



Academy at the Lakes

ATHLETIC
Handbook

2026–2027

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www.academyatthelakes.org

This handbook has been developed to provide a guide to the policies and procedures of the Academy at the Lakes Athletic Department. We ask all athletes, parents, and coaches to read and sign this booklet. We ask everyone involved in the program to demonstrate a positive, respectful and sportsmanlike approach to all activities that are a part of the school athletic experience.

MISSION

The athletic program at Academy at the Lakes provides students with opportunities to learn and grow through their athletic endeavor. Academy athletes develop character, self-discipline, determination, self-confidence, teamwork, and sportsmanship through their participation in the program. All members of the school's athletic community pursue these goals with vigor, joy, and a growth mindset.

AFFILIATIONS

FHSAA

All Academy varsity sports with the exception of football compete in the FHSAA. Accordingly, we are bound by all the rules and regulations of the FHSAA.

SSAA

The Academy football program competes in the Sunshine State Athletic Association.

FWCL

The Middle Division is a member of the Florida West Coast League, which offers competition between area independent middle schools. The league is divided into varsity teams for 7th and 8th Graders and junior varsity for 6th and 7th Graders.

PLAYER PARTICIPATION STANDARDS

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

ACADEMIC

Upper Division students must maintain a cumulative 2.0 grade point average. Only **semester** grades count and any change in eligibility will be determined at the end of the semester.

Middle Division students must maintain a 2.0 GPA, measured **quarterly**, and maintain a satisfactory conduct record.

PHYSICAL: Athletic Clearance

Students must have an annual physician exam completed on the FHSAA EL2 form and uploaded to the Athletic Clearance website. An exam is valid for one year after the exam date. Students must also submit a completed EL3 (FHSAA Consent and Release from Liability) form and watch the three required FHSAA videos and upload their certificates to be eligible.

Student-athletes will not be allowed to participate in practices or games until all forms are completed.

BEHAVIOR

Student-athletes are expected to comply with the Academy at the Lakes Student Handbook, the Athletic Handbook, and any team-specific rules, guidelines, or expectations established by coaches during a season. Violations of any of these standards may result in disciplinary action, including suspension or removal from a team. Any athlete found using, possessing, or distributing illegal drugs or alcohol will be subject to disciplinary consequences that may include dismissal from the team and/or the school. Reinstatement for participation in a future school year is not guaranteed. In addition, any fines assessed against Academy at the Lakes by the FHSAA or SSAA as a result of an athlete's conduct will be the responsibility of the athlete and/or the athlete's family.

SPORTSMANSHIP

Academy at the Lakes defines sportsmanship as conduct becoming to one participating in a sport, including but not limited to the following: fairness, respect for one's teammates, coaches, opponents, and the officials, as well as winning with grace and losing with dignity. Each Academy athlete at all levels is expected to exhibit good sportsmanship. Failure to do so may result in disciplinary action.

CLUB SPORTS/TRAVEL TEAMS

Academy at the Lakes believes that a student-athlete's primary commitment during their season (after family obligations and academics) is to their Academy team. Please take your child's Academy at the Lakes athletic schedule into account when scheduling activities outside of school. Missed practices and games due to Club Team/Travel Team participation will be considered unexcused and can be subject to disciplinary action imposed by the Academy coach. Club Team/Travel Team activities include but are not limited to external teams, fitness training, and personal instruction.

EXTRA ACADEMIC HELP

Student-athletes are allowed to miss a portion of practice to receive extra academic help due to classroom struggles. The student must inform the coach before going to extra help and make arrangements to attend the remaining portion of the practice. However, receiving extra academic help is not excused when it is due to a student not turning in classwork or homework. If too many practices are missed due to extra help, the athlete may need to re-think participation. The coach and Athletic Director may become involved in this process.

TRANSFER ELIGIBILITY "GOOD CAUSE" POLICY

One of the exceptions under Florida Law that allows a student who transfers schools to continue participating in the same sport at the new school is the "authorized for good cause" circumstances. "Good cause" includes but is not limited to the following:

- Move to a new residence by the student (with a person/people with whom he/she has been previously living).
- Transfer of school within the first twenty days of school.
- Undue hardship.

HOMESCHOOLED ATHLETES

Participation for homeschool student-athletes will be reviewed on an individual basis. The decision regarding eligibility and participation will be made jointly by the head coach, Athletic Director, Middle Division Director, and Upper Division Director following an interview and evaluation process.

The annual participation fee for homeschool student-athletes will be determined by the school's administration each year and is subject to change based on administrative review and approval.

ATHLETIC TEAM TRYOUTS

In accordance with our philosophy of athletics and our desire to see as many students as possible participate in the athletic program while at the Academy, we have a no-cut policy for our students. However, the coach has the authority to cut or dismiss an athlete from a team if it is the coach's opinion that allowing the athlete to participate on the team would be detrimental to team unity or for the safety of the athlete or the team. For varsity sports, all homeschool students are subject to tryouts, and it is at the discretion of the coach whether to allow them on the team. We strive to maximize the opportunity for all our students.

EXPECTATIONS OF DIFFERENT TEAM LEVELS

PARTICIPATION IN A MIDDLE DIVISION SPORT

Middle Division teams consist of athletes in grades 6–8. To receive participation credit in a particular sport, an athlete must participate on the team for the entire season. If injured during the season, an athlete is required to attend all team events for the remainder of the season to receive credit in that sport. The same participation rules apply in relation to being eligible for the Ironman Award. An athlete who quits a sport after the season has begun may not join a different Academy sport during that season.

Middle Division student-athletes must complete their Middle Division sports season before being eligible to participate in a junior varsity (JV) or varsity sport. Exceptions may be considered only when it is determined to be in the best interest of both the student-athlete and the athletic program. Such exceptions may be approved when a student's participation is necessary to support team viability or preserve a season. Any exception must be reviewed and approved by the Athletic Director and the appropriate coaches and school administrators.

*All Middle Division sports are contingent upon the number of sign-ups. If there are not enough pre-season sign-ups, the sport may not be offered. It is important to make a commitment when signing up. Accomplished athletes may try out for the varsity team **if invited** by the varsity coach, and/or the Athletic Director.*

VARSITY/UPPER DIVISION SPORTS

Varsity teams primarily consist of athletes in grades 9–12. On occasion and depending on the sport, Middle Division athletes may be **invited** to participate on varsity level teams once they complete their middle division season. Playing time is not guaranteed. There may be times when athletes do not participate in game action. An athlete who quits a sport after the season has begun may not join a different Academy sport during that season.

PARTICIPATING SIMULTANEOUSLY IN TWO VARSITY SPORTS

On rare occasions, an athlete may be allowed to participate in two varsity sports that occur simultaneously. For this to be allowed, both coaches of the respective sports and the athletic director must approve. Once approved, the athlete will be given a schedule of practices/games that he/she is required to attend for each sport. Failure to adhere to this pre-determined schedule will result in the athlete being removed from one or both sports.

ABSENCES

Excused Absences are those which are either (1) unforeseen emergencies or (2) are family/personal/school obligations that cannot be done at any other time and are **cleared with the coach at least one week in advance**.

Examples:

- Unforeseen family emergency – funeral, illness.
- Doctor appointment related to injuries incurred while playing.
- School activities (e.g. retreats, tutoring sessions, or other club/class events) or family obligations (e.g. weddings, religious events, etc.) which are **approved by the coach at least one week in advance** and cannot be done at any other time.
- Illness – absent from school.

Unexcused Absences are those which are (1) emergencies when the coach is not given proper communication, (2) events that could have been avoided or planned for a different time, (3) family/personal/school obligations that were not cleared at least one week in advance.

Examples:

- detention
- family vacations during the season
- school activities that are not cleared one week in advance
- routine medical or dental appointments
- homework

It is up to the discretion of the coach in dealing with unexcused absences. Consequences may include loss of playing time up to dismissal from the team.

If a student is excused from participation in P.E. for physical/medical reasons, he or she may not participate in after-school sports practices or games.

Athletes are expected to be at school on game days. If an athlete is not at school on the day of a game, then that athlete will not be allowed to participate in that game.

An athlete must attend school for $\frac{3}{4}$ of the school day (3 out of 4 block classes, 6 out of 8 C day classes) in order to be eligible to participate in athletic events that same day.

TARDIES: Excessive tardies, either excused or unexcused, can result in suspension or removal from the team.

- Excused tardies are those that were out of the player's control.
- Unexcused tardies are those that resulted due to lack of planning or could have been avoided.

Consequences for tardiness: At the coach's discretion.

EQUIPMENT AND UNIFORMS

It is the student's responsibility to care for the equipment and team uniforms issued. At the end of the season, team equipment issued to the student must be returned within one week of the last contest. Any damaged, unreturned, or lost items will be billed to the student's account. The average price for a uniform is \$150. In general, uniforms should be washed in the gentle cycle in **cold water**, colors separated and **hung to dry**.

SUPERVISION

Students using any athletic facility must be under the direct supervision of an Academy coach. Under no circumstances can any workout be unsupervised. Individual workouts must be approved and supervised by the athlete's coach, Assistant coach, or Athletic Department personnel assigned to that facility.

TRANSPORTATION

All athletes must ride the bus or other approved transportation to athletic events, including practices. Proper conduct is always required on the bus, and athletes are expected to keep the bus clean and free of trash. Parents may drive their child home from games if the coach allows, but the coach must be notified each time. If you would like your child to ride home with another parent, you must reach out to the coach in writing with your approval.

WEATHER

All teams will hold practice rain or shine, although it is at the discretion of each coach to cancel a practice in extreme inclement weather. In the case of bad weather, the Athletic Department will decide as soon as possible and notify the athletes and families. Parents attending away venues in threatening weather should first check online to see if the game has been cancelled.

In case of lightning, coaches are instructed to remove players from outdoor activities and move their athletes to a safe environment when lightning is reported within 8 miles of their location. This is determined by using the My Lightning Tracker App.

AWARDS

Lettering

Varsity athletes will receive a Letter if they complete a full season on a varsity team. It is not considered to be full participation unless a player is present at a minimum of 85% of all practices and games. If injured during the season, a player is expected to remain with the team in a support role and is required to attend practices and games in order to receive a Letter. *Letters will not be awarded for partial participation.*

Ironman

Ironman awards are given to each Middle Division and varsity athlete who competes fully in three or more sports during a school year. To earn credit for participation in a sport, an athlete must attend 85% or more of games and practices and must finish the season as a good-standing member of the team. *Ironman awards will not be awarded to partial participants.*

Banners

Athletes who receive FHSAA recognition, such as individual District Champion, Regional Champion, State Champion or State Runner-up will receive an individual banner. Student-athletes who make All-State will receive an individual banner. Students who earn Academic All-State will have their names added to the Academic All-State banners.

Athletes who qualify for the State Championship will have their name placed on a banner with other qualifying students. Teams that win a State Championship will have their rosters placed on a banner.

SPORTS OFFERED

Middle Division

Fall

Co-Ed Soccer
[Golf]
Girls Volleyball
Swimming
Cross Country

Winter

Basketball
Track and Field

Spring

[Tennis]
Softball
Baseball

Upper Division

Fall

Football
Golf
Girls Volleyball
Swimming
Cross Country
Cheerleading

Winter

Basketball
Soccer
Girls Weightlifting

Spring

Tennis
Softball
Baseball ('27)
Track and Field
Boys Weightlifting
Boys Volleyball

LOCATIONS OF ATHLETIC CONTESTS

Directions can be found on the Athletics portion of the school's website, www.academyatthelakes.org

PARENT ROLE

The role of the parent in an education-based athletics program is crucial. The support shown in the home is often manifested in the ability of the student to accept opportunities presented at school in the classroom and through co-curricular activities.

A person who demonstrates good sportsmanship is a true leader in the community. As a parent of a student at the Academy, your goals should include:

- * Recognize that athletics is part of the educational experience and that the benefits of involvement go well beyond the final score of the game.
- * Encourage our students to perform their best, just as we would urge them on with their class work, knowing that others may turn in better or lesser performances.
- * Participate in positive cheers or comments that encourage all students and avoid all cheers or comments that taunt or intimidate opponents, their fans, and officials.
- * Learn, understand, and respect the rules of the game, the officials who administer them, and their decisions.
- * Respect the task that our coaches face as teachers and support them as they strive to educate our youth. As a parent, coaching from the sidelines during a contest or practice is inappropriate. Coaching during contests is solely the role of the coach.
- * Respect our opponents as fellow students and acknowledge them for striving to do their best.
- * Work within the framework of the school operating procedures for fundraising, purchasing, travel, and other related activities.
- * Develop a sense of dignity under all circumstances.
- * Be a fan.... *not a fanatic*.

You can have a major influence on your child's attitude about academics and athletics. The leadership role you take in sportsmanship will help influence your child and our community for years to come.

GUIDELINES

The students, coaches, and our school need the support of the parents. We ask that parents remember the following:

Good sportsmanship is expected of everyone at the Academy. The coaches and players are expected to and are held accountable for representing the Academy with dignity, integrity, and respect. We expect the same high standards of behavior from parents. The Academy at the Lakes Athletic Department thanks you for your anticipated support.

Not all players get the same playing time. The nature of school athletics and competition means we try to put the best team on the court or field. It is the coach's job to decide who the most qualified players are, so the team has the best chance of success. Part of any player's maturation process includes putting one's personal desires aside for the betterment of the team.

Coaches are to be treated with the same respect as any other professional. Coaches put in many hours for very little financial compensation — they do it because they are committed educators who love the students and the sport. It is important that any conversations at home regarding the coaches or their decisions are put in a positive tone. We expect you and your child to treat his/her coach with respect.

Certain behaviors are considered inappropriate and unacceptable by Academy at the Lakes. The school and Athletic Department reserve the right to remove or refuse admission to persons who exhibit such behaviors. The school and the Athletic Department also reserve the right to dismiss a player from the program if that player's parent exhibits inappropriate behavior, such as:

- Repeated berating, humiliating, or taunting of our players or coaches.
- Repeated berating, humiliating, or taunting of our opponent's players, coaches or spectators.
- Repeated berating and harassment of game officials.
- Racist, sexist, or profane remarks directed at anyone.

COMMUNICATION

If you have any concerns about your child's coach or your child's athletic participation on a team, we ask that you please use this procedure and follow the listed steps in this order.

1. **Have your child speak to the coach.** Sometimes the coach is unaware of your child's concern or feelings. It is important that we work with our students in teaching them how to effectively communicate with adults and advocate for themselves. It is a safe space for practicing uncomfortable conversations. After said meeting, if needed, go to step two.
2. **Arrange an appointment to speak with your child's coach and child.** If you are still in need of mediation, go to step three.
3. **Arrange an appointment with, call, or write to the Athletic Director.** The Athletic Director will promptly investigate the situation and set up time to discuss the matter with you, the coach, and your child.

24-HOUR COOLING-OFF PERIOD

This is also known as the 24-hour rule to promote a positive and productive environment. PLEASE DO NOT APPROACH A COACH BEFORE OR AFTER A CONTEST OR PRACTICE. THESE CAN BE EMOTIONAL TIMES FOR ALL PARTIES. MEETINGS OF THIS NATURE RARELY PROMOTE POSITIVE RESOLUTION. IT IS BETTER TO CALL THE COACH AND ARRANGE AN APPOINTMENT TO MEET. PLEASE STRIVE TO FOLLOW THE 24-HOUR WAITING PERIOD. This will assist with reduced conflict, improved communication, positive role modeling, and bringing the focus back to the child.

POSITIVE COACHING

Academy at the Lakes is committed to the principles of Positive Coaching and does not condone a "win-at-all-cost" mentality. A Positive Coach shares that goal (wants to win) but has a second goal that is even more important: to use the sports experience to help young people learn "life lessons" and gain positive character traits

that will help them be successful throughout their lives. Please help us promote the three Academy themes that have the power to “transform youth sports so that sports can transform youth.” The three themes are:

1) Redefining “Winner.”

2) Filling the Emotional Tank.

3) Honoring the Game.

1) Redefining “Winner”

In professional sports (which are entertainment), there is only one goal — to have the most points at the end of a contest. However, in education-based athletics, there is a **second goal**: to produce young people who will be **positive contributors** to our society.

To help our children get the most out of competitive sports, we need to redefine what it means to be a "winner."

Winners:

- Give maximum effort.
- Have a *positive* attitude.
- Have a growth mindset.
- Respond to mistakes... next play mentality.
- Exhibit coachability.

This is called a Mastery Orientation. At Academy, the Tree of Mastery is an *ELM* Tree where *ELM* stands for **E**ffort, **L**earning, and **M**istakes.

If our athletes keep these things in mind, they will develop habits that will serve them well throughout their lives.

There is an added benefit. Athletes who are coached with a Mastery Orientation tend to have reduced anxiety and increased self-confidence. And, when athletes feel less anxiety, they are more likely to have fun playing their sport and to perform better!

Here’s how you can help:

- Tell your child about the ELM Tree of Mastery.
- Let your child know that you appreciate it when he or she tries hard even if unsuccessful.
- Ask rather than tell. Try to get your child to talk about his/her play rather than telling him/her what you think about it. Ask open-ended questions to get him/her to talk (e.g., What was the best part of the game for you? Did you have fun? What went well?).
- Recognize that Mastery is hard work. Let the coaches constructively criticize your child's play. Tell your child you are proud of him or her regardless of the outcome of the game.

2) Filling the "Emotional Tank"

Research shows that the home team wins about 60% of the time because of the emotional support a team receives when it plays in front of its own fans. We want our players to have a **portable** home team advantage that they can take wherever they go.

The key is the “**Emotional Tank.**” Like gas tanks in cars, we all have Emotional Tanks that need to be filled to do our best.

There will be times when you need to correct and criticize. Research has shown that a “Magic Ratio” of 5:1 (praise to criticism) is ideal. When the ratio drops much below 5:1, children become discouraged (their tanks become drained!). Help us achieve this Magic Ratio with your child.

Here’s how you can help:

- Fill your child's Emotional Tank. Encourage them regardless of what happens in the game.
- Try not to give your child a lot of advice (which after a tough game can seem like criticism, and drains a person’s tank). Remember, it’s difficult to do well with a low tank. When he/she makes a mistake, you might say, “Don’t worry. Let’s get the next one. You can do it.” After tough losses, it's often helpful to acknowledge feelings of disappointment. For example, you might say, "I can imagine you must be disappointed to have lost."
- Use the “3-Pluses-and-a-Wish” technique. Before you give advice, find three good things about your child's performance. Phrase the advice as a wish:
 - You really tried hard in the game today (Plus #1).
 - I also saw you filling your teammate’s Emotional Tank after he made a mistake (Plus #2).
 - And that play you made toward the end of the game shows how much you are improving (Plus #3).
 - When you make a mistake, what will you do next? I *wish* you wouldn’t get so down on yourself. It’s what you do after the mistake that matters to your team, not the mistake.

If you can’t come up with three pluses, don’t say the “wish” because then it may drain his or her emotional tank rather than fill it.

- Remember the Magic Ratio.* Praise your child about 5 times for every one time you criticize. If you do; he/she will be better able to hear your criticism without becoming defensive.

* It's called the Magic Ratio because magical things happen when we get close to it with our students.

3) Honoring the Game

Sportsmanship may seem like an out-of-date concept today when professional athletes and coaches act in ways we would not want our children to imitate. We intend to reverse this trend by “Honoring the Game.”

Honoring the Game gets to the **ROOTS** of the matter, where ROOTS stands for **respect**:

- **R**ules
- **O**pponents
- **O**fficials
- **T**eammates
- **S**elf

Rules: We don't bend the rules to win. We respect the letter and spirit of the rules.

Opponents: A worthy opponent is a gift that forces us to play to our highest potential. We try our hardest to win, but not at the expense of demeaning our opponents.

Officials: We treat officials with respect even when we disagree. They do have a different perspective.

Teammates: We never do anything that would embarrass our team.

Self: We try to live up to our own standards regardless of what others do.

Here's how you can help:

- Let your players/children know that you want them to honor the game. Discuss the meaning of each element of ROOTS with your athletes.
- Be a good role model. Honor the Game when you attend games. Cheer on your team. If, in your opinion, an officiating mistake is made, be silent! Use this as an opportunity to think about how difficult it is to officiate a perfect game, just as it is to play a perfect game.
- Encourage other parents to Honor the Game.

Parents and students may complete this agreement electronically by submitting the Athletic Handbook Agreement forms available on the Summer Checklist: <https://academyatthelakes.org/summer-checklist/>. Electronic submission is the preferred method.

If you are unable to submit the form online, you may print, sign, and return this page to the Athletic Department.



ATHLETIC HANDBOOK AGREEMENT 2026–2027

PARENT STATEMENT – The signature of both parents and the student is required unless a single parent household.

I/We _____ (*Print Parent(s)/Guardians(s) Name(s)*) have read the **2026-27 Academy Athletic Handbook** and understand that these are the policies of the athletic department. By signing this form, I/we acknowledge the Athletic Handbook as binding, and I/we explicitly accept its provisions as a condition of participation in the Academy sports program.

Parent Signature

Date

Parent Signature

Date

STUDENT STATEMENT

I _____ (*Print Student Name*) have read the **2026–27 Academy Athletic Handbook** and understand that these are the policies of the athletic department. By signing this form, I acknowledge the Athletic Handbook as binding, and I explicitly accept its provisions as a condition of participation in the Academy sports program.

Student Signature

Date

COACH STATEMENT

I _____ (*Print Name*) have read the **2026–27 Academy Athletic Handbook** and understand that these are the policies of the athletic department. By signing this form, I acknowledge the Athletic Handbook as binding, and I explicitly accept its provisions as a condition of participation in the Academy sports program.

Coach Signature

Date