

### **EQUITY GUIDELINES FOR SPIRIT TEAMS**

1. Review of Ridgeway Settlement Agreement: In 1984 the MHSA and Montana schools entered into a court arranged agreement to provide equal opportunities for girls as well as boys in all high school athletic areas – from providing equal numbers of sports to equal numbers of support appearances to equal sharing of practice facilities etc. The MHSA office must enforce and administer these equity regulations and make sure all schools are following the law.
2. Section N of the Ridgeway Settlement Agreement – Team Support states: “Within a school year and during the regular and tournament athletic season, a school district shall provide on an equal basis to male and female athletes any of the following types of support which it offers to either male or female athletes during the school year; pep assemblies, school announcements, rosters, programs, pep band, cheerleaders and drill team.”
3. Support groups must perform at the same number of girls’ extracurricular contests as they do for boys’ extracurricular contests. In very simple terms, it means that if the spirit teams cheer for ten boys’ contests during the year, they must cheer for ten girls’ contests over the year. The total figures are what must be equalized. Schools should have schedules available to verify numbers.

#### **Sample Spirit Team Appearance Schedule**

##### **Boys’ Sports**

Football – 5 appearances  
Boys’ Basketball – 8 appearances  
Wrestling – 4 appearances

***Total Appearances – 17***

##### **Girls’ Sports**

Girls’ Basketball – 12 appearances  
Volleyball – 5 appearances

***Total Appearances – 17***

4. Tournaments and playoffs (post-season) **DO NOT** apply when totaling regular season spirit appearances. What does matter is that your school has a policy that stipulates when, how and where the spirit team will perform at tournaments and that the policy applies to girls as well as boys. A written, gender-neutral policy is best. For example, if a school sends the spirit team to a girls’ district tournament, it shall do the same thing for boys’.
5. Assemblies and special events must be equalized. Spirit teams (if they conduct assemblies) should be aware that school assemblies shall be equal between the boys’ and girls’ sports. Schools should have schedules to confirm this. If spirit teams put on an assembly for a boys’ event, they shall put on an assembly for a girls’ event and they shall be equal during the year, just like spirit team appearances.

### **SPIRIT TEAM EQUITY INFORMATION FOR SPIRIT COACHES**

- Q1. Should spirit coaches encourage boys to be on the spirit team to comply with the Ridgeway Settlement Agreement?
- A1. Yes. Increasing the number of available spirit team members would increase the schools' ability to comply.
- Q2. Assume a school advertises for spirit team tryouts for football and volleyball and several people show up and want to cheer for football (or just boys' contests), but no one signs up for volleyball (or girls' contests). What must the spirit coach and the school do and can people still cheer for football?
- A2. Spirit team members can still cheer for football but the school must make a deliberate and immediate effort and must be able to document that they have exhausted all remedies to equalize. Solutions might be to use boys who are not participating in football, junior high spirit groups etc. A school has the present year to find a solution, and then the following year the school should comply and either equalize spirit group appearances or cut boys' contest appearances. In some circumstances, schools are allowed to be out of compliance for more than a year, but there must be thorough documentation.
- Q3. For spirit team appearance purposes, does football compare to volleyball? That is, if a school cheers for five football games, must they cheer for five volleyball matches?
- A3. No. The spirit team support rule is that a school cheer for an equal number of boys' and girls' contests. Simply said: if during the year you cheer for 20 boys' contests (all boys' sports), then you must cheer for 20 girls' contests. NO comparison between sports is necessary in the support area.
- Q4. Let's assume the volleyball coaching staff and players request that no spirit team appear and support their matches. What should be done?
- A4. This is acceptable, ***but*** the school must still equalize appearances. If there are no spirit team appearances at volleyball matches, then other boys' sport appearances must be reduced (or other girls' sport appearances be increased) to equalize the total appearances between boys' and girls' sports.
- Q5. Is it acceptable under the Ridgeway Settlement Agreement if for boys' basketball there are five spirit team members and for girls' basketball there are three?
- A5. Yes. However, it is preferable to have equal spirit teams if possible. The important thing is to equalize appearances.