



To: NJSIAA Executive Committee
From: Colleen Maguire, NJSIAA Executive Director
Date: May 8, 2024
RE: Spectator Code of Conduct Policy - Revised

Background

Since 2021, NJSIAA member schools have reported increasing concerns about the behavior of spectators and fans at interscholastic events. There have been reports of fans fighting with coaches, players, and other fans; reports of fans accosting officials; and reports of fans berating players and officials with expletives and bias language.

NJSIAA’s Sportsmanship Rule/Policy requires that “high standards of courtesy, fair play and sportsmanship must be featured at association competitions...good sportsmanship, respect for rules, respect for others, and fair play, are basically the motives through which an interscholastic athletic program is justified and defended....unsportsmanlike conduct shall subject the individual to disciplinary action.”

Additionally, NJSIAA’s Mission, Vision and Values prioritizes a physically and emotionally safe and healthy playing environment and insists that good sportsmanship be exhibited at all times by student athletes, coaches, officials, and spectators.

Indeed, the Sportsmanship Rule/Policy requires that “each school administration shall establish broad and specific policies and procedures relating to sportsmanship and to identify responsibilities of administrators, coaches and students to ensure their observance.”

In January 2024, administrators representing the 41 schools of the Big North Conference and the 37 schools of the New Jersey Interscholastic Conference asked the Executive Committee to develop a spectator code of conduct, for adoption by member schools, to better ensure that all member schools were enforcing the Sportsmanship Rule against fans and spectators.

Proposal

During the 2024-2025 school year, every NJSIAA member school must adopt a spectator code of conduct policy.

The policy must be provided to the parents/guardians of participating student-athletes and require a sign-off indicating understanding of the policy during the school’s sports registration process.

The policy must include expectations of appropriate behavior at interscholastic events and the disciplinary actions that will be taken when the policy is violated.

The disciplinary actions must include, at minimum, a suspension from attending future interscholastic event(s) and require an educational component. The policy must include increased disciplinary actions for multiple violations in a defined period of time.

The policy must be made available to NJSIAA staff upon request. NJSIAA staff reserves the right to share a member schools' policy with another member school when appropriate.

The code of conduct itself should be posted at all venues hosting interscholastic competition to the extent reasonably possible.

Failure of a member school to enforce its policy may result in discipline by the NJSIAA. In addition to the penalties set forth in Article X of the Bylaws, a school that does not enforce its policy may be prohibited from hosting an NJSIAA state tournament event.

Spectator Code of Conduct - Recommendation

Under the Sportsmanship Rule/Policy, as it is currently written, unsportsmanlike conduct includes, but is not limited to, actions of a fan or spectator who:

- strikes or physically abuses an official, opposing coach, player, or spectator;
- intentionally incites participants or spectators to violent or abusive action;
- uses obscene gestures or profane or unduly provocative language or action towards officials, opponents, or spectators; or
- engages in harassing verbal or physical conduct related to race, gender, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation or religion at an interscholastic event.

The list of covered persons should also include school staff and school security – this is in addition to officials, opposing coach, player, or spectator currently identified by the NJSIAA Sportsmanship Rule/Policy.

This list of unsportsmanlike actions is a minimum. In addition, NJSIAA recommends a member school's policy also prohibit the following:

- Use of profanity, threatening comments, or biased language before, during, or after an interscholastic event.
- Verbally harasses an official or ~~opponent~~ participant (i.e., coaches or players from any participating school) by using names or uniform numbers.
- Entering the field of play – before, during, or after an interscholastic event.
- Physical altercation with an official, coach, player, school staff, school security, or spectator – before, during, or after an interscholastic event.
- Use of artificial noisemakers or other instruments intended to disrupt the interscholastic event or distract the participants during an interscholastic event.

Disciplinary Actions

The member school's policy should include the following disciplinary actions for violations of the code of conduct:

- Immediate removal from the event and school premises.
- Suspension from the next home interscholastic event for a first offense.

- Longer suspensions from interscholastic events for multiple violations in a defined period of time (season, school year, calendar year, etc.).
- Completion of required educational component(s) before attendance at future home interscholastic event.

NJSIAA recommends the following educational components, which can be accessed at the National Federation's "NFHS Learn" website (www.nfhslearn.com):

- Positive Parenting within School Programs
- Sportsmanship
- Teaching and Modeling Behavior
- The Parent Seat

Policy Adoption

Member schools may adopt a policy that includes disciplinary measures which are stricter or more severe than the minimum requirements included in this proposal. In addition, Leagues and Conferences may adopt a policy that includes disciplinary measures which are stricter or more severe than the minimum requirements included in this proposal, such as suspending certain fans or spectators from both home and away league or conference contests.

Member schools will be required to confirm that they have adopted, and communicated, a spectator code of conduct policy that is in accordance with this proposal with its annual membership certification.