



POLICY AND PROCEDURES

FOR

UNIFIED SPORTS

Volleyball; Recreation

2026



Special Olympics
New Hampshire

UNIFIED SPORTS COMMITTEE

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Principle of Meaningful Involvement

The most important one of the “7 Criteria for the Success of a Special Olympics Unified Sports Program” is the **principle of meaningful involvement**. *Fundamentally, the principle of meaningful involvement ensures that every player is given an opportunity to contribute to the success of his or her team through their unique skills and qualities.* This means that every teammate: (a) demonstrates sufficient sport-specific skills and game understanding; (b) plays a valued role on the team that emphasizes his or her personal talents; and (c) has an opportunity to play without a heightened risk of injury.

All team members must be engaged and provide their own individual abilities and strengths. In so doing, athletes and partners may have different perspectives. The athletes on the team may not be accustomed to the experience of having their contributions accepted and respected. In addition, partners may need to be encouraged to play to their own personal bests while being a good teammate to others.

Consequently, when Unified Sports teams are created, it is extremely important that both athletes and partners are assessed as to their abilities and game play. While there could be noticeable differences in their skills, the coach will be able to observe their overall performance to determine if they have the requisite skills and understanding to safely participate on this team. The goal is that every teammate should play a meaningful role and have the opportunity to contribute his or her strengths to their Unified Sports team. There should be a quality of social interaction and communication among teammates that allows everyone to participate fully and enjoy a positive experience.

Indicators of Meaningful Involvement

- Teammates compete without causing undue risk of injury to themselves or others.
- Teammates participate according to the rules of competition.
- Teammates have the ability and opportunity to contribute to the performance of the team.
- Teammates adjust their skills according to those of other players, resulting in improved performance by team members with lesser ability.

Meaningful involvement is **not achieved** when certain team members ...

- Display superior sports skills without involving their teammates.
- Serve predominantly as on-field coaches rather than teammates or mentors.
- Control most aspects of the game, especially during the most critical periods.
- Do not train or practice regularly and only show up on the day of competition.
- Lower their level of ability dramatically so that they do not hurt others or control the entire game.

Note: It is important that all coaches and program leaders understand the Principle of Meaningful Involvement prior to the selection of team members.

As you can see, Unified Sports further meets the mission of Special Olympics and embraces the philosophy and principles of Special Olympics Unified Sports.

“I don’t see many differences. Athletes and partners both want to compete. And everyone wants to have fun.” – Don Hess, Unified Sports coach

The NHIAA Unified Sports Program seeks to provide meaningful opportunities for student engagement in athletics based upon the needs of all involved. Due to the fact that the qualifications to be considered a unified athlete include students with vastly different needs and abilities, the Unified Sports Committee has engaged in a discussion to provide two opportunities that member schools may choose which will maximize the meaningful participation opportunities for their athletes and partners: the Unified Sport's Player Development League or Varsity Program and the Unified Sports Recreation League or Junior Varsity Program. This model is taken directly from Special Olympics and reflects current best practices in unified sports across NFHS States.

Unified Sports Player Development Special Olympics	Unified Sports Recreation Special Olympics
Basic Principles - Inclusive sports program - Approximately equal number of athletes and partners train and compete - Similar age of athletes and partners - Training and competition scheduled for a season - Not required to be of similar ability; teammates of higher ability serve as mentors to assist players of lower abilities. - Rules modifications define players' roles, ensure meaningful involvement and prevent player dominance - Team never comprised solely of individuals with disabilities - Program has a choice of providing awards	Basic Principles - Inclusive recreational sports program - Composition of teams should be at least 25% athletes or partners - Does not require athletes and partners to be of similar age and ability - Preferably, participation is regularly scheduled - Does not follow any prescribed training, competition and or team composition requirements established by Special Olympics - Team never comprised solely of individuals with disabilities - No awards

Volleyball – Player Development

- All participants have a limited understanding of the NFHS playing rules
- Limited ability to serve, bump and hit
- Low understanding of violations
- Sportsmanship is a top priority
- Coaches will ensure that all participants on the team will have “meaningful involvement” in each game as outlined by the Special Olympics document entitled “Principle of Meaningful Involvement.”
- Score is kept
- Standings will be kept
- Season culminates in a championship tournament following NHIAA Tournament By-Laws
- All other rules contained in the NHIAA Policy and Procedures Manual apply
- Female athletes who participate in Fall Volleyball are allowed to participate as partners in Unified Volleyball.
 - Currently rostered male volleyball players who participate in Spring Volleyball may serve as managers, assistant coaches, helpers, etc.

Volleyball – Recreation

- All participants have a low understanding of the NFHS playing rules
- Low ability to serve, bump and hit
- Low understanding of violations
- No overhead serving
- No spiking
- Two service tries allowed
- Sportsmanship is a top priority
- Coaches will ensure that all participants on the team will have “meaningful involvement” in each game as outlined by the Special Olympics document entitled “Principle of Meaningful Involvement.”
- Female athletes who participate in Fall Volleyball are allowed to participate as partners in Unified Volleyball.
 - Currently rostered male volleyball players who participate in Spring Volleyball may serve as managers, assistant coaches, helpers, etc.

Points of Emphasis

Philosophy:

The focus of NHIAA Unified Sports is competition (not simply participation). Sports teaches so many life lessons: to work as a team, to follow rules and to be committed. Through sports we can find shared interests that allow friendships to form. Through the NHIAA/Special Olympics Unified Sports program we have an opportunity to make real positive changes in the lives of students with and without disabilities.

We must have high expectations for students with intellectual disabilities because if we do not, we are teaching another generation of regular education students that people with intellectual disabilities can't follow rules or be held accountable and as a result they will not be viable members of their community or society in general.

- Unified Sports shall be administered by the NHIAA Unified Sports Committee and the rules of the National Federation will govern the sport when applicable.
- Exception to the NFHS Uniform Rule(s): One set of uniforms per school (one color) shall be allowed.
- **Definition of Participants: (BLA XXXVI, Sect. 3)**
 - **Unified Student Athlete:** A student with an intellectual disability who, based on **his/her** IEP is expected to be in school in accordance to state law (RSA 186-C:2)
- **Corresponding Dates** set forth in By-Law Article XXXIX shall be adhered to in both Recreational and Player Development divisions.
- **Restriction of Participation – Unified Student Partner: (BLA XXXVI, Sect. 4, e.)**
Student Athletes playing the same sport will be **prohibited** from competing as a Unified Partner in Unified Sports that season (with the exception of female volleyball players participating as a partner in unified volleyball). Appropriate participation for such a Student Athlete Partner may take place as an assistant coach or manager. Schools with limited enrollment or special circumstances may apply to the Executive Director for a waiver of this rule.
- **Coaches Eligibility:** In addition to the training referred to in the NHIAA By-Law Article I, Section 32: Coaches Eligibility it is suggested that a Unified Sports Coach review a PowerPoint presentation by the start of the season (PowerPoint will be distributed by October 1st).
- **Alignment of Sports: (BLA XXXVI, Sect. 5)** Unified Sport teams in basketball, soccer, and volleyball shall be aligned in two leagues as co-ed sports. Unified Track shall be aligned in one division as a co-ed sport (CM 5.2017)
- **NFHS Guidelines for Management of Concussions:**
The NHIAA mandates the following of the NFHS guidelines for management of Concussions.
Concussions: Any athlete who exhibits signs, symptoms, or behaviors consistent with a concussion shall be immediately removed from the contest and shall not return to play until cleared by an appropriate health care professional.
For additional information and potential symptoms, please be sure to visit By-Law Article III; Sports Medicine: Sect. 13: Concussions and the New Hampshire SB402 and its language as written.

Sport Specific Policies & Procedures

Unified Volleyball: Recreation

1. **Dates:** Schedule will be determined by participating schools.

Schedules Due:	March 6, 2026
First Day to Practice:	March 30, 2026
First Day to Play:	April 13, 2026
Last Date to Schedule:	May 21, 2026
Last Date to Play:	May 22, 2026

2. **Authorization:** The NHIAA Unified Sports Committee shall administer unified volleyball and the rules of the National Federation will govern the sport when applicable.

3. **Legal Lineup:** A team must have at least three (3) Unified Student Athletes and not more than three (3) Unified Student Partners on the court at all times.

4. **Equipment/Court:** The ball shall have the NFHS Authenticating Mark imprinted. The net will be 7' 4 1/8". The service line may be brought in to 14'9".

5. **The Game:**
 - a. Substitutions
 - i. A Unified Student Athlete may only be substituted for a Unified Student Athlete
 - ii. A Unified Student Partner may only be substituted for a Unified Student Partner
 - b. Serving
 - i. The serving order and positions on the court, at service, shall alternate Athletes and Partners
 - ii. Once a server has scored three consecutive points, his/her team shall rotate to the next server and continue to serve
 - iii. The service line may be brought in to 14'9".
 - c. Scoring
 - i. A team needs to win two of three sets
 - ii. A team needs to win a set by 2 points
 - iii. Rally scoring will be used
 - iv. The first two sets will be played to 25 and the third to 15
 - v. Let Serve to Continue

6. **The Coach:**
 - a. Substitutions
 - i. The coach is permitted to make a request for substitution
 - The request will be recognized even if the player has not entered the substitution zone
 - ii. The coach is permitted to assist the athlete to move in position for substitutions

7. **Officials:** One NHIAA enrolled official will be used and paid at the sub-varsity rate.

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1. Introduction to Unified Sports: (BLA XXXVI, Sect. 2)

The vision of the joint NHIAA/Special Olympics sports project is to allow high school students with and without intellectual disabilities the opportunity to represent their high school by participating on a Unified Sports team providing the students with a quality experience of sports training and competition.

2. Definition of Participants: (BLA XXXVI, Sect. 3)

- a. **Unified Student Athlete:** A student with an intellectual disability who, based on **his/her** IEP is expected to be in school in accordance to state law (RSA 186-C:2)
- a. **Unified Student Partner:** Any student that meets the criteria outlined in NHIAA By-Law Article II: Eligibility.

3. Participant Eligibility: (BLA XXXVI, Sect. 4)

a. **Age Requirement:**

- i. A student with an intellectual disability **who, based on his/her IEP** may participate in Unified Sports as long as **he/she** is registered with the school.
- ii. **Unified Student Partner:** Refer to NHIAA By-Law Article II, Sect. 1: Age of Contestant.

b. **Scholastic Standing:**

- i. **Unified Student Athlete:** Special Education Students: Students receiving service under I.D.E.A., 89:313, R.S.A. 186: C and related State Board of Education regulations, to include students receiving service pursuant to Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, may be declared academically eligible by their principal provided that all other eligibility requirements are met or is a registered student at a school working towards a diploma or certificate.
- ii. **Unified Student Partner:** Refer to NHIAA By-Law Article II, Sect. 2: Scholastic Standing.

c. **Semester Rule:**

- i. **Unified Student Athlete:** Special Education Students: Students receiving service under I.D.E.A., 89:313, R.S.A. 186: C and related State Board of Education regulations, to include students receiving service pursuant to Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, may be declared academically eligible by their principal provided that all other eligibility requirements are met or is a registered student at a school working towards a diploma or certificate.
- ii. **Unified Student Partner:** Refer to NHIAA By-Law Article II, Sect. 3: Semester Rule.

- d. **Medical/Physical Requirements:** Refer to NHIAA By-Law Article III, Sect. 2: Medical Statement or local school requirements; whichever are higher.

- e. **Restriction of Participation – Unified Student Partner:** Student Athletes playing the same sport will be prohibited from competing as a Unified Partner in Unified Sports that season (with the exception of female volleyball players participating as a partner in unified volleyball). Appropriate participation for such a Student Athlete Partner may take place as an assistant coach or manager. Schools with limited enrollment or special circumstances may apply to the Executive Director for a waiver of this rule.
4. **Coaches Eligibility:** In addition to the training referred to in the NHIAA By-Law Article I, Sect. 32: Coaches Eligibility it is suggested that a Unified Sports Coach review a PowerPoint presentation by the start of the season (PowerPoint will be distributed by October 1st).
5. **Alignment of Sports: (BLA XXXVI, Sect. 5)** Unified Sport teams in basketball, soccer, and volleyball shall be aligned in two leagues as co-ed sports. Unified Track shall be aligned in one division as a co-ed sport (CM 5.2017)
6. **Officiating: (BLA XXXVI, Sect. 6)** All sanctioned Unified Sports contests in soccer, basketball and volleyball will have a minimum of one (1) NHIAA enrolled official. Athletic Directors will obtain their own officials for the regular season and shall pay them the sub-varsity rate.
7. **Completed Schedule and Forfeit:** All teams must complete their entire schedule submitted to the NHIAA. Any scheduled game(s) not played must be reported (in writing by both schools) to the NHIAA immediately. If a scheduled game can't be played both teams shall receive a forfeit loss.
8. **Medical Coverage at Athletic Events (By-Law Article III, Sect. 1):** The importance of the long-range safety of high school athletes cannot be overstated. Consequently, the NHIAA and its member schools will favor medical safety over any other countervailing concerns including competitive advantage. Every high school in New Hampshire must make provisions for **licensed** medical personnel at all practices and contests. The types of provisions that are acceptable are (the provisions are in alphabetical order, not preferential order):
 - a. Athletic Trainer
 - b. Board Certified Sports Physical Therapist
 - c. Emergency Medical Technician
 - d. Nurse
 - e. Nurse Practitioner
 - f. Physician
 - g. Physician Assistant
 - h. Systems developed to call medical personnel to the site of the athletic event

At the athletic competitions where medical coverage is either provided or mandated by the NHIAA, injuries sustained by athletes will be evaluated by the designated medical personnel. The clearance to re-enter competition after an injury will be made by the designated medical personnel only. Absent unanimous agreement between the designated medical personnel to allow continued participation, an injured player will not be allowed to return to the game. Their decision is final and cannot be overturned by the coach, coaching staff, parents/guardians, or any non-designated personnel.

When the NHIAA provides qualified medical personnel and member schools also provide qualified medical personnel, it is expressly understood that the NHIAA provider shall defer to the school designated qualified medical personnel if requested. If the member school does not provide qualified medical personnel or if no deferral is requested, the NHIAA provider will act as the designated medical personnel. In choosing who should act as the designated medical personnel, all medical personnel are expected to act in the best interests of the student athletes and participate to the extent that his or her expertise will increase the quality of the care delivered. Prior to the start of the event the NHIAA assigned medical personnel, in conjunction with the designated site manager, should review this requirement and determine the procedures/chain of command to be identified during the event to ensure compliance with the provisions stated in this By-Law.

Note: Student trainers, high school or college, cannot be used to meet the provisions of this By-Law.

9. **Blood Spillage and Body Fluids:** The NHIAA Sports Medicine Committee suggests that each school develop a local policy in cooperation with their local medical personnel, on how to handle blood spillage.
10. **Housekeeping Procedures for Blood and Body Fluids:** Disposable latex gloves should be worn to avoid contamination of the hands of the person cleaning spillages involving blood or other body fluids and secretions. Persons involved in cleaning contaminated surfaces should avoid exposure of open skin lesions or mucous membranes to blood or body fluids. A freshly prepared solution of dilute household bleach (one quarter cup of bleach diluted in one gallon of water) or other disinfectant labeled as virucidal, Tuberculocidal, staphylocidal is useful. Allow the disinfectant to stand wet for a minimum of one minute to start killing pathogens and disinfecting the area (10 minutes of disinfection time guarantees surface sterility). Whenever possible, disposable towels, tissues, and gloves should be used and properly discarded and mops should be rinsed in disinfectant.
11. **Interpretation of Excessive Bleeding:** National Federation Rules call for a player, who is bleeding, has an open wound or excessive blood on the uniform, to leave the court/field. The NHIAA interprets “excessive blood on the uniform” to mean that part of the uniform is saturated with blood. Saturated does not mean a wet spot. Saturated means a major portion of the garment is covered and soaked with blood. For this to occur, significant bleeding would have had to take place. For any blood on uniform less than “saturated”, the uniform does not have to be changed. School personnel have the responsibility of treating the blood area with the appropriate disinfecting solution before the athlete may participate. If the uniform is “saturated” with blood, the uniform must be changed before the athlete may participate. This interpretation is to be followed in the conduct of all NHIAA athletic events.
12. **NFHS Authenticating Mark:** All game balls at all levels of play shall have the NFHS Authenticating Mark imprinted.
The following procedure is to be followed:
 - a. Prior to the start of the game the head official is to inspect the game ball(s) to ensure the NFHS Authenticating Mark is imprinted. If the home team’s ball does not have the mark the visiting team’s ball with the Authenticating Mark is to be used.
 - b. In the event neither ball has the mark, the game is to be played and the head game official is to report the matter to the Supervisor of Officials, who in turn will notify the NHIAA office.

13. Outdoor Environmental Safety Lightning:

Lightning is the most consistent and significant weather hazard that may affect outdoor athletics. Within the United States, the National Severe Storm Laboratory (NSSL) estimates that 100 fatalities and 400-500 injuries requiring medical treatment occur from lightning strikes every year. The existence of blue sky and the absence of rain are not protection from lightning. Lightning can, and does, strike as far as 10 miles away from the rain shaft. It does not have to be raining for lightning to strike. Additionally, thunder always accompanies lightning, even though its audible range can be diminished due to background noise in the immediate environment, and its distance from the observer.

The following guidelines are recommended:

- A. All athletic staff and game personnel are to monitor threatening weather. Establish a chain of command as to who makes the decision to remove a team or individual from athletic sites or events (athletic/site/event director, game officials/umpires, sports medicine staff?).
- B. An emergency plan should include planned instructions for participants as well as spectators.
- C. Be aware of potential thunderstorms that may form during scheduled athletic events or practices. Included here should include National Weather Service – issued (NWS) thunderstorm “watches” and “warnings” as well as signs of thunderstorms developing nearby. A “watch” means conditions are favorable for severe weather to develop in an area; a “warning” means that severe weather has been reported in an area and for everyone to take proper precautions.
- D. Know where the closest “safe structure or location” is to the field or playing area, and know how long it takes to get to that safe structure or location.

Safe structure or location is defined as:

- i. Any building normally occupied or frequently used by people, i.e., a building with plumbing and /or electrical wiring that acts to electrically ground the structure. Avoid using shower facilities for safe shelter and **do not use** the showers or plumbing facilities during a thunderstorm.
 - ii. In the absence of a sturdy, frequently inhabited building, any vehicle with a hard metal roof (not a convertible or golf cart) and rolled up windows can provide a measure of safety. A vehicle is certainly better than remaining outdoors. It is not the rubber tires that make a vehicle safe shelter, but the hard metal roof, which dissipates the lightning strike around the vehicle. **DO NOT TOUCH THE SIDES OF THE VEHICLE!**
- E. WHEN YOU FIRST HEAR THUNDER OR SEE LIGHTING, SUSPEND ACTIVITIES AND GO TO A SAFE SHELTER OR LOCATION. **“IF YOU CAN SEE IT (LIGHTNING), FLEE IT (TAKE SHELTER). IF YOU CAN HEAR IT (THUNDER) CLEAR IT (SUSPEND ACTIVITIES).”** WAIT UNTIL 30 MINUTES AFTER THE LAST OBSERVED LIGHTNING OR THUNDER BEFORE RESUMING ACTIVITIES.

If no safe structure or location is within a reasonable distance, find a thick grove of small trees surrounded by taller trees or a dry ditch. Assume a crouched position on the ground with only the balls of the feet touching the ground, wrap your arms around your knees and lower your head. Minimize contact with the ground, because lightning current often enters a victim through the ground rather than by a direct overhead strike. **MINIMIZE YOUR BODY’S SURFACE AREA, AND MINIMIZE CONTACT WITH THE GROUND! DO NOT LIE FLAT!** Stay away from the tallest trees or objects (such as light poles or flag poles), metal objects (such as bleachers or fences), individual trees, standing pools of water, and open fields. Avoid being the highest object in a field. Do not take shelter under a single, tall tree.

14. NHIAA Guidelines On Ozone Pollution And Physical Activity:

School Administrators and coaches as well as other appropriate staff are to use this document in making decisions regarding indoor and outdoor activities during periods of high ozone pollution.

CHARTING AIR QUALITY

Local officials use a simple scale to forecast and report on smog levels and other air pollution.

Depending on where you live, it might be called Air Quality Index (AQI) or Pollutant Standards Index (PSI).

Current air quality is reported as a percentage of the federal health standard for a pollutant. If the current Index is above 100, air pollution exceeds the level considered safe.

At Ozone smog levels above 100, children, asthmatics and other sensitive groups should limit strenuous exercise. Even otherwise healthy people should consider limiting vigorous exercise when ozone levels are at or above the health standard.

If the index is above 200, corresponding to an ozone pollution level of .20 parts per million (ppm), the pollution level is judged unhealthy for everyone. At this level, air pollution is a serious health concern. Everyone should avoid strenuous outdoor activity, as respiratory tract irritation can occur.

U.S. EPA Air Quality Index

Index Value	Descriptor	Color	1 hr. Ozone ppb
0 – 50	Good	Green	---
51 – 100	Moderate	Yellow	---
101 – 150	Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups	Orange	125 – 164
151 – 200	Unhealthy	Red	165 – 204
201 – 300	Very Unhealthy	Purple	205 – 404
301 – 500	Hazardous	Maroon	405 – 604

Observing Air Quality

1. Watch the Calendar

Ozone smog tends to be worst during the May – to – September “smog season.” Be especially conscious of smog levels during warm weather. In warm areas, smog can be a problem at any time of the year. Carbon monoxide pollution levels also are related to the weather, as well as to altitude. In the western U.S., the highest carbon monoxide levels are found in the winter months.

2. Watch the Clock

Since sunlight and time are necessary for ozone smog formation, the highest levels of ozone typically occur during the afternoon. Since carbon monoxide is produced primarily by motor vehicles, the highest carbon monoxide levels usually occur during rush hour or during other traffic congestion situations.

3. Watch the News

Guidelines For Participation

1. Observe appropriate physical activity restrictions represented above.
2. If an ozone exceedance is expected, but has not yet occurred at the time an interscholastic practice or contest is scheduled to begin, that event may begin as scheduled.
3. If an interscholastic practice or contest is scheduled to begin and an E.P.A. warning is in effect (PSI 201 or higher), the event shall be cancelled, delayed or rescheduled.

When ozone levels reach a national PSI level of 201 (.201 parts per million), exercising indoors or outdoors may cause significant respiratory tract irritation and a decline in lung function. Therefore, strenuous exercise indoors and outdoors is to cease.

Recommended Restriction Of Physical Activity

The following limits on activity for each type of episode are as follows:

- A. Level Orange, PSI 101-150 (Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups)
 1. Active children and adults and people with heart or respiratory disease, such as asthma or allergies, should limit prolonged outdoor exertion.
 2. Healthy individuals with noticeable health effects associated with existing conditions should minimize outdoor activity.
- B. Level Red, PSI 151-200 (Unhealthy)
 1. All athletes should discontinue prolonged, vigorous exercise indoors and outdoors.
 2. Sensitive individuals, primarily children who are active outdoors and people with heart or respiratory disease such as asthma or allergies, should avoid indoor and outdoor activity.
 3. Indoor and outdoor activities that should be avoided include, but are not limited to, calisthenics, basketball, baseball, running, field hockey, soccer, football, tennis, swimming and diving.
- C. Level Purple, PSI 201-300 (Very Unhealthy)
 1. All athletes shall discontinue vigorous indoor and outdoor activities, regardless of duration.
 2. All indoor and outdoor physical education classes, sports practices and athletic competitions shall be rescheduled.

Note: Indoor practices may be held if an air-conditioned facility is available.

NFHS Guidelines for Management of Concussions:

The NHIAA mandates the following of the NFHS guidelines for management of Concussions.

Concussions: Any athlete who exhibits signs, symptoms, or behaviors consistent with a concussion shall be immediately removed from the contest and shall not return to play until cleared by an appropriate health care professional.

For additional information and potential symptoms, please be sure to visit By-Law Article III; Sports Medicine: Sect. 13: Concussions and the New Hampshire SB402 and its language as written.