



Legal Rights of Non-Traditional Students at TSSAA Schools

Must Be Allowed to Participate

The TSSAA permits a student associated with a church-related school (like Gateway Christian Schools) to participate in public school extracurricular athletics, subject to compliance with TSSAA eligibility rules. (See other eligibility requirements in TSSAA Bylaws, Article II, section 15.)

If a local school is a member of TSSAA, and the student is eligible to participate under TSSAA rules, the school is prohibited from preventing non-traditional students from seeking to participate. (See Tennessee Code Annotated § 49-6-3050(e), as signed into law April 1, 2013.)

Can Compete on Team or Individually

TSSAA member schools may "play or scrimmage any secondary school with grades 9 and above in regular season play. For the purposes of this rule, a school team may be one school or a cooperative program of one or more schools." (See TSSAA Bylaws, Article IV, section 1.) This could include home school cooperative teams and teams from church-related schools. TSSAA member schools may also play or scrimmage individual homeschooled students during the regular season, especially in individual sports such as track and field, wrestling, and golf. (See the "Non-Traditional Students" section of the FAQs in the TSSAA Bylaws. Access the updated version by clicking "Constitution & Bylaws" at the bottom of the page linked [HERE](#).)

Excerpts from TSSAA Constitution & Bylaws

Definition of Non-Traditional Students

"Non-traditional students include those students attending:

- a public virtual school recognized by the Tennessee Department of Education
- a legally-registered independent homeschool student
- a homeschool student enrolled in a church-related umbrella school
- a homeschool student enrolled in an online accredited school"

(TSSAA Constitution. "Definitions" section)

Eligibility of Non-Traditional Students

"This bylaw establishes the minimum eligibility requirements for a non-traditional student desiring to practice, tryout, and participate at any level in extracurricular athletics at a member school:

1. The student must reside in the TSSAA member school's territory.



2. The parent or guardian must notify the principal of the TSSAA member school of the non-traditional student's intent to try out and possibly participate before the first official practice date in the sport.
3. A non-traditional student participating for an independent school must pay full tuition and abide by all financial aid rules. For the purpose of this rule, "full tuition" is defined as the same amount paid by all other students enrolled and in regular attendance at the school.
4. Non-traditional students must meet all other eligibility requirements."

(TSSAA Bylaws. Article II, section 15)

Definition of Territory: "For a public school, the 'territory' of the school is the geographic boundaries and bus routes of the area served by that school as established by the local board of education. For a system-wide public school, magnet school or charter school, the 'territory' of the school is the geographic boundaries of the school system. For a non-public school the 'territory' of the school is the area within a twenty (20) mile radius from the school."

(TSSAA Constitution. "Definitions" section)

Eligibility of Transfer Students

"Except as otherwise provided in Section 12 above, the following transfer students are eligible:

k. A student transfers from a TSSAA member school to a non-traditional setting but continues to participate for the same TSSAA member school; and

l. A non-traditional student transfers to the TSSAA member school where he/she is already participating."

(TSSAA Bylaws. Article II, section 13)

Frequently Asked Questions

"I. Q. If a homeschool student participated in athletics for a school in his or her school system that was not the student's zoned school in 2023-24, does the student need to participate for their zoned school in 2024-25?

A. A homeschool student with an existing athletic record in 2023-24 at a TSSAA member school will be grandfathered in to be eligible to continue to participate for the same school in 2024-25 and after, provided the student meets all other eligibility requirements. Homeschool students without an existing athletic record must meet the new rule beginning in 2024-25.



2. Q. Can a homeschool student who participated in athletics for a school in his or her school system in 2023-24 that was not the student's zoned school choose to participate for his or her zoned school in 2024-25?
 - A. Yes, these students will be treated as though they were re-zoned and remain eligible, provided they meet all other eligibility requirements and make this decision at the beginning of the school year.

3. Q. What types of home schools does TSSAA recognize for purposes of athletic eligibility?
 - A. TSSAA recognizes the following types of home schools: (1) Independent home schools operated pursuant to Tenn. Code Ann. Section 49-6-3050; (2) Church-related umbrella schools operated pursuant to Tenn. Code Ann. Section 49-50-801; or (3) Accredited online schools.

4. Q. How is the tuition and financial aid rule applied to a homeschool student who attends an independent school?
 - A. The student must pay full tuition at the independent school and meet the same financial aid requirements as a traditional student.

5. Q. How is the academic rule applied to non-traditional students?
 - A. If the student is enrolled in a school or virtual program that awards traditional academic credits, then the student must earn credits in the same manner as traditional students under the Academic Rule. If the student is enrolled in a school or program that does not award traditional academic credits, then the student must achieve sufficient academic progress each semester to remain on track for graduation at the conclusion of four years from the beginning of his/her freshman year.

6. Q. When must a non-traditional student notify a school of his/her intent to participate?
 - A. A student should notify the member school of his/her intent to participate before the first practice date in the sport.

7. Q. How does the transfer rule apply to non-traditional students?
 - A. Once the student has an athletic record at a member school, eligibility following a change of schools is governed by the transfer rule."

(TSSAA Bylaws. TENNESSEE SECONDARY SCHOOL ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION BYLAWS FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS, "Non-Traditional Students" section)

Full TSSAA Handbook (Containing Constitution and Bylaws)

Access the most recent version by clicking "Constitution & Bylaws" at the bottom of the page linked [HERE](#).