

Recreation Family Guide

Age Group Changes & Travel Program Overview | 2026–2027 Season

WHAT'S CHANGING: NATIONAL AGE GROUP REALIGNMENT

Beginning Fall 2026, US Youth Soccer, US Club Soccer, and AYSO are shifting from a calendar-year (Jan–Dec) to a school-year (August 1 – July 31) age group cycle. This national change aligns soccer age groups with school grades, meaning your child will play alongside classmates.

What does this mean for your child? Children born January–July will continue with the same peer group. Children born August–December may shift to a new age group aligned with their school grade. For U11–U19 NCSL Rec players born Aug–Dec, there is an option to stay with current peers or move to the grade-aligned group.

2026–2027 Age Group Calculator

Age Group	Birth Dates (Aug 1 – Jul 31)	Approx. Grade (Fall 2026)
U5	Aug 1, 2021 – Jul 31, 2022	Pre-K
U6	Aug 1, 2020 – Jul 31, 2021	Kindergarten
U7	Aug 1, 2019 – Jul 31, 2020	1st Grade
U8	Aug 1, 2018 – Jul 31, 2019	2nd Grade
U9	Aug 1, 2017 – Jul 31, 2018	3rd Grade
U10	Aug 1, 2016 – Jul 31, 2017	4th Grade
U11	Aug 1, 2015 – Jul 31, 2016	5th Grade
U12	Aug 1, 2014 – Jul 31, 2015	6th Grade
U13	Aug 1, 2013 – Jul 31, 2014	7th Grade
U14	Aug 1, 2012 – Jul 31, 2013	8th Grade
U16	Aug 1, 2010 – Jul 31, 2012	9th – 10th Grade
U19	Aug 1, 2007 – Jul 31, 2010	11th – 12th Grade

Full table (U3–U19) available at mcleansoccer.org/age-group-change

UNDERSTANDING THE TRAVEL PROGRAM: LEVEL-BY-LEVEL BREAKDOWN

Many recreation families hear "travel soccer" and imagine cross-country trips every weekend. The reality is much more manageable, especially at the U9–U12 levels. Here's what each level actually looks like:

Program Level	Season	Practices/Wk	Tournaments	Typical Travel Radius
U9–U12 TRAVEL				
Green (Top)	Aug – Jun	2–3	4–5 per year	DMV + Richmond/Baltimore
White	Aug – Jun	2–3	3–4 per year	DMV metro area
Gold	Aug – Jun	2	3–4 per year	DMV metro area
Silver	Aug – Jun	2	3 per year	Local / DMV metro
U13–U19 TRAVEL				
Elite (GA / MLS NEXT AD)	Aug – Jul (year-round)	3	6–8 per year	Regional + national showcases
Competitive (Aspire / NAL)	Aug – Jun	2–3	4–6 per year	DMV + Mid-Atlantic region
NCSL/EDP Travel	Aug – Jun	2–3	3–5 per year	DMV + Richmond/Baltimore

Costs vary by level. Recreation: ~\$195/season. Travel: ~\$2,000–\$3,200/year (includes coaching, league fees, and some tournament fees).

U9–U12 Travel: What Rec Families Should Know *Most accessible entry point*

- Season runs August through May/June. Practices are typically 2 per week (evenings) at local McLean-area fields.
- Tournament weekends are usually 3–4 per season. Almost all are within the DMV area (Northern Virginia, Maryland, DC), with the farthest trips typically to Richmond or Baltimore.
- Teams are divided into Green, White, Gold, and Silver levels based on ability, so your child plays against similarly skilled opponents.
- All teams are coached by professional licensed coaches with oversight from MYS technical staff.
- This is a great step for players who love soccer and want more structured development without an overwhelming commitment.

U13–U19 Travel: Increasing Commitment with Age *Three tiers with distinct levels of competition*

NCSL/EDP Travel: The broadest tier. Season runs August through June with 2–3 weekly practices. Tournaments (3–5/year) are primarily in the DMV and Mid-Atlantic. This is the natural continuation for many U9–U12 travel players.

Competitive (GA Aspire / NAL): Higher-level regional competition. Season is August through June with 2–3 practices per week. Tournaments (4–6/year) extend across the Mid-Atlantic with occasional longer trips for showcases.

Elite (Girls Academy / MLS NEXT AD): The highest level. Year-round commitment (August through July) with 3 weekly practices. Tournaments (6–8/year) include regional and national showcases. This is the pathway for players pursuing the highest competitive development.

Key Takeaways for Recreation Families

- U9–U12 travel is primarily local – most tournament travel stays within the DMV area (not California or Florida!).
- The commitment grows gradually as players progress through the levels and age groups.
- Transitions work both ways – it's perfectly fine to try travel and return to recreation if it's not the right fit.
- There's no "right" age to start – it depends on your child's interest and your family's schedule.

Our goal is for every player to enjoy soccer, regardless of program level.

Learn more: mcleansoccer.org/age-group-change | mcleansoccer.org/travel-program