



Student Eligibility Guidance for High School Principals and Athletic Administrators

Enrollment & Attendance Bylaw Guidance Bylaws 4-3-2, 4-3-3, 4-3-4, 4-3-5

This document will focus on the semester eligibility standards which, like the enrollment and attendance standards found in Bylaw 4-3-1, have been a foundational basis upon which education-based athletics have been built since inception of the OHSAA in 1908. The semester standard is considered a “maximum participation opportunity” standard. Each student is permitted up to eight semesters of high school athletic participation opportunity, and each 7-8th grade student is permitted up to four semesters of 7-8th grade athletic participation opportunity whether the student is able to or chooses to participate in interscholastic athletics or not.

The “semester rule” is predicated on the notion that once a student begins his/her freshman year of high school, or the 7th grade in middle school, she/he should complete his or her education in four or two years, respectively. The rule also reinforces the notion that education supersedes athletics and that students should not be held back for athletic reasons. Notwithstanding these fundamental principles of the ‘semester rule,’ the member schools have identified scenarios under which the semester limitations might be waived. However, as one Ohio court noted, *“the exception to the age rule [is] intended to allow for the participation of a young person with a disability who would not impact the outcome of an event and probably under most circumstances would not be allowed to compete. It is a rule of compassion but was not intended to give the top athletes another year of eligibility”*. The same can be said of the semester rule exception.

These semester standards promote timely progress toward graduation by discouraging students from delaying or interrupting their education; prohibits students from enrolling and withdrawing for any semester during a school year to increase athletic advantage; promotes equality of competition; helps avoid exploitation from coaches or boosters who otherwise might seek to obtain transfers or delay a student’s normal progress through school; prevents displacement of younger students by older students who wish to unfairly protract their middle school or high school athletic careers; and places emphasis on the academic mission of the school. In addition, the assurance that each student is afforded the same number of semesters of athletic eligibility increases the number of students who will have an opportunity to participate for their schools.

The OHSAA has adopted four bylaws that define and clarify the eight-semester and four-semester participation standard. The guidance will discuss each of those bylaws.



OHIO HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION

Doug Ute, Executive Director

BYLAW 4-3-2: *For purposes of the semester bylaws 4-3-3 and 4-3-4 only, enrollment and attendance in a school shall be deemed continuous until such date when a student has been officially withdrawn from the school in accordance with that school's policies.*

Guidance: This bylaw clearly stipulates that a student is still considered to be enrolled in a school, and accountable to the semester bylaws, even though he or she may or may not be attending regularly. Until formal withdrawal from a school, the student is considered to be enrolled unless that student has enrolled in another school at which time, according to the operational definitions which precede this Section 3, the student would then be considered withdrawn.

BYLAW 4-3-3: *After a student completes the eighth grade or is otherwise eligible for high school athletics participation, the student may be eligible for a period not to exceed eight semesters taken in order of attendance, regardless of whether the student participates or is even eligible to participate in accordance with these eligibility bylaws. A student in grade 7 or 8 who attains the age of 15 before August 1 shall be eligible only at the high school level for a period not to exceed eight semesters commencing with the semester of the student's first participation at the high school level.*

See Bylaw 4-3-5 for further definition of what constitutes "order of attendance" as it relates to these semester bylaws.

Guidance: There are three exceptions to Bylaw 4-3-3 (eight-semester rule):

Exception 1 permits the completion of a sports season into the 9th semester for a student who completes the 8th semester during the fall. For example, a student who is a swimmer and is completing her 8th semester in the fall would be able to complete the swimming and diving season even though it extends into the second semester, but would be ineligible for a spring sport. This exception requires approval from the Executive Director's Office. **To receive a ruling on this exception**, the principal or athletic administrator shall direct a letter to Kristin Ronai (kronai@ohsaa.org) outlining the specific details of the student's situation.

Exception 2 is an exception for a student with a disability who would not likely participate in any meaningful way in any contest. **To receive a ruling on this exception**, the principal or athletic administrator shall complete the following application and send into the Executive Director's Office Attn: Kristin Ronai (kronai@ohsaa.org):

<https://ohsaaweb.blob.core.windows.net/files/Eligibility/forms/AgeSemesterWaiver.pdf>

Exception 3 permits a student who began high school in another country to have up to eight semesters of high school eligibility in the United States when evidence can be presented that the student's placement in high school outside the United States was inappropriate for the student's age and academic capabilities. **To receive a ruling on this exception**, the principal shall direct a letter to Kristin Ronai (kronai@ohsaa.org) outlining the specific details of the student's situation, including details that suggest the student's original placement in high school outside the United States was academically inappropriate. Some examples might include failing grades during those semesters outside the USA, test scores that might indicate the student should not have been placed in a particular grade level or any other academic evidence that would be persuasive.



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BYLAW 4-3-4: *After a student completes the sixth grade or is otherwise eligible for 7-8th grade athletics participation and before the student enters the ninth grade, the student may be eligible for a period not to exceed four semesters taken in order of attendance, whether the student participates or not.*

Guidance: There is only one exception to this rule for a student with a disability who would not likely participate in any meaningful way in any contest. **To receive a ruling on this exception,** the principal or athletic administrator shall complete the following application and send into the Executive Director's Office Attn: Kristin Ronai (kronai@ohsaa.org):
<https://ohsaaweb.blob.core.windows.net/files/Eligibility/forms/AgeSemesterWaiver.pdf>

BYLAW 4-3-5: *A student who is enrolled 15 or more school days in any semester, or who participates in an interscholastic contest prior to or during a semester, shall have that semester count as one semester of eligibility. In addition, the following situations shall count as a semester of eligibility:*

1: A student who does not attend school in a semester due to a suspension or an expulsion shall have that semester(s) count in the total of four (grades 7-8) or eight (high school) that are permitted. 2: A student who does not attend school due to enrollment in a postsecondary institution that is not part of the College Credit Plus Program (dual credit for both high school and postsecondary school) shall have that semester(s) count in the total of four or eight that are permitted. 3: A student who does not attend any school for a semester(s) due to truancy shall have that semester(s) count in the total of four or eight that are permitted. 4: A student who does not attend any school for a semester(s) due to withdrawal, and a student who is excused from compulsory attendance to be home educated shall have that semester(s) count in the total of four or eight that are permitted.

Guidance: There is one exception that would permit the Executive Director's Office to disregard a semester of enrollment – notice the use of the word “enrollment,” which means that the student has not been withdrawn but has simply not attended school - due to a set of circumstances that are no fault of the student's and would be considered extreme and unavoidable. To receive a ruling on this exception, the principal shall direct a letter to Kristin Ronai (kronai@ohsaa.org) outlining the specific details of the situation the student faced that caused him or her to be unable to attend school although still enrolled in the school.

Please feel free to contact Kristin Ronai (kronai@ohsaa.org), Ronald Sayers (rsayers@ohsaa.org) or Lizzy Wilson (lwilson@ohsaa.org) if you have any questions!