

SPIRIT SQUADS HANDBOOK RUSSELLVILLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

1) Introduction:

The purpose of this handbook is to provide guidelines for the administration of the Russellville Public School's spirit squad programs. Its purpose includes helping to establish uniform standards and procedures for all participants.

The information in this handbook has been developed in consultation with spirit squad coaches, parents, and administrators. This handbook has been approved by the Athletic Director and the administrators of Russellville Middle, Jr. and Sr. High Schools.

Changes to this handbook may be made at the coach's discretion. Spirit squad members will be responsible for changes upon notification by the spirit squad coach.

2) Philosophy:

Spirit squads play an important role in athletic contests and other school and community activities. Each squad boosts school spirit, promotes sportsmanship, and develops positive crowd involvement. Because of their high visibility and recognition by the public, it is imperative that high standards of conduct be observed, including positive personal behavior and an emphasis on teamwork. Responsibilities for team members should center on "leading" or "directing" students and other fans in positive expressions of support and involvement that create a cooperative spirit among students, faculty, athletes, and members of the community. All spirit squads' main responsibility is to support the teams at school sporting events. The junior high and high school spirit squad's next responsibility is to compete at the highest level in state competitions.

3) Responsibilities of the Spirit Squad Coach:

- Attend the fall AAA Spirit Rules Meeting
- Attend a documented safety meeting at least every other year unless he/she has the four-year ACC Safety certification
- Keep current medical information for each squad member
- Be responsible for members of the squad in all of their activities, fulfilling responsibilities to provide an environment free of safety hazards
- Attend all assigned activities, including practices, games, coaches' meetings, and community activities, or have an athletic department-approved adult substitute in case of emergencies or pre-approved absence
- Work cooperatively with the schools' administrators, activities director, other coaches, sponsors, band director, and community personnel
- Review district transportation guidelines and information and be on board the bus for all spirit squad trips
- Arrange through the athletic director the squad's transportation/meals to away contests, activities, and performances, keeping early dismissal from school to a minimum
- Make sure all routines/cheers and music are school appropriate
- Coordinate a schedule of performances at events and meet all required administrative duties
- Recognize individual and squad ability levels and limit activities accordingly
- Provide members of the squad with a copy of this handbook and enforce the policies and procedures it contains
- Keep open lines of communication with spirit squad members and parents
- Strive to develop in each squad member qualities of leadership, initiative, good judgment, high standards of conduct, and scholastic achievement
- Seek to promote good health habits, including the establishment of sound training rules

- Encourage good relationships among members of the squad and develop and maintain a positive working relationship between squads
- Respect the integrity and judgment of sports contest officials
- Manage the spirit squad budget according to the athletic department budget guidelines

4) Expectations of Squad Members:

- Act in a courteous, polite, responsible, and considerate manner
- Promote school spirit and good sportsmanship
- Cooperate with the coaches, officers, teachers, administrators, and other students
- Attend **ALL** scheduled practices, events, and activities and arrive on time
 - If you have an unexcused absence from practicing during a performance week, you will be pulled from the performance at the coach's discretion.
- Promote and maintain a **positive working relationship** between coaches, squads, and squad members
- Be enthusiastic, properly dressed, and well-groomed at all required events/activities/ and practices
- Know/master all cheers, chants, and routines by specified dates/ timelines provided by the coach.
- Follow all guidelines/procedures outlined in the Spirit Squad Handbook
- Follow all school rules/guidelines outlined in the RSD Student Handbook
- Maintain eligibility requirements (*RSD and AAA*)
- Participate in ALL required fundraisers
- Do not post derogatory or hurtful comments about the coach, team, or other squad members on social media outlets. (*See social media policy*)
- Team members should be leaders within the school and set a good example at **ALL** times.

5) Expectations of Parents:

- Provide positive attitude/behavior/role model for their student/school/community both on campus and off campus.
- Show respect for the coach, all participants, officials/judges/teachers.
- Attend pre-season meetings with the spirit squad coach.
- Provide financial support for the required costs of participation in spirit squads.
- Volunteer and be involved in parental activities throughout the season when possible.
- Do not post derogatory or hurtful comments about the coach, team, or other squad members on social media outlets.
- Follow the proper chain of command when addressing concerns

6) Grievance Procedure/Chain of Command:

If you need to address a concern with the Coach, please refer to the following:

- The athlete will attempt to resolve the issue by speaking to Coach first.
- If the problem is unresolved, schedule a meeting at school with Coach.
 - **Do NOT approach the coach before, during, or after a game, practice, or on social media. You may contact Coach via Band or email.**
- If the problem is unresolved, schedule an appointment with the Athletic Director
- If the problem is still unresolved, contact the building principal.
- If the problem is still unresolved, follow the Russellville School District appeal process.

7) Summer Camp: MANDATORY

The selection of the type, date, and location of the summer camp to be attended will be made by the spirit squad coach. Summer camp costs and expenses are the responsibility of each spirit squad

member. All spirit squad members are required to attend the scheduled summer camp and ALL practices. Exceptions must be preapproved by the spirit squad coach.

8) Tryouts:

Tryout procedures must be outlined by the spirit squad coach and approved by the athletic director and building principal. **Spirit squad coaches are responsible for the selection of squad members.**

Tryouts will be held in the spring. Prior to tryouts, the spirit squad coach will hand out a tryout packet containing all tryout expectations (criteria/skills/times/locations). Instructional clinics will be held during the week of tryouts. **Attendance is required for ALL instructional clinics and Tryouts.**

Exceptions must be preapproved by the spirit squad coach.

Tryout Scoring:

A total score derived from multiple areas will be utilized in determining membership of the spirit squad(s). It will be decided by performance of tryout skills and routines; Coaches Clinic Evaluation, and Teacher Evaluations with percentages to be determined by the individual coaches.

Tryout Eligibility Requirements:

- Meet all RSD and AAA eligibility requirements
- Not have resigned, quit, or been dismissed from a spirit squad
- Attend the pre-tryout meeting with a parent/guardian. Exceptions must be preapproved by the spirit squad coach.
- Have written permission from parent/guardian to participate in spirit squad activities
- Have all required paperwork/forms completely filled out/signed by parent/guardian and returned by the due date
- Have current physical
- Wear black shorts/pants, a white short-sleeved t-shirt, socks, and tennis shoes/dance shoes

Male Members:

Due to the change in competition divisions with a co-ed team, male members may or may not compete depending on the number of males on the team, skill level, and overall potential. Male members may be judged on a separate set of criteria at tryouts than female candidates.

In the selection of all spirit squads:

- The membership number of each squad will be determined where the “natural” break occurs with the top scores or at the discretion of the Coach.
- All scores will be kept confidential and will not be divulged.
- **The selection decision from tryouts is FINAL. Not all students chosen to be on the team will be on the competition squad.**

Tryout Grievance Procedure:

Grievances concerning tryout results must be submitted to the athletic director at least one week after the tryout results are announced.

Membership of Spirit Squads:

Russellville Middle School

- Top total scores of no less than 10 7th grade candidates. Squads may number less if enough participants do not score 50% or higher on their skill scores.

Russellville Junior High School

- Top total scores of no less than 10 8th and 9th grade candidates. Squads may number less if enough participants do not score 50% or higher on their skill scores.

Russellville High School

- Top total scores of no less than 10 10th-12th grade candidates. Squads may number less if enough participants do not score 50% or higher on their skill scores.

9) Captains and Co-Captains

The decision to have spirit team officers will be determined by the spirit squad coach. The captains and co-captains will be appointed by the spirit squad coach.

10) Involvement in other Sports or Extracurricular Activities

- Members are encouraged to participate in another school-sponsored sports/activities if it is mutually acceptable to and appropriately arranged with all involved parties (parents/student/coaches/athletic director/principal).
- Conflicts will be addressed/resolved by coaches involved.
- **Club Sports or Sports that are not school-related come second to school sports and will not be an excused absence.**

11) Grade Level Eligibility Requirements:

Middle School and Junior High Requirements

- All first semester 7th and 8th grade students have no requirements to be eligible as long as they have been promoted from the previous year.
- Second semester 8th grade students and first semester 9th grade students must pass (4) academic courses during the previous semester as specified by the Arkansas Department of Education's Standards for Accreditation of Arkansas Public Schools.
- All second semester 9th grade students must pass (4) academic courses the previous semester and have a 2.0 GPA to be eligible for their 10th grade year.

High School Eligibility Requirements

- All 10th, 11th, and 12th grade students must pass (4) academic courses and have a 2.0 GPA. If a student passes (4) courses but does not have a 2.0 GPA, he/she can attend SIP classes. Head coaches and the Athletic Director can provide further information regarding the SIP Program.
- At the end of the second semester, all students must meet RSD and AAA scholastic requirements in order to participate in spirit squad tryouts.

*The coach will do random grade checks throughout the school year; if a student is missing multiple assignments or has below a C in any particular class, the Coach has the right to bench the student from games, performances, or practices.

12) Sportsmanship:

The promotion of good sportsmanship is a primary responsibility of spirit groups. Spirit squad members should serve as role models for spectators, whether in uniform or not. All spirit squad members should know and follow the NFHS policy statement concerning good sportsmanship.

All material (cheers/choreography) should be directed toward entertaining and/or motivating the crowd to support the athletic team. All performances should exemplify positive support of the Russellville athletic teams.

13) Appearance:

- Members should look their best physically at all times.
- Hair should be worn up and **off the face** when practicing/required events/games.
- All uniforms and accessories, including shoes, must be kept neat and clean at all times.
- **No Acrylic Nails or Nail Color on nails during the season**
- **No jewelry, including body piercings, is allowed during practice or events.**
- **New ear or body piercings are not allowed if it will not have sufficient time to heal before practices/camp/games/competitions.**
- All tattoos must be covered while in uniform and must not be placed in an area of the body that cannot be covered by the spirit squad uniforms.
- Undergarments must be completely covered by the uniform, no bra straps should be showing at any time while in uniform.
- Look your best when representing RSD in uniform
- The complete uniform includes correct spandex, sports bra with maximum support, bow, socks, shell, skirt, liner, warm-up, and poms.
 - If you do not wear the correct attire, you will not be allowed to cheer/perform and it will be considered a strike within the three-strike rule. (See Three Strike Rule below.)

14) Uniforms and Expenses:

The school will provide uniforms for spirit squad members. The purchase of accessories and/or additional uniforms will be at the expense of the spirit squad. Such purchases must be approved by the spirit squad coach and athletic director or superintendent. "Out-of-pocket" expenses for spirit squad members and parents will be kept to **\$350.00, plus summer camp expenses.**

Uniforms and accessories purchased with school funds remain the property of the school.

Fundraising activities will be planned and/or approved by the spirit squad coach to aid in meeting individual expenses. Other fundraisers may also be conducted which will be directed toward the general fund for operational costs. All spirit squad members are required to participate in scheduled fundraisers. Exceptions must be preapproved by the spirit squad coach.

Spirit Squad fee is non-refundable if an athlete quits the team. In the event an athlete quits or is dismissed from the team, the athlete cannot wear team attire for the remainder of the school year.

Uniform Policies:

- Members must wear the correct and complete uniform at all required events
- Members may not give out any part of their spirit squad uniform to non-spirit squad individuals-**including any practice attire that shares RSD Spirit Squad affiliation.**
- Members are to launder/clean all uniforms prior to turning them in at the end of the year
- No part of the spirit squad uniform or accessories except the spirit squad jacket/hoodie is to be worn unless in complete uniform or pre-approved by the coach.
- No jewelry or other "extras" will be worn while in uniform or at practices.
- Do not wear the spirit squad uniforms as a costume.
- Members may not take uniforms from the uniform closet without the coach's knowledge
 - If a uniform no longer fits correctly, the member will need to return their current uniform to get a replacement. Replacements will not be issued for lost items without the lost item being paid for in advance.
- All adjustments or alterations must be reversible and are the responsibility of the athlete.

15) Practices:

- **ALL** practices are required for all squad members in-school and after-school
- Absences/Leaving Early will be excused at the discretion of the coach- *If athletes miss more than 3 practices due to illness, a doctor's note will be required for the remainder of absences in order for them to be excused.*
- Coaches must be notified prior to absence/leaving early at **least one week prior** to the absence if possible
- Absences/leaving early from practice may result in restriction from activities
- Additional practices may be scheduled depending on the need
- Non-school sponsored activity classes/practices/games/activities are **not** excused absences
- Members who miss practice are responsible for any information/choreography/cheers that they missed
- All choreography/band dances/cheers must be approved in practice before being performed in a game or pep rally.
- **No** stunting may be practiced **without the supervision** of the coach.
- You must dress out and be prepared to practice at **ALL** scheduled practices.
- All practices are CLOSED (members & coaches only, unless prior approval from coach)

16) Performances and Games

- Members are required to attend **ALL** home and away ballgames/performances/competitions/practices set by the coach.
- Coaches must be notified a minimum of **one week prior** to an absence
- Members must be on time for events and stay until the event is officially over.
- Per district policy, members must attend at least ½ of the school day in order to participate in events on that day. Exceptions must be preapproved by the coach.
- Gum/Suckers/Food are not allowed while cheering at events.
- Members are not to leave the stands or track during an event without the permission of the coach.
- Spirit squads will perform pre-game or halftime cheers/routines at home football and basketball sporting events.
- Cell phones will **NOT** be allowed out during games, performances, or competitions unless permission is granted by the Coach.
- In case of school closing due to weather, practices will not be held; however, if the teams still play, spirit squads are expected to participate unless directed not to by the athletic director/principal.

17) Transportation

- Members must ride school-provided transportation to all out-of-town events unless previous arrangements/permission are made with the coach/athletic director/principal by a parent at **least 24 hours prior** to the event.
- Members who miss the bus will not be allowed to participate in the event if he/she arrives via any means other than approved transportation unless prearranged with the coach.
- Members may ride home from out-of-town events with their own parents/guardians if the parent/guardian signs he/she out with the coach.
- Members traveling home with someone other than his/her own parent/guardian must submit **a written/signed note** at least 24 hours prior to the event to the coach and building principal for approval.

18) Competition

- The decision to participate in competitions will be made by the spirit squad coach/principal/and athletic director. Squads may attend up to five AAA-sanctioned invitational competitions per year in addition to the AAA state championships for high school teams.

School spirit coaches may cut members from competitions due to a lack of skills, poor work ethic, attitude, or failure to attend practices at ANY TIME during the competition season.

19) Vacations

- Members are encouraged to take a vacation during the designated Athletic Dead Weeks.
- Any vacation outside of the Athletic Dead Period must be communicated to the Coach in advance.
- Members may not take a vacation during the school year in which they miss practices/games/ or events.
- Members are expected to be at **ALL** scheduled practices/games/events/activities from **March 2023 - March 2024**.
- Extended absences must be approved by the Coach.
- Athletes will receive discipline, as laid out in the handbook, for practices/games/events/etc missed during that time unless approved by the Coach in advance. Please review the grievance procedures stated previously.

20) Safety

All AAA and NFHS guidelines must be followed at all practices and performances. No practice or meeting is to be held without the spirit squad coach or an adult specifically designated by the spirit squad coach being present.

21) Discipline

The very basis for, and philosophy of, the team member position demands high standards of conduct. Therefore, it should be realized that at times it may be necessary for disciplinary actions to be taken against team members which seem more severe than those taken against other students who are not team members and may have been involved in the same or similar situation. Once a member has been dismissed from or resigns from a spirit squad, he/she is ineligible for future tryouts.

THREE-STRIKE RULE

If an athlete violates **ANY** of the rules listed in this handbook, it will follow the three-strike policy, which is as follows:

First Offense: Verbal Warning

Second Offense: Written Warning (Subject to benching and other disciplinary action listed below and written notice signed by parent, athlete, and coach)

Third Offense: 1st Strike (Subject to benching and other disciplinary action listed below and written notice signed by parent, athlete, and coach)

Fourth Offense: 2nd Strike/Probation (Subject to benching and other disciplinary action listed below and written notice signed by parent, athlete, and coach)

Fifth Offense: Dismissal (Meeting with parent, athlete, and coach.)

Football and Basketball: Sit out a quarter

- Eating, drinking, or chewing gum while on the field or court unless at a designated time.
- Being tardy to ANY team activity.
- Excessive talking or out-of-proper line-up during practice/games/appearances

- Disrupting practice/event
- Failure to assume responsibility
- Turning money/notes/permission slips/etc. in late
- Not cheering, yelling, or smiling during game or performance
 - First warning only.
 - If the behavior is not corrected, athletes can be benched until the behavior is remedied.
- Inappropriate practice uniform
 - This would include any piece of the uniform.
 - This would also include inappropriate hair.
- Forgotten props or accessories

Football and Basketball: Sit out two quarters

- Not cooperating with coaches, teachers, or other squad members
- Public display of affection
- Giving out any part of the team uniform to non-spirit squad members
- Uniform violations include but are not limited to:
 - Untidy uniform or appearance
 - Wearing a wrong or incomplete game uniform
 - Wearing clothing that is not part of the official uniform
- Unfavorable attitude or display of poor sportsmanship
- Leaving practices or games without permission/approval from the coach
- Using your phone during any event (practice, game, fundraiser, competition) unless specified by the coach

Sit out Game and/or Performance:

- Unexcused absence from practice or in-school practice
- Receiving negative feedback from a teacher or any other school employee about poor behavior, attitude, or grades.
- Receiving lunch detention for behavioral issues or tardies.
- Not following the chain of command issued in the grievance policy by the parent or athlete
- Insubordination to the coach or being disrespectful to the coach
- Not correcting any unacceptable behavior after being notified by the coach
- Walking out of a practice or disrespecting the coach or teammates
- Any violation listed in the AAA handbook, including:
 - Acrylic Nails or Nail Color on Nails during Season
 - Wearing jewelry or Hair not secured. (If jewelry is not removed, the athlete will be benched the entirety of the practice/event/game/competition. Insubordination can result in dismissal.)

For anything not covered in the list above, the coach may use their discretion for consequences depending on the severity of the occurrence. **Coach maintains the ability at any given time to bench a member or dismiss a member for inadequate performance levels and/or poor work attitude, and/or poor classroom performance. Continued failure to measure up to the standards set by the spirit coach may result in dismissal from the squad.**

Reasons for Dismissal:

- Not following the rules pertaining to travel to and from games/events/competitions
- Not following the correct plan laid out for probation
- Improper behavior, including but not limited to:

(This includes social media: Snapchat, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, Facebook, etc.)

- Bullying
- Gossiping and/or Causing Drama that negatively impacts the team.
- Cursing (Be careful of TikTok music and/or Instagram music)
- Inappropriate Gestures
- Racial Remarks and/or Comments
- Fighting
- Bad Sportsmanship toward another team
- Smoking, vaping, drinking, and/or drug use ON OR OFF CAMPUS
- Excessive behavior issues in school
- Walking out of a practice, game, or competition.
- Posting/Messaging anything derogatory regarding the team, coach, teammates, or school online.
- Unexcused absence from a game, mandatory activity, competition, or performance.

22) Awards

Spirit members will receive an award based on years of service. This award will align with awards given in other areas of athletics. If a member quits or is dismissed from the squad, he/she will not receive an award. End-of-the-year awards may be given at the coach's discretion..

23) Conclusion

It is understood that not every conceivable aspect of an organization can be governed by a set of rules. Therefore, the spirit squad coaches, athletic director, and superintendent reserve the right to deal with matters that may arise and are not covered in the preceding material. In addition, the spirit squad coaches, athletic director, and superintendent reserve the right to act jointly to waive provisions under unusual or extenuating circumstances.

Contract Signature:

I have read the RSD Spirit Handbook, and I am aware of my responsibilities and the expectations of being a Spirit Squad Member. I understand that if I violate any of the policies within the handbook that there will be disciplinary action up to dismissal from the team. I agree to follow the grievance procedure by first discussing any issue that may arise with the coach first before having a parent contact the coach.

Athlete Signature

Date

I have read the RSD Spirit Handbook, and I am aware of what my responsibilities are as a member's parent. I am also aware of my member's responsibilities and the expectations of my son/daughter as a Spirit Squad member. I understand that if my child or I violate the policies within the handbook that there will be disciplinary action up to dismissal from the team for my child. I agree to follow the grievance procedure by first allowing my athlete to discuss any issue that may arise with the coach first before contacting the coach myself.

Parent Signature

Date
Social Media Policy:

I will not take or distribute any inappropriate pictures/videos of myself or my teammates, in or out of uniform, on or off campus. I will not post any inappropriate pictures of myself or my teammates on any social media account or share via text messages/private messages/Snapchat. I will not post photos, music, videos, or exchange text messages that could be construed as racially derogatory, discriminatory, of illegal activity, activity that violates the handbook, or in poor taste.

Examples: Using racially derogatory language, cussing, posting music with cussing, or sexually explicit content, including TikTok videos, and sending nudes or partial nudes. This can be posted online, privately, or texted material.

Remember: The internet never forgets. If in doubt, DO NOT post or send it!

ZERO TOLERANCE: Violation of Social Media policy will immediately be considered a first strike up to dismissal. No verbal/written warnings for Social Media Policy violations. The final decision is that of the Coach.

Athlete Signature

Date

Parent Signature

Date