

**ATHLETIC PLACEMENT PROCESS  
FOR  
INTERSCHOOL ATHLETIC PROGRAMS**



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## PREFACE

The Athletic Placement Process (APP) is a program for evaluating students who want to participate in sports at higher or lower levels, as approved by the Board of Regents as a part of the school eligibility rules in 1980, and is aligned with Learning Standards 1 and 2. Commissioner's Regulation Section 135.4(c)(7)(ii)(a)(4) states:

*A Board of Education may permit pupils in grades no lower than seventh to compete on any senior high school team, or permit senior high pupils to compete on any teams in grades no lower than seventh, provided the pupils are placed at levels of competition appropriate to their physiological maturity, physical fitness, and skills in relationship to other pupils on those teams in accordance with standards established by the Commissioner.*

These standards state that students will have the necessary knowledge and skills to establish and maintain physical fitness, participate in physical activity, maintain personal health, and acquire both the knowledge and ability to create and maintain a safe and healthy environment.

The New York State Education Department (NYSED) has collaborated with the New York State Athletic Administrators Association (NYSAAA), the New York State Public High School Athletic Association (NYSPHSAA), the Statewide School Health Services Center (SSHSC), district directors of school health services (commonly referred to as medical directors and previously known as school medical officers), and directors of physical education/athletics to promote physical education and interschool athletic competition statewide. This guide to the Athletic Placement Process is the result of that collaboration.

This document represents the shared belief of the NYSAAA, the NYSPHSAA, medical directors, directors of physical education/athletics, and the NYSED that physical education and interscholastic athletic competition are important to the development of the whole child, and that students benefit when they can participate in such activities at a pace that is consistent with their physical and emotional maturity, size, fitness level, and athletic skill.

Schools, both public and private, competing in interscholastic sports under the jurisdiction of the Commissioner's Regulations may choose whether or not to adopt a policy that permits students in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades to try out for a high school team, or that permits high school students to play at the modified level. If schools choose to have such a policy, the process outlined in this document is to be followed.

Normally, a student is eligible for senior high athletic competition in a sport during each of four consecutive seasons, beginning with entry into the ninth grade. However, by satisfying the requirements of the APP, a student may receive extended eligibility that permits:

- a) participation during five consecutive seasons in the approved sport, after entry into the eighth grade; or
- b) participation during six consecutive seasons in the approved sport, after entry into the seventh grade.

THE INTENT OF THE APP IS TO PROVIDE A PROTOCOL FOR THOSE DISTRICTS THAT CHOOSE TO ALLOW STUDENTS IN GRADES 7 AND 8 TO MOVE UP; OR FOR STUDENTS IN GRADES 9-12 TO MOVE DOWN, ALLOWING THEM TO PARTICIPATE SAFELY AT AN APPROPRIATE LEVEL OF COMPETITION BASED UPON PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL READINESS AND ATHLETIC ABILITY RATHER THAN AGE AND GRADE ALONE.

Students do not mature at the same rate, and there can be tremendous developmental differences between students of the same age. The APP is not to be used to fill positions on teams, provide additional experience, provide an opportunity for middle school or junior high students when no modified program is offered, or to reward a student. Instead, it is aimed at the few, select students who can benefit from such placement because of their level of readiness.

## **How to Use This Guide**

The APP is a program that may be implemented at the discretion of local school districts. It is not mandated.

The APP is intended for use by student athletes in grades 7 - 12, and directly relates to specific interschool sport categories and levels of competition as follows:

### Intermediate

- Grades 7 - 8

### Commencement

- Grades 9 - 12

### Interscholastic Sports Categories:

#### Contact Sports

basketball, baseball, field hockey, ice hockey, lacrosse, soccer, football, softball, volleyball, competitive cheerleading, and wrestling

#### Non-Contact Sports

archery, bowling, cross-country, golf, gymnastics, rifle, swimming & diving, skiing, tennis, track & field, fencing, and badminton

### Athletic Competition Levels:

- Modified
- Freshman
- Junior Varsity
- Varsity

The main body of this document is organized to assist the medical director and the physical education director and/or athletic director in administering all aspects of the APP.

There is great diversity among student athletes throughout New York State. The APP was revised to assess a student's physical and emotional maturation, physical fitness, and sport skill, so that a student may be placed at a level of competition that should result in increased opportunity, a fairer competitive environment, minimized risk, and greater personal satisfaction. In districts that allow the program, safety must be of paramount importance.

The APP is to be used only when an individual athlete's athletic skills warrant moving to the commencement or intermediate sport competition level, and therefore, ideally, it should be initiated by the district's physical education director and/or athletic director and physical education staff, who recognize the student's skill. The APP may be used either prior to the beginning of the season, so that the student athlete can participate in the try-out period, or within the timelines specified by the NYSPHSAA Promotion Rule.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

Physical education teachers, coaches, students, or parents/guardians may ask the physical education director and/or athletic director to evaluate a student, using the APP. Students will not be processed through the evaluation procedures without a request from the physical education director and/or athletic director and parent/guardian written permission. It is not the intent to evaluate all modified students, and evaluation should be considered only for those students with the appropriate physical and emotional readiness, and whose athletic abilities are outside of those of their age-related peers.

### Transition from Selection Classification to Athletic Placement Process for 2014-2015

- Beginning in the fall season of 2015, the APP will be used to advance students to the high school athletic program.
- Students in 7<sup>th</sup> grade will be evaluated through the APP.
- Students in 8<sup>th</sup> grade who have not been Selectively Classified for a sport in the previous year will be processed through the APP.
- Students in 8<sup>th</sup> grade who had been advanced to a higher level through the Selection Classification process in the previous year will not need to be re-evaluated if they remain at the same level of athletic competition in the same sport. If a student changes levels of the sport, the APP will be followed.

### After the fall season of 2015, the following should be implemented:

If a student in grade 7 or 8 has reached the chronological age of 15 years old prior to July 1, he or she is eligible to participate on high school athletics without undergoing the APP; only medical approval by the district medical director is required, as these students are already at an advanced age and would otherwise lose eligibility due to aging out.

A student who has undergone the APP does not need the procedure repeated if he/she achieved the required scores for fitness, maturity, and comparable physical size for the desired sport and level, regardless of the school year in which the testing was completed.

If a student has undergone the APP evaluation procedure and participated in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, the process would not have to be repeated in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade *provided they remain at the same level of athletic competition in the same sport*. If the student changes levels or sports, the student's scores should be reviewed to see if they meet the requirements for the desired level and sport. APP evaluation procedures must be repeated only if the scores do not meet the requirements for the desired level and sport.

If a student has attained an appropriate level of physical maturity, and has a height and weight that are comparable to those of the proposed team members as determined by the medical director, they may proceed to the next level of skills assessment by the athletic/physical education director. If the medical director does not clear the student to participate in the desired sport and level, **he or she may not proceed any further in the evaluation process**. Medical directors should not be pressured to change their decision. If a student is determined to be comparable with the physical size and maturity of the average age and sex of the students against whom they wish to compete, but fails to meet **more than one** of the physical fitness test standards, or if a student fails to meet an appropriate sport skill level as determined by the coach, **he or she may not proceed any further in the evaluation process**.

In conclusion, the district medical director and the director of physical education/athletics and ultimately the board of education ensure compliance with the APP. It is intended only for the student who is truly at a level of physical and emotional maturity, comparable physical size, fitness, and sport skill that is commensurate with the level of competition that they wish to pursue.

An athlete may not be approved to participate by the medical director due to health impairment and/or the student's physical maturation level. Whenever there is disagreement between a private health care provider and the district medical director, efforts should be made by both parties to come to agreement for the health and safety of the student athlete. In these cases, the primary concern should be allowing an athlete to participate to the fullest level of his or her potential safely, and neither the demands of parents, athletes, or coaches should confound that concern. However, Education Law, Section 3208(a) provides a due process procedure to students or their parents/guardians to petition the courts for relief from a school district's exclusion of the student from participation in an athletic program. In the event of such disqualification, school authorities should advise the parents and the student of the availability of this process. The court may then grant such a petition, if it is satisfied that it is in the best interest of the student and that it is reasonably safe for the student to participate in the athletic program.

## PROCEDURES FOR THE DIRECTOR OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND ATHLETICS

The director of physical education/athletics has the responsibility of ensuring that the APP is followed by all parties involved; that the medical director is included at appropriate times; and that the final determinations are sent to the parents, competing school districts, and section executives. Students who pass all parts of the APP are permitted to try out. There are no waivers. A student must meet the appropriate standards of physical and emotional maturity, size, fitness, and skill, in order to qualify.

### IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

ALL STEPS MUST BE FOLLOWED, IN ORDER, FOR EACH APP REQUEST.

**Step 1 District Policy:** Confirm that the school district has approved a resolution to allow students to participate in the APP (and/or revise the language in existing “Selection/Classification” policies to include the new process). If no such resolution exists, proper steps should be taken to ensure that this first requirement is met.(see Appendix A–Sample Resolution).

**Step 2 Parent/Guardian Permission:** All students who are to be evaluated must first obtain written parent/guardian permission before any evaluation may begin (see Appendix B).

**Step 3 Administrative Approval:** The athletic administrator should confirm that the student is suitable for consideration, which includes the likelihood that the student would play in at least 50% of the games. Additionally, because of the increased time demands of participation at the high school level, the student’s academic performance (as determined at the local level) should be at or above grade level. Furthermore, administration should assess the student’s emotional readiness to socialize with high school-aged students. If the student is not academically or socially ready, the student should not proceed through the APP.

**Step 4 Medical Clearance:** (Must be completed BEFORE the physical fitness portion of the process) The district medical director will determine a student’s physical maturity level, and compare the physical size of the student in relation to that of the students against whom the student wishes to compete. If the student is determined to have attained the appropriate physical maturity level and comparable physical size for the desired sport and level (see Appendix C and H), the student may proceed with step 5. If the student is determined to **not** have attained an appropriate physical maturity level for the desired sport and level, **the process stops**.

**Important Note on the Physical Maturity Examination:** *For the medical director, determining the physical maturity level of the student is an important step in the APP process. This is done to ensure that the student has attained a level of physical development at which the chances of growth plate or overuse injury is minimized. Since the growth plate is the weakest area of the growing skeleton, weaker than the nearby ligaments and tendons that connect bones to other bones and muscles, injury to a growth plate can lead to a serious and potentially permanent injury to a joint or long bone. While growth plate injuries are usually caused by an acute event such as a fall or a blow to a limb, they can also result from overuse, such as when a gymnast practices for hours on the uneven bars, a runner runs long distances, or a baseball pitcher spends hours perfecting a curve ball. Growth plate trauma and other overuse injuries may*

occur in competitive sports such as football, basketball, softball, track & field, and gymnastics. The likelihood increases when students are doing a single sport year round without substantial rest; therefore, caution must be exercised in determining the physical maturity of students at this age level. Developmental staging reduces, but does not eliminate, the risks of injury to a younger student moving up to sport activities involving more developmentally mature students. Since all growth plates might not be fully matured by the time a student reaches Tanner 5, care must be exercised in determining the physical maturity of athletes. The size of the student in relation to the other athletes is also a critical component in determining the risk of injury.

*It is always best to err on the side of caution and keep a student at the age-appropriate level of play in order to safeguard the student. There will be many more years for the student to advance in athletics, and success is more likely if he or she does not suffer from permanent injuries.*

**Step 5 Sport Skill Evaluation:** The sport coach will rely on past personal observations and may consider input from the student's former coaches to complete the evaluation. If the coach is unfamiliar with the student, the sport coach may wish to observe the student in a physical education class (see Appendix D).

**Step 6 Physical Fitness Testing:** This must be done by a certified physical education teacher who is not a coach of the sport for which the student will be trying out. The President's Physical Fitness Test has been selected as the test for this process, and the student must meet the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile level for their age in 4 out of 5 test components (see Appendix E, I, and J). For students trying out for swimming, see Appendix J for an alternate fitness test to the 1 mile walk/run- students trying out for swimming may choose to either do the 1 mile walk/ run or the 500 yard swim.

*Exception to the physical fitness test requirement: Students who desire to try out for bowling or golf teams are not required to complete the physical fitness testing.*

**Step 7 Qualification Determination:** The results of the three evaluations will be sent to the director of physical education/athletics. **Only students who pass all parts of the APP are permitted to try out.**

**Step 8 Try Outs:** The student is allowed to try out for the sport and level requested or the student must return to the modified level of competition. For students trying out for bowling or golf, see instructions for try outs for these sports in Appendix G.

**Step 9 Records:** The physical education director and/or athletic director must maintain all records of students who have successfully completed the APP. Items to be kept in the student's file are: Parent/Guardian Permission and Result letters; Maturity Evaluation and Medical Director Form; Physical Fitness results; Coach's Sport Skill Evaluation.

**Step 10 Notifications:** A Notification List (see Appendix F) of the scores of all athletes who have successfully completed the process and have been approved through the APP **after the try-out period has been completed** must be sent to:

- The physical education director and/or athletic director of competitor schools
- Athletic governing board or section office