



20 Must-Have Online School Forms for K-12 Athletic Programs

FINAL*  *FORMS

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Introduction

Section 01

Forms play a critical role in the success of any K-12 athletic program. To join a team, students need to complete and sign a variety of forms to ensure compliance with laws and regulations. Forms establish the responsibilities of all parties in an athletic program—coaches, administrators, parents, and the students themselves—and they give athletic directors the perfect mechanism for collecting and distributing important information.

Although they are a critical component of any sports program, forms have traditionally been a source of headaches for athletic directors and administrators. Paper forms are easy to misplace or lose—especially as an athletic program scales. What’s more, paper forms lend themselves to inaccuracies. Someone might accidentally write down the wrong information or have terrible handwriting that’s nearly impossible to read.

At the same time, paper forms can be difficult to update in a timely manner. Let’s say a school wants to add a vaping policy to its student handbook for the upcoming school year. When done manually, putting that form together, distributing it to every athlete, and collecting and storing the signed documents is an arduous and time-consuming process.





For these reasons, more and more athletic directors are bringing forms into the digital age. With online forms, ADs can make sure that the right people get the right information at the right time. It's an easy way to ensure compliance while making life easier for every stakeholder in your athletic program.

Once you've decided to move your forms online, you need to decide which specific forms you need. This can be a bit complicated because form requirements vary by state, district, and school. While state forms are often mandated by the Department of Education and the Department of Health, many districts have their own specific policies (such as on bullying, transgender athletes, and social media).

To make your life a bit easier, this e-book provides a comprehensive list of 13 must-have forms for athletes and 7 for coaches across all K-12 athletic programs—regardless of where you're located.

PRO TIP

Check department, district, and state guidelines before implementing any of these recommendations to ensure you're complying with policies and regulations. You'll also want to customize each suggested form based on those requirements and the unique needs of your district.

13 Must-Have Forms for Athletes

Section 02

To participate in a sports program, student-athletes need to sign a variety of forms to ensure compliance and determine liabilities for each stakeholder. Here are 13 forms that all athletic programs would be wise to require all participating students to sign.

1. Drug, Alcohol, and Tobacco Policy

Students already know that they aren't allowed to use drugs, alcohol, or tobacco. This policy helps them understand what will happen to them in the event that they are caught using any of these substances.

A drug, alcohol, and tobacco policy—which should cover conduct both at school and out of school—defines terms like “alcohol use” and “tobacco use” and outlines the consequences that stem from violating the policy. This policy should also evolve with the times. For example, a current policy might include language that makes vaping impermissible.





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2. Social Media Policy

A recent study from Common Sense Media found that 70 percent of high school students use social media several times a day. Because social media is widely accessible, inappropriate images or posts could reflect poorly on the athlete, the team, and the school.

A social media policy defines “social media” as any media that reaches a group, a team, or the public. It states what’s not permitted—such as posting photos of students using alcohol or tobacco. In addition, such a policy spells out the penalties and other consequences that stem from irresponsible use of social media.

3. Team and Group Communication Policies

In recent years, students have been caught using group communication apps to cheat on tests and bully other students. A team and group communication policy enables schools to monitor communications involving a significant number of people associated with an activity—such as an athletic team.

This policy should define what a significant number is (e.g., three or more athletes or a majority of students on the team). It should also spell out what would happen in the event that a student or group of students violates the policy.



4. Captain's Practice Waiver

From time to time, some sports teams might decide to hold so-called captain's practices—which involve members of the team without supervision by a coach or school representative.

A captain's practice waiver prohibits any practices or activities from taking place on school grounds without adult supervision. This waiver also absolves the school of any responsibility for injuries or actions that may occur at such unauthorized, unsupervised activities.

5. Transportation Waiver

Some states restrict the age of drivers who can transport students to games, practices, and other activities. Similarly, certain adults may be prohibited from transporting a particular student, such as a parent who doesn't have custody of their child.

A transportation waiver establishes permissible drivers for student-athletes and defines who can drive athletes home after an event (e.g., a parent).



6. Drug Testing Policy

Drug use can harm students and those around them. Because of this, schools do everything they can to keep their students off drugs.

A drug testing policy outlines when and how students might be tested for drug use. It also spells out the consequences a student will face for failing a test. For example, a first offense might result in a one-game suspension, a second offense might result in being kicked off the team, and a third offense might result in expulsion.

7. Road Running Policy

When members of the track team, cross-country team, or another group run on roads, they can get injured by being struck by a vehicle, falling, or other accidents.

A road running policy sets expectations for how students should deal with aggressive drivers (e.g., don't engage with drivers who appear angry). It also governs how athletes must behave when running on public roads. For example, a policy might state that students must use sidewalks whenever they're available or need to run with a buddy at all times.



8. Fitness Center Liability Waiver

Athletes may get injured lifting weights, running on treadmills, or through other exercises. To prevent the school from being responsible for such injuries, a fitness center liability waiver should be a prerequisite for any student to use such facilities.

This waiver—which allows the school to disclaim responsibilities due to any regular or irresponsible use of equipment—should define when and how a student can use the fitness center (e.g., when properly supervised by school representatives).

9. Parent Release Form for Media Recording

Many schools have directories that provide the students' contact information. However, not every parent wants this information publicly available. For example, a celebrity might prefer to maintain privacy. Similarly, a parent escaping an abusive relationship may not want their address known.

A parent release form for media recording grants permission to use a student's name and image in media, such as a school directory or a local newspaper. It also gives provisions for sharing information within the school without distributing it externally.



10. Emergency Medical Forms

Schools are focused on providing exemplary educational and athletic experiences to all students. To that end, emergency medical forms are required to help schools avoid potentially harmful circumstances, such as exposing an athlete to foods they're allergic to. The forms also help medical professionals accurately diagnose and treat incidents or injuries that occur, such as distinguishing between a heat stroke and a bee sting if a runner who is allergic to bees collapses.

These forms should allow parents to provide real-time updates alerting other parents and coaches of potential “breaking news” about a student’s physical or mental health. They should also provide the contact information of parents or other guardians in the event of an emergency.

11. High School Athletic Physical Form

States require students to complete physicals in order to ensure they are healthy enough to participate in sports.

The high school athletic physical form details students’ past and present health. It has an expiration date so that coaches, trainers, and administrators have the most current assessment of an athlete’s health. Because of this, this form reduces risk by providing a physician’s assessment of an athlete’s fitness to perform.



12. Athletic Clearance Form

Students cannot participate in sports until they are deemed eligible based on a number of requirements, which vary on a school-by-school basis.

Athletic clearance forms stipulate that a student can't play a sport until they are cleared by the appropriate school official—even if all of their other forms have been completed and submitted. This provides administrators the ability to address any outstanding issues that could otherwise affect an athlete's eligibility, such as grades or recovery from an injury.

13. Student and Parent Handbooks

In an ideal world, every student and parent would follow every policy as precisely as possible. Unfortunately, it's only a matter of time before someone violates a school policy.

Student and parent handbooks establish expectations for students and parents, such as how they should behave at sporting events. These handbooks also provide grounds for punishing students or parents for violating school policies, as in the case of verbally abusing referees or umpires at a game.

Students and parents both need to acknowledge that they've received their handbooks and indicate that they understand what's been conveyed by signing the appropriate sections. For example, students and parents may sign policies related to event behavior or alcohol and drug use in addition to signing a statement acknowledging that they understand everything in the handbook.

A dark, monochromatic photograph of a coach sitting on a field, surrounded by children and soccer balls. The coach is in the center, looking down at the children. Two soccer balls are on the ground in front of him. The children are sitting on the grass, some with their backs to the camera. The overall tone is professional and focused.

7 Must-Have Forms for Coaches

Section 03

On the other side of the coin, districts need coaches to fill out a number of forms for safety and compliance reasons. Here are seven of the most popular forms for coaches.

1. School District and Athletic Department Policies

As representatives of the school, athletic coaches and staff are responsible for compliance and student safety. District and athletic department policies can increase compliance while improving student safety and reducing risk.

These forms establish responsibilities and expectations for athletic coaches and staff members, such as how to handle equipment and how to treat students and parents. They also spell out policies on the appropriate use of technology, communications guidelines, fundraising, and how to handle student injuries and parent complaints, among other things.





2. New Hire Information

Because coaches interact with students on a regular basis, it is critical to ensure that the professionals a district hires are qualified for their jobs.

When new hires come on board, they should fill out new hire forms that are required by the district or state and outline their experience, qualifications, licenses, and certifications in order to document their job readiness.

3. Emergency Contacts

Like the athletes they're coaching, staffers can be injured. To ensure they know who to call when the coach goes down, many districts have coaches fill out emergency contact forms with the contact information of the person or people they'd want to be called in the event of an emergency.



4. Health Conditions

Are you aware that your coaches may have critical health conditions? For example, 30.3 million Americans have diabetes, according to the CDC—meaning it's not uncommon for coaches to have this condition. When medical professionals are aware of medical histories and conditions, they are able to treat injuries and respond to emergencies more efficiently.

Health condition forms enable coaches to disclose their medical conditions and histories—such as asthma, epilepsy, and heart conditions—which could be relevant for treating medical emergencies.

5. AED Location Map

During a sporting event or practice, students, staff, spectators, or others could require emergency treatment. For example, someone might have a heart attack.

Districts should have automated external defibrillator (AED) location maps that show coaches where they can access AED devices during a cardiac arrest event. Staff should sign off that they have seen the map and know where the devices are located.



6. Student-Athlete Return-to-Play Procedures

When athletes are recovering from injuries (e.g., a concussion), they could make matters worse if they get back into action before they are fully healed. Depending on the circumstances, these subsequent injuries could be worse than the original.

Student-athlete return-to-play procedures prohibit coaches from allowing students to participate in sporting activities until they have been cleared by the appropriate officials. These procedures establish protocols for assessing the fitness of injured athletes before they can resume participation. All information is kept in a permanent record, meeting records retention requirements.

7. State Requirements

States have different requirements for state laws, concussion protocols, sudden cardiac arrest awareness, heat guidelines, and other areas.

State requirements forms include current state policies for handling student health and treatment. These forms document the awareness and understanding of relevant policies and procedures, which are needed to ensure your district is in compliance with federal, state, and local laws and regulations.

How to Achieve 100% Form Completion

Section 04

It's one thing to have the perfect collection of forms to distribute. It's quite another to get the signatures you need to ensure a safe program. With the right student-athlete management system in place, you can bring more efficiency and convenience to the form collection process. At the same time, you can increase the reliability of the data you collect while securing sensitive student data.

Although a student-athlete management platform makes the form collection process easier, it's not a cure-all. Here are some best practices to keep in mind in order to achieve 100 percent form completion once you move to a digital system:

Get Buy-In from Parents

First things first: Send an introductory letter to parents and students describing the benefits of online forms. Tell them that the new system will boost compliance and safety while making their lives easier. Let them know that they can complete and sign forms on any connected device. Because data is saved from season to season, they'll never have to enter the same information twice. What's more, forms are pre-populated whenever possible, which saves parents time when they have multiple children.

Send Automatic Reminders

Once you've onboarded students and parents, send them automatic reminders to nudge them to fill out the forms. Take a proactive stance on student eligibility and health by sending alerts when forms are incomplete or when it's time for a new physical.

Simplify Eligibility

Leading student-athlete management systems make it incredibly easy to figure out whether a student is eligible or not. For example, eligible students might appear green in the system.



Start Collecting Signatures Earlier

You don't have to wait until September to send out forms needed for fall sports. Student-athlete management systems enable you to start collecting information before the school year begins—perhaps as early as March to account for summer activities like tennis and cross-country or spring training for football, cheer, and so forth.

Implement Penalties for Not Completing Forms

Enacting penalties—such as a loss of parking privileges for upperclassmen—will almost certainly accelerate form collection. You don't want to be too severe, but you do want to encourage promptness.

Forms are needed to ensure compliance, protect athletes, and create a positive sporting experience in your district. Although athletic directors have traditionally relied on paper forms, more and more districts are choosing to make data collection and retention easier for all parties by moving forms to the paperless era.



Checklist: Your 20 Must-Have Forms

Section 05



Checklist: Your 20 Must-Have Forms

For Students

- Drug, Alcohol, and Tobacco Policy
- Social Media Policy
- Team and Group Communication Policies
- Captain's Practice Waiver
- Transportation Waiver
- Drug Testing Policy
- Road Running Policy
- Fitness Center Liability Waiver
- Parent Release Form for Media Recording
- Emergency Medical Forms
- High School Athletic Physical Form
- Athletic Clearance Form
- Student and Parent Handbooks

For Coaches

- School District and Athletic Department Policies
- New Hire Information
- Emergency Contacts
- Health Conditions
- AED Location Map
- Student-Athlete Return-to-Play Procedures
- State Requirements

Get Started with FinalForms

FinalForms offers a feature-rich SaaS solution designed to help athletic directors and administrators like you bring efficiency, security, and reliability to form collection—enhancing the athletic experience for everyone. Our team is made up of educators and coaches who understand the pain points you're experiencing and work hard every day to deliver a superior solution to these challenges.

To learn more about how FinalForms can provide a better athlete management experience for parents, coaches, and staff, schedule a demo today. See for yourself how FinalForms can help your coaches and staff put the focus where it matters most: on athletes.