

## Travel Soccer - Age Group Formation Change August 2026

In 2016, US Soccer implemented a major shift in player classification by transitioning from a school-year-based system (August-July) to a birth-year system (January-December). This change aimed to align American soccer with international standards set by FIFA, creating consistency in player development and national team selection. However, the shift had significant effects on youth soccer across the country.

One of the biggest challenges was team disruption. Many players were suddenly separated from long-time teammates and forced into new age groups, impacting team chemistry and development pathways. Coaches had to rethink their rosters and adjust training plans to accommodate the realignment. Additionally, the change reinforced the “relative age effect,” where players born earlier in the year often have a developmental advantage over their younger peers. While this issue already existed, the new system made it more pronounced by widening the age gap within each calendar-year group. Despite the initial disruptions, the long-term goal of aligning with international standards has helped U.S. Soccer better integrate into the global game. The move also encouraged clubs and coaches to focus more on individual player development rather than relying on physical maturity advantages.

**However, after much feedback from players, parents, and coaches, U.S. Soccer has decided to return to School-Year age groups starting in the 2026/2027 season.** US Youth Soccer, US Club Soccer, American Youth Soccer Association, Girls Academy, and MLS Next Academy Division have decided to move to an age group formation that changes from birth year player placement (January 1-December 31), to the school age group calendar of August 1-July 31 placement. This decision was made to better align players with their school grade peers, academic calendars, and improve player retention by allowing teammates to progress together through both school and soccer. This change will affect ALL of our travel soccer teams.

***Example:** In the 2026-2027 soccer year, if your child was born in October 2016, they fall within the school year range of August 1, 2016 - July 31, 2017 and would play for a U10 team. If a team consists of players in the same birth year, kids born on or after August 1st would be "playing up" a year if they stayed with same teammates.*

Players are allowed to stay together on their existing team. Your child does *not* need to switch teams if you choose to keep them where they are. However, it's important to understand that players remaining on existing teams may compete against opponents who are older under the new structure. This is a normal part of the transition and many clubs will experience similar mixed-age matchups.

As of Fall 2026-27, these will be the team age groups:

**U9 August 1, 2017 – July 31, 2018**

**U10 August 1, 2016 – July 31, 2017**

**U11 August 1, 2015 - July 31, 2016**

**U12 August 1, 2014 – July 31, 2015**  
**U13 August 1, 2013 - July 31, 2014**  
**U14 August 1, 2012 - July 31, 2013**  
**U15 August 1, 2011 - July 31, 2012**  
**U16 August 1, 2010 - July 31, 2011**  
**U17 August 1, 2009 – July 31, 2010**

As a member club of USYS, the GSC follows this national standard to ensure that our players are aligned with age groups used in leagues, tournaments, development pathways, and college recruiting. Our focus will continue to be on player development, and we will work to ensure every child is placed in an environment that fits their developmental needs and long-term growth. All clubs in our league will follow the same structure, so competitive balance will remain consistent.

While there will be team disruptions in the short term, we believe that the long-term benefits will outweigh the short term disruptions. Please be patient with our club as we navigate these upcoming changes. If you have concerns about your child's placement or need help understanding how the school-age based system applies to your player, Please contact us at [goshensoccerny@gmail.com](mailto:goshensoccerny@gmail.com).

For more information provided by USYS, visit their website at <https://www.usyouthsoccer.org/news/2025/06/10/updated-decision-on-age-group-formation/>