to compete at the high school level if otherwise eligible). A middle school student has 4 semesters of eligibility in grades 7–8. After four semesters of enrollment in 7th and 8th grade, the student is no longer eligible to participate in middle school sports.

These are OHSAA rules designed to ensure fair competition among same-age peers. Any questions about a student's age or semester eligibility should be directed to the Athletic Director before the season starts.

Athletic Advisory Council

The Athletic Advisory Council is composed of the following personnel:

1. High School Athletic Director: Chairperson
2. 7-12 Principal
3. Site Manager(s)
4. Head Coach of each sanctioned varsity sport

Council Procedures:

- **Agenda Items:** Any Council member may place items on the agenda for discussion and action.
- **Voting:** Each member has one vote, regardless of how many sports he/she coaches. Passage of any item requires a 2/3 majority vote. Approved items are then taken to the Board of Education for final approval.
- **Meetings:** The Council will meet at least four times per year (August, November, March, and June). Special meetings may be called at the request of 2/3 of the Council members.
- **Duties:** The Council's responsibilities include:
 - Continuously evaluating the interscholastic athletic program.
 - Developing long-range plans to improve and expand facilities for each sport.
 - Unifying objectives between the high school and middle school programs to ensure alignment.
 - Establishing the athletic program as an integral part of the total educational program of Hillsdale Local Schools.
 - Directing any concerns with the program to the head coach of that sport or the Athletic Director for initial review (chain of command).

Attendance at School

To be eligible to participate in a practice or contest on a given day, student-athletes are expected to attend school.

Key Guidelines

- **Excused Absences:** Absences for reasons such as medical appointments, funerals, or college visits must be approved through the school office and communicated to the coach.
- **Illness:** Students who leave school due to illness or are absent because they are sick may not return solely to participate in practices or contests that day.
- **Unexcused Absences:** Any unexcused absence or truancy on practice or game days may result in ineligibility to participate and may lead to additional team discipline.
- **Exceptions:** Extenuating circumstances may be considered by the Principal or Athletic Director, but must be approved in advance.

This policy reinforces the priority of academics and student health while promoting accountability and fairness.

Awards: Rules and Regulations

Hillsdale Local Schools recognizes student-athletes through letters, pins, certificates, and other awards. Athletic awards are earned through meaningful participation and contribution in interscholastic contests, not simply by effort, seniority, or practice attendance. While commitment and hard work are expected of all athletes, awards are intended to recognize competitive participation and achievement. Participation in athletics is educational, and awards are secondary. Earning an award should never be the primary motivation for participation.

General Award Principles

- Awards are based primarily on game/meet participation and performance.
- Practice attendance alone does not guarantee a varsity letter.
- Each sport has objective criteria for earning a varsity letter.
- Coaches may apply limited discretion in special circumstances (e.g., injury, unique contributions).
- Athletes must complete the season in good standing to receive awards.
- Athletes may receive only one award per sport per season (highest level earned).

General Requirements for Any Athletic Award

To receive any athletic award, a student-athlete must:

- Demonstrate sportsmanship and appropriate conduct.
- Maintain academic eligibility.
- Complete the season in good standing (not quit or be dismissed).
- Attend the team or athletic awards ceremony (or receive prior approval for absence).
- Head coaches certify award eligibility, which is verified by the Athletic Director.

Scholar Athlete Award

This award is given to any athlete who maintains a cumulative 3.5 GPA for the first three nine weeks, with no C's throughout the first three grading periods.

Varsity Letter Criteria (By Sport)

Meeting any one of the listed criteria qualifies an athlete for a varsity letter, unless otherwise noted:

- Baseball / Softball: Participate in at least 50% of total innings (pitchers: 50% of innings pitched) or coach's discretion
- Basketball: Play in at least 50% of total quarters or at the coach's discretion
- Cheerleading: Complete the full season/year in good standing or at the coach's discretion
- Cross Country: Compete as varsity in at least 50% of meets, score at league, or advance from Districts or at the coach's discretion
- Football: Play in at least 50% of total quarters or at the coach's discretion
- Golf: Compete in at least 50% of matches or at the coach's discretion
- Soccer: Play in at least 50% of total halves or at the coach's discretion
- Track & Field: Score in at least 50% of meets, place in league, qualify beyond Districts or at the coach's discretion
- Volleyball: Play in at least 50% of total sets or coach's discretion
- Wrestling: Compete or score points in at least 50% of meets, place at league, advance in postseason, or at the coach's discretion

Coaches will review the criteria with athletes at the start of the season.

Types of Athletic Awards

Varsity Awards

- First Varsity Letter: 7" Block "H", sport pin, and service bar
- Subsequent Letters (same sport): Service bar and certificate
- Third Year Letter: Service bar and small plaque
- Fourth Year Letter: Service bar and trophy

Junior Varsity Awards

- First Year JV: 4" block "H" and service bar
- Additional JV Years: Additional service bar

Freshman Awards

- All freshmen who complete a season receive a 3" block "H" for participation.

Cheerleading Awards

- Same structure as athletic awards, with a megaphone pin in place of a sport-specific pin.

Managers / Statisticians / Support Roles

- 1st Year: Silver medallion
- 2nd Year: Gold medallion
- 3rd/4th Year: Plaque

Participation Certificates

- Awarded to athletes who complete a season but do not meet letter criteria.

Special Provisions

- Senior Recognition: Seniors with three or more years in a program may receive a varsity letter upon season completion at the coach's discretion, even if criteria are not fully met.
- Injured Athletes: Athletes injured after significant participation may receive awards at the coach's discretion.
- Letter Jackets: Only athletes who earn a varsity letter may purchase or wear an official Hillsdale letter jacket.

This awards system ensures that Hillsdale athletic honors remain meaningful, fair, and reflective of true varsity contribution, while recognizing commitment, perseverance, and sportsmanship.

Chain of Command

To ensure clear communication, accountability, and effective problem resolution, Hillsdale Local School District follows a defined chain of responsibility within the athletic program. Questions or concerns should be addressed at the lowest appropriate level before moving up the chain.

The athletic chain of responsibility is as follows:

1. Hillsdale Board of Education
2. Superintendent
3. 7–12 Principal
4. Athletic Director
5. High School/ Middle School Site Manager
6. Head Coaches
7. Assistant Coaches

This structure promotes timely communication, consistency in decision-making, and respect for each role within the athletic program.

Cheerleading

Cheerleading is an integral part of the Hillsdale Athletic Department. Cheerleaders are considered student-athletes and are held to the same standards, rules, and expectations as all other athletes. Cheerleaders must comply with all athletic policies, including academic eligibility, attendance requirements, training rules, codes of conduct, and behavior expectations, both in school and on social media. Violations of the Athletic Code of Conduct may result in disciplinary action, including suspension from cheering or other consequences consistent with those applied to athletes.

The Cheerleading Advisor is a member of the athletic coaching staff and may establish additional squad-specific rules related to safety, uniforms, appearance, practice expectations, travel, social media conduct, and lettering criteria. These rules will be communicated at the start of the season and must align with district and athletic department policies. The Cheerleading Advisor, in consultation with the Athletic Director, may impose appropriate consequences for violations of cheer-specific rules, such as temporary removal from performances or contests.

Cheerleaders play a vital role in promoting school spirit and supporting Hillsdale teams. Their contributions are valued equally alongside those of all athletic participants, and cheerleaders are expected to give and receive respect as members of the Hillsdale Athletics program.

Communication & Pre-Season Meetings

Clear communication and early expectation-setting are essential to a successful athletic season. All student-athletes and at least one parent/guardian must attend a mandatory pre-season meeting prior to participation in each sport. Pre-season meetings are scheduled by the Athletic Director before each Fall, Winter, and Spring season and may include general and sport-specific sessions. Team expectations, schedules, eligibility requirements, and required forms will be reviewed.

Families unable to attend must arrange a meeting with the head coach before the athlete may participate. Athletes who do not complete this requirement may be withheld from competition. All required athletic forms must be completed prior to the start of the season. Students who join a team late must review and acknowledge all required information before participating.

The Athletic Handbook is reviewed with student-athletes and families at the mandatory OHSAA pre-season meeting. Families are encouraged to use pre-season meetings to ask general questions and support ongoing communication with the Athletic Department.

Communication and the 24-Hour Rule

To support respectful communication and positive relationships, Hillsdale Local Schools follows a 24-hour rule regarding concerns related to athletic contests. Parents and student-athletes should not confront a coach immediately before or after a game or event. Emotions can be high, and meaningful conversations are best held after time for reflection. Student-athletes are encouraged to speak directly with their coach first to discuss any questions or concerns. If a concern remains after that conversation, parents may contact the coach to schedule a meeting at a mutually convenient time for a calm, respectful, and constructive discussion focused on the student's growth and experience.

Conflicts in Extracurricular Activities

Hillsdale encourages student involvement in a variety of school-sponsored activities, including athletics, clubs, music, and academic teams. While scheduling conflicts may occur, the Athletic Department and activity advisors will work together to minimize conflicts whenever possible.

When a conflict arises between two school-sponsored activities, coaches and advisors will communicate to find a reasonable solution that allows the student to participate in both when feasible. Students will not be required to choose one school activity over another unless a compromise cannot be reached.

If a conflict cannot be resolved and a student must miss a practice or contest for an approved school activity, the absence will be excused provided it is communicated in advance. Students will not be academically or athletically penalized for excused school-related conflicts.

Absences for non-school or unexcused reasons may result in consequences determined by the coach, including additional practice requirements or adjustments to playing time until the student is prepared to rejoin the team.

Clear and timely communication is essential. Students should notify both the coach and the activity advisor as soon as a conflict is known. If a conflict cannot be resolved, students or parents should contact the Athletic Director for assistance.

Facility Use, Safety, and Equipment Care

The safety of student-athletes and the security of school facilities are shared responsibilities.

Coaches are responsible for supervision and facility security, and athletes are expected to respect school property and equipment.

- Students may not be in school buildings or athletic facilities without an authorized adult present.
- Student-athletes are not permitted to use coaches' offices as lounges. Offices and storage areas must remain locked when not in use.

Locker Rooms & Training Areas

- Locker rooms should be monitored and only used for their intended purposes.
- Training rooms and injury-care areas may only be used for their intended purpose and under supervision. These areas are not social spaces.

Equipment & Uniforms

- Athletes are responsible for the care and return of uniforms and equipment. Lost or damaged equipment beyond normal wear may result in replacement costs.
- All equipment must be properly stored after use. Leaving equipment out creates safety hazards and increases the risk of loss or theft.
- Athletes are expected to maintain proper hygiene, including regular laundering of personal practice gear.

Facility Care

- Any maintenance or safety concerns (e.g., broken equipment, wet floors, damaged lockers) should be reported promptly to the coach or Athletic Director.
- Athletes are expected to treat all facilities with care and pride.

Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) Guidelines

Effective November 2025, Ohio high school student-athletes may earn compensation for the use of their Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) in accordance with OHSAA Bylaw 4-11. Hillsdale student-athletes are permitted to enter NIL agreements provided all OHSAA requirements are met.

All NIL agreements must be disclosed to the Athletic Director in writing and reported to OHSAA within 14 days of execution. Failure to disclose an NIL agreement may result in loss of eligibility for up to 20% of the season or other penalties as determined by OHSAA.

NIL compensation must be for legitimate services and may not be pay-for-play or tied to athletic performance. Athletes may not use school names, logos, uniforms, facilities, or imply school or OHSAA endorsement. NIL activities must remain separate from school teams, staff, boosters, and school-sponsored events.

NIL opportunities may not be used as recruiting inducements. Students may not accept NIL agreements tied to enrollment or transfer decisions. Certain categories are prohibited, including gambling, alcohol, tobacco/vaping, cannabis, adult entertainment, firearms, or other OHSAA-restricted products.

Student-athletes must continue to meet all academic, eligibility, and team obligations. NIL participation does not excuse absences from practices, competitions, or academic responsibilities. Families are encouraged to review contracts carefully and seek professional guidance when needed.

Violations of NIL rules may result in disciplinary action by Hillsdale Local Schools and/or OHSA, including suspension or loss of eligibility. When in doubt, student-athletes should consult the Athletic Director before entering any NIL agreement.

For more information, see OHSA Bylaw 4-11 and the OHSA NIL Resource Center.

Ohio High School Athletic Association (OHSA)

The Ohio High School Athletic Association controls interscholastic athletics in Ohio. Our school intends to comply with the OHSA Constitution and Bylaws. The OHSA has given the principal ultimate responsibility for all athletics within his/her school. All student-athletes must follow OHSA rules and bylaws, as well as the local rules in this handbook.

Out-of-Season Fitness Program

Hillsdale Local Schools encourages student-athletes to remain active and physically prepared year-round. Because many Hillsdale athletes participate in multiple sports, out-of-season fitness programs are designed to support overall athletic development while respecting multi-sport participation.

Program Guidelines

- **Voluntary Participation:** All out-of-season fitness, conditioning, open-gym, and workout activities are voluntary. Participation may not be required to make or remain on a team.
- **OHSA Compliance:** All off-season activities must comply with OHSA bylaws, including rules regarding contact periods, sport-specific instruction, and coaching limitations. Coaches will strictly follow all no-contact and out-of-season restrictions.
- **General Conditioning Focus:** Off-season programs emphasize strength, speed, agility, endurance, and injury prevention, not sport-specific skills, plays, or organized practices outside permitted periods.
- **Open to All Students:** Off-season programs and open gyms must be open to all interested students and may not be limited to select groups or teams.
- **Facility Use:** In-season teams have priority use of facilities and equipment. Scheduling conflicts will be resolved by the Athletic Director.
- **Supervision Required:** All conditioning sessions and open gyms must be supervised by a school employee or coach. Unsafe or inappropriate behavior may result in removal from the session.
- **Open Gym/Free Play:** Unstructured, supervised open gyms may be offered. These sessions involve free play only and may not include organized coaching, instruction, or simulated practices.

Participation in off-season fitness programs can improve performance, reduce injury risk, and build school-wide camaraderie. While optional, student-athletes are encouraged to take advantage of these opportunities to support long-term athletic success.

Participation Requirements

Before a student-athlete may participate in any practice or contest, all of the following requirements must be met:

1. Eligibility Requirements: The student-athlete must meet all academic and behavioral eligibility requirements as outlined in this handbook.
2. Required Forms & Acknowledgments: The student-athlete and a parent/guardian must complete all required forms and acknowledgments through FinalForms or approved hard-copy submissions, including:
 - Emergency Medical Authorization
 - Athletic Handbook and Athletic Responsibility Acknowledgment
 - OHSAA Preseason Meeting Presentation (attendance or review)
 - OHSAA Student-Athlete Eligibility Statement
 - Concussion Acknowledgment and Sway Testing Consent (if applicable)
 - Sudden Cardiac Arrest Awareness (Lindsay's Law)
 - OHSAA Authorization (including drug testing consent, if applicable)
 - OHSAA Pre-Participation Physical Exam (PPE): valid within the past year
 - OHSAA Sportsmanship Pledge
 - Fan Code of Conduct and Fan Ejection Policy Acknowledgment

These requirements ensure that health, safety, eligibility, and behavioral expectations are clearly understood. No student-athlete may participate in official practices or contests until all eligibility requirements and forms are completed and approved.

Participation Windows

To comply with OHSAA guidelines and prevent year-round pressure on athletes, Hillsdale establishes designated participation windows for out-of-season conditioning and open fitness programs. These windows provide balance, allow recovery between seasons, and support multi-sport participation.

Out-of-Season Conditioning Windows

- Fall Fitness: September 1 – November 30
- Winter Fitness: December 1 – February 28 (or 29)
- Spring Fitness: March 1 – May 31
- Summer Fitness: June 1 – August 31

These windows allow athletes who are not currently in season to participate in general conditioning or open gyms. Summer fitness is more flexible, though official fall practices begin in early August per OHSAA rules. Coaches will communicate schedules in advance.

Key Guidelines

- Voluntary Participation: Attendance is never mandatory and may not be used to determine team selection or playing time.
- Open to All: Fitness sessions must be open to all interested students and may not be limited to select groups.
- General Conditioning Only: Activities focus on overall fitness (strength, speed, agility, endurance) and may not include sport-specific instruction outside approved coaching periods.

- No Game Simulation: Conditioning activities may not resemble official interscholastic contests in Hillsdale sports unless permitted by OHSAA and without organized coaching.
- Multi-Sport Friendly: Programs are designed to benefit athletes across all sports and support shared participation.

Coaches manage compliance and scheduling details. Student-athletes are encouraged to participate as their schedule allows, knowing these programs are designed to support health, performance, and enjoyment, not obligation.

Physicals

We usually offer (through UH) a sports physical night in May or June for a low cost, so take advantage of that if you can. Otherwise, see your family doctor or a clinic. No student will be allowed to practice (including tryouts) without proof of physical and insurance. Physicals are valid for 13 months, so they must be kept up to date.

Scholastic Eligibility Requirements

To be eligible for interscholastic athletics, student-athletes must meet both Hillsdale Local School District and OHSAA academic standards.

Hillsdale Local School District Requirement

- The Hillsdale Board of Education requires a minimum GPA of 1.0 (on a 4.0 scale) to participate in extracurricular activities.
- A student with a GPA below 1.0 for a grading period is ineligible for the following grading period.
- Students with an IEP are exempt from the 1.0 GPA requirement if specified in the IEP, but must still meet OHSAA eligibility standards unless otherwise noted.

OHSAA Academic Standards

Eligibility is based on the grading period immediately preceding the season:

- Grades 9–12: Must have passed and be enrolled in at least five (5) one-credit courses (or the equivalent) toward graduation.
- Grades 7–8: Must have passed and be enrolled in at least four (4) classes.
- Students must be enrolled full-time at Hillsdale Middle/High School (or an approved equivalent).

Eligibility Review Timeline

- Academic eligibility is reviewed at the end of each nine-week grading period.
- Eligibility or ineligibility begins on the fifth school day of the next grading period and remains in effect until the fifth school day of the following grading period.

Failing Grades

- A student may still be eligible with one failing grade, provided OHSAA credit requirements are met.
- Multiple failing grades may result in ineligibility if credit requirements are not satisfied.

Ineligible Student-Athletes

- Ineligible athletes may practice and attend team activities, but may not dress or compete in games or scrimmages.
- Eligibility for competition is restored only after academic requirements are met at the next grading checkpoint.

These academic standards reinforce the district's commitment to educational success. Students and parents are encouraged to monitor grades closely and seek academic support when needed.

Seasons & Practice

Sports Seasons

The Ohio High School Athletic Association (OHSAA) establishes official start and end dates for each sport season, including the first permitted day of practice. Hillsdale athletic teams will not begin mandatory practices before OHSAA-approved dates. Once official practice begins, all practices and tryouts are considered mandatory unless otherwise stated by the coach. Athletes are expected to be present on the first day of fall sports, usually August 1. Any known conflicts with the start of practice should be communicated to the coach in advance, as early absences may affect readiness or team placement.

Holidays

No practices or events will be held on Thanksgiving Day or Christmas Day. Practices on other holidays require prior approval from the Principal or Athletic Director and, if approved, must end by noon. Athletes with religious or family conflicts should communicate with their coach and will be excused as appropriate.

In-Season Practices

Practice schedules are set by the coach and communicated in advance. Changes will be shared as early as possible. Regular attendance is expected for safety, team development, and preparation. As a general guideline, unexcused absences from practice may result in reduced or no playing time in the next contest ("No Practice / No Play" guideline). Athletes should promptly inform coaches of any legitimate absences.

Weekends

Hillsdale will not require practices on both Saturday and Sunday of the same weekend. Typically, Sunday is reserved for rest or family time. In limited circumstances, a coach may schedule a practice or walkthrough on one weekend day, but athletes will not be required to practice both days.

Supervision

All practices, workouts, and conditioning sessions must be supervised by a coach or authorized adult. Students may not use school athletic facilities without supervision. Coaches will ensure proper supervision until all athletes are picked up.

Summary

Once the season begins, athletes should expect regular weekday practices and possible Saturday contests. Practice frequency and duration follow OHSAA safety regulations. Athletes are expected to promptly communicate injuries, illnesses, or conflicts to coaches or athletic staff.

Social Media Conduct & Electronic Communication

Participation in Hillsdale athletics is a privilege and includes expectations for appropriate conduct on and off the field, including online and electronic communication. Student-athletes represent Hillsdale Local Schools at all times and are expected to demonstrate respect, integrity, and sportsmanship in all digital interactions.

Student-athletes must use social media, group messaging, and electronic communication responsibly. Harassing, bullying, threatening, demeaning, obscene, discriminatory, or otherwise inappropriate content is prohibited, including negative comments about teammates, coaches, opponents, officials, or the school. If it would not be appropriate to say in person, it should not be posted online. Digital content may be permanent and widely shared.

Team group texts, messaging apps, and social media groups used for athletic purposes are considered extensions of the school environment. Communication must remain respectful, appropriate, and team-focused. Coaches or designated staff may monitor team communication platforms. Parents included in group communications are expected to model respectful and constructive behavior.

Student-athletes may not post content that violates school rules or reflects poorly on the athletic program, including references to underage drinking, vaping, drug use, profanity, or sexually explicit material. Off-campus online behavior that causes a substantial disruption or targets others may result in disciplinary action by the school and the athletic department.

Parents and guardians are expected to use social media responsibly and address concerns through proper channels rather than through online channels. Violations of this policy may result in disciplinary action, including restrictions on participation or attendance at athletic events. Serious violations may require administrative review or law enforcement action.

When in doubt, do not post. Positive digital behavior is an extension of being a good teammate and community member.

Spectator Expectations

Hillsdale spectators play an important role in creating a positive and respectful game-day environment. Fans are expected to treat athletes, coaches, officials, and fellow spectators with respect at all times, even when they disagree with a call or decision. Mistakes and judgment calls are a part of athletic competition, and it is never acceptable to approach, confront, yell at, or attempt to communicate with coaches or officials, nor to enter the field of play or court at any time. Spectators should provide positive, encouraging support and demonstrate self-control whether winning or losing. Attendance at athletic events is a privilege, and all spectators are expected to represent Hillsdale with class, dignity, and Falcon pride.

Sport Commitment Expectations

Once a student-athlete appears on an official OHSA eligibility roster for a sport, the athlete is considered committed to that team for the season and may not join another school-sponsored sport until that season has concluded. In general, athletes may not quit one sport mid-season to join another sport already in progress.

Mid-Season Changes

Mid-season sport changes are permitted only in limited circumstances and require approval from the Athletic Director:

- **Medical/Injury Reasons:** If a physician provides written documentation stating the athlete should discontinue one sport for medical reasons but may safely participate in another, a change may be considered with approval from both coaches and the Athletic Director.
- **Mutual Agreement:** In rare cases, a mid-season change may be approved if both coaches and the Athletic Director agree that the change benefits the athlete and does not unfairly impact either team. This option will not be approved to avoid tryouts or seek a competitive advantage.

Athletes who leave a team mid-season must first meet with the coach and the Athletic Director. Quitting a team without a valid cause is discouraged and may limit participation in future sports.

Late Joiners

Students who are not on a team by the end of the initial tryout/practice period or by the first regular-season contest may not join that team for the remainder of the season, except in special circumstances (e.g., injury during tryouts, transfer into the district, or restored academic eligibility). All exceptions require administrative approval.

Quitting a Sport

An athlete who quits a sport after the first official contest may not begin practices or activities for another sport until the original sport's season (including postseason) has ended. This policy encourages commitment, accountability, and respect for teammates. Athletes are encouraged to carefully consider their commitments before selecting a sport. Early communication with coaches is essential if concerns arise before competition begins.

Team-Specific Rules

Head coaches may establish reasonable team-specific rules that support safety, accountability, and program standards. These rules must be clearly communicated to athletes and parents at the start of the season and may include expectations related to:

- **Notification of Legal Issues:** Athletes must immediately report any law enforcement contact, arrest, or charge (excluding minor traffic violations) to the coach or Athletic Director.
- **Attendance and Punctuality:** Expectations for attendance, punctuality, and communication regarding absences.
- **Curfew and Conduct:** Reasonable guidelines related to rest, behavior, dress, or activities that may affect performance or safety.
- **General Conduct:** Expectations during practices, contests, travel, locker rooms, and public settings.

Violations of team-specific rules will be addressed by the coach, in consultation with the Athletic Director, when appropriate. Consequences may include conditioning, loss of playing time, suspension, or removal from the team, with any removal coordinated through the Athletic Director and provided with due process.

Sportsmanship Expectations

For Student-Athletes: *The Hillsdale athletic program will be conducted in a manner such that:*

- Participants develop good character through involvement in their sport.
- A positive attitude toward life is fostered through exemplary leadership and teamwork.
- Every student has an equal opportunity to try out for the sport of his or her choice.
- Pre-season conditioning programs are conducted to ensure participants' health and safety.
- Discipline is administered in a fair and uniform manner throughout the program.
- An informative communication system exists between the Athletic Department, students, and the community.
- To maintain a positive and respectful environment, student-athletes who fail to follow these expectations may face consequences, which may include limitations on participation.

Sportsmanship - The “Ten Commandments” for Student-Athletes

At Hillsdale, we emphasize sportsmanship heavily. The following “Ten Commandments” of sportsmanship are good rules to live by for athletes, coaches, parents, and fans alike:

1. **The Golden Rule:** *Treat others as you wish to be treated. (In sports terms: respect your opponents and officials just as you want to be respected.)*
2. **Enjoy the Game:** *Remember that athletics are meant to be fun for participants and spectators alike. Don't take things so seriously that you lose the joy. Encourage enjoyment for others as well.*
3. **Take Responsibility:** *Be accountable for your actions. If you commit a foul, accept it without complaint. If you make a mistake, own it and move on.*
4. **Be Open-Minded and Forgiving:** *Recognize that everyone has weaknesses; forgive mistakes – whether it's a teammate dropping a pass or an official missing a call – getting angry doesn't help. Keep an open mind and give others grace.*
5. **Take Pride:** *Have pride in your performance and your school. Strive for excellence and carry yourself with dignity as a Falcon.*
6. **Be a Friend:** *Support others, don't tear them down. Create a positive environment. Congratulate opponents on good plays, pick up an injured player, and high-five your teammate coming off the court.*
7. **Encourage Others:** *Motivate your teammates to be their best. Positive encouragement is contagious and can elevate the whole team.*
8. **Spread Sportsmanship:** *Let your good behavior influence others. If you remain composed and respectful, your teammates and even fans might follow suit. Sportsmanship should be as contagious as a great play.*
9. **Remember the Privilege:** *Participation in sports is a privilege, not a right. Appreciate the opportunity to represent your school. Don't abuse the opportunity with poor behavior.*
10. **Practice Sportsmanship Always:** *In all situations, even when things aren't going your way, uphold these principles at all costs. True character shows in adversity – keep your cool and your class, whether winning or losing.*

For Family Members: *Parents/guardians and family are expected to represent the Hillsdale athletic program positively by:*

- Helping student-athletes develop good character through positive support and involvement throughout the season.
- Maintaining a positive attitude toward all student-athletes, coaches, and officials.
- Refraining from using negative or derogatory remarks at sporting events.
- Following proper protocols (such as contacting coaches or the Athletic Director) if an issue arises.
- Demonstrating good sportsmanship at all athletic events, this is imperative.
- To ensure a positive environment for all participants, family members who fail to follow these expectations may be restricted from attending future events.

WCAL Ejection Policy and Procedures

Sportsmanship - The “Ten Commandments” for Fans

At Hillsdale, sportsmanship isn't limited to athletes and coaches—it extends to everyone in the stands. Our spectators play an important role in shaping the game-day environment and modeling Falcon values. The following expectations guide how we cheer, support, and represent our school community:

1. **The Golden Rule:** *Treat athletes, coaches, officials, and fellow spectators with the same respect you expect in return. Cheer positively and never demean others.*
2. **Enjoy the Game:** *Athletics are meant to be enjoyable for everyone. Support the experience without letting emotions overshadow the fun of the game.*
3. **Take Responsibility:** *Be accountable for your words and actions. If emotions run high, pause, refocus, and choose respectful behavior.*
4. **Be Open-Minded and Forgiving:** *Mistakes happen by players, coaches, and officials. Missed calls and errors are part of the game. Anger and criticism do not improve outcomes.*
5. **Take Pride in Hillsdale:** *Your behavior reflects our school and community. Represent Hillsdale with class, dignity, and Falcon pride at all times.*
6. **Be Supportive:** *Encourage and uplift, never tear down. Applaud good effort, good sportsmanship, and strong play from both teams.*
7. **Encourage, Don't Intimidate:** *Positive encouragement energizes athletes; negative comments distract and discourage. Choose words that build confidence and respect.*
8. **Model Sportsmanship:** *Let your conduct set the tone. Calm, respectful fans influence others and help create a positive environment for everyone.*
9. **Remember the Privilege:** *Attending and supporting school athletics is a privilege. Help preserve that privilege by demonstrating appropriate behavior at all events.*
10. **Practice Sportsmanship—Always:** *Whether winning or losing, uphold these expectations. True Falcon character is shown in moments of adversity as much as celebration.*

Remember: Sportsmanship takes teamwork – everyone (players, coaches, parents, and fans) must work together to create a culture of respect and integrity. By following these guidelines, we honor the game and each other.

Trainer

Athletic trainers are often present at high school home contests and selected practices to support student-athlete health and safety. Any injury—no matter how minor—must be reported immediately to the coach and/or athletic trainer. Student-athletes are expected to follow all evaluation, treatment, and

return-to-play instructions provided by the trainer or medical professional. If a physician restricts participation for a specific period of time, written medical clearance is required before the student-athlete may return to practice or competition.

Transportation of Athletic Teams

For safety and supervision, student-athletes are expected to travel to and from away contests using school-provided transportation. Athletes must ride with the team to the event.

A student-athlete may be released to a parent/guardian after an away contest only with prior written permission from and approval by the head coach. The parent/guardian must meet the coach in person at the event to assume responsibility for the student. Student-athletes may not drive themselves or ride with other students to or from away contests without prior approval from the Athletic Director or Principal, which will be granted only in extraordinary circumstances. If the District has exhausted all available transportation options and is unable to provide transportation to or from an event, student transportation shall be conducted in accordance with the Alternative Transportation Procedures approved by the Board of Education.

All school and team rules apply during team travel. Coaches are responsible for supervising conduct on buses, at stops, and at host sites. Student-athletes are expected to follow the driver's and coach's instructions, meet the coach-established dress code expectations, remain with the team, and demonstrate appropriate behavior in public settings. Conduct that reflects poorly on the team or school may result in disciplinary action, including possible removal from the team. Traveling as a team promotes safety, accountability, and team unity. By following these guidelines, student-athletes help ensure a safe and positive experience for everyone.

Tryouts & Playing Time

Tryouts are mandatory and will be held during OHSAA-approved dates for all sports in which participation exceeds available roster space. Please note that all fall sports, excluding golf, begin mandatory tryouts on August 1. Participation in tryouts does not guarantee placement on a team. Team selection is determined by the head coach and based on sport-specific criteria, including skill level, effort, attitude, coachability, positional needs, and overall team balance.

The head coach has final authority over roster size and team selection.

When cuts are necessary, selection criteria will be communicated in advance, and feedback may be provided upon request. Some sports may operate as no-cut programs or offer multiple levels, while others may require cuts due to safety, facility, or equipment limitations.

Playing time is not guaranteed and is determined by the coaching staff based on factors such as practice performance, effort, attitude, skill development, and game situations. While sub-varsity levels emphasize participation and development, varsity competition focuses on fielding the most competitive lineup. Student-athletes may respectfully ask coaches what they can improve to earn additional playing time. Parents should follow established communication protocols and allow appropriate time before addressing concerns.

Injuries during tryouts will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis by the coach and Athletic Director. Coaches are expected to handle tryouts and cuts professionally and respectfully, and students are encouraged to remain positive and consider other opportunities for involvement.

Vacation Policy

In-season vacations or trips are strongly discouraged, as they can impact both the team and an athlete's role. Families are encouraged to consider team commitments carefully when scheduling travel during a sports season.

If an athlete misses practices or contests due to a vacation or similar non-school commitment, the following generally apply upon return:

- The athlete may be required to complete one practice day for each practice or contest missed before resuming competition, to ensure safety and readiness.
- Extended absences may affect playing time, role, or position, and athletes should be prepared to earn their way back into the lineup. Coaches will not hold positions for athletes who are absent.
- Coaches may implement additional requirements, such as conditioning or skill work, depending on the sport and the length of the absence. The head coach's decision is final.

Families should inform the coach of anticipated absences well in advance. Repeated or prolonged absences for vacations may be viewed as a lack of commitment and could jeopardize team participation.

Student Athletic Code of Conduct

Hillsdale Local School officials and coaches of athletic teams believe that students selected for the privilege of team membership should conduct themselves as responsible representatives of our school. This means maintaining high standards of behavior, following team rules, and demonstrating sportsmanship at all times. To ensure this conduct, the Athletic Director and coaches will enforce the Athletic Code of Conduct. Members of teams who fail to abide by the Athletic Code are subject to disciplinary action as prescribed by this Handbook's code and by team rules.

As recognized representatives of Hillsdale Local Schools, team members must exhibit the character and behavior outlined in this Code. The behavior of team members is subject to year-round monitoring by coaches and school officials, in season or out of season, in uniform or out of uniform, in school or out of school. In other words, athletes are expected to uphold school rules and the athletic code 365 days a year. Note: Violations of the Athletic Code during the summer or other "off" periods will carry the same weight as those during the season. An athlete is considered an athlete 24/7, 365 days a year.

Close contact with coaches and advisors gives them the opportunity to observe, confront, and assist young people in making good decisions. Hillsdale Local Schools supports education and awareness training in areas such as alcohol and drug use, as well as other conduct issues. We encourage open communication among administrators, coaches, participants, and families to proactively address any

issues. The goal of this Athletic Code of Conduct is accountability, education, and support. Student-athletes are encouraged to seek help early by speaking with a coach or trusted adult.

Prohibited Conduct

Major Violations

A student-athlete may be subject to disciplinary action for any of the following major violations:

- **School Discipline Violations:** Any violation of the Hillsdale Student Handbook, Heartland Technical Education Center Student Handbook (for Career Center students), applicable Codes of Conduct, or this Athletic Code of Conduct that results in removal from school (including out-of-school suspension or expulsion) is also considered a violation of the Athletic Code.
- **Insubordination / Unsportsmanlike Conduct:** Acts of insubordination or unsportsmanlike behavior during the season, including fighting, verbal abuse of officials, opponents, coaches, or spectators. Any conduct resulting in ejection from a contest or removal by school personnel is a serious violation of this Code.
- **Alcohol, Drugs, Tobacco, or Vaping:** The use, possession, distribution, or association with alcohol, tobacco (including vaping or e-cigarettes), marijuana, THC, illegal drugs, controlled substances, or related paraphernalia is prohibited year-round, on or off school property. Misuse or sharing of prescription or over-the-counter medication is also a violation.
- **Criminal Offenses:** Commission of any criminal act under local, state, or federal law (excluding minor traffic violations). Serious offenses may result in suspension or loss of eligibility for up to one calendar year, depending on severity and relevance to school safety and conduct expectations.

Consequences for Violations

Violations of the Athletic Code of Conduct may result in disciplinary action. Consequences are intended to be progressive, fair, and educational, while holding student-athletes accountable. These rules apply whenever a student-athlete represents Hillsdale, including during the school year and during athletic seasons. Violations occurring outside a season may carry over to the next season of participation.

School Discipline / Removal from School

- An athlete suspended or expelled from school is ineligible to practice or compete for the same number of school days.
- Accumulating 15 total days of school suspension during one season will result in dismissal from the team for the remainder of that season.

Ejections & Insubordination

- OHSAA penalties apply automatically to ejections for unsportsmanlike conduct or flagrant fouls and will be enforced by the school.
- If an ejection occurs in the final contest of a season, the penalty carries over to the athlete's next sport.

- A second ejection in the same season results in suspension for the remainder of that season.
- Additional school or team discipline may be imposed, up to and including removal from the team, depending on severity.

Alcohol, Drug, Tobacco & Vaping Violations

Substance violations are cumulative across grades 7–12.

First Offense

- Suspension from 30% of scheduled contests (practice required; no competition).
- Mandatory substance abuse assessment and completion of recommended counseling (family responsibility).
- Self-referral before discovery may reduce the suspension to 20% (one-time option).

Second Offense

- Suspension from 50% of scheduled contests, which may carry over between seasons.
- Required completion of a substance abuse counseling program.

Third Offense

- Ineligible for all interscholastic athletics for one full calendar year.
- Completion of counseling is required prior to reinstatement.
- Continued team involvement in a non-playing role may be permitted at the school's discretion.

Additional offenses may result in extended or permanent ineligibility.

Additional Notes

- Suspensions carry over between seasons and school years if not fully served.
- The athlete must complete the season in good standing for suspension time to count.
- Counseling requirements must be completed for reinstatement.
- Offenses apply year-round, including during the off-season.

At the discretion of building administration, consequences may be reduced if the student provides documentation to the principal or designee showing that a substance abuse assessment has been completed or scheduled with Appleseed Community Health or a comparable agency. If an assessment is scheduled and all recommendations are followed, out-of-school suspension days and extracurricular consequences may be reduced or lifted. If the student does not pursue an assessment, consequences will be enforced as outlined in the student handbook and approved by the Hillsdale Board of Education. The District administrative team may assist families in contacting an appropriate agency.

Due Process

Hillsdale Local Schools is committed to providing student-athletes with due process in all disciplinary matters. Before athletic discipline is imposed, the student-athlete will be informed of the concern or alleged violation and given an opportunity to respond. Disciplinary decisions will be based on the facts of each situation and applied consistently and fairly. When appropriate, parents/guardians will be notified, and students may appeal decisions in accordance with district procedures and Board policy.

This Athletic Handbook applies solely to the 2026–2027 school year and supersedes all prior athletic handbooks, guidelines, and athletic conduct documents. It is intended as a reference guide, not a contract, and outlines expectations, responsibilities, and standards that support a safe, respectful, and successful interscholastic athletic program.

This handbook reflects Hillsdale Board of Education policies and Ohio state and federal laws in effect at the time of publication. In the event of a conflict between this handbook, Board policy, or applicable law, Board policy and law shall prevail.

Because laws, regulations, OHSAA bylaws, and Board policies may change, the district reserves the right to revise, update, or amend this handbook at any time. Families and student-athletes will be notified of significant changes when required.

This Athletic Handbook automatically expires at the conclusion of the 2026–2027 school year and will be reviewed and reissued annually. No provision of this handbook carries forward beyond the stated effective dates unless formally adopted in a subsequent edition.

Thank you to our student-athletes and families for reviewing this guide and supporting Hillsdale Athletics. By understanding expectations and working together, we foster a program rooted in respect, accountability, and excellence. Let's make the most of the year ahead as we continue to Take Flight.

Board of Education Approval Date: 03/16/2026

Handbook Effective Dates: August 2026 – June 2027