

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

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BACKGROUND

School-based coaches play a crucial role in developing and maintaining an environment which goes beyond solely sport skill development to teach a broader set of educational objectives. Trained coaches have been shown to positively impact student-athlete skill development, as well as efficacy, leadership behaviors, positive youth development, and motivation for continued participation (Bean & Forneris, 2017; Beni et al, 2017). In the United States, most states have training requirements designed to ensure school-based coaches are prepared in health/safety procedures and understand their roles and responsibilities when working with student-athletes. Although these requirements are set, most research suggests coaches understanding and application of best practices in effective coaching behaviors are limited (McCallister et al., 2000; Nelson et al., 2006).

In the 1990's, the American Sport Education Program (ASEP) in partnership with the National Federation of High School Associations (NFHS) began offering coach trainings. This resulted in State Athletic Associations (SAA) and Boards of Education (BoE) requiring coaches to take pedagogy and health-related trainings. By 2000, 40 percent of states had mandated that all coaches were to be certified in First Aid (FA) and Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR), while 34 percent required completion of a pedagogy course (Burgeson et al., 2001). Since the beginning of their revised coach education program in 2007, the NFHS has increased the number of coaches who have received the Fundamentals of Coaching (FoC) training from 8% to over 40% (NFHS, 2020). For coaches, the NFHS offers over 50 courses ranging in topics such as

coaching specific sports, health-related aspects, engaging with students, athletic directions, and parents, bullying and hazing, and social media (NFHS, 2021).

To highlight the changing landscape of coaching training requirements for school sport, the National Coaching Report (NASPE, 2008) overviewed state legislation for school-based coaches across all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The report concluded that states differed greatly in who establishes and governs their requirements. Also, most states allowed for coaches not to be teacher educators, yet exemptions existed for those who were, irrespective of subject area. Coach training at the time often included a NFHS Fundamentals of Coaching course (FoC), First Aid, CPR, and a sports rules training. Authors of the report noted increases in states requiring completion of trainings prior to the start of the season and highlighted the lack of on-going professional development required of coaches beyond their initial coach training. Recommendations suggested an increase in communication and support of coach training between SAA and BoE, while also proposed the refinement of coach training to be accessible, affordable, and based on the needs of adult learners.

Since the National Coaching Report (NASPE, 2008), most states have changed their requirements for school-based coaches. However, the implementation of coach training requirements is not universally required across the U.S. since each state governing body has their own mandates for coach education (Collins & Medbery, 2008; Strand et al., 2019). To date, little research has systematically explored variations in state policies and the landscape of requirements across the United States. To better understand the training and preparation of school-based coaches in the United States, this policy report maps the requirements in each of the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

METHOD

Data were collected for 50 states and the District of Columbia ($n = 51$) from public documents on the websites of SAA and DoE for 17 items. The items were the establishment and governance of requirements; teacher and/or coach license required; any exemptions or bypasses existed; pedagogy, health-related, and additional trainings; delivery of trainings; policies for assistant, volunteer, and middle school coaches; time frame to complete trainings; renewal process of trainings; incentives and cost of trainings. The findings were placed and charted in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. As a follow up, all 50 states and the District of Columbia were contacted by email to confirm that their published documents provided the most up to date information. Forty-nine of 51 follow-ups were successfully contacted with data confirmed. Data was analyzed descriptively with summary charts and graphs generated.

RESULTS

Establishment and Governance of Requirements for Coaches

Of the 17 items, four main subsections were charted (see Table 1), including (a) the establishment and governance of requirements; (b) coach trainings offered and their mode of delivery; (c) the requirements for assistant, volunteer, and middle school coaches; and (d) the timeframe for completion, renewal procedures, and incentives.

As demonstrated in Table 1, multiple governing bodies oversee school sport and coach training requirements. In most cases, either the SAA ($n = 25$, 49%) or the DoE ($n = 22$, 43%) establishes these requirements. For the rest ($n = 4$, 8%), other associations such as the Principals' Association, Educational Examiners, or Teaching Standards Board decides. The governance of training requirements differs, with the SAA ($n = 40$, 78%) governing in most states, with the DoE ($n = 4$, 8%), other associations ($n = 4$, 8%), and the local school district ($n = 3$, 6%) enforcing the policies less often.

Almost all states ($n = 49, 96\%$) require trainings for coaches. Currently, no states require coaches to be teachers, however there are restrictions placed on those who are not teachers in some states. For instance, 3 states (6%) require head coaches for varsity teams be teachers, and do not allow for non-teachers to be either assistant or head coaches or that they cannot coach certain sports (i.e., football and basketball in all three states). Also, there are notable exceptions to the licensure process. In total, 20 states (39%) have exemptions for teachers regardless of their subject area ($n = 20, 39\%$), meaning that they are not required to complete any of the required trainings. Four states (8%) have exemptions in place for physical educators, and two states (4%) allow for college courses to supplement the required trainings. Furthermore, three states (6%) have emergency extensions that allow for coaches to delay the completion of trainings up to one-year. In contrast, 18 states (35%) do not have any exemptions or allow for adjustments to be made to the licensure process while two states (4%) do not specify.

Coach Trainings and Mode of Delivery

In all situations, coaches must complete trainings in either health- and/or pedagogy-related aspects. Trainings for health-related aspects include FA, CPR, CT, SCA, and Heat Illness/Acclimatization (HIA). Ninety-two percent of states ($n = 47$) require that coaches complete trainings in FA and CPR, and every state ($n = 51, 100\%$) requires completion of CT. SCA training is required for coaches in 29 states (57%) and recommended in two states (4%). HIA training is becoming more popular with thirty-three percent ($n = 17$) of states requiring and seven states (14%) recommending this training. A few states ($n = 3, 6\%$) only require football or autumn sport coaches to complete the SCA and/or HIA training.

For the states that require training on pedagogical aspects ($n = 49; 96\%$), the NFHS' FoC ($n = 35, 68\%$) is the most popular pedagogy course while ASEP's Principles of Coaching ($n = 3,$

6%) is another option. Four states (8%) allow for coaches to choose either of these two courses and in one state (2%) the local school district decides. Additional or alternative trainings are required in six states (12%) in the subject areas of human development, developmental psychology, and organization management. An annual sport rules training is required for coaches in 30 states (59%) but in two states (4%) only head coaches must complete this training. Fifteen states (29%) require coaches to complete a sport knowledge test while five states (10%) recommend this training.

In addition to the trainings for health and pedagogy-related aspects, 27 states (53%) have additional legislative requirements. The most frequent include background check/fingerprinting ($n = 26$, 51%), child abuse recognition training ($n = 8$, 16%), sportspersonship/character training ($n = 4$, 8%), and drug/steroid education ($n = 4$, 8%). Twelve states (24%) do not report any additional legislative requirements and seven states (14%) explicitly state that local school districts make decisions about additional training requirements.

Similar to recent trends in coach education and professional development, most trainings are offered in an online format in full or some capacity ($n = 44$, 86%). Sixty-five percent of states ($n = 33$) use online trainings completely, while only twelve percent still require training to be completed in person ($n = 6$). Some states do provide the option for coaches offering opportunities to complete trainings both online and in-person ($n = 11$, 21%).

Requirements for Assistant, Volunteer, and Middle School Coaches

The required trainings sometimes vary depending on the role of the coach. Forty-three states (84%) require assistant coaches to complete the same process as head coaches. Two states (4%) exempt assistant coaches from certain trainings and three states (6%) do not specify any differences. For volunteer coaches, less states ($n = 35$, 68%) have the same requirements as head

coaches and three states (6%) recommend that they complete the same process. Some states ($n = 6$, 12%) exempt volunteer coaches from certain trainings and five states (10%) do not specify. Two states (4%) allow the local school district to decide on the policies for assistant and volunteer coaches. Despite the required education for high school coaches, over half of the states ($n = 31$; 61%) do not have training requirements for middle school coaches

Timeframe of Completion, Renewal, Costs, and Incentives

In total, 32 states (63%) require coaches to complete all trainings prior to their coaching start date. Nine states (18%) provide a year or less time frame for completion, whereas six states (12%) allow for up to two or more years. Two states (4%) do not specify the requirements and two states (4%) leave the decision at the local school district level. Most states ($n = 39$; 76%) require renewal for the health-related trainings. The timeframe for renewal can range from one to three years, yet some states do not provide any information ($n = 11$, 22%). Surprisingly, sixty-one percent of states ($n = 31$) do not require a renewal of training in pedagogical aspects. Nine states (18%) do not specify and in two states (4%) the local school district decides the renewal process.

The total cost for licensure can range dependent upon the training and the state. The most expensive training was FoC, which ranged from \$35 to \$140. Additional trainings such as FA and CPR also ranged in cost from \$35 to \$90, while SCA and HIA usually was free of charge. Moreover, often states did not provide any incentives for coaches to be licensed ($n = 37$, 73%). The consequences for incompleteness of trainings varied across all states but common outcomes results in ineligibility, suspension, and/or fines. Of the nine states (17%) who provided an incentive for the completion of trainings, the most common outcome was that the coach licensure was regarded as professional development credit ($n = 3$, 6%).

Table 1. *Policy Landscape Across the U.S.*

State	Est. / Gov.	Teacher License	Coach License	Trainings	Delivery	Assistant	Volunteer	Middle School	Time	Renewal Trainings	Incentives
AL	SAA	No	Yes	FoC FA CPR CT SCA HIA	Online	Same	Same	Yes	Prior to start date	Annual	None
AK	SAA	No	Yes	FoC FA CPR CT SCA	Online	Same	Different	No	Prior to start date	3 years	None
AZ	DoE / SAA	No	Yes	FoC FA CPR CT	Online	Same	Same	No	45 days	DNS	None
AR	DoE / SAA	No	Yes	FoC FA CPR CT SCA HIA	In-Person & Online	Same	Same	Yes	Prior to start date	3 years	None
CA	DoE / SAA	No	Yes	FoC FA CPR CT SCA HIA	In-Person & Online	Same	Same	No	Prior to start date	2 years	None
CO	SAA	No	Yes	Either FA CPR CT	In-Person & Online	Same	Same	No	Prior to start date	Annual	Yes

Table 1 (continued).

State	Est. / Gov.	Teacher License	Coach License	Trainings	Delivery	Assistant	Volunteer	Middle School	Time	Renewal Trainings	Incentives
CT	DoE	No	Yes	Other FA CPR CT	In- Person	Same	Same	Yes	Prior to start date	3 years	DNS
DE	DoE / SAA	No	Yes	FA CPR CT	Online	Same	Different	Yes	Prior to start date	2 years	None
DC	DoE / SAA	No	Yes	FA CPR CT SCA HIA	Online	Same	Same	No	Prior to start date	2 years	None
FL	DoE / SD	No	SD	FA CPR CT SCA HIA	SD	SD	SD	SD	SD	SD	SD
GA	SAA	No	Yes	PoC FA CPR CT	In- Person	DNS	DNS	No	Prior to start date	DNS	None
HI	SAA	No	Yes	FoC FA CPR CT SCA HIA	Online	Same	Same	No	2 years	Annual	None

Table 1 (continued).

State	Est./Gov.	Teacher License	Coach License	Trainings	Delivery	Assistant	Volunteer	Middle School	Time	Renewal Trainings	Incentives
ID	SAA	No	Yes	FoC FA CPR CT SCA	Online	Different	Different	No	Prior to start date	2 years	Yes
IL	SAA	No	Yes	PoC FA CPR CT	In-Person & Online	Same	Same	No	1 year	DNS	None
IN	SAA	No	Yes	FoC FA CPR CT SCA HIA	Online	Same	Same	No	Prior to start date	2 years	None
IA	Other	No	Yes	Other FA CPR CT	In-Person & Online	Same	Same	Yes	Prior to start date	DNS	None
KS	SAA	No	Yes	Either FA CPR CT SCA HIA	In-Person & Online	Same	Different	Yes	1 year	2 years	Yes
KY	DoE / SAA	No	Yes	FoC FA CPR CT SCA	Online	Same	Same	No	Prior to start date	2 years	SD

Table 1 (continued).

State	Est./Gov.	Teacher License	Coach License	Trainings	Delivery	Assistant	Volunteer	Middle School	Time	Renewal Trainings	Incentives
LA	SAA	No	Yes	FoC FA CPR CT	Online	DNS	DNS	No	Prior to start date	3 years	None
ME	Other	No	Yes	FoC FA CPR CT SCA HIA	Online	Same	Same	No	1 year	DNS	None
MD	DoE / SD	No	Yes	FoC FA CPR CT SCA	Online	SD	SD	No	Prior to start date	2 years	SD
MA	SAA	No	Yes	FoC FA CPR CT SCA	In-Person	Same	Same	Yes	2 years	Annual	None
MI	SAA	No	Yes	Other FA CPR CT SCA	In-Person	Different	Different	No	Prior to start date	DNS	SD
MN	DoE	No	Yes	Other CT SCA	In-Person & Online	Same	Same	No	Prior to start date	3 years	None

Table 1 (continued).

State	Est./Gov.	Teacher License	Coach License	Trainings	Delivery	Assistant	Volunteer	Middle School	Time	Renewal Trainings	Incentives
MS	SAA	No	Yes	FoC FA CPR CT	Online	Same	Same	Yes	Prior to start date	2 years	Yes
MO	SAA	No	Yes	FoC FA CPR CT	Online	Same	DNS	No	Prior to start date	2 years	None
MT	SAA	No	Yes	FoC CT	Online	Same	Same	No	Prior to start date	Annual	None
NE	DoE / SAA	No	Yes	FoC CT SCA HIA	Online	Same	Different	No	3 years	DNS	None
NV	SAA	No	Yes	FoC FA CPR CT	Online	Same	Same	No	Prior to start date	DNS	None
NH	SAA	No	Yes	FoC FA CPR CT HIA	In- Person	Same	Different	No	1 year	3 years	None
NJ	DoE	No	Yes	FoC FA CPR CT HIA	Online	Same	Same	No	120 days	Annual	None

Table 1 (continued).

State	Est./Gov.	Teacher License	Coach License	Trainings	Delivery	Assistant	Volunteer	Middle School	Time	Renewal Trainings	Incentives
NM	DoE / SAA	No	Yes	FoC FA CPR CT	Online	DNS	DNS	Yes	DNS	DNS	None
NY	DoE	No	Yes	Other FA CPR CT	In- Person & Online	Same	Same	No	Prior to start date	2 years	Yes
NC	DoE / SD	No	SD	FoC FA CPR CT	Online	Same	Same	No	Prior to start date	2 years	None
ND	SAA	No	Yes	FoC FA CPR CT	Online	Same	Same	No	DNS	2 years	None
OH	DoE / SAA	No	Yes	FoC FA CPR CT SCA	Online	Same	Same	Yes	Prior to start date	Annual	None
OK	DoE / SAA	No	Yes	FoC FA CPR CT SCA HIA	Online	Same	Same	Yes	Prior to start date	Annual	None
OR	SAA	No	Yes	FoC FA CPR CT HIA	Online	Same	Same	No	Prior to start date	Annual	None

Table 1 (continued).

State	Est./Gov.	Teacher License	Coach License	Trainings	Delivery	Assistant	Volunteer	Middle School	Time	Renewal Trainings	Incentives
PA	SAA	No	Yes	FoC FA CPR CT SCA	In- Person & Online	Same	Same	Yes	2 years	Annual	None
RI	DoE / SAA	No	Yes	FoC FA CPR CT SCA	Online	Same	Same	No	Prior to start date	Annual	None
SC	SAA	No	Yes	FoC FA CPR CT SCA HIA	Online	Different	Different	Yes	Prior to start date	2 years	Yes
SD	SAA	No	Yes	FoC FA CPR CT	Online	Same	Same	No	Prior to start date	2 years	Yes
TN	SAA	No	Yes	FoC FA CPR CT SCA	Online	Same	Same	Yes	Prior to start date	3 years	None
TX	DoE / SAA	No	Yes	FoC FA CPR CT SCA	In- Person & Online	Same	Same	Yes	30 days	3 years	Yes

Table 1 (continued).

State	Est./Gov.	Teacher License	Coach License	Trainings	Delivery	Assistant	Volunteer	Middle School	Time	Renewal Trainings	Incentives
UT	DoE / SAA	No	Yes	FoC FA CPR CT	Online	Same	Same	No	Prior to start date	Annual	None
VT	Other	No	Yes	FoC FA CPR CT SCA	Online	Same	Same	No	1 year	DNS	None
VA	DoE / SAA	No	Yes	Either FA CPR CT SCA HIA	Online	Same	Same	No	2 years	2 years	None
WA	DoE / SAA	No	Yes	FoC FA CPR CT SCA	Online	Same	Same	Yes	3 years	Annual	None
WV	SAA	No	Yes	PoC FA CPR CT SCA HIA	In-Person	Same	Same	Yes	Prior to start date	Annual	None
WI	SAA	No	Yes	FoC FA CPR CT SCA	Online	Same	Different	Yes	1 year	2 years	None

Table 1 (continued).

State	Est./Gov.	Teacher License	Coach License	Trainings	Delivery	Assistant	Volunteer	Middle School	Time	Renewal Trainings	Incentives
WY	Other	No	Yes	Other FA CPR CT	In- Person & Online	Same	DNS	No	Prior to start date	DNS	Yes

Note. SAA = State Activities Association; DoE = Department of Education; SD = School District; FoC = NFHS Fundamentals of Coaching; PoC = ASEP Principles of Coaching; FA = First Aid Training; CPR = Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation Training; CT = Concussion Training; SCA = Sudden Cardiac Arrest Training; HIA = Heat Illness/Acclimatation Training; DNS = Does Not Specify

DISCUSSION

Most states (96%) require coach training in some capacity; however, exemptions exist for teachers, physical educators, and as college credit. The licensure process has transitioned mostly to the completion of online courses prior to start date. Despite the requirements for high school coaches, over half of the states do not require any trainings for middle school coaches. The renewal process is often only for the health-related components (e.g., First Aid, Concussion Training) whereas few states require coaches to recertify in pedagogy-related topics. While all states have training requirements for school-based coaches, this process varies with many states having a health-related focus. This overview brings attention to the importance of quality coaching trainings to meet the needs of coaches. Trainings for school coaches should look to go beyond ‘how not be sued’ to better reflect quality coaching practice and pedagogy that best aligns with the educational aspects of school sport.

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