

NMAA Appeals Review Committee Eligibility Hearing
St. Pius X High School Student
November 4, 2025
9:00 a.m.- Virtual

Welcome - Meeting called to order by Mr. Paul Benoit, NMAA Appeals Review Committee Chairman, at 9:13 a.m., Mrs. Alissa Wesbrook, NMAA Assistant to the Executive Director, conducted roll call and the following members were present:

Mr. Paul Benoit- Retired Superintendent, Floyd Municipal Schools
Mr. Vance Lee, Superintendent, Capitán Municipal Schools
Mr. Gerry Washburn, Superintendent, Carlsbad Municipal Schools

3 members were present representing a committee quorum.

Approval of the Agenda:

Mr. Benoit asked for a motion to approve the agenda. Mr. Washburn made a motion to approve the agenda as presented. Mr. Lee seconded. A vote was taken and passed unanimously (3-0).

Closed Session (unless family requests hearing to be in open session)

Mr. Benoit asked the appealing party if they wish for the appeal to be in open session or closed session. Mr. Jim Cook, Athletic Director at St. Pius X High School, and Ms. Natalie Abeita, mother of Danni, stated they wish for this appeal to be held in open session.

Mr. Benoit- the meeting will remain open as per the request.

Also in attendance were: Mr. Dusty Young, NMAA Executive Director; Mr. Scott Owen, NMAA Associate Director, and Danni Waseta, student.

Mr. Benoit reviewed the agenda

Background and Ruling

Mr. Dusty Young stated Danni is a junior transfer student to St. Pius X High School who currently resides at 1017 Sun Circle in the Rio Grande attendance zone. Last year as a sophomore, Danni also resided at the 1017 Sun Circle address and attended Valencia High School where she participated in cheerleading. Because Danni attended a school outside of her attendance zone and has enrolled in a new school, she is considered a transfer student in accordance with NMAA Bylaw 6.6.1 and has been deemed ineligible for varsity participation in the sport of cheerleading for 365 calendar days from date of her enrollment at St. Pius. Danni has been ruled varsity eligible immediately in all other sports under the NMAA's "did not participate" provision and is also eligible for sub-varsity participation and sideline cheer during her period of ineligibility.

Aggrieved Party Statement

Mr. Cook stated he will turn this over to Ms. Abeita and Danni.

Ms. Abeita stated Danni does have a script she wrote out and would like to read.

Danni- it was during an afternoon at practice, and they were working on their state routine. She was kicked in the head by a teammate, she instantly felt lightheaded and her vision was blurry. She raised her hand and told the coaches she needed a break but couldn't tell if she wasn't actually looking at them due to her blurred vision. She grabbed her phone and ran outside. She thought a coach was going to follow her out but she didn't. She went outside to catch her breath and felt her chest tighten; she does also have asthma. Symptoms started to worsen, and her vision became blurrier and she hyperventilated. She called her mom, and she couldn't understand what she was saying, she also started to throw up. She was finally able to go back inside but the doors automatically lock when one leaves, so she couldn't get back in. She couldn't do anything. Moments later her mom arrived and a teammate finally came out to check on her. Her teammate told her she tried to go and find her but the coaches wouldn't let her. She ended up outside in the dark and felt like she had a concussion. Later, she had the worst headaches in school. She continued to attend school but decided to stop participating in cheer. She could not do it anymore; the coaches were treating her so bad. Her teammates ignored her and stopped talking to her. The reason for attending Valencia in the first place is her older sister and brother had an amazing experience at Valencia. Her sister was able to cheer on the state mat but that dream never came true the way she imagined. Her freshman and sophomore years took a lot from her. This was the most difficult chapter in her life, and she is just asking for a chance to cheer again. Cheer is her outlet and passion and allows her to feel more like herself. She feels confident and feels something greater than herself. This has been taken away from her twice. She doesn't want to lose another year due to circumstances that were out of her control. She just wants to cheer on the state mat.

Ms. Abeita- it was traumatic for her, and it brings back memories of an immense traumatic experience. Valencia is a ways up there, it took about 25 minutes from where she was. Getting the call and trying to calm her down, she felt helpless. The heart-breaking part was hearing the music go back on, there wasn't anyone that checked on her, and it was dark outside. She was with her teammate when she arrived, and Danni was very disoriented and sitting there in the dark alone. She decided she wasn't going to return to the team. She was ignored by the team and felt invisible. She made it through the year at Valencia and for two years she hasn't been able to step foot on the state mat. The coach quit right before winter break of her freshman year, so her cheer season was cut short and last year she went in positive attitude as it was supposed to be a better year but instead she watched her totally go downhill. It is hard to put into words that her daughter was outside by herself, in the dark and not one person went and checked on her at all.

Appeal Review Committee Questions

Lee- does the family reside in the Rio Grande attendance zone.

Ms. Abeita- Yes, they do. They are from Isleta Pueblo and reside on the Pueblo. It was her understanding that the kids that live on the pueblo can go where they wish for high school. Those that live on the Isleta Pueblo have kids that attend Valencia, Los Lunas, Belen, Atrisco Heritage and St Pius. From what she understood there is not clear what school they have to attend.

Lee- it is his understanding that Isleta Reservation, the whole reservation is zoned to Rio Grande. Mr. Young stated he is not sure, but the address in which they reside is in the Rio Grande attendance zone.

Benoit- what is her date of enrollment at St. Pius X HS.

Cook- It should be 8/11/2025.

Benoit- Danni finished the year at Valencia and finished her cheer season. No, she did finish the school year, but when the incident happened, she decided to walk away from the team and from participation in cheer, so she did not finish the season.

Benoit- asked if anyone went and spoke to administration at Valencia after this incident took place. Ms. Abeita- stated she spoke with Mr. Sears, the athletic trainer, and made him aware of what had happened. He came into practice before the incident occurred to tell him the coaches he was leaving. He did not understand why they didn't call him to come back. She didn't know why they didn't call him back. At no time did the coaches ever reach out to them. That morning after the incident her decision was not to go back. She did speak to the district AD Coach Hays. She explained to him that she would not have Danni return to cheer. They never heard anything from the coaches regarding the incident until that afternoon, she figured after Mr. Hays spoke the coach the coach reached out to her. The coach called and left a voicemail. She called her back and explained to her Danni would not be returning to the team. The coach simply requested her to return her uniforms.

Benoit- why did the family choose St. Pius.

Ms. Abeita- they spoke about it over winter break, her nephew attended Pius the year before. Danni was feeling the negativity of the team but was hesitant to transfer. State cheer competition takes place in March and after that Danni came to her and explained what was going on at Valencia. So, she called St Pius and set up a visit and a tour and her sister encouraged her to do a shadow day.

Danni-she was able to shadow a student that is now a senior. It was the greatest experience; everyone was so nice. She felt like she could be herself again, she met a lot of friends so fast. She was included in everything and liked the teachers and how they taught. She is blessed to be at St Pius.

Benoit- what are the enrollment requirements at St. Pius.

Cook- junior class there was no waitlist, the lower-level classes there is. Requirements include submitting transcripts, and possibly taking a placement test to see what classes to get into. Lastly, the family must pay tuition.

The main reason why he felt he needed to bring this to the committee is when Danni had the accident and was not cared for, to this date there is still no injury report. He asked Ms. Abeita to get him a report before this process, but there is no incident report/injury report on file. The trainer never evaluated her. That is his concern.

Benoit- asked if the transfer process was told to the family and they were informed that there could be eligibility issues.

Cook- Yes, she was informed.

Lee- did they already have tryouts for competition, is she currently on the team, conditionally.

Cook- she did try out as they did hold fall tryouts and she did make the team. She is not eligible for competitions at this point but participating with the team. The winter season is their competition season but at this point cannot participate with the team. Additionally, they do not have a junior varsity team.

Executive Session

Mr. Benoit asked for a motion to go into Executive Session for discussion purposes only. A motion was made by Mr. Washburn and seconded by Mr. Lee to go into Executive Session at 9:44 a.m. A roll call vote was taken and the motion passed unanimously with a vote of 3-0.

Yes/For	No/Against	Appeal Review Committee Member Name
X		Mr. Paul Benoit
X		Mr. Vance Lee
X		Mr. Gerry Washburn

Mr. Benoit asked for a motion to go back into open session. A motion was made by Mr. Lee and seconded by Mr. Washburn to reconvene into open session at 9:53 a.m. A roll call vote was taken and the motion passed unanimously with a vote of 3-0. Mr. Benoit stated there was no action taken during Executive Session.

Yes/For	No/Against	Appeal Review Committee Member Name
X		Mr. Paul Benoit
X		Mr. Vance Lee
X		Mr. Gerry Washburn

Action Items

Vote On Student Eligibility: Mr. Benoit asked if there was any need for further discussion, if not he asked a motion to uphold, amend or overturn the original decision. A motion was made by Mr. Lee to uphold the New Mexico Activities Association Decision regarding Danni Waseta. Mr. Washburn seconded. A vote was taken and the motion unanimously passed with a vote of 3-0.

Adjournment

Mr. Benoit asked for a motion to adjourn. A motion was made by Mr. Washburn and seconded by Mr. Lee. The meeting was adjourned at 9:54 a.m.