

# Getting Started with Oregon High School Equestrian Teams (ohset)

Welcome! We are pleased that you have taken the time to open this OHSET information packet! A great opportunity is before you! You have taken the first step. Our goal is to help you to be a part of our High School Equestrian athletic program!! Please read on and let us know if you have any questions. Contact information is below.



## **What is the OHSET Mission?**

Oregon High School Equestrian Teams is dedicated to promoting and organizing equestrian competition in high school athletic or activity programs.

It is our main goal to provide recognition in the high schools of the equestrian athlete and to give them an opportunity to achieve that recognition in a fair, positive and educational format. The goals are to encourage team play, peer acceptance, good horsemanship and to have cooperative adult supervised leadership for all students in grades 9 through 12.

## **When did OHSET begin?**

The Oregon High School Equestrian Team athletic program was formed first in the Southern District in 1993, in cooperation with the Oregon Horsemen's Association, and some positive role models within Grants Pass and Roseburg.

Since that first year, there has been incredible growth in the High School Equestrian program. We have grown to 8 Oregon Districts, and interest flourishing in other states with programs in Washington and New Hampshire. Presently there are over 1256 students in nearly 124 high schools participating in Oregon High School Equestrian Teams. Most High Schools have approved the awarding of High School Varsity Letters for those athletes who meet the requirements as set forth in the rules of the Equestrian program, as well as any additional requirements of the attending school.

## **Who can participate?**

Any high school in the United States of America is eligible to form a team and join the High School Equestrian Teams organization. The state is divided into districts. Districts are made up of High Schools. Each High School competes as a team. Athletes are affiliated with a high school team.

## **When are the competitions?**

Competition is a winter/spring sport season and runs from December 1 through the State Championship meet. Visit [www.ohset.com](http://www.ohset.com) for calendar of dates for competitions. District plans three district competitions in January, February, March and/or April, where athletes are required to compete in at least two of the three meets to determine who will be eligible for the State Championships.

Competition follows sportsmanship guidelines as set down by the State's School Activities Association and School Board, individual participating school activity guidelines and equine sportsmanship guidelines.

## **What is the plan?**

As of the publishing of this information packet, Districts are planning their equestrian meets. This is the prime time for High School teams to be organizing. September through December, around Oregon, Washington, New Hampshire and other states, is the time for team planning and athletes to be fundraising. The OHSET Annual Open Meeting is the first Saturday in December and official practice or season begins December 1<sup>st</sup>. Registration for the current season ends January 15<sup>th</sup>.

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## **What do I have to do to have an Equestrian team at our high school?**

There are many ways of going about this process. Two methods that have worked well are the Ambitious Method and the Take-It-Slower Method. If you are not sure which to choose, I suggest going with the Ambitious Method first.

### **Ambitious Method**

1. **Identify your Schools next School Board Meeting** and put {your school name} High School Equestrian Team on the agenda.
  - a. Hint: You can generally find this information on the internet or call the school and ask.
  - b. If there are more schools interested in the same school district contact the School District
2. **Type a cover letter** to each member on the School Board, the Principal and the Athletic Director of your High School identifying:
  - a. The date of the Board meeting
  - b. Your goal - Sanctioning Oregon High School Equestrian Team for {your school name} High School as a Varsity Sport.
  - c. Encourage them to read an attached Information Packet - select information that is presented here.
    - i. You may want to tab the packet for ease of reading with areas you think they will be concerned with - they will probably be:
      - (a) No funds are expected from the High School
      - (b) Why approve or support another sport
      - (c) Title IX
3. Deliver this packet personally to each person in cover letter.
4. Prepare for the meeting
  - a. Have a lot of people at the meeting to support you
    - i. Have the interested students there
    - ii. If you are in an OHSET District, call on the **District Chair** to join you or send someone to support you.
    - iii. If you are not in a current OHSET District, contact the OHSET STATE CHAIR (contact information located on the last page of this packet)
    - iv. Invite any horse people in the community to support the process. This could include
      - (a) Coaches
      - (b) Trainers
      - (c) 4H
      - (d) Feed and tack store owners
      - (e) Other School OHSET advisors or coaches - email them
  - b. Know your information
    - i. Read the **WHOLE** packet - they will ask questions. More information below.

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- ii. Call the District Representatives listed in your packets to talk over the information and give you hints that have worked at other schools. Invite them to your meeting.
      - c. Encourage your students to speak on why this sport is important to them – this is usually has the MOST impact. Help them prepare!
5. At the meeting
  - a. Thank them for the time to discuss this very important topic
  - b. Briefly review
    - i. I would like to provide the opportunity for the {your school name} High School to offer high school students Equestrian Sports as a Varsity Sport.
    - ii. This Varsity Sport will **NOT**:
      - (a) Cost the school any money
      - (b) Require any additional facilities
      - (c) Incur the school liability
    - iii. This Varsity Sport WILL:
      - (a) Provide teenagers another reason to stay in school and busy at a sport that requires discipline, skill, organization and other life skills to participate.
      - (b) Decrease the number of teenage pregnancies and students turning to drugs, violence and crime in our community
      - (c) Mentor future leaders.
    - iv. I would like the students to share their personal reasons
      - (a) This is the time the student could share their personal perspective
6. Summarize
  - a. No youth should be penalized or disadvantaged because they have not had the opportunity to participate in their high school sport.
  - b. Other schools throughout the state are now providing athletic varsity letters for equine sports
    - i. Name schools in your league if applicable – see OHSET Schools
  - c. Why a Varsity Letter you might ask, why do they get Varsity letters in Football – recognition and contention for scholarships.
  - d. I would like to encourage you to vote yes on sanctioning High School Equestrian as a Varsity Sport at { your school name} High School.
  - e. Keeping our students on the back of a horse helps to keep our students moving in the direction we hope for in their future.
7. Thank them for their time.
  - a. Hint: If you have a timeline, let them know. Ask when you could expect an answer.

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## The Take-It-Slower Method

1. Make an appointment to meet with the Principal and Athletic Director of your High School.
2. **Prepare for the meeting** - Know your information - see above
3. At the meeting
  - a. Thank them for the time to discuss this very important topic
  - b. Provide an Information Packet (this could be given to them prior to the meeting)
  - c. Briefly review - same as above
    - i. You would like to provide the opportunity for the {your school name} High School to offer high school students Equestrian Sports as a Varsity Sport.
    - ii. This Varsity Sport will NOT:
    - iii. This Varsity Sport WILL:
  - d. Summarize
    - i. Other schools throughout the state are now providing athletic varsity letters for equine sports  
Name schools in your league if applicable
    - ii. Why a Varsity Letter you might ask, why do they get Varsity letters in Football - recognition and contention for scholarships?
    - iii. I would like encourage you to sanction High School Equestrian as a Varsity Sport at {your school name} High School.
    - iv. Ask what the next step in the process is and proceed accordingly
    - v. Thank them for their time.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Why approve or support another sport?

According to the information provided by the School Districts, State, and Federal Agencies, the number of High School dropouts, teenage pregnancies, and disinterested students in our High Schools is increasing. As these numbers continue to rise, our tax, charitable, and private resources are being diverted to the nurturing and care of these young mothers, their babies and increased crime. In Oregon & Washington, nearly every High School has established Day Care centers within the School or nearby.

Students are becoming disinterested in school and are increasingly looking anywhere they can for leadership, care, respect, love and self-esteem. Many times, this leaves the door open for our youth to be drawn into gangs or other teenage problem areas.

The Equestrian competition is not necessarily the Savior of all these perplexing and dangerous trends, but the Equestrian program, just like Basketball, Football, or any other organized sport, is another way in which our future leaders can be nurtured and mentored by adults and other youth who care!

The primary reason that volunteers came together to see this program begin was in response to the needs of the young Equestrian athletes within our schools. For many equestrians, the dedication to their sport creates a disconnection from their school and peers because of

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their commitment to their horse and the many responsibilities that go along with it. This athletic program, just like the others, provides the high school equestrian a niche in their high schools. ... a reason to stay in school, a peer group with similar interests and needs, a positive peer pressure that motivates and encourages them to use their gifts and abilities and they excel. High School Equestrian is another method of recognizing the high school student for their hard work and dedication.

### **How can we afford to support another sport?**

***No funds are expected from the High School.*** Once approved by the administrators of each High School, the team may solicit funds from the appropriate Booster Club, and/or raise funds (in accordance with the High School, School District, and amateur rules and regulations) towards the costs associated with the team.

### **What is the cost to the student?**

Each athlete is assessed an annual fee that covers participation in all events. This fee will be paid to the District that the team competes in with a portion forwarded to the State. All fees are used to cover the cost of arena rent, judges, awards, and equipment. The fee is reassessed on an annual basis by the district and runs between \$150-\$250.

There are no fees paid to coaches or other professional horse trainers. Those riders, who already are working with a trainer, may do so at their own expense.

Team uniforms are the responsibility of each team member, with many teams utilizing fund raising programs to pay for the team items. No class fees are assessed.

Transportation to and from the events is the responsibility of each rider/athlete and all stall, horse, and tack (equipment) expenses are theirs alone.

### **What about the Liability?**

Many strategies are enlisted by OHSET, the Coaches, Advisors and the Athletes to diminish any liability!

Under Oregon State Equine Inherent Risk Laws, ORS 30.687~30.697, and similarly in Washington and other states, all athletes participate at their own risk, and accordingly under the law, that no person shall be liable for damages sustained by another solely as a result of risks inherent in equine activity.

### **What about the Liability? Continued.....**

This law identifies the limitations of risk for schools as an equine activity sponsor. All "Equine activity sponsors" shall not be liable for any injuries to or the death of a participant. This provides exceptional protection for each School District, from lawsuits, as the law disallows lawsuits involving the inherent risk law from even being filed.

To ensure that each participant and guardian have knowledge of the inherent risk law, OHSET requires each athlete and their legal guardian to sign an OHSET Code of Conduct attestation that stipulates adherence to safe equestrian practices and awareness that they are participating and riding at their own risk. All High School rules and their respective Code of Conduct will be honored and adhered to as well.

OHSET strongly encourages all athletes to carry medical insurance throughout the entire season.

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As additional protection the Oregon High School Equestrian Teams Inc. maintains a Commercial Insurance policy for the arena, spectators, staff, and other associated actions.

A primary strategy to reduce risk is our promotion of safety in our program. As in any sports, we have experienced horse people around to identify the very rare unsafe situation. Most riders are horse owners and are familiar with the responsibilities that go along with partnering with a horse in competition. Coaches and Advisors are encouraged and expected to continually assess an athlete's skills and abilities. Additionally, OHSET rules of participation guide our athletes and their advisors in National & State recognized Standards of performance such as wearing helmets and boots when riding, appropriate equipment, etc that all focus on safe and pleasurable competition.

For further information, resources include OHSET Rule Book or OHSET Website, [www.OHSET.com](http://www.OHSET.com). There you can find a full reading of the Oregon Equine Inherent Risk Laws, OHSET Rules, Regulations and the Code of Conduct.

### ***Interesting Title IX Issues***

Currently the Equestrian Teams competition participation is comprised of over 90% young women. Since this would classify the competition as "female" gender specific, it is important that all participants, District Representatives and School officials observe and follow the intent of Title IX (nine). Title IX is part of the 1972 Federal Education Amendment and was created to level the playing field of education with regard to gender.

Many have construed that it is only for recognized sports. According to those legal rulings and opinions published, this is far from the truth. Information, past rulings and H.R. 6 Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 support in the approval (if needed) of Equestrian Teams in the High Schools.

The issue of gender is not an issue that the Oregon High School Equestrian Teams program intends to focus its energy on. However, it is important that the youth of our High Schools be given the opportunity to proceed with an Equestrian Team if they so choose.

### **Horses on School Campus?**

This is the schools decision. It is very rare that High School Equestrian Teams have their horses on campus. Examples where High Schools have requested their teams to perform or participate are generally around school functions such as Homecoming, Awards Banquets, etc. All horse related practices are generally done in horse arenas.

### **What do you need from the high school?**

Requirements are minimal - approval to participate as a school sport or activity.

Other niceties include:

- Team meeting space - generally a class room for planning meetings.
- Announcements of upcoming meetings, OHSET competitions and equestrian champions
- Recognition of the Equestrian Athlete. Many High Schools award Varsity Letters when the athletes meet similar predetermined criteria, similar to OSAA Sports athletes.

### **What are the Lettering Requirements?**

The following is a guideline. The final lettering requirements and/or standards should be in harmony with the other sports in your High School. The Team Advisor/Coach will recommend the awarding of the letter to the Team Members, and will submit that

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recommendation to the appropriate Athletic Director. If required, upon the verification of school rules, policies, and/or regulations the Athletic Director will approve the award. When possible, the Team should be included in the awards programs of the respective High School.

A Team Member must meet either of the following criteria in addition to any other school rules or regulations:

- 1) If a Team Member is awarded a 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> place district medal in an event provided they participated in two of three district's meets.
- 2) The following will give each Team Member a possible of 100 total points for active involvement. In order to achieve a Letter, a Team Member must score 80 points or better. The Team Advisor/Coach will score each Team Member according to their participation in;
  - A. Completion on time of Goal and Evaluation Sheets
  - B. Active participation in team meetings and participation on at least one team, district or State committee.
  - C. Active participation in Team Fund Raising Events.
  - D. Active attendance at scheduled events whether participating in competition or not. You should readily show your Team spirit and support.
  - E. Athlete must read, sign, and abide by the Code of Conduct set forth by the Oregon High School Equestrian Team and/or the High School you represent.

### **What are the Classes of Competition?**

Riders may participate in up to five individual performance or timed classes as well as team classes. Each team will have a total of 51 slots to be utilized in individual riding classes.

#### **Pattern Classes**

1. Dressage Seat Equitation
2. Hunt Seat Equitation
3. Hunt Seat Eq Over Fences
4. In Hand Trail
5. Trail Equitation
6. Reining
7. Driving
8. Saddle Seat Equitation
9. Showmanship
10. Stock Seat Equitation
11. Working Rancher

#### **Timed Classes**

12. Break-away Roping
13. Steer Daubing
14. Barrels
15. Keyhole
16. Figure 8
17. Pole Bending
18. Individual Flags

#### **Team Classes**

19. Team Penning
20. Drill Team
21. In Hand Obstacle Relay
22. Working Pairs
23. Canadian Flag Race
24. Two Man Birangle

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### **How many other high schools have Equestrian Teams and who are they?**

In **124 High Schools**, the Athletic Director, Principal, and School Boards that have approved and support The Oregon High School Equestrian Teams Inc. as well as honor the **1256 athletes** that participate and meet the lettering requirements for Athletic Letters. After Jan 16<sup>th</sup>, website's school page is updated showing which school belongs to which district. Please be sure to have your school registrations turned in advance.

### **How is the team structure set up?**

Each team is provided direction from one Advisor who functions as an organizer, scheduler, and mentor. See the OHSET rulebook for Advisor and Coach Expectations. This adult does not have to be a trainer or a coach. A great match is for an interested adult coordinator to be the scheduler and contact point for the team. This leaves the training, and instruction to those best suited and equipped, the coach.

The High School Equestrian Team Advisor(s) reports to the District High School Equestrian Board. Some High Schools may require an Advisor to be a member of the school faculty. Many School and/or Districts require, all adult Coach, Advisors and supervisors to adhere to Criminal History Background Checks or other prerequisites to fill the position. This is at the schools discretion.

All OHSET Advisors and/or Coaches are volunteers - there are no paid positions.

### **Now that I have approval from my school, what is next?**

Congratulations!!

1. Set up a meeting date for the school team
2. Canvas the school
  - a. Put up posters that quickly outline purpose of the Equestrian Team  
Name some of the events so students know they could participate  
Varsity Sport or Activity
  - a. Have announcements made during school announcements
  - b. Put a written announcement of the meeting in the school newsletter to parents
  - c. Have the students that you know are interested contact other students that ride and ask them to attend
3. Get a sense of participation
4. **Register interested participants** - See Registration Packet
  - a. Get copy of last report Card
  - b. Review Code of Conduct & Violation Procedures and get signed copy
  - c. Have participant fill out Goals and Evaluation Sheet
  - d. Collect participation fees - State, District and Team fees if applicable
5. **Register Team** - See Team Registration Form  
Fill out form COMPLETELY and turn in to District Prior to January 15th.  
Enclose State and District Participation fees for each Participant Registered  
Send all to District Secretary



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### **What if I only have 4 or fewer students that want to participate at our High School?**

A Choice is available:

You can compete as a High School with only 1 rider if desired or you could apply for a Team Cooperative Sponsorship. This is a process where two schools compete as one team. We follow the OSAA guidelines in Co-oping Schools with the following exceptions:

Sponsoring Teams that have more than 9 student athletes will not be allowed to co-op.

Cooperating Teams that have more than 4 student athletes will not be allowed to co-op. OHSET's goal is for all riders to participate. There may be exceptions to the rules above to fulfill the organizational goals. This is only granted by the State after District approval. Every team wishing to co-op teams must apply in writing. Application includes documentation from School Principal or Athletic Director that the school has been canvassed. Application is made to the District Secretary. District Board makes a recommendation to the Co-op Committee. Co-Op committee may approve or pass on to the State Board. State Board will evaluate and approve or disapprove. Approved Co-ops are only good for one year. Please be sure to follow the format and guidelines outlined in the OHSET Rule book. Deadline date for Co-op approvals by the State Board is January 15<sup>th</sup>.

### **Where can I get more information?**

Visit the website: [www.OHSET.com](http://www.OHSET.com) for district contact information. If you are not sure of which district to contact or have questions for State level; please feel free to contact the State Chair and Vice Chair.

#### OHSET STATE CHAIRS

**State Chair:** Candi Bothum (541) 548-0573 [cbothum@ohset.com](mailto:cbothum@ohset.com)

**State Vice Chair:** Karissa Dishon (503) 266-4012 [kdishon@ohset.com](mailto:kdishon@ohset.com)