

# Arizona's School Choice Landscape and High School Athletic Eligibility



# Arizona School Choice Options

- Open Enrollment
  - Arizona students may enroll in any school where enrollment capacity exists (district schools still maintain an enrollment boundary)
- District Public Schools
- Public Charter Schools
- Online Charter Schools
- Private/Parochial Schools
- Home School
- Empowerment Scholarship Accounts (voucher)

# AZ High School Athletic Eligibility

## District School, Charter School, Private/Parochial School

9th Grade Enrollment - Student is eligible at any school in which they initially enroll/attend

Following initial enrollment/attendance, transfer eligibility is determined as:

- First transfer - student is eligible for 50% of the season, including playoffs
- Subsequent transfer - student is ineligible for 365 days from the date of enrollment/attendance at the new school

\*\* Transfer students may gain full eligibility through hardship appeal process (family move, etc.) - *Student Transfer Hardship Documentation Matrix*

# Eligibility Items

## Online Charter School - AIA Bylaw 15.3.1.2

- Local Control decision, student must reside in school boundary. Currently 1 school in AZ allows

## Homeschool - Student must be in compliance with ARS 15.802.01

- Student is eligible to try out at their school boundary school (ARS 15.802.01)

## Empowerment Scholarship Account (voucher)

- Local Control decision, student may not be enrolled in any school

# Looking Back and Looking Forward

- Increased academic performance across the state
- Athletic destination schools/programs
- Conversation ongoing regarding one free transfer
- Continue to meet the needs of member schools and elevate opportunities for student athletes!



**STATE**  
**CHAMPIONS**  
**PLAY HERE**

AIA

The background features a large, light gray watermark of the NCHSAA logo. The logo is a shield-shaped emblem with the letters 'NCHSAA' at the top, a silhouette of the state of North Carolina in the center, and a 'TM' trademark symbol at the bottom right. The shield is framed by a thin gray border.

# NAVIGATING CHANGE: TRANSFERS, SCHOOL CHOICE, & ELIGIBILITY

“It’s a winding road, that leads us to who knows where....”

# Transfers: Much Stricter But There Are Loopholes

- Basic rule: 365-day sit-out period if transfer occurs after initial enrollment into 9<sup>th</sup> grade
  - *Applies whether in district*
  - *Out of district*
- Exception:
  - *If a Bonafide, non-athletic reason, i.e. family relocation*
  - *Both school systems agree*
- If disagreement between school systems, waiver process
  - *NCHSAA mediates*

**TAKE AWAY:** Enforce rules designed to discourage athletic transfers, but allow flexibility--LIFE CHANGES

# School Choice



Created Complications

Freedom to move for academic reasons  
Eligibility rules may vary from system to system



Legal Enrollment, But....

Eligibility may be lost—at least for a year



Charter and Non-Traditional Follow Same Transfer Rules



Choice creates disconnect between education policies and athletic policies



**TAKE AWAY:** Tension is a challenge and management is almost impossible

# Eligibility: State Board of Education Controlled

NCHSAA is the administering organization

## Scholastics

- Must pass 70% of courses from previous semester
- Must attend 85% of the previous semester
- Must be promoted to next grade level or on track to graduate

## Age

- Cannot turn 19 on or before August 31

## Time-Line

- 8 consecutive semesters of opportunity

**TAKE AWAY:** Try to keep athletics tied to education-based participation

# Control/Challenge/Freedom

## State Board of Education (SBE) Is In Control

- SBE writes the rules
- NCHSAA enforces the rules
  - Cannot change eligibility rules
  - Can approve and then recommend the creation of rules

## Challenge Is Balancing Fairness vs. Freedom

- Families want flexibility to move their children
- Schools want to prevent recruiting
- Parents and athletes believe they have rights to exercise freedom to transfer without losing a year

# FINALLY.....

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Try to maintain a position of leadership relative to rules and regulations



Avoid becoming a manager of rules shaped by someone else's policies

# Navigating a New Normal:

## The Emergence of Academic Freedom and TSSAA Transfer Rules



# New Legislation Sets the Stage

- 2022 - Opportunities to expand school choice become governor's highest priority.
- All transfer restrictions were on the chopping block.
- Conversations and relationships bought the association some time.
- The majority of administrators did not want a free transfer.



# 2025-2026 Revision

Students could transfer for the first time without penalty for an academic, social emotional, environmental, reason provided the sending school's principal confirmed the transfer was not for athletic or disciplinary reasons.

Lots of conflict.....

Survey of member school principals determine that the majority of schools would rather have a student's first transfer not conditional on the sending school's principal.

Discussion with Student Advisory Committee members revealed preference for the first transfer to not be conditional on the sending school's principal.



# 2026-2027 First-Time Transfer Provision

Students will have the opportunity to transfer the first time without restriction after establishing an athletic record in grades 6-8 and grades 9-12 provided that the transfer occurs in between school years.

Most other existing transfer exceptions have now been eliminated.

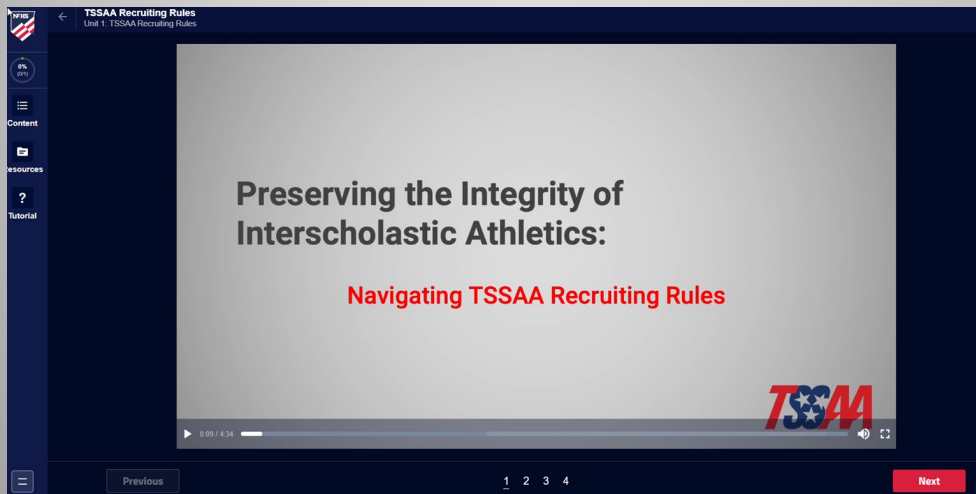
The fundamental principles of the TSSAA Bylaws are now a part of statute.



# Recruiting Concerns

Standardized Penalties for Recruiting Level 1 - Level 4

Education of all involved becomes a priority



# Lesson #1: Spend the Money on a Good Lobbyist

- This is the only reason we still have any transfer restrictions



## Lesson #2: If the Legislature is Involved, Know Your Tipping Point

- Compromise isn't defeat; it's survival.
- Look for ways where the association can benefit.



# Lesson #3: Communication is Key

If you don't currently have a regularly scheduled communication to your membership, start now!

Subject Frequently Asked Fridays (Transfer Rule/Recruiting Rule)

Good morning to each of you! We hope you've had a fantastic week. Following yesterday's summary of the Legislative Council meeting, we want to provide some clarification for a significant shift in our association's transfer rules.

These changes were made in direct response to, and in preparation for, the incoming state law. As you begin conversations with students and families inquiring about enrollment, please use the following guiding principles to navigate these conversations.

## 1. Terminology: "First" vs. "One-Time"

It is vital to use the correct language when thinking through this new rule and when advising families. The law and bylaw revisions specifically use the term "first time transfer", not "one-time transfer." While this may seem like a nuance, it is a critical distinction for eligibility tracking over a student's entire career. The rule has not suddenly given every student a "one-time pass".

## 2. Previous Transfers Count!!!

The "clock" does not start today; it looks backward. The new rule only provides a transfer opportunity if it is the student's first time transferring schools. Any transfer that occurred after the initial establishment of an athletic record counts toward this provision. This applies even if the previous transfer met an exception at the time (i.e. bona fide change of residence, hardship approval, etc.). If a student has transferred at any point in the past, they have likely exhausted their "First Time Transfer" opportunity. The exception to this would be if the transfer(s) occurred prior to the establishment of an athletic record.

## 3. Timing of the Transfer

For the purposes of this rule, the student must finish the school year at their current school and begin the school year at their new school. The school or school system may begin processing the transfer internally whenever it deems necessary. However, the TSSAA Portal will have to be modified to accommodate these new rules, and it will not be ready for submission of transfer students until later this summer. Coaches should check with their administration about the school or school district's policies before allowing new students to participate in summer activities.



# Lesson #4: Keep Things in Perspective

- The conflict can consume you if you allow it...take care of yourself. It's not life or death. Control what you can control and don't worry about the rest.

