



**REGULATIONS SUMMARIZED**  
**THE SPORT-SPECIFIC TRANSFER RULE**  
**THIS IS A SUMMARY – ALWAYS CONSULT THE**  
**SCHOOL ATHLETIC DIRECTOR OR THE MHSAA**  
**FOR CLARIFICATIONS**

**Sport-Specific Transfer Regulation:** Unless a high school student meets one of the 15 stated exceptions - most exceptions involve a defined residential change - **a student will not be eligible for the next season in a sport he or she participated in at his or her former high school (any level) during the most recent previous school year. A student would be eligible in sports he or she did not participate in during the previous or current school year.** Ineligibility is for the next school year in the sport played previously. A student who transfers during a season will not be eligible that season in a sport played that season, and ineligible in that sport the next season.

“Participation” means to have actually entered and competed in an interscholastic scrimmage or contest. To “participate” means to actually enter and play (or run, or swim, etc.) in an interscholastic scrimmage or contest.

The transfer rule activates once a student is enrolled in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Enrolled, for the purposes of this rule, means on the official records of the school **and** actual attendance in one or more classes (traditional or online). A student is also considered enrolled if he or she participates in a scrimmage or contest, such as in August before school starts.

Once a student who is enrolled in grades 9 -12 changes schools, that student is not eligible for specific sports played previously in high school UNLESS he or she meets one of the 15 exceptions, which generally have to do with a residential change or a school’s status changing. Below are **brief summaries** of the 15 exceptions (these are not the full rule). There are many situations which are NOT exceptions and the transfer student is not eligible in a sport played previously – see the top of page two.

Below is a **brief summary** of the 15 Exceptions from the MHSAA Handbook.

**EIGHT RESIDENCY EXCEPTIONS**

1. Student moves with the people he/she was living with previously (full & complete). *\*Page 3 Note G*
2. Student was not living exclusively with either parent and moves back to them. +
3. Ward of the Court placed with foster parents.
4. Approved International Program student moves in with host family in district. 2 semesters/3 trimesters then sit 1 year and may resume eligibility. (See C)
5. Married student moves into the school district.
8. Student moves with or to **divorced** parent or parents never married (See Int. 92). **(ETF) +**
12. An 18-year-old moves without parents. **(ETF) +**
13. A student resides in a boarding school. **(ETF) +**

**FIVE SCHOOL STATUS EXCEPTIONS**

6. School ceases to operate, not merged (Int. 64 & 90).
7. School is reorganized or consolidated.
9. School Board ordered safety or enrollment shift transfer.
11. Achieved highest grade available in former school.
15. New school established; enrolled on first day.

**TWO STUDENT STATUS EXCEPTIONS**

10. Incoming 1<sup>st</sup>-time 9<sup>th</sup>-grader (not applicable to J-1 or F-1 Visa students).
14. Expelled student returns under pre-existing criteria.

**+Four Exceptions** (2, 8, 12 & 13) are allowed once in grades 9-12.

**(ETF) is an Educational Transfer Form** and only used for these 3 exceptions (8, 12 & 13). The current MHSAA form must be completed by both school principals certifying that the transfer is not significantly related to or motivated by athletics and returned signed by the MHSAA **before** the student participates in a game or scrimmage. There is an allowance for students whose parents never married to use this form. (See Interpretation 92).

**Continued**

- A. **Common situations where a student may change schools after beginning the 9<sup>th</sup> grade and the student is NOT eligible in a sport played during the previous or current season:**
- School of choice – even if from out of state or returning to the school of residence.
  - **Returning to a school of residence after choosing to attend another school under school of choice or a non-public school.**
  - Guardianship.
  - **Sport dropped or school does not sponsor a sport.**
  - Categorized as homeless (the situation may warrant the school requesting a waiver).
  - A student under 18 moving in with a relative or friend (not moving with people he/she lived with previously).
  - Financial considerations including not being able to afford tuition.

- B. **International Students:** (F-1 or J-1 Visa) including incoming 9<sup>th</sup> graders are only eligible if they meet a residency exception or if they are placed by an **Approved International Student Program (AISP)**. AISP students are eligible immediately for one year and then wait one year (play one, wait one). International students who are not from an AISP program may be eligible at the subvarsity level after sitting until the 91<sup>st</sup> school day of enrollment at the new school without any special approval if the school desires. Otherwise, international students are not eligible for varsity sports for up to 8 semesters or 12 trimesters. The current MHSAA – AISP list is here: <https://www.mhsaa.com/portals/0/Documents/AD%20Forms/csietlists.pdf>

There are several MHSAA interpretations related to international students who change schools or whose program or visa changes. International students and host families should consult the school athletic director and MHSAA before changing enrollment if they seek sports eligibility.

- C. **Changes of residency must be full and complete (Exception 1).** (As defined by MHSAA Interpretations) Students who change residence may be eligible immediately in a sport played in the previous or current season if the residential change was full and complete. Residential changes which grant immediate eligibility are intended to be somewhat permanent. All the people the student lived with previously (the family unit, as defined) must move and actually be residing in the new residence. The previous residence must be disposed of (either vacant or sold, or rented to non-family). Other documentation must also be provided to the school, including a changed driver's license and utility bill. See points G and H below. See MHSAA.com for the Residential Change Checklist. Click on Schools, Parents, then see Regulations Summary on the right. <https://www.mhsaa.com/portals/0/documents/AD%20Forms/residential%20change.pdf>
- D. **Changes of residency must be from one public school district to another public school district.** Regardless of the kind of school attended – public, nonpublic or charter, a change of residency **must be from one public school attendance area to another.**

Multi-high-school districts such as Detroit, Dearborn and Lansing consider each school attendance area as a separate district for the purposes of the transfer rule. Students who transfer into a district-wide school such as Detroit Cass Tech or Renaissance are not eligible immediately in a sport played the previous year even if they meet an exception such as a residential change. They are, however, eligible in sports not played at the former school in the previous school year. Students who relocate into districts with both district-wide and geography or border schools would have eligibility in a previous sport only at their school of geography.

- E. **A student who changes schools under a residency exception is eligible in any sport at:**
- 1) The same school – a student does not have to change schools because he or she changes residence.
  - 2) **The public school of his or her new district or attendance area.**
  - 3) The closest nonpublic school to the new residence (drivable highway miles):
    - a. School of the same denomination if the student had most recently been attending such a school.
  - 4) The closest charter school to his or her new residence.

**A transfer student who enrolls in a school other than one of the four schools above, will not be eligible in a sport played at the former school in the most recent school year, but will be eligible in sports not played that year.** If a student transfers during a current season, he or she is not eligible for the remainder of that season and the next season as well.

- F. **Transferring after a season begins:** A student who transfers later in a school year and meets an exception such as changing residences, or a student who seeks to play in a sport not played the previous or current season, is eligible for MHSAA tournaments **only** if he or she is enrolled in the new school **prior to** Oct. 1 for fall sports, Feb. 1 for winter sports tournaments and May 1 for spring sports tournaments. The student may play in regular season contests, but not in MHSAA tournaments.
- G. **Athletic-Related Transfers** – After starting the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, a transfer student who has played high school sports and who does not meet one of the 15 exceptions would be ineligible for the current and next season in that sport if the transfer is into a school where one of the following links existed in the previous 12 months: The student was involved in a non-school activity that was coached or directed by a school coach, administrator or parent of the new school. The student was coached by a former school coach (**\*see note G. below**) or by a personal trainer who is a coach, attended an open gym and then transfers schools, or is involved in summer activities with the new school before being registered to enroll at that school. Transfer students who are not signed up to attend a school should not be involved in summer activities with school coaches.

Note: It is against the rules for a person directly or indirectly associated with a school or student to attempt to secure or encourage attendance because of athletics. The **anti-recruiting rule** (undue influence) has a maximum penalty of up to four years of ineligibility for a student or four years of suspension of a coach or other adult involved in any recruiting related to athletics.

- H. **Athletic-Motivated Transfers** – After starting the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, a transfer student who has played high school sports and who does not meet one of the 15 exceptions may be declared ineligible in sports played previously in the next season if the transfer is primarily for athletic purposes. The former school must make an allegation with additional proofs to the MHSAA executive director within 40 calendar days of the student's enrollment (first day of class) in the new school. An athletic-motivated transfer is defined as but not limited to the following (see the *MHSAA Handbook* for specific language): The student or parent is dissatisfied or has a conflict with playing time, team position, philosophy relating to sports, etc. The student seeks to nullify actions by the former school relating to discipline or eligibility. The student or parent seeks to play on a less successful team to rank higher among players on that team, or a more successful team to gain exposure to higher competition and/or college scouts. The student seeks to participate with teammates or coaches with whom the student had participated previously. The MHSAA will not be involved in investigating or mediating athletic-motivated transfer issues between member schools of the same school district or when one school releases the student to another district.

**Note to G and H Regarding a Residential Change:** Even if the student's circumstances subsequently satisfy one of the exceptions of Section 9(A) that would normally allow a transfer student immediate eligibility, the student shall remain ineligible in a sport played in the previous or current school year.

**\*Under Point G (Athletic Related), a residential change where the student is following a newly-hired coach does not permit eligibility regardless of the date of enrollment or actual residential change.** A residential change where a student is following a newly hired coach of the student's former school does not permit eligibility in the sport involved, regardless of the timing of the residential change and enrollment.

**Under Point H (Athletic Motivated), a residential change (Exception 1) must be full and complete in the same period of time as enrollment to meet this** exception if an allegation is made and confirmed. If one of the circumstances existed during the previous 12 months, the student will be ineligible in the sport involved.