

Mapping of School-Based Coach Education and Training Requirements in the United States



MILLION
COACHES
CHALLENGE





Coaches in school-based settings are often governed by their state high school athletic associations and the evolution of training and education requirements instituted by these entities. Notable shifts in the policy landscape have occurred over the past four years, especially regarding health and safety and mental health requirements for coaches. This brief summarizes policy changes first mapped in 2020 and then again in 2024 to distill how the landscape of school-based sport is evolving as it pertains to coach training and education requirements in the United States.

Key Takeaways

- Governance is becoming more centralized (as State Activities Associations and Departments of Education are taking more ownership over coach education and training).
- Many states have taken action to ensure coaches are trained in health and safety protocols (namely sudden cardiac arrest training and heat-related safety) likely in unison with the crisis of Damar Hamlin at the Buffalo Bills.
- Mental health has become a clear focus, with seven states now requiring this training and two additional states are working to approve this training through the legislative process. When asked about evolving priorities, state leaders mentioned mental health, along with continued priorities to ensure coaches are prepared to support athlete health and safety.
- Opportunities exist for states to pass legislation that focuses on scaffolding learning over time and generating continuing education requirements for coaches, namely in areas of pedagogy, positive youth development, and wellness as many states only require coaches complete one pedagogy-related training during their first year.





Methodology

Public documents outlining coach training requirements were retrieved from the websites of State Activities Associations and Departments of Education for each of the 50 states and the District of Columbia (N = 51). Each state's school coach training requirements were coded based on key factors initially outlined in the National Coaching Report conducted by the National Association of Sport and Physical Education (NASPE, 2008). Five main sections were charted, including:

- the establishment and governance of requirements;
- state-specific training requirements;
- the mode of delivery for trainings;
- variations in training requirements based on coaching role; and
- the logistics of training requirements.

After mapping requirements based on the policy language, each individual responsible for overseeing coaching requirements at each state and the District of Columbia were contacted via email to verify the content of their respective state's training requirements and processes. In total, 47 of the 51 individuals (86%) confirmed content in the five main sections. These individuals also were asked to answer two questions:

- What are the top priorities you and your organization are focused on when it comes to coach training and education?; and
- What, if any, requirements are under review in the legislative process in your state?

Fourteen of the 51 state leaders (27%) responded to prompts related to emerging priorities and provided legislative updates.

Summary of Findings

Policy Landscape

Table 1 displays the policy landscape across all 50 states and the District of Columbia, demonstrating the notable differences and variability by states. The following are outlined: (a) oversight and governance entities (i.e., State Activities Associations, Departments of Education, multiple governing bodies, or school districts); (b) state-specific training requirements (i.e., Fundamentals of Coaching, First Aid); (c) the mode of delivery for trainings (i.e., online, in-person, or both); (d) the training requirements based on the coaching role (whether states have the same trainings for assistant, volunteer, and middle school coaches compared to head coaches); and (e) the logistics of training requirements (i.e., expectations for completion, timeframes for required health training renewal, and incentives).

Governance. Overall, a near majority of states are governed by either a State Activities Associations (n = 25, 49%) or Department of Education (n = 6, 12%). Others are governed by a combination of entities, such as the Department of Education and school district policies, or other state and local entities. A few states are governed by other entities, including the State Principal Associations governing school-based sport (Maine and Vermont) and the Board of Educational Examiners (Iowa).

State-specific training requirements. Findings demonstrate that most states (n = 42, 82%) require multiple trainings on health-related content, along with one required pedagogy-related training. In fact, most states (n = 37, 73%) have school-based coaches complete five or more of trainings (see Table 1 for



more detail on requirements by state). Overwhelmingly, the one pedagogy-related training required by most states is the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) Fundamentals of Coaching training (n = 33; 65%).

Mode and timing of delivery. Most states use trainings in an online format (n = 34, 67%), with fewer states providing training in-person (n = 4, 8%) or both online and in-person options (n = 13, 25%). There still is great variability across states in the length of time when licensures need to be renewed (i.e., 1-2 years, 5 years, etc.).

Requirements based on coaching role. In terms of who must abide by the training requirements put forth by the governing bodies, findings demonstrate that most states (n = 45, 88%) require assistant coaches to complete the same training requirements as head coaches. In the states that did not have the same coaching licensure process as the head coach at the assistant and volunteer levels, these states only required coaches to complete the health and safety-related trainings. Nearly half of the states (n = 23; 45%) had training requirements for middle school coaches. Interestingly, over two-thirds of states (n = 35, 68%) have the same coaching licensure requirements for interscholastic volunteer coaches as head coaches.

Logistics. Over two-thirds of states (n = 35, 69%) require school-based coaches to obtain their coaching licensure prior to their coaching start date, yet a few states provide school-based coaches more leniency in obtaining their licensure (e.g., trainings must be done within first year, etc.). Interestingly, some states (n = 8, 16%) provide incentives for coaches to complete trainings, such as continuing education units. In one state specifically, non-certified teachers who complete requirements are then viewed as equal to certified teachers in the hiring processes for coaching positions.

Changes in Training Requirements

Table 2 summarizes the changes in the policy landscape from 2020 to 2024. Most notably, the policy landscape has become somewhat more centralized, with three states moving governance to a State Activities Association or Department of Education (as compared to having multiple entities governing school-based sport). Although almost all states (n= 50; 98%) require high school coaches to complete coaching licensure requirements, yet many states (n = 32; 63%) offer adjustments to this process. Some include having the requirements be exempt for certified teachers, covered by university credits, and/or delayed in emergency situations. In terms of health and safety trainings, more states have requirements in this domain, with one additional state requiring First Aid and CPR (Nebraska), five additional states requiring Sudden Cardiac Arrest Training (Colorado, Louisiana, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Oregon) and five states (Colorado, Louisiana, Minnesota, Rhode Island, Texas) now requiring heat illness/ acclimatization trainings. Of note, seven states (14%; Alabama, Colorado, Idaho, Minnesota, Ohio, Rhode Island, Washington) now mandate mental health training for coaches (and another two have this mandate under review in the legislature). While this was not assessed in 2020, it is believed no states required a mental health training prior to 2020.

In 2020, six states (Connecticut, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Wyoming) used alternative pedagogy-related training or clock hours instead of the NFHS' Fundamentals of Coaching or Human Kinetics' Principles of Coaching courses. In 2024, one additional state (Florida) began using an alternative training method, as university credits in athletic coaching satisfy their pedagogy-related training requirements. Seven states also reported a notable uptick in requiring other coach trainings in areas



such as sportsmanship (Alabama), unified sports (Alaska, Delaware), emergency action planning (Kansas), implicit bias (Vermont), preventing discrimination (Oregon), and child abuse recognition (Rhode Island). Furthermore, evident changes are happening in relation to who needs to meet state training requirements. Four more states (Alaska, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Vermont) now require middle school coaches to complete the same training requirements as high school coaches.

Top Priorities for Coach Training and Education

Table 3 overviews the priorities related to coach training and education as perceived by the state leaders who chose to answer the open-ended questions (N = 14). A majority reported athlete health and safety (n = 8; 57%) was a top priority, followed by mental health and wellness (n = 5; 38%) and continuing education and professional development for coaches (n = 4; 29%). Other themes included (a) loss of interest in in-person clinics; (b) consistent communication; (c) diversity, equity, and inclusion; (d) rules and regulations; (e) on-going changes in student needs; and (f) unified standards.

Three state leaders of the 14 respondents denoted active legislative processes underway in their states. State leaders from Louisiana reported trainings on AED and mental health are under review, along with a process to mandate mental health evaluations with athletes after injuries. Washington is currently in the process of reviewing a training mandate for health illness prevention and coaching diverse athletes. Pennsylvania has a bill in the Senate focused on ensuring every public and charter school has an automated AED device and school health services plans in the event of sudden cardiac arrest. Last, Pennsylvania has a bill to support mental health training for coaches that was approved by the Pennsylvania House of Representatives and is now undergoing review in the Senate.

Additional Opportunities

Other insights from a policy perspective include greater emphasis on training and educating middle school coaches and the use of additional priorities to incentivize training among coaches. There also seems to be growing acceptance for the use of on-line trainings, yet one wonders still if this modality is effective at promoting mastery of competencies.

First, there are opportunities to extend coach training requirements to middle school and volunteer coaches, as many states still do not have required training for these two groups in the interscholastic space. Although not explored here, there also may be potential for legislation related to community-based coaches.

Additionally, there continues to be differences in requirements across the states in relation to sport and pedagogy coach training requirements. Some states have no requirements in this area, others require training in fundamentals, yet few require sport-specific training for licensure.

Last, variability exists across the states in relation to the timing of when licensures need to be renewed. One wonders how long coaches can successfully retain protocols such as CPR and first aid (entities such as the United States Council for Athletes' Health recommend these be renewed annually). At least more states are ensuring coaches have these certifications prior to coaching, but this may present itself as an area of policy improvement for others.



Who We Are

The organizations of the Million Coaches Challenge are committed to equipping a generation of coaches with the knowledge and tools to help young people thrive on and off the playing field.

Ball State University

California Governor's Advisory Council on Physical Fitness and Mental Well-Being

Center for Healing & Justice through Sport (CHJS)

CoachUp! Washington

Girls on the Run International

How to Coach Kids

Laureus Sport for Good Foundation USA

LiFEsports at The Ohio State University and Ohio High School Athletic Association

LiFEsports at University of Maryland

Little League®

National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA)

Positive Coaching Alliance

Project Play

Susan Crown Exchange

U.S. Soccer Foundation

United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee's (USOPC)

USA Fencing, USA Weightlifting, and USA Triathlon

Wichita Public Schools with Kansas State High School Activities Association

We would like to thank the researchers and authors: Obidiah Atkinson, PhD; Samantha Bates, PhD, LISW-S, and Dawn Anderson-Butcher, PhD, LISW-S, CMPC

References

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- National Association for Sport and Physical Education. (2008). National coaching report. Reston, VA: National Association for Sport and Physical Education.



Table 1. Policy Landscape by State/DC

State	Est./Gov.	Required Trainings								Method	Asst. Coach	Vol. Coach	MS	Comp.	Recert.	Incent.
		FoC	SR	SK	FA/CPR	C	SCA	HIA	MH							
AL	SAA	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Both	Same	Same	Yes	Prior	2 yr	Yes
AK	SAA	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓			Online	Same		Yes	Prior	3 yr	
AZ	DoE/SAA	✓		✓	✓	✓				Online	Same	Same		2 mo	DNS	
AR	DoE/SAA	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		Online	Same	Same	Yes	Prior	3 yr	
CA	DoE/SAA				✓	✓	✓	✓		Both	Same	Same		Prior	2 yr	
CO	SAA	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Online	Same	Same		Prior	1 yr	Yes
CT	DoE		✓		✓	✓				Both	Same	Same	Yes	Prior	1-2 yr	Yes
DE	DoE		✓		✓	✓				Online	Same	Same	Yes	Prior	2 yr	
DC	DoE/SAA		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		Online	Same	Same		Prior	2 yr	
FL	DoE/SD				✓	✓	✓	✓		Both	SD	SD	SD	SD	5 yr	
GA	SAA		✓		✓	✓				Both	DNS	DNS		2 mo		
HI	SAA	✓				✓	✓	✓		Online	Same	Same		Prior	1 yr	
ID	SAA	✓			✓	✓	✓		✓	Online	Same	Same		Prior	2 yr	
IL	SAA		✓		✓	✓				Both	Same	Same		1 yr		
IN	SAA	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		Online	Same	Same		Prior	2 yr	
IA	Other		✓		✓	✓				Both	Same	Same	Yes	Prior	5 yr	
KS	SAA		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		Both	Same		Yes	Prior	1-2 yr	
KY	DoE/SAA	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓			Online	Same	Same		Prior	2 yr	Yes
LA	SAA	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		Online	Same			Prior	3 yr	
ME	Other	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓		Online	Same	Same		1 yr	1-2 yr	
MD	DoE/SD	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			Online	SD	SD		SD	2 yr	Yes
MA	SAA	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓			Both	Same	Same	Yes	2 yr	1 yr	
MI	SAA		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			In-Person	DNS	DNS		Prior	DNS	Yes
MN	DoE			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	Both				Prior	3 yr	
MS	SAA	✓	✓		✓	✓				Online	Same	Same	Yes	Prior	2 yr	Yes
MO	SAA	✓	✓		✓	✓				Online	Same	Same		Prior	2 yr	
MT	SAA	✓	✓			✓				Online	Same	Same		Prior	1 yr	
NE	DoE/SAA	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓		Online	Same			3 yr	DNS	
NV	SAA	✓			✓	✓				Online	Same	Same		Prior	3 yr	
NH	SAA		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		In-Person	Same			1 yr	3 yr	
NJ	DoE	✓			✓	✓		✓		Online	Same	Same		Prior	2 yr	
NM	DoE/SAA	✓			✓	✓				Online	DNS	DNS	Yes	DNS	DNS	
NY	DoE		✓	✓	✓	✓				Both	Same	Same	Yes	Prior	2 yr	Yes
NC	DoE/SD	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓			Online	Same	Same		Prior	2 yr	
ND	SAA	✓			✓	✓				Online	Same	Same		Prior	2 yr	
OH	DoE	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	Online	Same	Same	Yes	Prior	2 yr	
OK	DoE/SAA	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		Online	Same	Same	Yes	Prior	2 yr	



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State	Est./Gov.	Required Trainings								Method	Asst. Coach	Vol. Coach	MS	Comp.	Recert.	Incent.
		FoC	SR	SK	FA/CPR	C	SCA	HIA	MH							
OR	SAA	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		Online	Same	Same		Prior	2 yr	
PA	SD				✓	✓	✓			Both	Same	Same	Yes	2 yr	1 yr	
RI	DoE/SAA	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Online	Same	Same	Yes	Prior	1 yr	Yes
SC	SAA	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓		Online	Same	Same	Yes	Prior	1 yr	Yes
SD	SAA	✓	✓		✓	✓				Online	Same	Same	Yes	Prior	2 yr	Yes
TN	SAA	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓			Online	Same	Same	Yes	Prior	3 yr	
TX	DoE/SAA	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		Online	Same	Same	Yes	1 mo	1 yr	
UT	DoE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				Both	Same	Same		Prior	1 yr	
VT	Other	✓			✓	✓	✓			Online	Same	Same	Yes	1 yr		
VA	DoE/SAA		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		Online	Same	Same		2 yr	2 yr	
WA	DoE/SAA		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	Online	Same	Same	Yes	3 yr	1 yr	
WV	SAA		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		In-Person	Same	Same	Yes	Prior	1 yr	
WI	SAA	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓			Online	Same		Yes	1 yr	2 yr	
WY	Other			✓	✓	✓				Both	Same	Same		Prior	2 yr	

Note. Est./Gov. = Establishment/Governance of requirements; SAA = State Activities Association; DoE = State Department of Education; SD = School District; FoC = NFHS Fundamentals of Coaching; SR = Sport Rules; SK = Sport-Specific Knowledge; FA/CPR = First Aid Training/ Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation; C = Concussion; SCA = Sudden Cardiac Arrest; HIA = Heat Illness/Acclimatation; Asst. Coach = Assistant coach requirements; Vol. Coach = Volunteer coach requirements; MS = Requirements for Middle School coaches; Comp. = Time allowed to complete training requirements; Recert. = Duration to recertify requirements; Incent. = Incentives for completion of coach licensure; DNS = Does not specify information.



Table 2. Synthesis of Training Requirements and Related Contextual Factors

Training Requirements and Contextual Factors	2020	2024	Summary of Changes	% Change
Establishment & Governance				
State Activities Association (SAA)	24 (47%)	25 (49%)	1 more state	+2%
Department of Education (DoE)	4 (8%)	6 (12%)	2 more states	+4%
Combination of Entities	18 (35%)	16 (31%)	2 less states	-4%
Other Entity	5 (10%)	4 (8%)	1 less state	-2%
Adjustments to Licensure Process				
Adjustments Present	33 (65%)	30 (59%)	3 less states	-6%
Training Requirements				
Health-Related Training				
First Aid/CPR (FA/CPR)	47 (92%)	48 (94%)	1 more state	+2%
Concussion (C)	51 (100%)	51 (100%)	Same	No change
Sudden Cardiac Arrest (SCA)	29 (57%)	34 (67%)	5 more states	+10%
Heat Illness/Aclimatization (HIA)	17 (33%)	22 (43%)	5 more states	+10%
Mental Health (MH)		7 (14%)	Did not track in the 2020; however, believe no states mandated at that time	+14%
Pedagogy-Related Training				
Fundamentals of Coaching (FoC)	39 (76%)	33 (65%)	6 less states	-11%
Alternative Course	9 (18%)	16 (31%)	7 more states	+13%
None/School District	3 (6%)	2 (4%)	1 less state	-2%
Alternative Training				
Sport Rules (SR)	28 (55%)	33 (65%)	5 more states	+10%
Sport Knowledge (SK)	14 (29%)	14 (27%)	Same	-2%
Additional Trainings	9 (18%)	16 (31%)	7 more states	+13%
Legislative				
Background Check/Fingerprinting	26 (51%)	26 (51%)	Same	No change
Child Abuse Recognition	8 (16%)	9 (18%)	1 more state	+2%
Method of Delivery				
Online	33 (65%)	34 (67%)	1 more state	+2%
In-Person	6 (12%)	3 (6%)	3 less states	-6%
Both Options	12 (24%)	14 (27%)	2 more states	+4%
Requirements of Head Coach Extended to Other Coaching Roles				
High School Assistant Coach	43 (84%)	45 (88%)	2 more states	+4%
High School Volunteer Coach	35 (68%)	35 (68%)	Same	No change
Middle School Coach	19 (37%)	23 (45%)	4 more states	+7%



Table 2. Synthesis of Training Requirements and Related Contextual Factors

Training Requirements and Contextual Factors	2020	2024	Summary of Changes	% Change
Logistics				
<i>Timeframe to Complete Required Trainings</i>				
Prior to Coaching Start Date	32 (63%)	35 (69%)	3 more states	+6%
Additional Time Provided	15 (30%)	10 (20%)	5 less states	-10%
Did Not Specify/School District	4 (8%)	3 (6%)	1 less state	-2%
<i>Recertification Procedures</i>				
1-2 years	32 (63%)	36 (71%)	4 more states	+8%
3-5 years	7 (14%)	9 (18%)	2 more states	+4%
Did Not Specify/School District/None	4 (8%)	3 (6%)	1 less state	-2%
<i>Incentives</i>				
Incentives Provided	5 (10%)	8 (16%)	3 more states	+6%
Did Not Specify/Incentives Not Provided	46 (90%)	43 (84%)	3 less states	-8%

Table 3. Top Priorities from State Leaders on Coach Education and Training (N = 14)

Theme	n	% of Respondents	States
Athlete health and safety	8	57%	Kansas, Louisiana, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Wyoming, Rhode Island, West Virginia
Mental health, wellness, and social-emotional skills for student-athletes	5	38%	Massachusetts, Ohio, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Jersey
Continuing education/ Professional development for coaches	4	29%	Idaho, Louisiana, West Virginia, Rhode Island
Education-based philosophy/sports as an extension of the classroom	3	21%	Massachusetts, Ohio, Minnesota
Foundations of coaching/Role of the coach as teacher and manager	3	21%	Massachusetts, North Carolina, Wyoming
Costs of training/Ease of use	3	21%	Florida, Kansas, Texas
Sportsmanship	2	14%	Massachusetts, New Jersey
Effectiveness/relevance of training content	2	14%	Kansas, Texas

*Please note only themes that were reflected in responses from two or more state leaders are included in the table. Other individual responses included: (a) loss of interest in in-person clinics; (b) consistent communication; (c) diversity, equity, and inclusion; (d) rules and regulations; (e) on-going changes in student needs; and (f) unified standards.

