



Southeast Polk CSD Policy & Guidelines: 8th Grade Participation in High School Athletics

I. Purpose and Philosophy

The Southeast Polk Community School District recognizes recent changes in Iowa legislation permitting 8th-grade students to participate in high school athletics under specific circumstances.

Our core philosophy is that moving an 8th-grade student up to a high school program must be a **unique and exceptional circumstance**. It is reserved strictly for student-athletes who possess the exceptional skills, physical readiness, and emotional maturity to be an immediate **varsity-level contributor**.

The district remains deeply committed to maintaining robust, sustainable junior high activity programs that emphasize fundamental skill development and age-appropriate growth. Southeast Polk High School programs will not pull 8th-grade students up simply to fill out rosters or to create additional lower-level high school developmental squads (such as JV2 or sophomore teams).

II. State Mandated Framework & Local Policy Considerations

To ensure compliance with Iowa law (HF2591) and Iowa Administrative Code 281-36.1(280), administrators, coaches, and parents must adhere to the following directives:

- **Single-Season Participation Rule:** An 8th-grade student who opts to participate in a high school sport season **is strictly prohibited** from participating in that same sport's junior high/8th-grade season. This applies even if the junior high and high school seasons take place at different times of the school year.
- **Academic Eligibility:** While state law does not mandate high school academic requirements for 8th graders, **Southeast Polk CSD policy dictates that 8th graders will continue to fall under the Junior High/8th Grade academic policy** for eligibility purposes.



- **Medical Clearance:** Prior to participation, the parent/guardian must submit written [documentation from a licensed physician](#) stating that the student can safely compete at the high school level. This is to be completed via Bound.
- **Code of Conduct:** The moment an 8th-grade student officially joins a Southeast Polk high school athletic program, they immediately fall under the jurisdiction of the **High School Student Code of Conduct Policy**.
- **High School Eligibility Semesters:** Participating as an 8th grader **does not** reduce a student's high school eligibility. Upon entering the 9th grade for the first time, the student will still have the standard maximum of eight consecutive semesters of athletic eligibility remaining.
- **Future Transfer Impact (140-Day Rule):** Parents must be aware that if an 8th grader participates in a high school sport under this policy and subsequently chooses to enroll in a *different* high school for 9th grade, they will be **ineligible for varsity athletics for a period of 140 calendar days** at the new school.
- **No Guarantees:** Approval of this request permits an 8th grader to try out or join the program, but it does not guarantee team membership, specific placement, or guaranteed playing time.

III. Developmentally Appropriate Criteria for Approval

Before initiating an eligibility request, the varsity head coach must evaluate the student-athlete against the following criteria:

1. **Physical Readiness:** Does the student possess the physical strength, speed, and conditioning to safely compete against high school varsity athletes?
2. **Emotional & Social Maturity:** Can the student handle the psychological pressures, time commitments, and social dynamics of a high school varsity environment?
3. **Skill Development:** Does the student display an advanced technical skillset that justifies bypassing junior high programming?
4. **Varsity Impact:** Will this student be a meaningful contributor at the varsity level?

If the head coach has not had sufficient opportunity to evaluate the student during the offseason, the coach may invite the student to participate in up to two (2) high school practice sessions for evaluation purposes.

These sessions are evaluations only and do not guarantee placement on a high school team.