



WIAA Philosophy on Addressing Student Eligibility Concerns as a Result of COVID-19

The WIAA has been deeply saddened that our high school students lost the opportunity to participate for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year. However, we are thankful we have a handbook with extensive language around student eligibility and a comprehensive process for students to appeal eligibility concerns.

As we move toward the return of school and participation in education-based activities, we anticipate many unique and challenging situations that may impact eligibility. We encourage the leaders in our membership to help each family navigate the eligibility process with compassion, grace and understanding. Our eligibility committees will be equally diligent in processing eligibility appeals and working to help students gain eligibility within the rules of the organization.

*A key component of eligibility appeals are found in the presence of a **hardship**. A hardship is not only a unique circumstance beyond the control of the student or family, it must also be totally different from those that exist for the majority or even a small minority of students. For eligibility purposes, the WIAA has deemed that COVID-19 is not, in and of itself, a hardship. However, this does not preclude a student from having a hardship as a result of COVID-19. Every student has been impacted by COVID-19, however not every student has a direct, causal relationship between the eligibility rule and their inability to meet such rule as a result of COVID-19.*

It is the intention of the WIAA to address each individual concern through our statewide eligibility process.

The eligibility process for students is the responsibility of the Athletic Director at each member school. If an Athletic Director deems a student ineligible due to not being able to fully meet the eligibility requirements, an appeal process is available. The Athletic Director will help the family navigate the appeal process. The appeal process could result in one of two options: Granted Without a Hearing (this would happen as a result of an appeal packet having complete paperwork that meets the WIAA definition of a Hardship) or an Eligibility Hearing. Eligibility appeals are done at the beginning of the season in which the ineligibility is present.

Below are specifics to each Eligibility Rule intended to help address specific questions:

Physical Exam 17.11.0

Prior to the first practice for participation in interscholastic athletics a student shall undergo a thorough medical examination and be approved for interscholastic athletic competition by a medical authority licensed to perform a physical examination.

- Many schools require a new physical every 13 months and are concerned about students not having access to their doctor to complete a new physical during the COVID-19 closures. The WIAA has a minimum requirement of physicals every 24 months so districts could consider a waiver of their 13 month rule.
- The WIAA does not intend to provide a waiver of their physical exam rules as a result of COVID-19.

Age 18.4.0 ***AGE LIMITS - SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL** – A student shall be under 20 years of age on September for the fall sports season, on December 1 for the winter sports season, and on March 1 for the spring sports season.*

***AGE LIMITS - JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL** – A student shall not have reached their 16th birthday prior to June 1 of the previous school year.*

***AGE LIMITS - MIDDLE SCHOOL** – A student shall not have reached their 15th birthday prior to June 1 of the previous school year. Middle school is defined as a school with at least seventh and eighth grade levels.*

- The WIAA does not intend to provide a waiver of the age limitations rules as a result of COVID-19.

Regular Member of a School 18.5.0

Students must be regular members of the school they represent in order to participate in an interscholastic activity. Students are a "regular member" of a school if they are enrolled half time or more, exclusive of interscholastic activities.

18.5.1 Home Based Education

18.5.2 Alternative Education

18.5.3 Private School Education

- It is reasonable to anticipate families will explore the best learning environment for their students, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. This may include online school, alternative school, etc.
- The WIAA does not intend to provide a waiver of its "member of a school" rules as a result of COVID-19.

Scholarship: Maintain Passing Grades in a Minimum Number of Classes/Credits 18.7.0

In order to maintain eligibility during the current semester/trimester, the student shall maintain passing grades, or the minimum grade standards as determined by the school district if more restrictive, in a minimum number of classes

- The WIAA does not intend to provide a waiver of its scholarship rules as a result of COVID-19.
- There have been some questions about seniors (2019-2020) wanting to return to school for an additional year (2020-21). With this said, it is important to note that they will need to meet the minimum grade standards in order to have an opportunity to seek eligibility.

Scholarship: Previous Semester 18.7.4

The student shall have passed the minimum number of classes as listed in 18.7.0 in the immediately preceding semester/trimester in order to be eligible for competition during the succeeding semester/trimester.

- **For the upcoming fall of 2020, the WIAA has agreed to provide a blanket waiver to rule 18.7.4, as a result of COVID-19.**
 - 18.7.6 A will be utilized as follows: In the fall of 2020, **all students** are not required to meet the previous semester scholarship rule in 18.7.4 provided they meet all other eligibility requirements. The student's grades will be monitored during the first designated monitoring period established by the school and every three (3) to six (6) weeks thereafter.
 - There may be situations in which families choose to UN-enroll their students from their school. The vital step to maintain athletic eligibility for the fall of 2020-21 is going to be reflected in the student's transcript (indicating they maintained enrollment in school) for the 2nd semester/3rd trimester. It is the hope that if a family chooses to UN-enroll their student from school during the pandemic, they have enrolled them in another form of education that can be reflected on their transcript.
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Scholarship: Regular Attendance 18.9.0

The student shall be enrolled and in regular attendance within the first 15 school days in a semester or ten (10) school days in a trimester at the start of the current semester/trimester in order to participate in interscholastic contests during the current semester/trimester. An enrolled student who receives semester/trimester grades will be considered to have been in attendance for that semester/trimester unless they are withdrawn from school.

- The WIAA does not intend to provide a blanket waiver of its regular attendance rules as a result of COVID-19.
 - If the school system is unable to begin school on schedule in August/September, the expectation will include meeting the spirit of the rule upon the opening of school. Each school's opening day would be the date used for this rule.
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Residence 18.10.0

The place where the family unit has established its home and/or the place where the student is habitually present and to which, when departing, the student intends to return.

- The WIAA does not intend to provide a blanket waiver of its residence rules as a result of COVID-19.
 - It is reasonable to assume some families have been separated and/or family units disrupted as a result of COVID-19. These cases will need to be addressed on an individual basis via the hardship process.
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Transferring Student 18.11.0

*After **residing in**, registering with, attending, or participating with a middle level or high school, students changing enrollment to/from one school district to another school district or from one high school to another high school within a multiple high school district shall be considered transferring students. In order to be eligible for varsity competition, transferring students must meet the transferring student requirements of 18.11.1, 18.11.2, 18.11.3, or be granted a waiver under 18.13.0 and 18.26.3.*

- The WIAA does not intend to provide a blanket waiver of its transfer rules as a result of COVID-19.
- It is reasonable to assume some families have faced challenges and choose to transfer their students to a new school. This may be a result of financial hardship. Academic programming, family hardship or personal choice. These cases will need to be addressed on an individual basis via the hardship process.
- If a family unit has been disrupted during the pandemic and has returned together upon the beginning of school, there would not have been a disruption of continued enrollment, thus no concern. The challenge will be if a family enrolls a student in a new school without meeting the transfer rules.



Season Limitations 18.14.0

After entering or being eligible to enter the seventh (7th) grade students shall have six (6) consecutive years of interscholastic eligibility. If the seventh (7th) or eighth (8th) grade is repeated, and such repetition is based upon documented academic deficiencies by the school principal, the repeated year shall not count against the student's six (6) interscholastic competitive years. Home school students are required to provide documentation of academic deficiency to be verified by the school principal.

After entering or being eligible to enter the ninth (9th) grade, a student shall have four (4) consecutive years of interscholastic eligibility.

- The WIAA does not intend to provide a blanket waiver of the season limitations rule as a result of COVID-19.
- It is reasonable to assume there are seniors that are not on track to graduate and have missed their senior sports season wishing to return to their high school for one more year. These cases will need to be addressed on an individual basis via the hardship process. These students will be required to meet all other conditions of eligibility (age, scholarship, previous semester, etc) and have an academic plan for the entire school year documenting the deficiency in academics needed to be completed to graduate.
- In addition, Season Limitations would only be granted for sports in which the student did not have the opportunity to compete for 4 years. If a student is claiming hardship due to COVID-19 and wishing to gain an additional year of eligibility, most likely Fall and Winter seasons would not be granted but spring would be considered (unless there is a different hardship directly related to a fall or winter sport).

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- **18.26.3A - Due to COVID-19, the WIAA eligibility interpretation is that 2020 Spring Sports (no matter how many practices were completed or games played prior to COVID-19) will not be considered a season of participation.**

Frequently Asked Questions:

Question: Due to covid-19 and the quality of education my student received this spring and the fact that they are young for their grade, we would like to have our student "re-classify" and do 9th grade again.

Answer: "Re-classify" is not a term used in high school athletics. Per WIAA rule 18.14.0 (Season Limitations), after entering or being eligible to enter seventh (7th) grade, students shall have six (6) consecutive years of interscholastic eligibility. Rule 18.14.0 explains the process for repeating 7th or 8th grade.

Question: Due to covid-19, our school will be issuing a significant number of incomplete grades to our students. How will this impact previous semester academic requirements?

Answer: The WIAA has agreed to treat all students grade 9-12 as we would treat incoming 9th graders (WIAA Handbook Rule 18.7.6A). Incompletes do not negatively impact the interpretation of this rule. Reminder, schools will need to monitor grades during the first designated monitoring period established by the school and every three (3) to six (6) weeks after.

Question: Our physician's office is currently not seeing patients to perform physicals. Can my student have a variance on their expiration date because of this?

Answer: The health and safety of students is a top priority of the WIAA. We understand that some areas may have difficulty arranging physicals, but the school and school district should work with the medical community for the best options. The WIAA will not waive its policy on physical expiration dates.