

2025-26 MHSAA GIRLS COMPETITIVE CHEER COMMITTEE MINUTES

Wednesday, January 21, 2026, 9:30 a.m. – East Lansing

MEMBERS PRESENT

Candace Fahr, Fenton (CCCAM)
Mike Fosburg, Fremont (MIAAA)
Karyn Furlong, Gull Lake
Brittany Hylton, Westland
Pat Marsman, Grand Rapids
Stefanie Miller, Paw Paw
Chad O'Brien, Adrian
Phyllis Olszewski, East Jordan
Angela Raithel, Grosse Ile

Stacy Smith, Caledonia (MCJA)
Sarah Stewart, Ovid-Elsie
Chris Westfall, Ypsilanti

GUEST

Brittany Tyler, Woodhaven (MATS)

MHSAA STAFF

Kiersten Anstead
Kathy Vrugink Westdorp (Recorder)

The 2025-26 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 14, 2026. 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. District, Regional, and Final sites and times have been posted at MHSAA.com. Eleven Districts will be held on Friday, February 20, and 13 on Saturday, February 21, 2026. The eight Regionals will be held on Saturday, February 28, 2026, and Finals are on Friday, March 6 (D4-2 p.m. and D1-6:30 p.m.) and Saturday, March 7 (D3-11 a.m. and D2-3:30 p.m.) The calendar will change in 2026-27 to one week earlier.

Additionally, 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. Compliance with the Office for Civil Rights criteria within the U.S. Department of Education was crucial in solidifying the sport's legitimacy, and 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, 317 schools sponsor the sport, with team distribution recorded as follows: 84, 82, 77, and 74 across divisions.

The conversation included challenges and strategies related to maintaining and growing girls competitive cheer, with some of the conversation highlighting the importance of balancing program numbers with other winter sports offerings as well as the impact of coaching turnover.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

COMPARATIVE CONCUSSION DATA

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

- 2022-23: 5,942 participants | 2.14% concussion prevalence rate
- 2023-24: 6,172 participants | 1.86% concussion prevalence rate
- 2024-25: 6,319 participants | 1.08% concussion prevalence rate

An explanation was provided regarding the significant difference in prevalence rates between the 2022-23 season and the 2023-24 season, with the 2024-25 season. It was clarified that during the two earlier school years, concussion data included both sideline cheerleading and girls competitive cheer 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 2025-26 season, 46 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 improve athletes' health and safety. 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. It was noted that several teams had dropped from Divisions 3 and 4, which re-emphasized the need to consider all divisions and team sizes when making rule recommendations.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

The committee continued its discussion of coaches' experience, noting that many have fewer than 5 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. 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 sideline cheerleading and provided additional recommendations to help ensure that teams practice and perform on safe surfaces under qualified coaching supervision.

COACH-OFFICIAL COMMUNICATION

The group discussed the challenges and potential solutions regarding score sheet comments and coach-official interactions at competitions. Coaches emphasized the need for a middle ground, allowing coaches to ask questions while discouraging inappropriate demands. It was highlighted that there was an importance of maintaining a balance between providing feedback and respecting the official's expertise and training. The discussion also touched on the need for education and communication between coaches and officials to advance the sport safely and inclusively.

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. Include new allowances for Inversions:

- Turns that are 180 degrees or less into the inversion.
- Tumbling that includes contact with the cheering surface into the inversion and comes to a stop in the inversion before transitioning to the next stunt.
- Add – p. 59 to 2. Inversions may only dismount/transition to the following:
- Non-inverted stunt, cradle, or transition at shoulder level or below, or transition to a braced extended level stunt with two points of contact.
- Pg. 64 – Add language: The flyer does not move through an inverted position – except for a legal suspended roll or braced inversion.

b. Pg. 56 Vault: Include an allowance which includes a suspended roll during a vault (shoot through).

A flyer may pass through a head-over-heels motion during a vault if all of the following conditions are met:

- The flyer begins in a stationary sponge position.
- The post is in direct contact with the cheering surface.
- The bases initiate a continuous motion.
- The flyer is transitioned in a head-over-heels motion and maintains continuous hand/hand or hand/arm contact with the post.
- The flyer is caught by a new set of bases in a cradle position only.
- The bases catching the flyer were not part of the initiation of a stunt prior to catching.

RECOMMENDATION TO THE REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL

1. Incorporate the proposed high school playing rule recommendations to MHSAA staff in the 2026-28 Girls Competitive Cheer Manual. (12-0)