Flower Mound Youth Lacrosse Playing Up Policy Statement

Purpose

This policy outlines the considerations, expectations, and procedures for youth lacrosse players who request or are recommended to play up **ONE** grade level. The intent of allowing players to compete above their age or grade division is to support appropriate athletic development while maintaining player safety, positive team experiences, and fair competition**. At no point in time will a player be allowed to play up more than one grade level, i.e. a 3rd grader will not play up at the 5-6 level or a 5th grader at the 7-8 level. Due to league policies 8th grade players are NOT allowed to play up at high school, 9th grade, JV, or Varsity levels.**

Guiding Principles

Flower Mound Lacrosse Association (FMLA) recognizes that each athlete develops differently in skill, physical maturity, confidence, and emotional readiness. Decisions regarding playing up will be made on a case-by-case basis with the best interests of the player, team, and program in mind.

Playing up is considered a developmental opportunity, not an entitlement or guaranteed placement. Players who do play up are not guaranteed playing time.

The on–grade level team will be the player's priority. If the on-grade level and the team in which the player is moving up to are playing at the same time, then the player will play for the on-grade level team.

Potential Benefits of Playing Up

Playing up one grade level may provide meaningful developmental opportunities for certain athletes, including:

- Increased challenge appropriate to the player's current skill level
- Exposure to faster pace of play and higher-level competition
- Opportunities to develop leadership, resilience, and adaptability
- Enhanced lacrosse IQ through competing with more advanced players
- Potential for additional playing opportunities when roster numbers require support
- Ability to help balance or complete team rosters within FMLA
- Improved long-term development for players who have clearly outgrown their current division

Potential Risks and Considerations

FMLA also recognizes that playing up may present risks or unintended negative outcomes, including:

- Increased risk of injury due to size, strength, speed, or physical maturity differences
- Reduced playing time if the player is added primarily to fill roster numbers
- Possible discouragement or loss of confidence if the player is not yet ready for the higher level
- Increased emotional or social pressure from competing with older players
- Greater physical and mental fatigue from accelerated competition demands
- Potential impact on enjoyment of the sport and long-term player retention
- Reduced opportunities for peer leadership within the player's own age group

Evaluation Criteria

Requests or recommendations for a player to move up one grade level may consider the following factors:

- Demonstrated skill level and lacrosse fundamentals
- Physical maturity and ability to compete safely
- Coach evaluations and recommendations
- Player attitude, work ethic, and emotional readiness
- Current and projected playing time opportunities. If teams maintain a full roster with adequate substitutions then younger players will not be allowed to play up.
- Team roster sizes and organizational needs
- Parent and player input (Playing up needs to be a player driven decision that is agreed to by the parent)
- Overall developmental benefit to the athlete

Approval Process

All playing-up decisions must be reviewed and approved by FMLA coaches both on-grade level coaches and the coaches of the team the player is asking to play up to, along with the appropriate youth coordinator. Evaluations will include coach observations, player assessments, and conversations between FMLA representatives, the player, and the parents.

FMLA reserves the right to:

- Approve or deny requests based on team need, player safety, and developmental considerations

- Reevaluate placement during the season if concerns arise

Parent and Player Acknowledgment

Parents and players should understand that:

- Playing up does not guarantee increased playing time, starting positions, or advanced opportunities. Players playing up will be used as subs and to fill in where needed. There is no guarantee the player will play where they want or usually play on their on grade level team.
- The primary goal is long-term player development and enjoyment of the sport
- Safety and positive athletic experiences will remain FMLA's top priorities

Conclusion

FMLA supports challenging athletes in appropriate ways while balancing safety, development, confidence, and enjoyment. Decisions regarding playing up one grade level will always prioritize the integrity of the program as a whole while also considering what is best for the individual player.