



Frequently Asked Questions Regarding the Age Matrix Change – Competitive Program

1. What exactly is changing?

Beginning at Comp Tryouts in 2026 (the start of the 2026–27 season), US Soccer is moving to an August 1 - July 31 school year cycle for all age groups. This replaces the old calendar year (aka birth year) system.

2. Why was this change made?

Major youth soccer governing bodies reviewed participation and education data and concluded that aligning soccer age groups with school grades helps more kids play with classmates, improves social fit, and reduces the number of “trapped players” (kids whose soccer age group doesn’t match their grade).

Trapped Players - In many places, the club season is impacted by the high school soccer season or the middle school soccer season. For example, in Northern California, most high schools play soccer in the winter. CIF rules prohibit high school players from training with the club teams during that time. If an 8th grader is on a club team with all high school players, their team will not be able to train during this time and they will not have a team to play with.

Starting Soccer - Many kids begin playing on a soccer team in order to be with their friends. Under the calendar year system, a player born in December would not be able to play on the team with their best school friend who was born in January. At the youngest age groups, the mission to grow the game, provide opportunities for as many players as possible, and help children fall in love with soccer. Any barrier to a player starting to play the game goes against those goals.

3. How does this effect my player?

Players born August through December stay in the same age group in 2026–2027 (a “repeat”).

Players born in January through July must advance to the next age group as usual.

4. Will repeating an age group hinder my player’s development?

No. Most soccer experts agree that playing with similarly aged players allows for better development overall, which will lead to a stronger, more diverse skill set. Moreover, players playing on an age appropriate team will be better able to compete with other teams, as opposed to playing up and competing with teams that are on average 8 months older.

5. What should I do if I want my player to play up?

With rare exception, “playing up” will not be allowed. Exceptions are at the discretion of the GHSC Technical Director and the respective Program Director of Coaching, with input from the player’s current and prospective coaches. Exceptions will only be made for players who are significantly more advanced than their similarly aged peers, and have the emotional maturity to handle playing on an older team. These players must be among the top 1 or 2 players in their appropriate age group, as well as the top 3 or 4 players of the age group in which they are requesting to play. The final decision will be made at tryouts, as there may be new players trying out for the team that will impact where the requesting player ranks.

The process to request to play up is as follows:

- Beginning with Winter Training, the player’s parent will send a request in writing to the GHSC Technical Director and the respective Program Director of Coaching.
- During Winter Training and Spring League play, the GHSC Technical Director and respective Program Director of Coaching or another qualified, experienced individual affiliated with GHSC will observe the player in question during both trainings and game play. The goal is to have a qualified, experienced person conduct an objective evaluation. This avoids any subconscious, unintentional bias by the player’s current coach.
- If need be, stand-alone evaluations of the player will also be conducted by the personnel described above.
- During tryouts, the player in question must attend at least one tryout with their appropriately aged group and one with the older age group in which they wish to play.
- At the conclusion of tryouts, the GHSC Technical Director and the respective Program Director of Coaching will confer with the coaches of the teams in question and a final decision will be made. The final decision will be made by the GHSC Technical Director and the respective Program Director of Coaching.