

2025 MHSAA GIRLS COMPETITIVE CHEER COMMITTEE MINUTES

Wednesday, January 22, 2025, 9:30 a.m. – East Lansing

MEMBERS PRESENT

Judy Cox, Bay City
Mike Fosburg, Newaygo (MIAAA)
Karyn Furlong, Richland
Brittany Hylton, Wayne-Westland
Beth Lockhart, Fenton (CCCAM)
Pat Marsman, Grand Rapids
Stefanie Miller, Paw Paw

Phyllis Olszewski, East Jordan
Jessica Trefry, Michigan Center
Chris Westfall, Ypsilanti
Christina Wilson, Brighton

MHSAA STAFF

Kathy Vruggink Westdorp (Recorder)

The 2024-25 Girls Competitive Cheer Committee convened to review its responsibilities as a standing sport committee, including its role in making recommendations to MHSAA staff and the MHSAA Representative Council. Additionally, the committee examined the charge of the Girls Competitive Cheer Sub-Committee, which met on January 15, 2025. This sub-committee focused on the technical aspects of girls competitive cheer, providing recommendations that were submitted for further review.

The committee reviewed key materials, including the Tournament Manager's Materials and Participating School Tournament Information, the minutes from last year's meeting, and the Manual insert. Furthermore, the District, Regional, and Finals sites and times have been posted at MHSAA.com, and committee members conducted the draw for the Finals rotation.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

HISTORY OF GIRLS COMPETITIVE CHEER

The committee revisited the history of girls competitive cheer, focusing on the MHSAA's commitment to ensuring that the sport met the official definition of an interscholastic sport. To achieve this, Michigan cheer coaches and athletic administrators developed a structured format to establish consistent rules while enabling teams to showcase all elements of cheer techniques and styles that promote athleticism. Additionally, compliance with the Office for Civil Rights criteria within the U.S. Department of Education was crucial in solidifying the sport's legitimacy. Over the years, girls competitive cheer has provided a valuable opportunity for female athletes, contributing to increased participation and spectatorship. Those involved—coaches, officials, and administrators—carry the same responsibilities as their counterparts in other interscholastic sports, including prioritizing student-athlete safety, facility standards, and good sportsmanship. As part of the discussion, the committee analyzed the current number of schools offering girls competitive cheer. As of this date, 327 schools sponsor the sport, with team distribution recorded as follows: 78, 80, 89, and 80 across divisions.

COMPARATIVE CONCUSSION DATA

The committee also reviewed comparative concussion data from the MHSAA Head Injury Reporting System, analyzing statistics by sport and year to guide decision-making related to athlete stunting and safety.

- 2021-22: 5,741 participants | 1.67% concussion prevalence rate
- 2022-23: 5,942 participants | 2.14% concussion prevalence rate
- 2023-24: 6,172 participants | 115 reported concussions, equating to a 1.86% prevalence rate (or 19 concussions per 1,000 participants)

Further analysis revealed that the majority of head injuries occurred during practice, particularly in the middle or late stages of sessions, and most were reported at the varsity level. So far in the 2024-25 season, 50 head injuries have been recorded in girls competitive cheer. This data is

crucial in ensuring that the committee has access to comprehensive sport injury information to make informed decisions that enhance athlete safety and well-being.

PARTICIPATION EXPANSION

The Girls Competitive Cheer Committee continued its discussions on various topics related to the evolution of girls competitive cheer as a sport. A key focus of the conversation was expanding participation and implementing measures to enhance the health and safety of athletes. One significant concern raised was the extensive time commitment required throughout the school year, particularly for students involved in both sideline cheerleading and girls competitive cheer. Several committee members expressed that the overlapping seasons contribute to the perception that girls competitive cheer has become a year-round sport. To address this, the committee reviewed the length of the season. A change is set to take effect in the 2026-27 school year for the season to end one week earlier.

Another major discussion point was the structure of competition rounds. Some committee members suggested removing one round and incorporating its elements into the remaining two, stating that the current format demands an overwhelming amount of material for athletes to learn. The committee also addressed concerns about losing athletes to club and travel teams that offer more advanced stunting and skill development. While recognizing the benefits of high-level training, members emphasized the importance of keeping girls competitive cheer, inclusive, and financially accessible. Fundraising challenges were acknowledged, as many schools struggle to afford proper equipment or hire specialized “skill coaches.” The discussion underscored the need to strike a balance between advancing skills and maintaining safety and affordability for schools and families. Middle school cheerleading was also discussed, with particular interest in allowing additional stunting at that level to encourage greater participation.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

The committee engaged in further discussion regarding the experience level of coaches in girls competitive cheer, noting that many have fewer than five years of experience and may not fully understand stunting and tumbling progressions. To address this, there was a strong emphasis on the need for additional education and training programs to ensure coaches are well-versed in proper progressions when instructing athletes.

Expanding participation in girls competitive cheer was also a key topic, with discussions highlighting the value of introducing programs for younger students through community education initiatives to build interest and skill development at an earlier age. Other proposed enhancements included adjusting participation requirements in competition rounds and forming a dedicated task force to create more opportunities for female athletes in girls competitive cheer while maintaining a strong commitment to health and safety. The Competitive Cheer Coaches Association of Michigan (CCCAM) reaffirmed its commitment to providing ongoing training and support for new coaches to ensure they are properly equipped to lead their teams safely and effectively.

SIDELINE CHEERLEADING

Concerns were raised regarding the safety and coaching standards in sideline cheerleading. The committee discussed the need to develop formal guidelines and recommendations to ensure teams practice and perform on safe surfaces under qualified coaching supervision.

Another significant concern was the conditions on the track where sideline cheerleaders perform, as they often share space with other athletic and event-related distractions. Addressing these environmental challenges will be an important step in ensuring a safer and more structured experience for sideline cheer participants.

2024-25 GIRLS COMPETITIVE CHEER TOURNAMENT INFORMATION

The 2024-25 Competitive Cheer Tournament will hold Districts on Friday and Saturday, February 14 and 15, 2025. There will be six Districts in four Divisions which will each have four teams progress to eight Regionals the following week on Saturday, February 22, 2025. Four teams from each of the eight Regionals will move to the Finals at the McGuirk Arena at Central Michigan University on Friday, February 28 and Saturday, March 1, 2025. This will include four separate sessions of girls competitive cheer, scheduled at 2 p.m. and 6:30 p.m. on Friday and 11 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. on Saturday.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO MHSAA STAFF

The Girls Competitive Cheer Committee recommends the following to MHSAA staff regarding the technical playing rules of Girls Competitive Cheer.

1. For high school only:

a. Page 59 of Girls Competitive Cheer Manual:

Allow non-release inversions as part of a single-braced pyramid. (9-0)

Addition: A static inversion may be part of a single-braced pyramid when all of the following occurs:

- The inverted flyer shall have at least two bases and a spotter.
- Each bracer is at elevator level or below. If in an elevator, the bracer(s) shall have two bases and a spotter.
- The flyer and one bracer maintain hand-to-hand/arm contact.
- Constant contact is maintained between the flyer, the original bases, and the spotter.
- The bracer must maintain constant contact with the flyer until no longer inverted.
- The inversion may only transition to a stunt at shoulder level or below.

b. Page 64 of Girls Competitive Cheer Manual:

Allow in a braced release pyramid, a flyer to transition to a face down or face up horizontal position or lowered to a split position while maintaining contact with the bracers), and three catchers. (10-0)

2. For middle school only:

c. Page 81 of Girls Competitive Cheer Manual:

Allow middle school to perform non-pyramid forward suspended rolls. Middle school teams may only end a forward suspended roll in a cradle position. No twisting allowed. (9-0)

d. Discuss the allowance for middle school to perform braced release stunts. (Task Force)

3. Page 14 of Girls Competitive Cheer Manual:

e. If bows are worn, the bow must be of a solid color, non-metallic and may include heat transfer items of school-approved logos and lettering. Adornments may not include glitter, mesh, overlays, rhinestones, sequins and/or studs. (9-0)

4. Create a task force in an effort to increase participation opportunities for female athletes in girls competitive cheer and possible restructure of the rounds. (9-0)

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL

1. Retract the 2024 proposal - (Regulation II, Section 11 (E) - to start Girls Competitive Cheer two Mondays before Thanksgiving and continue to have the first practice date three Mondays before Thanksgiving. (November 10, 2025). (11-0)
2. Due to facility constraints at Central Michigan University for 2025-26 only, adjust the Girls Competitive Cheer calendar for Finals to be one week later than the adjusted one-week earlier schedule. (Districts: Feb.20-21, Regionals: Feb. 28, Finals: March 6 & 7, 2026). (11-0)
3. Incorporate the proposed technical high school and middle school rules recommendations to MHSAA staff for insertion into the 2024-26 Girls Competitive Cheer Manual. (9-0)