

**RECOMMENDATION OF THE NORTH CAROLINA BOARD OF ATHLETIC TRAINER
EXAMINER on SAFE AND COMPETENT SERVICES FOR NORTH CAROLINA STUDENTS**

For any school or institution that considers the possibility of training students in high schools, colleges or universities to act in the role of a “first responder”, the North Carolina Board of Athletic Trainer Examiners respectfully cautions that this action would be contrary to North Carolina law and place students at great risk for injury with lifelong consequences or even death. First of all, no authority exists for an exemption for “local school administrative units” to use persons who are not “hired” by the units to provide these emergency and chronic care services. Certainly the General Assembly was aware of a certain level of skill and maturity that would be weighed prior to the employment of an individual charged to make the medical decisions necessary to provide medical emergency and rehabilitation services for students when it approved this exemption. Furthermore, nowhere in the Practice Act is an athletic trainer nor a “first responder” authorized to provide training to high school or collegiate students to act as “first responders” or licensed athletic trainers.

The North Carolina Board of Athletic Trainer Examiners (NCBATE) awards a license for practice as an athletic trainer to those persons who provide evidence of good moral character, graduation from an accredited four-year college or university in a course of study approved by the Board, having passed the examination administered by the National Athletic Trainers’ Association Board of Certification, Inc., and having submitted a written practice protocol with a physician licensed to practice medicine in North Carolina. However, these requirements do not apply to specifically named persons not holding themselves out as athletic trainers or one institution specifically exempted from the license requirement. Those persons are set out in North Carolina General Statute 90-527 as follows:

- (1) Licensed professionals such as nurses, physical therapists, and chiropractors who do not hold themselves out to the public as athletic trainers.
- (2) Any NC licensed physician.
- (3) A person serving as a student-trainer or in a similar position under the direct supervision of a physician or licensed athletic trainer.
- (4) An athletic trainer affiliated in another state representing the other state’s organization in an event held in NC.
- (5) Boxing trainers not holding themselves out as athletic trainers.

The institutional exemption is extended to local school administrative units who may hire persons to perform the activities of athletic trainers in the scope of their employment but who by virtue of this employment do not hold themselves out as athletic trainers.

The standards for athletic trainers are set forth in the North Carolina Athletic Trainers Licensing Act. The purpose of this Act is to ensure minimum standards of competency and to provide the public with safe athletic trainer services.

The North Carolina General Assembly has attempted to balance local school unit autonomy with the need to protect one of the most vulnerable members of its citizenry, its children. Those providing the services of an athletic trainer to children attending schools governed by “local school administrative units” often are the non-credentialed “first responders.” These persons, with a widely-ranging level of skill and experience, do not operate within the role delineation study of a professional board nor do these persons provide services supervised by a physician pursuant to an explicit protocol.

The General Assembly has authorized this practice consistent with its historical deference to the political will of local school boards who operate under the umbrella of sovereign immunity that limits each board’s financial liability for death or injury to any child who may need medical care for many decades to come due to an athletic injury suffered at school practice and playing fields in North Carolina. It has allowed local school administrative units managing their own budgets autonomy to hire a person it determines to be capable of providing the necessary emergency medical attention without physician oversight.

The North Carolina Board of Athletic Trainer Examiners is in accordance with the National Athletic Trainers Association in their statement regarding the use of student athletic trainers on the secondary school level and collegiate and university setting reminds all athletic trainers across the state that :

“The NATA recognizes that allowing students the opportunity to observe the daily professional duties and responsibilities of an athletic trainer can be a valuable educational experience. This unique experience may expose students to the foundations of various health related careers as well as provide them with important life skills. Regardless of practice setting, it is understood that all athletic trainers must comply with their state practice acts, the BOC Standards of Practice when certified, and the NATA Code of Ethics when a member. These legal and ethical parameters apply and limit the incorporation of student aides outside of the classroom and within the activities of athletic programs. Student aides must only observe the licensed/certified athletic trainer outside of the educational environment. Coaches and school administrators must not allow or expect student aides to assist or act independently with regard to the evaluation, assessment, treatment and rehabilitation of injuries. Additionally, it is paramount that student aides not be expected, asked or permitted to make “return to play” decisions. Specifically, licensed/certified athletic trainers, coaches and administrators must not ask athletic training student to engage in any of the following activities: (1) Interpreting referrals from other healthcare providers (2) Performing evaluations on a patient (3) Making decisions about treatments, procedures or activities (4) Planning patient care (5) Independently providing athletic training services during team travel.”

More fundamentally, the NCBATE cautions that the results of more and more studies revealing the risks of sports injury places a greater burden on the schools of North Carolina to act prudently when providing preventive and emergency care for its students. But most fundamentally, the NCBATE appeals to the shared sense of responsibility

that each and every school holds to take steps, not to lower its standards for the health and safety of each child, but to raise them.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this matter.