ATHLETICS HANDBOOK

2026–2027

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Hunters Creek Middle School Athletics

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1. Mission and Educational Purpose

Mission Statement

The purpose of athletics in Onslow County Schools is to serve as an extension of the classroom, providing educational experiences that develop lifelong habits, attitudes, leadership, teamwork, physical development, personal pride, and respect for others.

Educational Value of Athletics

Hunters Creek Middle School athletics promotes competitive excellence within an educational setting. Winning is valued, but never at the expense of sportsmanship, student well-being, academics, safety, integrity, or appropriate conduct.

- Student-athletes are expected to give their best effort and demonstrate commitment to teammates.
- Athletic programs will be conducted as educational activities and will not operate under a “winning at any cost” philosophy.
- Student-athletes are expected to act fairly, follow rules, respect others, and respond to adversity with dignity.

2. Participation, Eligibility, and Required Documentation

Voluntary Participation and Expectations

Participation in HCMS athletics is voluntary and is a privilege. Student-athletes represent the school and are expected to conduct themselves with integrity, pride, and respect. HCMS may restrict or revoke participation when a student fails to meet school, district, state, athletic department, or team expectations.

Academic Eligibility

- Fall sports eligibility is determined using grades and attendance from the second semester of the previous school year.
- Spring sports eligibility is determined using grades and attendance from the fall semester of the current school year.
- Students must have passed a minimum of five classes from the previous semester to remain eligible.
- Once selected for a team, HCMS student-athletes are expected to maintain a grade of 70% or higher in all classes during the season.

Attendance, Age, and Semester Requirements

- Students must have attended at least 85% of school days during the previous semester. Based on the current handbook standard, more than 13 absences may result in loss of eligibility.
- A student who turns 15 on or before August 31 is not eligible for middle school athletics.
- Students may compete for four semesters after first entry into seventh grade.

Financial Obligations

All school fees and outstanding athletic obligations must be resolved before participation, consistent with school and district procedures.

Physical Examination, Insurance, and Forms

- A valid athletic physical is required. The handbook standard recognizes a physical as valid for 395 days from the date of administration.

- Health insurance or school-provided insurance is required before tryouts, practices, scrimmages, or contests.
- All required OCS athletic participation forms and parent/guardian acknowledgments must be on file before participation.
- A student returning from a serious injury or illness must provide required medical clearance before resuming participation.

District, NCHSAA, and state requirements control when they are more restrictive or are subsequently updated.

3. Health, Safety, Injury, and Concussion

Assumption of Risk

Interscholastic athletics involves inherent risks, including serious injury, sudden cardiac arrest, infectious disease exposure, and concussion. Student-athletes must follow safety rules, report health concerns, maintain proper hygiene, inspect equipment, follow conditioning expectations, and refrain from illegal drugs or controlled substances.

Sudden Cardiac Arrest Awareness

Families are encouraged to discuss cardiovascular screening with a healthcare provider. Required sports physicals may not include specialized cardiovascular screening.

Injury and Illness Reporting

- Immediately report injuries, illness, or changes in health status to the head coach and/or appropriate medical personnel.
- Follow injury-management, rehabilitation, and reassessment requirements.
- Do not return to full participation until properly released when medical clearance is required.

Concussion Response and Return to Play

- Any student with a possible concussion must be removed from practice or competition immediately.
- The student may not return to play on the same day of a suspected concussion.
- When in doubt, sit them out.
- Required medical evaluation and NCHSAA return-to-play documentation must be completed before return to participation.
- At least one parent/guardian must complete required annual concussion information requirements as part of athletic eligibility.

4. Academic and Behavior Expectations

Athletes at HCMS are expected to uphold high standards of academic performance and personal conduct on campus, in the community, online, and during athletic activities.

Academic Expectations During the Season

Once selected for a team, student-athletes are required to maintain a grade of 70% or higher in all classes. A student at 69% or lower in any class will be required to complete corrective measures such as tutoring and will lose playing time under the athletic department's established grade-check procedures.

Behavior Expectations

- Demonstrate respect toward coaches, teammates, opponents, officials, teachers, staff, and classmates.
- Arrive on time and prepared for practices and contests.
- Maintain honesty, fairness, and integrity.
- Follow school rules, attendance expectations, dress code, and classroom expectations.
- Promote team unity and place team responsibilities above individual recognition.
- Accept accountability for choices and consequences.

Athletic Consequences for School Discipline

ASD: A student assigned after-school detention must attend ASD before attending a practice or contest. Loss of playing time may occur at the coach's discretion.

ISS: All forms of In-School Suspension are treated the same for athletic purposes. There is no distinction between partial-day ISS and full-day ISS. For a first ISS assignment during a sport season, the student may not practice or participate in an athletic contest during the suspension and is ineligible for the next scheduled contest. A second ISS assignment during the same sport season results in suspension from the team for the remainder of the season.

OSS: A student serving Out-of-School Suspension during a sport season will be suspended from that team for the remainder of the season.

School administration, the Athletic Director, and the head coach may review serious or unusual circumstances consistent with applicable district policy.

5. Attendance and Team Commitment

Daily Attendance

Student-athletes must be present at school to participate in athletic competition. A student absent on the day of a contest may not participate. A student checking out before 11:00 a.m. or checking in after 11:00 a.m. is considered absent for athletic participation purposes unless an exception is approved in advance by school administration.

Practice, Contest, and Team Activity Attendance

- Consistent attendance is required to remain in good standing.
- Only the head coach, school administrator, or Athletic Director may excuse a student-athlete from a required practice, contest, or team activity.
- Required contests on non-school days remain team obligations unless an absence is approved.
- Three consecutive missed practices, contests, and/or team meetings without contact with the coach will be treated as quitting the team.

Quitting a Team

- A student who leaves a team may not participate in another sport until the season of the team they left has officially concluded.
- The student may not participate in another sport's off-season workouts, conditioning, or skill development during the same season.
- A student-athlete who quits or is removed from a team will not be recognized for that sport at the annual Athletic Banquet.

6. Uniforms and Equipment

All uniforms and equipment issued by HCMS remain school property. Student-athletes must care for, clean, properly store, and return all issued items. Items may not be altered without approval.

Lost, stolen, or damaged items resulting from neglect or abuse may become the financial responsibility of the student-athlete. Unresolved equipment obligations may affect athletic awards or future athletic participation consistent with school procedures.

7. Transportation, Travel, and Pick-Up

Team Transportation

Transportation to and from athletic contests for team members, including student-athletes, approved team managers, and statisticians, will be provided in OCS-owned or OCS-leased vehicles. Team members must travel with the team unless a prior exception is approved by the principal or designee.

After away contests, a student may be released directly to a parent/guardian in accordance with the approved travel-release process.

Pick-Up Expectations and Tardies

A 20-minute pick-up window is allowed following practices and contests. Parents/guardians are responsible for prompt transportation and proactive communication when an unavoidable delay occurs.

- First tardy: Coach and parent/guardian conference.
- Second tardy: Student will not participate with the team for two school days, including practices and contests.
- Third tardy: Student will be removed from the team.

8. Team Selection and Tryouts

Participation is voluntary, and students must complete the tryout process to be selected. Limited roster space means not every student who tries out will be selected.

- Tryouts are open to students who meet eligibility and pre-participation requirements.
- Tryout periods will last a minimum of two days to provide reasonable evaluation time.
- A student without required paperwork on the first day, or absent without prior coach approval, forfeits the guaranteed two-day tryout opportunity.
- Final roster decisions rest with the coach and may consider skill, effort, attitude, sportsmanship, potential, and team needs.

9. Student Team Managers

Purpose and Status

Student team managers are members of the HCMS athletic program and serve an important role in supporting their assigned team and coaching staff. Serving as a team manager is a privilege requiring responsibility, commitment, maturity, and appropriate conduct.

Same Rules and Expectations as Student-Athletes

Student team managers must follow the same school, athletic department, team, academic, attendance, transportation, conduct, sportsmanship, and social media rules and expectations as student-athletes unless a policy specifically applies only to athletic competition.

Academic and Conduct Expectations

Team managers are expected to maintain a grade of 70% or higher in all classes and are subject to the official athletic grade-check process. Office referrals, serious misconduct, repeated disciplinary concerns, or failure to meet academic expectations may result in suspension or removal from manager duties.

Managers Must Remain With the Team

Student team managers must remain with their assigned team at all times during practices, contests, team travel, and team-sponsored activities. Managers may not leave the team area, sideline, bench area, gymnasium, field, athletic facility, or designated team location without permission from the head coach or an authorized school staff member.

Managers may not wander the school or competition site, visit friends, sit in spectator areas, or otherwise separate themselves from the team during a team activity. If assigned a task that requires leaving the immediate team area, the manager must receive direction or permission from a coach and return to the team immediately after completing the task.

Attendance, Sportsmanship, and Duties

Managers are expected to attend required practices, contests, meetings, and team activities; arrive on time; remain for the duration of the activity; and complete assigned responsibilities. Duties may include equipment, uniforms, water, supplies, scorekeeping, statistics, video, setup, and cleanup.

Managers must demonstrate appropriate sportsmanship and may not argue with officials, taunt, make negative comments toward opponents or spectators, or engage in conduct that negatively represents HCMS Athletics.

Removal From the Manager Position

The head coach and Athletic Director may suspend or remove a student manager for failure to follow school rules, athletic policies, team expectations, academic requirements, coach directions, attendance requirements, or assigned responsibilities.

10. Practices and Team Operations

Closed Practices

All HCMS athletic practices are closed. Practices are limited to coaches, student-athletes, approved student team managers, and authorized school or athletic personnel only.

Parents/guardians should remain in the parking lot or pick-up line while waiting. Parent/coach meetings will not occur immediately before, during, or directly after a practice or contest.

Sunday, Canceled-School, and Early-Release Restrictions

- Sunday practices and required team gatherings are prohibited.
- Practices and contests are not permitted on days school is canceled or dismissed early due to inclement weather unless special approval is granted by the Superintendent or designee.

11. Communication and the 24-Hour Rule

24-Hour Rule

Parents/guardians must wait at least 24 hours after a contest or practice before requesting a meeting with a coach regarding a concern.

Communication Guidelines

- Use school email or the front office to request communication with a coach.
- Schedule meetings in advance.
- Address concerns first with the coach, then the Athletic Director, then school administration, and then the District Coordinator of Athletics if further resolution is needed.
- Communication must remain courteous, professional, and focused on student growth and success.

Appropriate Parent Concerns

- Treatment of the parent's child, emotionally or physically.
- Safety and health concerns.
- Academic progress, behavior, or disciplinary matters involving the parent's child.
- Ways to help the student grow, mature, and improve.

Topics Not Appropriate for Parent-Coach Discussion

- Game strategy.
- Playing time or position assignments.
- Play calling.
- Other students or athletes.

12. Sportsmanship and Ejections

Student-Athlete and Team Member Expectations

- Recognize that athletic participation is a privilege and that team members represent HCMS.
- Demonstrate fair play, respect, and integrity.
- Avoid inappropriate language, taunting, trash talking, and unnecessary physical contact.
- Encourage good sportsmanship and respect the judgment and integrity of officials.
- Be modest in victory and gracious in defeat.

Spectator and Parent Sportsmanship

Parents, guardians, and spectators are expected to respect players, coaches, officials, and other spectators; refrain from heckling and confrontational behavior; and support student effort in a positive manner. Inappropriate conduct may result in removal from an event and additional school action when applicable.

Taunting and Ejection

Taunting, baiting, ridicule, or conduct intended to anger or demean others is inconsistent with HCMS Athletics. The applicable NCHSAA ejection policy applies to student-athletes, coaches, managers, and game administrators. Fighting, biting as observed by an official, taunting or baiting, spitting toward an opponent, profanity or obscene gestures, and disrespectfully addressing an official may result in ejection and additional consequences.

Physical contact with an official may result in the most serious penalties available under applicable NCHSAA and school rules. Current NCHSAA rules control if requirements change.

13. Social Media, Digital Citizenship

Social Media and Digital Citizenship

Student-athletes and team managers are representatives of HCMS Athletics and are expected to use social media responsibly. Online activity must comply with school rules, OCS Board of Education policies, applicable law, team expectations, and NCHSAA requirements.

- Think before posting and avoid content that would be inappropriate in front of a coach, parent, teacher, or principal.
- Use social media to encourage teammates and demonstrate school pride.
- Do not post negative comments about teammates, coaches, opponents, officials, or the school.
- Do not engage in cyberbullying, harassment, threats, discriminatory conduct, or the sharing of vulgar or harmful content.
- Do not post content involving illegal activity, drugs, alcohol, or controlled substances.

14. Coaches: Professional and Program Expectations

HCMS coaches are educators and leaders responsible for providing safe, organized, developmentally appropriate athletic experiences.

- Model professionalism, sportsmanship, integrity, and respect.
- Know and enforce school, athletic department, district, and applicable NCHSAA rules.
- Maintain appropriate supervision of student-athletes and team managers.
- Communicate schedules, expectations, attendance requirements, and team procedures clearly.
- Conduct fair and reasonable tryouts and make roster decisions based on legitimate program factors.
- Monitor academic concerns through established grade-check procedures and support student academic success.
- Protect confidential student information and discuss student matters only with appropriate individuals.
- Inspect facilities and equipment, report safety concerns, and follow injury and emergency procedures.
- Ensure student-athletes and managers remain accounted for during practices, contests, travel, and dismissal.
- Avoid promises of playing time, positions, awards, or future team selection.
- Follow the chain of communication and refer unresolved or serious concerns to the Athletic Director or administration.
- Return equipment, uniforms, keys, records, and athletic department materials at the conclusion of the season.

15. Booster Clubs, Volunteers, and Team Support

Booster and Parent Support

Booster organizations and parent volunteers support HCMS Athletics but do not direct coaching decisions, roster selection, playing time, game strategy, discipline, or athletic department policy.

Volunteer Expectations

- Volunteers must follow school and district visitor, volunteer, safety, and supervision procedures.
- Volunteers may not independently supervise student-athletes or team managers unless specifically authorized under school procedures.
- Volunteers must maintain appropriate boundaries and respectful communication with students, coaches, officials, and families.
- Confidential student information must not be shared.
- Fundraising, purchases, donations, and use of school or team branding must follow school and district approval procedures.
- Alcohol, tobacco, nicotine, illegal drugs, weapons, harassment, and threatening behavior are prohibited in connection with school athletic activities consistent with school and district rules.

Financial and Fundraising Accountability

All fundraising, donations, purchases, and handling of athletic funds must follow HCMS and OCS procedures. Coaches, booster groups, and volunteers must receive required approval before representing a fundraiser as an HCMS athletic activity.

16. Athletic Awards

Most Valuable Player (MVP) Award

Purpose

The MVP Award recognizes a student-athlete who demonstrates outstanding athletic contribution, leadership, sportsmanship, character, and commitment to a team during a specific athletic season. Statistics, scoring, individual records, or athletic ability alone do not determine the recipient.

MVP Eligibility Requirements

Academic Standard: The student-athlete must maintain a grade of 70% or higher in every class at each official athletic grade check conducted during the athletic season. If an official grade check shows a grade below 70% in any class, the student-athlete is no longer eligible for the MVP Award for that sport. Regaining contest eligibility does not restore MVP Award eligibility.

Grade-entry errors, assignments awaiting grading, or temporary entries may be verified before a final determination. The Athletic Director makes the final academic eligibility determination using the verified official grade-check record.

Student Conduct: The student-athlete must have no office referrals during the athletic season. An office referral during the season makes the student-athlete ineligible for MVP consideration.

Leadership: The student-athlete must consistently demonstrate leadership through actions, attitude, effort, accountability, and treatment of others. Team captain status is not required.

Sportsmanship: The student-athlete must consistently demonstrate exemplary sportsmanship. Documented unsportsmanlike conduct may result in removal from consideration.

Athletic Contribution: Performance, improvement, consistency, competitive impact, and team contribution may be considered, but statistics alone will not determine the award.

Commitment and Team Responsibility: The student-athlete must complete the season in good standing and demonstrate effort, preparation, attendance, coachability, perseverance, and dedication.

MVP Selection

At the conclusion of the season, the head coach selects the MVP from eligible student-athletes. Before announcement, the Athletic Director will verify the selected student's official grade-check and conduct records. The head coach should consider athletic contribution, leadership, sportsmanship, commitment, character, and positive impact on the team.

Male and Female Athlete of the Year

Purpose

The Male Athlete of the Year and Female Athlete of the Year awards are the highest individual athletic honors presented by the HCMS athletic program. They recognize excellence in athletics, academics, sportsmanship, character, leadership, and positive representation of the school.

Eligibility Requirements

Academic Eligibility: The student-athlete must earn a grade of 70% or higher in every class during all four grading quarters of the school year and must meet the 70% standard at each official athletic grade check conducted during any athletic season in which the student participates. A verified grade below 70% at an official grade check or as a quarterly grade makes the student ineligible for Athlete of the Year consideration.

Student Conduct: The student-athlete must have no office referrals during the entire school year.

Sportsmanship: The student-athlete must consistently demonstrate exemplary respect, integrity, self-control, and appropriate conduct toward teammates, coaches, opponents, officials, staff, and spectators.

Athletic Participation and Good Standing: The student-athlete must actively and eligibly participate in at least one school-sponsored sport and complete the season or seasons in good standing.

Single-Sport and Multi-Sport Athletes

Participation in multiple sports is not required. A single-sport athlete receives the same consideration as a multi-sport athlete. The number of sports played does not automatically increase a score, determine the recipient, or serve as a tiebreaker.

Nomination and Selection

At the conclusion of the final athletic season, head coaches may nominate eligible student-athletes. The Athletic Director verifies eligibility before a nominee advances. The Athletic Director and designated coaching staff evaluate eligible nominees using the 100-point rubric below.

Evaluation Category	Maximum Points
Athletic Achievement	30
Sportsmanship	25
Leadership and Character	20
Commitment and Work Ethic	15
Positive Impact on Athletic Program	10
TOTAL	**100**

Tie-Breaking and Final Verification

Ties are reviewed first by Sportsmanship score and then by Leadership and Character score. If a tie remains, the Athletic Director and selection committee conduct a final review of each nominee's overall body of work. The Athletic Director verifies grades, conduct, participation, and good standing before awards are announced.

17. Parent/Guardian Expectations

- Support the student unconditionally and recognize effort, commitment, and growth.
- Model teamwork, selflessness, and respect for coaches, teammates, opponents, and officials.
- Encourage perseverance and sportsmanship.
- Avoid negative comments about team members, coaches, or officials that place students in conflict with team expectations.
- Communicate medical needs, schedule conflicts, and approved transportation deviations promptly.
- Follow the 24-Hour Rule and chain of communication.

18. Chain of Communication

Step 1: Meet with the student's coach. Contact the school front office or use school email to request an appointment.

Step 2: If unresolved, meet with the Athletic Director.

Step 3: If further resolution is needed, meet with school administration.

Step 4: If concerns persist, contact the District Coordinator of Athletics.

19. Handbook Authority and Annual Review

This handbook establishes HCMS athletic program expectations. It is intended to operate consistently with Onslow County Schools policies, NCHSAA rules, and applicable law. If a conflict exists, the controlling district, state, or NCHSAA requirement will apply.

Athletic rules and external requirements may change. The Athletic Director and school administration may update procedures and communicate changes to coaches, student-athletes, team managers, and families as necessary.

20. Student and Parent/Guardian Acknowledgment

After reviewing the HCMS 2026–2027 Athletics Handbook, please sign and return this acknowledgment form to the student's coach.

By signing below, I confirm that I have read, understand, and agree to abide by the policies and expectations outlined in the HCMS 2026–2027 Athletics Handbook.

Student Name (print): _____

Student Signature: _____ Date: _____

Parent/Guardian Name (print): _____

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____ Date: _____

Sport/Team: _____