# The Pathways School-Catonsville

# 2026-2027
# Parent/Student Handbook

THE PATHWAYS SCHOOL – CATONSVILLE
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FORREST FLANDERS
PRINCIPAL

Please note changes may be made to this handbook during the school year.

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# Pathways Schools Philosophy

We believe that our students can learn, be successful, trust themselves and others, change, and take charge of their lives.

We believe that in order for students to do so, they must be taught the social, emotional, academic and survival skills needed to live independently and productively in their families and communities.

We believe that our students are worthy of every effort that can be made on their behalf so that they may realize their own self-worth.

We believe that providing them with small, structured, safe, and caring environments is best for enabling this self-discovery and change.

We seek to establish close working relationships with families and/or guardians to facilitate communication, conflict resolution and training to meet their son's or daughter's needs.

For students as well as families our goal is to provide PATHWAYS to a better future.

# At Pathways – Catonsville

The Pathways School – Catonsville is designed for students who have not experienced success in traditional school environments. Students typically enrolled in The Pathways School – Catonsville are young adults whose primary interest lies in making a successful transition from high school to post-secondary life. We provide a safe environment for students to have the opportunity to accomplish this goal. A safe environment must be free of threat of injury or intimidation and must be conducive to acquiring mature self-control and decision-making skills. Each student engages in the personal work of self-discovery and goal achievement.

On their educational journey, students may exhibit some inappropriate behavior. Punishment may not be appropriate. We are continuing to embrace some of the principles of Restorative Practices. A primary tenant of Restorative Practices is repairing relationships that may have been damaged by a person/student's choices. Some of the possible consequences of student choices are outlined in this manual. A student's behavioral issues are addressed on an individual basis.

We believe that healthful relationships are crucial to the successful implementation of our educational and therapeutic program. We are, therefore, committed to working with students and families to establish supports both at school and in the community. Community supports are essential for helping students with a successful transition to life after high school.

# Introduction

The Pathways Schools' philosophy identifies what we believe students can achieve. In the Site Policies and Procedures, The Pathways School – Catonsville identifies the expectations for student conduct to ensure a safe environment. The structure of The Pathways School – Catonsville differs from other schools. The individualized orientation allows great flexibility and variation. Our policies and procedures are designed to respond to the variety of locations and situations in which our students learn. The first section of this document describes what we expect from our students.

The Behavior Management System (BMS) is designed to help students achieve. This system enables the students to have daily practice of the behavioral and academic skills necessary to ensure success in the learning environment. **It identifies ways appropriate, positive student conduct is rewarded and the ways inappropriate, negative behaviors receive consequences.** The BMS includes incentives/motivational activities and privileges, crisis plans, and contracts. A full description of the BMS and its components is included in the third section of this document.

# Site Policies and Procedures

In the Site Policies and Procedures, The Pathways School – Catonsville identifies the expectations for student conduct to ensure a safe environment. The structure of The Pathways School – Catonsville differs from other schools. The individualized orientation allows great flexibility and variation. Our policies and procedures are designed to respond to the variety of locations and situations in which our students learn while ensuring the safety of students, staff, and the community.

## School Hours

The Pathways School – Catonsville's school day is 8:25 AM to 3:25 PM for students, with the exception of Wednesdays, which has an early dismissal of 1:00 PM. Students are expected to be dressed and ready for pick-up at their home at 8:25 AM. If the student will be late or absent, parent/guardian must e-mail the Principal. Staff may wait up to fifteen minutes for student. Parents/guardians will be notified each time the student is absent.

## Absences

Refer to The Pathways Schools' attendance policy in The Pathways Schools' Parent/Student Handbook for specific descriptions of excused and unexcused absences.

## Use of School Site

The Pathways School – Catonsville occupies a suite in an office building in Catonsville, Maryland. Our program is a neighbor to other professional organizations and businesses. The professionalism of the environment must be preserved for our co-tenants. We believe that this environment provides an excellent opportunity for our students to gain professional interaction skills that will serve them as adults.

Staff will model, instruct, and remediate appropriate professional behaviors for our students. Staff or students' parents/guardians will accompany them as they enter and exit the office building. The consequences for violating the professional environment of this building may include loss of points, suspension, suspension from on-site activities and recommendation for discharge from the program, at the discretion of the Principal.

The Principal assumes direct responsibility for maintaining communication with the landlord and our co-tenants. Any concerns with the safety or maintenance of the suite or building, violations of this policy, and incidents of negative interaction between Pathways staff, students, families, or visitors and co-tenants or their visitors must be reported directly to the Principal, as soon as possible.

## Use of Community Locations

The Pathways School – Catonsville uses a variety of public and community settings for school lessons and activities. The rules of conduct may vary greatly among these settings. Students are expected to follow the rules of both The Pathways Schools and the location.
In the community and at places of employment, the policies of that location take precedence over Pathways procedures. For example, the security guard of the Catonsville County Public Libraries may take control of any situation at a library branch. In those instances, the staff's primary responsibility is to advocate for the unique needs of the student and to communicate with the Principal, parents/guardians, and, at times, the local school system (LSS).

## Transportation

Students are transported to and from school-related activities by the staff of The Pathways School – Catonsville. Each staff member drives their personal vehicle to transport students. Students, at times, may be transported in a Pathways van, cab, or other rented vehicle. Each staff person has discretion to set the specific rules of conduct within the vehicle, to include use of car radio, eating in the vehicle, etc.

Students must maintain safe, appropriate behaviors in order to continue to receive transportation provided by Pathways. If students exhibit unsafe or inappropriate behavior in a staff vehicle, transportation privileges may be suspended.

Students may drive their vehicles to school-related and school sponsored activities with pre-approval from the Principal. The Principal will approve a student's request when the student:

1. possesses a valid Maryland driver's license;
2. is driving a licensed and insured vehicle owned by the student or parents/guardians;
3. needs to attend work or transition-related activities outside of school hours; and provides, if student is under eighteen years of age, written permission from parent/guardian to drive to this activity or, if student is eighteen years of age or older, written documentation of the activity (work schedule) and parent/guardian's verbal acknowledgement of awareness that student is driving for a school-related activity.
4. Views videos about safe driving practices provided by the school.

## Meals and Snacks

We do not have the facilities to provide lunch for students. It is the responsibility of students to bring either a packed lunch or money to purchase meals. Students are permitted at staff discretion, to eat throughout the day. At all times, students must follow the food and drink restrictions of the community settings. There will be occasions where meals are provided as incentives or as part of an activity or celebration. Students will generally know about these in advance. If providing meals and snacks presents a hardship for an individual student's family, the parent or caregiver is encouraged to contact the Principal.

## Communication

Communication is essential, and email, cell phones, and communication apps facilitate communication with staff and students who are off-site. It is the policy of the Pathways School – Catonsville that staff cell phones are turned on and worn/carried by staff **during school hours**.

When parents/guardians want to communicate with their son or daughter, they are encouraged to call our school site. In cases of emergency, the parents/guardians should contact the Principal directly. The Principal will then communicate the plan of action to the student's team and the student.

## Student Use of School Phones

There are times that students will need to use school phones during school hours. At no time are students permitted to use the phone without staff permission and supervision. They can use them under the following conditions:

1) Transition-related phone calls under the direction of staff.
Students can make these calls in the presence of a staff member.
2) Personal or other (i.e. parents/guardians, family, therapist, etc.)
Students must first obtain permission from staff. Then the phone number will be dialed under the supervision of staff and the student will be supervised during the conversation.

## Student Cell Phones and Electronics

In conjunction with The Pathways Schools' cell phone policy (see previous section); the following policy applies to students at the Pathways School - Catonsville:

Cell phones should be off or on vibrate throughout the entire school day; on site or in the community, unless specific permission is granted by a staff member (e.g. to use the calculator, calendar, or make a call to an employer). When on site, cell phones should not be seen or heard. If a student's cell phone becomes a regular disruption to instruction, an individualized plan will be developed to address the concern(s).

**Students are discouraged from bringing electronic devices, including but not limited to tablets, handheld gaming systems, and laptop computers to school.** Use must be in accordance with the **Pathways Schools Acceptable Use Policy for Staff and Students Using Computers and Other Electronic Devices.** Additionally**,** these devices may only be used with headphones and with pre-approval of staff.

Approval, at staff discretion, is based on:

1) Nature of student lessons, activities, or assignments,
2) Non-interference with student learning and tasks,
3) Acceptable language, content, and message of the entertainment,
4) Student's pattern of success with following staff directions,
5) Respectful use of the device such as volume control, not speaking or singing, etc., and
6) Cooperation with staff and remaining on-task while listening to music.

Because locked facilities are not available, these devices are ***solely the responsibility of the student***. Students are not allowed to bring an unreasonable or excessive quantity of electronic devices and /or accompanying media. Staff may require students to select which few items to bring each day. Pathways is not responsible for lost, stolen, or broken items. Pathways does not recommend the gifting, loaning and/or trading of electronic device and/or accompanying media amongst students.

# Dress Code

Students, as part of this program, are expected to dress appropriately for the school, career, and transition activities scheduled for the day. Successful career exploration requires neat, clean, and professional appearance. Certain outdoor activities and jobs may require specific clothing. During internship or job hours, students must comply with the dress requirements of the workplace. Staff discretion will determine the appropriateness of dress. The following criteria provide guidelines regarding inappropriate clothing:

Tops

- Tops should be continuous from neckline to waist. The entire mid-section and cleavage should not show. Undergarments must be covered fully.
- No clothing, to include jewelry and accessories, with vulgar language, obscene pictures, weapons, violence, drug/alcohol or drug paraphernalia and tobacco products.
- No identifiable gang/crew clothing or paraphernalia.
- No see-through clothing.

Skirts, Dresses, and Shorts

- Skirts, dresses, and shorts should reach finger tip length of one's extended arm

Pants

- Pants should be secured at waist – no sagging below waist to expose undergarments and/or body parts.
- Tights, stretch pants, leggings and the like, must be worn with clothing long enough to cover buttocks.

Tattoos

- Offensive and inappropriate tattoos, as determined by the Principal, must be covered.

## Consequences for Inappropriate Dress

Students will be expected to abide by the dress code. Those students who are not dressed appropriately will be expected to change their clothing before staff drive away from their home. If a student refuses to dress appropriately, he or she will receive school programming apart from other students for the day or receive a day of suspension, depending on the nature of the inappropriate clothing. Students will be asked to cover inappropriate clothing noticed during the school day. If the item cannot be suitably covered, the student may be taken home in order to change clothing and finish the school day.

# Tobacco and Smoking Policy

It is against the law in the State of Maryland for students to use, distribute, or possess tobacco products during school. Tobacco products are defined as any substance containing tobacco, including cigarettes, cigars, smoking tobacco, snuff or smokeless tobacco. Vapor or electronic cigarette devices are also prohibited, in accordance with local school system policy.

The Pathways Schools are tobacco-free environments. We support the belief that both first and second-hand smoke pose a significant health risk. We encourage students who use tobacco to seek alternative means for addressing their desire. This policy is in effect during the school day, school sponsored activities, and field trips.

All tobacco products, lighters, and matches must be turned in to the CSS immediately upon pick-up. The CSS will inform the Principal, who will inform the parents/guardians that the student possesses these items.

The items will be returned to the student at the end of the day if (1) the student is aged 18 years or older, and (2) they were turned in voluntarily by the student, appropriate consequences will be determined.

If a pattern of non-compliance with the tobacco policy develops, a conference with a local school system representative may be requested. The purpose of this conference would be to determine whether this school placement continues to be appropriate.

# Instruction

As expected, the plans for lessons do not always represent the actual instructional event. Therefore, throughout the instructional week, the Community Support Staff (CSS) uses the Daily Monitoring Log (DML), and Special Educators use Individual Education Program (IEP) goal tracking sheets to record the actual subject taught, materials and time span of the activity. Excused/Unexcused absences are recorded each day. Throughout the instructional week, the CSS evaluates each instructional activity. This documentation includes a record of student-requested and staff-directed breaks in instruction. This evaluation represents a running record of the academic and behavioral functioning of the individual student. These documents are used for staff reference, IEP progress notation and development.

# Behavior Management System

The Pathways Schools philosophy identifies what we believe students can achieve. The Behavior Management System is designed to help them realize these achievements. This system enables the students to have daily practice of the behavioral and academic skills necessary to ensure success in the learning environment. In addition, it provides a regular system of monitoring, by both staff and students and an incentive of positive rewards as students experience and display their progress. Our policies regarding student conduct are in effect throughout the school or workday, on field trips, and during any school-sponsored activities. When employed, students will also be held accountable to their employer's rules for conduct, attendance, etc.

The Behavior Management System includes the weekly point tallies, individualized incentives, crisis plans, a number of motivational activities/privileges, and contracts. Students are encouraged to participate actively in developing their goals and scheduling their activities. The staff's regular evaluation and feedback is designed to assist the student with learning to self evaluate and with internalizing social skills and behavioral controls. These skills enhance progress in the academic, vocational, social, and behavioral areas.

The Weekly Behavior Tracking and Point Sheet (Figure 1, in Goal Tracking Section) form provides a place for staff to track points possible and earned toward behavioral goals. This form helps to structure daily and weekly feedback, reviewing positive happenings. Please see additional information in the "Goal Tracking" section below. Students begin to experience mistakes without feelings of failure and to identify their strengths and weaknesses.

In our goal-based incentive system, students are able to use their goal success to earn privileges and rewards. Incentives are agreed upon by the student and his/her team (CSS, teacher, therapist & principal). The team will determine what criteria must be met for a specific incentive to be awarded.

The Pathways Schools provide a safe environment in which students accomplish their goals. A safe environment must be free of threat of injury or intimidation and must be conducive to acquiring mature self-control and decision-making skills. We have established procedures to address behaviors and incidents that occasionally interfere with a safe learning environment. These procedures are described in the section, entitled Crisis Procedures.

A variety of motivational activities reward the students' appropriate behaviors and successes within the program. Participation in some activities may be based on behavioral success and student interest. See a full description of these activities in the section titled, Motivational Activities.

Clearly communicated expectations are the cornerstone of effective behavior management. Confusion, at times, results from the high degree of individualization at Pathways School – Catonsville. Written agreements outline the expected behaviors, the rewards for success, and the consequences for failure to meet expectations. A description is included in the section, entitled Contracts.

By providing this comprehensive system of practice and rewards, the Pathways staff ensures that students will take full advantage of the incentives offered in order to facilitate positive behavior and academic skill development. More importantly, we hope to empower each student as s/he begins to internalize the positive feelings that come from success. The Pathways School – Catonsville behavior management data is reviewed to determine student progress or to develop alternative strategies or services to address student needs. We review data from Gradelink, DMLs, IEP goal tracking sheets, Behavior Trackers, and reports during team meetings, staff meetings, case studies and while writing progress reports, report cards, and IEPs.

# Crisis Procedures

The Pathways School – Catonsville holds a high standard for student interaction. Whenever a student is unable (whether emotionally, physically, or otherwise) to participate fully in the activities planned and scheduled for that time, we expect that student to inform staff respectfully and promptly, to negotiate plausible alternative activities that address legitimate learning outcomes, and to make appropriate choices to remain productive in school. We expect a similar process between students and staff when they experience disagreement.

# Safety Procedures

## Modifying the Schedule

Students are encouraged to participate in the generation of each week's schedule. It is believed that students will improve in self-advocacy so that over time the schedule will increasingly reflect the learning styles and habits of each individual. However, at times, the planned activities no longer fit the student's primary need. At those times, the CSS has discretion to negotiate modifications to the planned schedule. Usually, these modifications consist of switching the order or location of activities.

## Behavior Intervention

At times, modifying the student's schedule is not adequate. It is always our expectation that students remain in programming and complete the school day. In those instances, when this is not possible, the CSS contacts a therapist either for guidance or to request an unscheduled therapy appointment for the student. The therapist will honor unscheduled appointments when they do not conflict with another scheduled therapy appointment. If there is a conflict, the student will be seen by another staff member as a way to resolve the situation.

### Imminent Danger

In cases of imminent danger to self or others, staff works to maintain the safety of the students, staff, and community. When on-site, staff assesses if going to a community-based setting will deescalate the situation while maintaining the safety of students, staff, and others. In those instances, staff, student, and Principal make a plan for the remainder of the day.

### Emergencies

In cases of emergencies, The Pathways School – Catonsville follows The Pathways Schools' procedures. All emergencies are reported to the Principal as soon as feasible. All staff members have authority to make the decision to seek medical treatment for students, according to the information provided to the school on the enrollment forms. Staff, providing service in the community, carry a copy of emergency contact information for each student in their care.

## Instructional Breaks

Breaks are used to provide a student an opportunity to refocus on the activity. Breaks may be used for incidents that negotiation between student and staff is not successful, such as when a student refuses to participate in the activity, when the student's behaviors are interfering with his/her or others' learning, and when the student's emotional state is not conducive to learning. These breaks in the individualized instruction are an opportunity for the student to reevaluate the behavior, to consider the consequences of not completing the tasks, and to make choices of how to engage successfully in the activity. There are two types of breaks: student-requested and staff-directed.

### Student-Requested Break

A student who needs a break may initiate one at his or her request. The student, usually, requests to leave the instructional space for the break. The student must respectfully state the exact location to which he/she is retreating, **within eyesight** of the staff member and the duration requested. Although Pathways staff honors a student's self-awareness of needing a break, all staff has discretion in approving the request, including location and duration. A break may not be granted if the staff has the opinion that the student is merely avoiding his/her work or if the staff believes that safety or security is jeopardized. Because it is the staff's responsibility to monitor the student during the time-out, **the student must remain within the line of sight and hearing of the staff at all times**. It is the student's responsibility to return from time-out at the agreed time.

### Staff-Directed Break

A staff member will direct a break from instruction when it may improve the quality of the teaching/learning process. The location of staff-directed breaks varies according to the specific nature of the incident. Staff may accompany the student on a brief respite, such as a walk, a purchase of a snack, etc. Other times the student may sit quietly for the break. **At all times, the student must remain within the line of sight and hearing of the staff person.** At times that the student still feels unprepared to continue the activity, the staff and student may discuss alternative activities. All breaks are recorded by the CSS.

# AWOL

"AWOL" is a term borrowed from the military, meaning Away With Out Leave. Whenever a student leaves the assigned instructional space without prior consent, s/he is considered AWOL. We consider this behavior to be very serious. Because most activities are implemented in community settings, supervision of students to ensure safety is critical. As described above, we understand that at times students need to take a respite from their work. We make a simple, yet significant distinction between (1) a student requesting to leave and (2) a student leaving without staff knowledge. The former is acceptable. The latter requires staff intervention. Staff's primary responsibility is to assess whether the student poses a threat of danger to self or others. Staff assumes threat of danger when there is insufficient assurance that the student is not a threat of danger.

## Not a Danger

If the student poses no such threat, the student is permitted up to fifteen minutes to return safely to the assigned area. This type of AWOL is recorded and reported. A collaborative conversation between the CSS, teacher, and therapist determines the consequences and follow-up. When a student goes AWOL repeatedly, the Principal determines the appropriate disciplinary action, up to and including recommendation for discharge.

If the student does not return to the assigned area within fifteen minutes, the staff person will contact the Principal. This type of AWOL is documented on the Student Behavior Report. The Principal, in collaboration with the team including Pathways' Executive Director, Therapist, Teacher, and CSS, will determine the appropriate course of action. The Principal may telephone parents/guardians or the police; it may be determined that the student has walked home. A re-entry conference may be held with parents/guardians to determine and assure continued safety and compliance to school rules.

## Danger to Self or Others

If the student poses a threat of danger to self or others while leaving without permission, the staff person immediately contacts the Principal, and police may be contacted. In these cases, the parents/guardians are notified as soon as feasible. A re-entry conference with student and parents/guardians will likely be held to determine and assure continued safety and compliance to school rules.

These AWOLs are recorded on the daily instructional record and may also be recorded on the Student Behavior Report, which is filed in the student's permanent record and at The Pathways Schools' Administrative Office.

# Suspensions

In response to certain behaviors and incidences, a student may be suspended from school or transportation. An incident of aggression, derogatory slurs, gross or repeated infractions of Pathways Schools' policies are some examples of suspendable offenses. Excessive days of absence may interfere with meeting graduation requirements. Whenever students are suspended, parents/guardians and the LSS are notified.

In order for a student to re-enter the Pathways school community, the student, parent/guardian, Pathways school personnel, and LSS representatives, if appropriate, meet to discuss the incident, focusing on determining interventions and insight to reduce the likelihood of repeat behavior. This conference is an opportunity for the student and family to recommit to the goals and policies of The Pathways School – Catonsville.

Typically, re-entry conferences are held at The Pathways School – Catonsville site. Certain circumstances may require that this meeting be held at either the LSS offices or The Pathways Schools' Administrative Office. The choice of location is at the discretion of Pathways staff, in communication with the LSS.

## Documentation of Crises

All behavioral incidents are recorded on the daily instructional record. The staff who witnessed the incident will complete the documentation using other forms, such as Student Behavior Report, Suicide Prevention/ Intervention Form, and Suspension Notice with Re-Entry Conference form. These reports are maintained in the permanent student record and are filed at The Pathways Schools' Administrative House. Some reports are sent to the LSS.

## Motivational Activities

Students have the opportunity to earn and participate in a variety of motivational activities throughout the school year. Students earn awards and activities based on their behavior and academic performance. The Pathways School – Catonsville attempts to closely match motivation and rewards typical of adult life. However, we recognize that students enjoy frequent acknowledgement. Therefore, we include a range of activities that are designed to motivate our students toward success and to reward their hard work in attaining their successes.

## Individualized Projects

One goal of The Pathways School – Catonsville focuses on individualization of the school program. We believe that as we tailor our approach to match individual strengths and needs, students' internal motivation will increase. It is that internal motivation that is the cornerstone of success in Pathways and in adult life. Some projects that we have included in our programming are community service with local organizations, visits to local and regional points of interest and senior projects

## Certificates of Merit

Certificates of merit and recognition are used to mark student achievements. These and other awards are presented during our community groups, so that all peers and staff can celebrate each student's successes. Along with many certificates of merit, students may receive a prize award, such as gift certificates and celebration lunches.

## Perfect Attendance Awards

Each quarter, students who are absent no days receive a certificate. The list of students with perfect attendance is posted on-site and published in the CB Times Newsletter. These certificates are presented during community groups. When students have perfect attendance during at least two quarters of the school year, they receive a prize award, such as gift certificates or celebration lunches.

## Honor Roll

Students are placed on the Honor Roll for each quarter in which they earn an average of “B” or better in all subjects. The list of students on Honor Roll is posted on-site and published in the CB Times Newsletter. When students earn Honor Roll in two quarters of the school year, he/she receives an award, such as a gift certificate or celebration lunch.

## Principal’s Honor Roll

Students are placed on the Principal’s Honor Roll for each quarter in which they earn all “A” grades. The list of students on Principal’s Honor Roll is posted on-site and published in the CB Times Newsletter. For each quarter a student earns Principal’s Honor Roll, he/she receives an award, such as a gift certificate or celebration lunch.

## Leadership

As in adult life, our most common response to achievement is increased responsibility. Although we do not employ a level system that rigidly outlines the expectations and privileges for each achievement phase, we do recognize that certain students are more able to assist in preparing, organizing, and implementing some school activities. As we notice a student showing the leadership and self-management skills necessary, we promote that student into representing the students and program on certain committees. Committees include the Pep Rally Committee, Spring Retreat Committee, Yearbook Staff, Newsletter Staff and Recreation Activities Committee.

## Alternative Activities and Trips

The Pathways Schools include a variety of alternative activities and trips, e.g.,working with an artist-in-residence or attending a performance at the Kennedy Center. Only students who demonstrate appropriate participation and behaviors during their regular school activities are eligible to participate in these activities.

## Recreation

Recreation Activities are scheduled for all students who have completed their assignments and met expectations (i.e. attendance, behavior) for the week. Recreation Activities are normally scheduled on Friday afternoons, and are designed to be both fun and educational or therapeutic. Based on an individual’s behaviors, staff may determine that the student is not group-appropriate. Alternative activities may be planned for those students.

## Outstanding Student

The Pathways Schools recognizes one student from the program each year. A student who demonstrates outstanding growth and achievement receives a generous student award plaque and prize. This prize is presented during the graduation and commencement ceremony in June.

## Contracts

In order to help clarify expectations and agreements between individual students and The Pathways School – Catonsville, we utilize contracts at times. The purpose of contracts varies from pre-admissions agreements concerning behaviors to attendance contracts. In all cases, staff, parent/guardian, and student agree to the terms of the contract. In some cases, the LSS representatives may also participate in the writing of a contract. These contracts are filed in the student's record, provided to the student, family, and LSS, and each member of the student's school team.