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TO: NJSIAA Member Schools

FROM: Steven J. Timko, Executive Director

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RE: Homeschooling

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On November 9, 2011, the NJSIAA Executive Committee amended a Clarification to the NJSIAA Bylaws to make it clear that a Board of Education could, in its discretion, allow homeschoolers to compete in interscholastic sports, provided both the school and the homeschooled student complied with newly-adopted NJSIAA guidelines.

The NJSIAA Homeschooler Guidelines are attached to this memo and will be posted on the NJSIAA website. In addition, they will be published in the next addition of the NJSIAA Handbook.

The Department of Education website states that a “Board of Education may, but is not required by law to, allow a child educated elsewhere than at school to participate in curricular and extra-curricular activities or sports activities.” (Department of Education Frequently Asked Questions: Homeschooling). In light of this, the NJSIAA Executive Committee believed that it was important to be proactive and to provide guidelines to member schools to regulate any such participation.

The purpose of these Homeschooler Guidelines is to ensure that homeschooled students participate on the same level playing field as other student-athletes. To accomplish this, the Guidelines require (1) that before any homeschooler can participate, he or she must first obtain approval of the board of Education, (2) proof that the student resides in the district, (3) permission of the principal, (4) compliance with the same standards of behavior and performance as all other members of the team, (5) compliance with NJSIAA eligibility rules, (6) demonstration to the satisfaction of the local school officials that the student is receiving an equivalent education, (7) demonstration to the satisfaction of the local school officials that the student is academically qualified to participate, and (8) no transfers to a home school program for athletic advantage. For example, a student cannot drop out of school because of an academic or disciplinary issue and then turn around and participate as a homeschooler. The Guidelines specifically state that “any student who withdraws from a public school program to enroll in a home school program, and is ineligible at the time of withdrawal from the public school program due to his/her failure to meet academic, behavioral or eligibility standards, shall be ineligible to compete in interscholastic athletic competition in the same manner as a student who is transferred from one school to another for athletic advantage.” (Guideline 8).

Once again, the local Board of Education must decide whether it will permit homeschooled students to participate in sports. NJSIAA rules will not stand in the way. However, if participation is allowed, it must occur in accordance with the NJSIAA Homeschooler Guidelines. These Guidelines are designed to ensure that homeschoolers who participate in sports meet the same eligibility requirements as other student-athletes.

As always, NJSIAA staff is available to answer any questions you may have.

New Jersey Homeschooler Guidelines

A home schooled student is eligible to participate in interscholastic athletics if the following conditions are met:

- 1. Approval by the local Board of Education.** Consistent with Department of Education Guidelines, a home schooled student may participate in interscholastic athletics if the local board of education, in its discretion, approves of the participation of home schooled students on the high school teams.
- 2. Residency.** The home schooled student must reside in the school district that serves the high school and must meet the residency criteria pursuant to N.J.A.C. 6A:22 and provide proof of residence as required by the local school board. In school districts that serve more than one town, a home schooled student must be assigned to the school of record in the same manner as other students.
- 3. Notice and request to Principal.** The parents of the home schooled student must submit a written request to the principal of the member school to try out for an athletic team in interscholastic athletics.
- 4. Compliance with local requirements.** The home schooled student must comply with the same physical examination, insurance, age, academic and other requirements for participation as required of all students at that high school. The home schooled student must adhere to the same standards of behavior, responsibilities and performance as other members of the team.
- 5. Compliance with NJSIAA requirements.** Home schooled students must meet all eligibility requirements established by the NJSIAA, including but not limited to rules relating to amateur status, age, recruitment, academic credits, semesters of eligibility and transfers. Home schooled students will be subject to all rulings and decisions of the NJSIAA, and may appeal any adverse decision to the Commissioner of Education under N.J.A.C. 6A:3-7.1 et seq.
- 6. Demonstration of equivalent education.** The parents of the homeschooled student must meet with local school officials to demonstrate that the student is receiving an academically equivalent education.
- 7. Certification of academic eligibility.** The parents of the homeschooled student must submit evidence satisfactory to the Principal that the homeschooled student has met the requirements of the Academic Credit Rule and the requirements of the school's own academic policy.
- 8. Transfer to a home school program.** Any student who withdraws from a public school program to enroll in a home school program, and who is ineligible at the time of withdrawal from the public school program due to his/her failure to meet academic, behavioral or eligibility standards, shall be ineligible to compete in interscholastic athletic competition in the same manner as a student who has transferred from one school to another for athletic advantage.

9. The rights, privileges, and responsibilities associated with all other student athletes attending NJSIAA member schools will apply to home schooled students who have satisfied the requirements above.