



2025-2026
NMAA STATE SPIRIT CHAMPIONSHIPS
COMPETITION GUIDELINES & PERFORMANCE CRITERIA

CHEER



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2025-2026 NMAA SPIRIT CHAMPIONSHIPS

COMPETITION GUIDELINES & PERFORMANCE CRITERIA: CHEER

INTRODUCTION

This document reviews the guidelines and performance criteria for the NMAA Spirit Championships for cheer. In addition to the guidelines and criteria outlined in this document, all New Mexico Activities Association (NMAA) bylaws and National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) rules apply. While some sport specific bylaws are included in this document, this document does not replace any section of the NMAA Handbook. It is the responsibility of coaches to be aware of, abide by, and enforce all guidelines, bylaws and rules set forth by the NMAA and NFHS as they apply to the sport of spirit (i.e., cheer and dance).

STATE CHAMPIONSHIP ELIGIBILITY

The NMAA State Spirit Competition is open to all NMAA member high school varsity cheer teams who meet eligibility criteria as set forth in the NMAA Handbook and as outlined below.

- Teams must compete in a minimum of three NMAA sanctioned competitions prior to the State Spirit Championships.
- Coaches, both head and all assistants, must have attended the Spirit Coaches Clinic.
- Only one team may represent a school.
- Entries must be submitted by the by Wednesday, February 18, 2026.

CLASSES/DIVISIONS

Teams must compete at the same classification level that the school participates in for basketball.

There are six classes in cheer and two divisions, all-girl and co-ed. The co-ed division is defined as any team having two or more male participants. Teams with one male participant may choose to compete as co-ed or in the all-girl division.

- All-Girl Division: A/2A, 3A, 4A, 5A
- Co-Ed Division: A/4A, 5A

Each team must declare the division in which they will perform by the stated deadline on the competition registration form. Teams will not be allowed to change divisions after the deadline.

ROSTER INFORMATION & LIMITATIONS

All performers, including alternates, must be listed on the competition registration form submitted to the NMAA. In addition, a roster is submitted for each routine on the day of the competition. The following information and roster limitations apply:

- Each cheer team, whether all-girl or co-ed, is limited to 24 performers in addition to a mascot(s), four alternates, two student managers, one music person and four coaches.
- Each team will perform two routines; a performance roster is required for each routine. No more than four team members can be different from one routine than the other. If more than four team members are

different from one routine than the other, an unsportsmanlike penalty violation will be issued by NMAA personnel (refer to points deducted for violation on the Technical Judge Sheet posted on the NMAA website).

- The roster for the first routine must only list those performing in the first routine.
- The roster for the second routine must only list those performing in the second routine.
- A maximum of four athletes included in the first routine may be dropped from and not a part of the second routine.
- A maximum of four athletes who did not perform in the first routine may be added to and perform in the second routine; they must be listed on the roster for the second routine.
- Everyone, student and adult, listed on a team's roster must meet the requirements as stated in the NMAA Handbook, Section 7.19.5.D.4.

PERFORMANCE CATEGORIES

Each team must perform two routines specific to the following performance categories:

1. Game Day
2. Cheer with Music

PERFORMANCE GUIDELINES & CRITERIA: GAME DAY

This section includes general performance category information for Game Day routines and is followed by rules, restrictions, and related information specific to each section of a Game Day routine: band chant, crowd leading and fight song.

General Information: Game Day

- Routine shall be composed of the following three sections and performed in the order listed: band chant, crowd leading and fight song.
- Practicality is important. Practicality refers to actions that can be done on any surface in any type of weather – practical things that can occur at games. For example, seat rolls, heel stretches and arabesques are not practical at a game.
- Performance time is restricted to a maximum of 3 minutes (3:00). Each section is not timed but should be approximately 1 minute per section.
- Routine will include an announcer-led game-day situation; the situational cue will be centered around football.
- Situational football cues will be the transition between band chant and crowd leading.
- Teams will not be aware of their situational cue prior to performance.
- The use of crowd leading tools such as signs, poms, flags, and/or megaphones are encouraged. Refrain from banging megaphones, flagpoles, etc. on performance floor.
- Official cheerleading mats (54 feet wide by 42 feet deep) will be in place at the center of the basketball court.

Rules, Restrictions & Related Information: Band Chant

The following applies to the band chant section of the routine:

- Music must be recorded by a marching band.
- Stunts and tumbling are prohibited.
- Kicks and jumps are allowed.

Rules, Restrictions & Related Information: Crowd Leading

The following applies to the crowd leading section of the routine:

- Emphasize crowd involvement.
- Crowd leading tools are highly encouraged.
- Music is prohibited.
- Crowd leading skills restrictions are as follows:
 - Basket, sponge, and/or elevator tosses are prohibited.
 - Inversions are prohibited.
 - Twisting dismounts from stunts are prohibited.
 - Single-leg extended stunts are limited to liberties and liberty hitches.
 - Running tumbling is prohibited.
 - Standing tumbling is restricted to single skills only.
 - Connecting skills are prohibited. For example, a standing back handspring/back tuck is prohibited.
 - The most elite skill allowed is a standing back tuck.
 - Athletes may engage in multiple skills in the routine, but they are limited to single skills only – NO connecting skills.

Rules, Restrictions & Related Information: Fight Song

The following applies to the fight song section of the routine:

- Music must be recorded by a marching band.
- Up to three consecutive 8 counts may be incorporated with stunts, tumbling, and/or jumps. If repeated, incorporating stunts, tumbling, and/or jumps must repeat as initially performed.
- Fight song skill restrictions are as follows:
 - Basket, sponge, and/or elevator tosses are prohibited.
 - Inversions are prohibited.
 - Twisting dismounts from stunts are prohibited.
 - Single-leg extended stunts are limited to liberties and liberty hitches.
 - Running tumbling is prohibited.
 - Standing tumbling is restricted to single skills only.
 - Connecting skills are prohibited. For example, a standing back handspring/back tuck is prohibited.
 - The most elite skill allowed is a standing back tuck.
 - Athletes may engage in multiple skills in the routine, but they are limited to single skills only – NO connecting skills.
 - A tumbling, stunting, or jumping skill will be counted towards the three consecutive 8 count incorporation.

PERFORMANCE GUIDELINES & CRITERIA: CHEER WITH MUSIC

This section includes performance category information, rules, and restrictions for Cheer with Music routines.

- Performance time is restricted to a maximum of 2 minutes and 30 seconds (2:30).
- Music is required and is restricted to a maximum of 1 minute and 30 seconds (1:30).
- Once music begins, it can be interrupted with chants, cheers, stunts, etc.
- The school fight song can be used in this performance category.
- Music selection should fall in line with NFHS Spirit Rule 1-2-1b.
- Official cheerleading mats (54 feet wide by 42 feet deep) will be in place at the center of the basketball court.

PERFORMANCE ENTRANCE/EXIT: ALL PERFORMANCES

The following guidelines apply to all performances:

- Teams will be announced: *Now performing...*
- Teams will have 30 seconds after being announced to:
 - Enter the performance floor.
 - Set up props.
 - Assume position.
- Once a team is announced and proceeds to the performance floor, the team may not return to the area designated for teams standing by for competition (also referred to as the tunnel).
- The timing of a performance will begin with the first signal (i.e., stomp, clap, verbal cue, beat of music, etc.) and end upon the conclusion of the performance.
- Upon the conclusion of a team's performance, teams will have 15 seconds to exit the performance floor.

Music

The following applies to all performances on the performance floor and in the warm-up room:

- A music system will be provided. All music must be recorded on a laptop, tablet, or smartphone. Record music at the highest volume possible.
- Live music is prohibited during a team's entrance, performance, and/or exit.
- It is strongly recommended that a device with a direct auxiliary (AUX) port be used. Teams are responsible for providing their own adapters (i.e., lightning/USB/USB-C for AUX port or any other necessary AUX port adapter). Adapters will not be provided by the NMAA.
- Each team is responsible for providing a team representative to control (start/stop) music, including the volume on the laptop/tablet/smartphone.
- Prior to connecting to the music system provided, music must be cued and ready with the volume up all the way on the laptop/tablet/smartphone. Tablets and smartphones must be in airplane mode and cases removed.
- Recording equipment varies. The team representative controls the music, including the volume on the laptop/tablet/smartphone. In the event of a music malfunction during a performance, the team representative will make the determination whether to stop the music.
 - If the team representative stops the music, the announcer will direct the performing team to regroup and restart the performance.
 - There will not be a point deduction for a music malfunction.
 - A coach may not request that the routine be repeated once the team has left the performance floor.

JUDGES

Each performance will be evaluated and scored by a panel of performance judges with technical judges present to monitor and issue penalty violations if necessary. NMAA scoresheets will be used (available on the NMAA website).

Judging Panels: Performance Judges

There will be two panels of performance judges; each panel will consist of six judges (a total of 12 judges). Each panel will score one of the two routines performed by a team. If one panel scores a team's first routine performed, the other panel will score the same team's second routine performed.

Each panel of judges will be stationed at the concourse level with one panel stationed on the east side and one panel stationed on the west side. Teams will alternate which side they face for each routine; the performance schedule will indicate which side a team faces for each routine.

Technical Judges

Technical judges will monitor routines from the performance floor level to determine whether there are any safety violations and issue penalty violations accordingly. Refer to the safety section for more information.

SAFETY

Regulations

Safety rules always apply to all spirit teams. The violation of safety guidelines during the competition will result in penalty point deductions. Violation of any rules in the NFHS Spirit Rules Book and/or NMAA guidelines will result in a deduction from the total performance score for the routine in which there was a violation. Technical judges will determine safety guideline violations. Refer to the current NFHS Spirit Rules Book for safety guidelines.

Spotters

Spotters must be members of the varsity team performing and must participate in the routine. Additional spotters will be on the performance floor and in the warm-up room for the purpose of spotting all stunting.

DEDUCTIONS

All deductions issued for a performance by a technical judge and/or designated NMAA personnel will be documented on a Technical Judge Sheet (available on the NMAA website).

Penalty point deductions are issued for the following violations:

- Violations of the NFHS Rules Book
- Unsportsmanlike conduct as outlined in the NFHS Rules Book and/or NMAA guidelines (including roster violations)
- Landing or stepping off the designated competition area (i.e., complete hand, foot, and/or other body part)
- Exceeding time limits (entrance, performance, and/or exit)
- Game Day guideline (format) violations

Refer to the Technical Judge Sheet (available on the NMAA website) for point deductions issued for violations.

SCORING: PERFORMANCE SCORE FOR INDIVIDUAL ROUTINES AND COMPETITION SCORE

A performance score will be calculated for each team's routine. Each team's performance scores will be averaged to calculate an overall competition score for each team. NMAA scoresheets will be used (available on the NMAA website).

Performance Score for Each Routine

The following applies to calculating the performance score for each routine performed by a team:

- Each routine is scored by a panel of six judges. The six scores will be averaged for a final performance score for each routine.
- If there are any penalty point deductions, they will be subtracted from the combined scores of the six judges before averaging the performance score for the routine in which there was a violation(s).

Competition Score – Combined Score for Both Routines

The following applies to calculating each team's competition score:

- The competition score is the average of both performance scores of each routine performed by a team.
- The performance score for each routine will be combined and averaged for a competition score.
- The competition score will be used to determine competition winners.

All scores are final. Technical protests or appeals will not be accepted. Requests to watch a recorded performance when a coach disagrees with a score and/or a penalty violation will not be granted. By participating in the state spirit competition, each team acknowledges that the scores, judges' decisions, and validated point totals from scoresheets are final.

AWARDS

Trophies for Top Place Team Finishers

State championship trophies will be awarded to top place team finishers in each division and class. Medals will be awarded to each member of teams finishing in first place.

State championship trophies will be awarded based on the number of teams competing in a class.

- 1-4 teams competing in a class: A 1st place trophy will be awarded.
- 5-6 teams competing in a class: A 1st and 2nd place trophy will be awarded.
- 7 or more teams competing in a class: A 1st, 2nd and 3rd place trophy will be awarded.

Tiebreaking Procedures

In the event of a tie, the team with the highest performance score for a routine will be used to determine ranking among the tied teams.

For example:

Team	1st Routine	2nd Routine	Competition Score Total
1	98	95	193
2	96	97	193
3	94	99	193

- Teams 1, 2 & 3 would be in a three-way tie all having the same competition score (combination of both routine performance scores). Therefore, the highest performance score for a routine would be used to determine ranking resulting in the following:
 - 1st Place: Team 3 with the highest performance score of 99
 - 2nd Place: Team 1 with the second highest performance score of 98
 - 3rd Place: Team 2 with the third highest performance score of 97

If tied teams have the same performance scores for routines regardless of routine order, a trophy will be awarded to the tied teams for the place in which they tied. The team that traveled the furthest would take the trophy home and a duplicate trophy(s) would be mailed to the remaining tied team(s).

For example:

Team	1st Routine	2nd Routine	Competition Score Total
1	98	95	193
2	95	98	193
3	94	99	193

- Teams 1, 2 & 3 would be in a three-way tie all having the same competition score (combination of both routine performance scores). Therefore, the highest performance score for a routine would be used to determine ranking resulting in the following:
 - 1st Place: Team 3 with the highest performance score of 99
 - 2nd Place: Team 1 and Team 2 would tie with each having the second highest performance score of 98.
 - 3rd Place: Not applicable since the top three place finishers finished in 1st and 2nd place.

RESOURCES

Provided below is a list of resources for coaches. Some resources have been referenced in this document while others have not but serve as a resource for coaches preparing their teams for the NMAA State Spirit Championships.

- NFHS Rules Book
- [NMAA Handbook](#)
- [NMAA Spirit Bylaws](#)
- [NMAA Spirit Webpage](#)
 - Cheer Guidelines & Performance Criteria (this document)
 - Scoresheets for each performance category
 - Technical Judge Sheet
 - Stunt Progression Handout
 - Pyramid Progression Handout
 - Game Day Tip Sheet
 - Game Day Situational Cues
- [NFHS Learn: USA Safety Cheer & Dance Safety Certification](#)