



Raleigh Swimming Association

www.swimrsa.org

2025-2026 Practice Group Placement Philosophy

Practice Group Placement Philosophy

Many factors influence group placement: some can be explained easily, while others may be influenced by coaching instinct or experience. Clearly communicating our philosophy for practice group placement enables a better understanding of the decisions that determine placement. RSA strives to place each individual in the group that best fits the athlete's skill set and age. Practice group placement is not an indication of a coach's belief about the athlete's future success. RSA prioritizes each athlete's individual needs and an athlete develops at a unique rate; therefore, **athletes in some lower level groups are sometimes faster than those in higher level groups. Overlap always exists.**

Upward group movement is not meant to be a reward, but rather a next step in development. Additionally, **fall group placement does not dictate an athlete's group placement for the entire year.** Coaches are continuously evaluating their athletes and will move them based on the best interests of the athletes. **The coaching staff has the final discretion regarding an athlete's practice group placement.**

Some of the important factors driving practice group placement are:

- Training Ability and Technique
 - Does the athlete practice at the same level as the athlete races?
 - Does the athlete make the technical changes requested by the coach?
- Leadership
 - Are the athlete's actions positively influencing others in the group?
- Commitment
 - How frequently does the athlete attend practice?
 - How frequently does the athlete participate in meets?
 - How does the athlete prioritize swimming as a sport?
- Maturity
 - How old is the athlete?
 - Is the athlete emotionally ready for the next level of training?
 - Is the athlete physically ready for the next level of training?
 - How well does the athlete deal with change?
- Meet Results
 - How do the athlete's results translate to training needs?
 - How do the athlete's results translate to meet qualifications?
- Group Size
 - What is the maximum number of athletes allowed in a practice group to ensure appropriate lane space and the ability to effectively coach the athletes under the caveat of ensuring internal movement is allowed for developing athletes?

RSA realizes that changes in practice groups can impact family routines. Practice group moves can affect schedules, carpools, team dues, coaches and expectations. Hopefully, the Practice Group Placement Philosophy provides information to aid families in anticipating practice group movement and the factors determining when a move will occur. The coaching staff makes every effort to provide considerable advance notice of any upcoming practice group placement changes.

Sonner Practice Groups: Annual Commitment

Nova Practice Group

The Nova group is capped at 30 athletes and includes athletes as young as seven and as old as nine years old. Typically, Nova athletes have *four practice opportunities each week with dryland training *twice a week for fifteen minutes. The coaching staff recommends that a Nova athlete attend at least two practices each week. Water time for the Nova group is one hour per practice.

The goals of the Nova group are to build technique, introduce athletes to competitive swimming, have fun, and enjoy the sport of swimming.

Dolphin Practice Group

The Dolphin group is capped at 32 athletes and includes athletes ages 8 to 10. Dolphin practice is offered *five times weekly with thirty minutes of dryland training *twice weekly. The coaching staff recommends that Dolphin athletes attend at least three practices a week. The Dolphin group has one hour or one hour and fifteen minutes of water time for each practice.

The goals of the Dolphin group are to continue refining technique, as well as to have fun and enjoy the sport of swimming.

Wahoo Practice Group

The Wahoo group is capped at 30 athletes. This group includes athletes who are 9 to 11 years old. Practice is offered a total of *six times each week. The coaching staff recommends that Wahoo athletes attend four to five practices each week. Water time for the Wahoo group is one hour and fifteen minutes or one hour and thirty minutes per practice. Dryland training for the Wahoo group is offered *two times each week for thirty minutes each session.

The goals of the Wahoo group are to provide tailored training to the more advanced age group athlete and to transition athletes from 10 and under to 11-12 competition.

Mackerel Practice Group

The Mackerel group includes athletes between the ages of 11 and 13, *in middle school*, and is capped at 26 athletes. Mackerel practice is offered *six times weekly with thirty minutes of dryland training *two times weekly. The coaching staff recommends that Mackerel athletes attend four to five practices a week. Water time for the Mackerel group is one hour and fifteen minutes or one hour and thirty minutes per practice.

Intensity is increased from the 10 and Under practice groups. The overall goal of the Mackerel group is to refine the skills necessary to move into the Cobia group or the Barracuda group.

Barracuda Practice Group

The Barracuda group offers *six practices weekly. The coaching staff recommends that athletes attend five practices during most weeks of the year. Water time for the Barracuda group is one hour and thirty minutes to one hour and forty-five minutes per practice with dryland training offered *three times a week for thirty minutes each. This group is capped at 32 athletes, typically ranging in age from 11 to 13 years old.

Barracuda has a large age overlap with several groups, but requires the highest skill level. In this group, athletes learn how to train while focusing on good stroke mechanics and developing their fifth stroke, underwaters. This is a high intensity workout that focuses on precise details of every stroke and race strategies.

The prerequisite for the Barracuda group is a USA Swimming 10 and Under BB time in at least one stroke. The goal of this group is to prepare athletes to compete in the 13-14 age group.

Cobia Practice Group

The Cobia group is offered *six practices weekly. The coaching staff recommends that athletes attend six practices during most weeks of the year. Water time for the Cobia group is one hour and thirty minutes to one hour and forty-five minutes per practice. Dryland training is offered *three times a week for thirty minutes each session with the expectation that athletes will attend at least two dryland sessions. This group is capped at 24 athletes, typically ranging in age from 13 to 15 years old.

In this group, athletes learn to train for higher level swimming, honing good stroke mechanics, developing a good aerobic base, and developing good race details.

The prerequisite for the Cobia group is USA Swimming 11-12 B times in at least two events and an 11-12 BB time in at least one event. The goal of this group is to prepare athletes to compete in the 13-14 age group and to move into the PreSenior or Senior Silver group.

PreSenior Practice Group

Athletes in the PreSenior group are 13-15 years old. Practices for the PreSenior group are offered *six times weekly. The coaching staff recommends that athletes attend five to six practices during most weeks of the year. Water time for this group is an hour and forty-five minutes. In addition, dryland training is offered *three times weekly: two sessions of thirty minutes and one session of forty-five minutes. The PreSenior group is capped at 32 athletes.

Intensity is increased, but technique remains an integral part of the training. Technique work is focused largely on precise parts of any the strokes. Additional yardage, specific race work and volume training are introduced. Training focuses on learning how to race every event and introduces longer races. Pace is emphasized.

The prerequisite for the PreSenior group is a USA Swimming 11-12 BB time in at least two events. The goals of the PreSenior group are to enable athletes to compete at the North Carolina Swimming Age Group Champs and to prepare for Senior level competition and training.

Senior Silver Practice Group

Senior Silver practices focus on building confidence in training and in racing and on the discipline of good practice habits, good stroke mechanics, and quality of practice. Athletes in this group are in high school. Practices are offered *ten times weekly with the expectation that seven of those practices will be attended. The group is capped at 30 athletes. Water time for the Senior Silver group includes morning and afternoon practice opportunities. Water time varies from ninety minutes to two hours per practice. Dryland training is offered *three times weekly: *two sessions of forty-five minutes and *one session of sixty minutes. The expectation is that athletes will attend at least two of the three dryland sessions.

Athletes will learn the championship mindset, including nutrition, prehab and rehab to build strength and mobility.

The prerequisite for the Senior Silver group is a North Carolina Swimming 13-14 Age Group cut or a USA Swimming 13-14 A and/or BB times in multiple events. The overall goal of the Senior Silver group is to prepare athletes for the longevity of the sport by facilitating the growth of athletes to their maximum potential, including Senior Champs, Senior Sectionals and higher level national meets. Like Senior Gold athletes, athletes in the Senior Silver Group are highly committed to swimming and are expected to act as role models for the entire swimming program at RSA.

Senior Gold Practice Group

Senior Gold is the most elite practice group at RSA. Athletes in this group are in high school by the start of the swim year. Practices are offered *ten times weekly with the expectation that seven or more of those practices will be attended. The group is capped at 30 athletes. Water time for the Senior Gold group includes morning and afternoon practice opportunities. Water time varies from ninety minutes (mornings) to two hours (typical afternoons) per practice. Dryland training is offered *three times weekly: *two sessions of forty-five minutes and *one session of sixty minutes.

Senior Gold practices hone in on race specific training and offer high intensity workouts. Athletes will develop high level training techniques such as heart rate zones and race pace efforts. Athletes are expected to take their time away from the pool more seriously (i.e., sleep, nutrition, and recovery). The focus of this group is on strength and power development.

The prerequisite for the Senior Gold group is a North Carolina Swimming Senior Champs cut in at least one event. The overall goal of the Senior Gold group is to facilitate the growth of athletes to their maximum potential and prepare them for the next steps of their lives post high school swimming. Athletes in the Senior Gold Group are highly committed to swimming and are expected to act as role models for the entire swimming program at RSA.

Sonner Practice Groups: Introductory Groups: Monthly Commitment

Tarpon Practice Group: Tarpon T, TH 2:00pm; Tarpon M, W 5:00pm; and Tarpon T, TH 6:00pm

Tarpon is a preschool entry-level group for swimming at RSA. This group is designed to teach 3 to 5 year-old athletes how to properly swim freestyle and backstroke, as well as to introduce other competitive strokes. Since technique is the primary focus, the group is capped at 8-16 athletes per practice group with a low coach to swimmer ratio of 1 coach per 4 athletes. Coaches provide in-water instruction to athletes. Practices are forty-five minutes long and are

offered *two times per week. Tarpon athletes may participate in designated intrasquad meets based on the Lead Coach's recommendation.

The goals of the Tarpon group are to foster a lifelong love of swimming, introduce young athletes to swim team, and prepare them for the Seahorse group. There are **three different practice groups** within the Tarpon group: Tarpon T, TH 2:00pm; Tarpon M, W 5:00pm; and Tarpon T, TH 6:00pm.

Seahorse Practice Group : Seahorse Early and Seahorse Late

Seahorse is a school-aged entry-level group for swimming at RSA. This hybrid group aims to teach 5 and 6 year-old athletes how to properly swim the four competitive strokes. Since technique is the primary focus, each subgroup is capped at 16 athletes with a low coach to staff ratio of 1 coach per 5 athletes. In-water instruction is paired with on-deck instruction for the athletes. Practices are forty-five minutes long on Tuesdays and Thursdays and an hour long on Saturdays; practices are offered *three times per week. Seahorse athletes may participate in select meets based on the Lead Coach's recommendation.

The goals of the Seahorse group are to foster a lifelong love of swimming, introduce young athletes to the swim team, acclimate to the larger pool decks, and prepare for the SeaStar practice group. Seahorse Early and Seahorse Late are **two different practice groups** within the Seahorse practice group.

SeaStar Practice Group: SeaStar Early and SeaStar Late

SeaStar is a school-aged entry-level group for swimming at RSA. This group aims to teach 6 and 7 year-old athletes how to properly swim the four competitive strokes. Since technique is the primary focus, each subgroup is capped at 14 athletes with a low coach to staff ratio of 1 coach per 7 athletes. Practices are forty-five minutes long on Tuesdays and Thursdays and an hour long on Saturdays; practices are offered *three times per week.

Participation in select meets is encouraged for the SeaStar group, but participation is optional. The goals of the SeaStar group are to foster a lifelong love of swimming, acclimate to the larger pool decks, introduce athletes to competitive swimming, and prepare athletes to move to the Nova or Jack 1 practice groups. SeaStar Early and SeaStar Late are **two different practice groups** within the SeaStar practice group.

Sonner Practice Groups: Monthly Commitment

Jack Practice Group: Jack 1 and Jack 2

Jack is the monthly commitment group for **elementary school athletes**, athletes primarily between the ages of 8 and 11 years old, who want to swim throughout the year, but may want to take time off during holidays or for other sports. Jack 1 and Jack 2 are **two different age subgroups** within the Jack practice group.

Jack 1 is for athletes in the second or third grade, primarily eight and nine years old. **Jack 2 is for athletes in the fourth or fifth grade**, primarily nine to eleven years old. Each subgroup is capped at 18 athletes. Practices for this group are offered *four times a week with an hour of water time. Fifteen minutes of dryland training is offered *two times weekly.

Note kindergarteners and first graders are not eligible for the Jack group.

Meet participation is encouraged for the Jack group. The goals of this group are to promote good swimming technique and prepare the athletes for the next level of swimming, increase the athlete's fitness level, and foster a life-long love of swimming.

Mako Practice Group

Mako is the monthly commitment group for **middle school athletes** and is capped at 17 athletes. Athletes are typically 11-14 years old. Practices for this group are offered *four times weekly with one hour and fifteen minutes of water time and thirty minutes of dryland training *two times weekly.

Meet participation is encouraged for athletes in the Mako group. The goals of this group are to promote good swimming technique and prepare the athletes for the next level of swimming, increase the athlete's fitness level, and foster a life-long love of swimming.

Blackfin Practice Group: Blackfin Afternoon and Blackfin Evening

Blackfin is the monthly commitment group for **high school athletes**. Blackfin Afternoon is capped at 12 athletes; Blackfin Evening is capped at 20 athletes. Practices are offered *five times per week with an hour of water time per practice and thirty minutes of dryland training *twice weekly.

Meet participation is encouraged for the Blackfin group, especially those planning to swim for their high school teams. This group is ideal for swimmers who are not interested in the commitment level of the Senior groups (Gold, Silver or Onyx) and want to improve their skills for the high school swimming season OR other athletes who want to cross-train during their chosen sport's offseason or maintain a high fitness level.

The overall goals of this group are to promote good swimming technique, prepare the athletes for high school swimming, and promote a life-long love of swimming. Blackfin Afternoon and Blackfin Evening are **two different practice groups** within the Blackfin practice group.

RSA at Sunset Practice Groups: Annual Commitment

Some of RSA's groups train primarily at our satellite location at Sunset Ridge North in Holly Springs. These groups provide training for all swimming levels from the new swimmer to the athlete who wants to swim on a swim team throughout the year (but may be new to swimming at a more structured level) to the year-round competitive athlete. Practice groups remain peer based within our Practice Group Placement Philosophy. Both annual and monthly commitment practice groups are offered.

Bowfin Practice Group

Bowfin is a practice group for eleven to thirteen year olds and is capped at 38 athletes. Practices for this group are offered *six times weekly, typically with an hour and thirty minutes to an hour and forty-five minutes of water time. In addition, thirty minutes of dryland training is offered *twice weekly. The coaching staff recommends that Bowfin athletes attend four to five practices a week. Intensity is increased from the Bluegill and Swordtail groups, but technique remains an integral part of the group. Technique work is focused largely on precise parts of any given stroke or skill. Athletes are introduced to heart rate training and more advanced interval training.

The prerequisite for the Bowfin group is a minimum of one USA Swimming 10 and Under BB time. The goals of this group are to promote good swimming technique, prepare the athletes to compete at North Carolina Swimming's Age Group Champs, increase the athlete's fitness level and foster a life-long love of swimming.

Redtail Practice Group

Redtail athletes are 13 to 15 years old. Practices for the Redtail group are offered *six times weekly. The coaching staff recommends that athletes attend four to five practices during most weeks of the year. Water time for this group is an hour and forty-five minutes. In addition, dryland training is offered *three times weekly: two sessions of thirty minutes and one session of forty-five minutes. The group is capped at 32 athletes.

In the Redtail group, intensity is increased, but technique remains an integral part of the training. Technique work is focused largely on precise parts of any the strokes. Additional yardage, specific race work and volume training are introduced. Training focuses on learning how to race every event and introduces longer races. Pace is emphasized.

The prerequisite for the Redtail group is at least one USA Swimming 11-12 BB time. The goals of the Redtail group are to enable athletes to compete at North Carolina Swimming's Age Group Champs as a 13-14 and to prepare for Senior level competition and training.

Senior Onyx Practice Group

The Senior Onyx group offers the highest intensity training at the Sunset site.

Athletes in this group are in high school. Practices are offered *nine times weekly with the expectation that six of those practices will be attended. The group is capped at 32 athletes. Water time for the Senior Onyx group includes morning and afternoon practice opportunities. Water time varies from ninety minutes to two hours per practice. Dryland training is offered *two times weekly for sixty minutes per session.

The prerequisite for the Senior Onyx group is a minimum of one USA Swimming 13-14 A time or a USA Swimming 13-14 BB time in at least two strokes. The overall goals of the Senior Onyx group are to facilitate the growth of swimmers to their maximum potential, to enable the athletes to qualify for North Carolina Swimming Senior Champs, and to prepare for Senior level swimming. Like Senior Gold and Senior Silver athletes, athletes in the Senior Onyx group are highly committed to swimming and are expected to act as role models for the entire swimming program at RSA.

RSA at Sunset Practice Groups: Introductory Groups: Monthly Commitment

Minnow Practice Group: Minnow Early and Minnow Late

Minnow is a school-aged entry-level group for swimming at RSA. This group is designed to teach athletes who are six to eight years old how to properly swim the four competitive strokes. Since technique is the primary focus, RSA maintains a coach to athlete ratio of 1 to 16 and caps each subgroup at 16. Practices are one hour long and are offered *three times per week.

The goals of Minnow are to foster a lifelong love of swimming, acclimate to the larger pool decks, introduce athletes to competitive swimming, and prepare athletes to move to the next level of swimming in the Sunfish practice group. Minnow Early and Minnow Late are **two different practice groups** within the Minnow practice group.

RSA at Sunset Practice Groups: Monthly Commitment

Sunfish Practice Group

Sunfish is a monthly commitment practice group for **elementary school athletes**, eight to ten years old, who are new or in their first few years of year-round swimming. The group is capped at 32 athletes. *Four practices are offered weekly with an hour to an hour and fifteen minutes of water time, as well as fifteen minutes of dryland training *twice weekly. The coaching staff recommends that a Sunfish athlete attend three to four practices each week.

The goals of this group are to transition athletes from 8 and Under competition to 9-10 competition while focusing on improving technique, as well as to have fun and enjoy the sport of swimming.

Bluegill Practice Group

Bluegill is a monthly commitment practice group for **elementary school athletes**, primarily nine to eleven years old. The group is capped at 32 athletes. *Five practices are offered weekly; practice length is one hour and fifteen minutes to one hour and thirty minutes per practice. In addition, thirty minutes of dryland training is offered *twice weekly. The coaching staff recommends that Bluegill athletes attend at least three practices a week. Technique work and yardage are increased as athletes prepare for the next level.

Meet participation is encouraged for the Bluegill group. The overall goals of the group are to transition athletes from 10 and under to 11-12 competition, as well as to have fun and enjoy the sport of swimming.

Swordtail Practice Group

Swordtail is a monthly commitment practice group for **middle school athletes** and is capped at 32 athletes. Practices for this group are offered *five times weekly, typically with an hour and fifteen to an hour and thirty minutes of water time. In addition, thirty minutes of dryland training is offered *twice weekly. The coaching staff recommends that Swordtail athletes attend at least three practices a week.

Intensity is increased from the Bluegill group, but technique remains an integral part of training. Technique work is focused largely on precise parts of any given stroke or skill. Athletes are introduced to anaerobic training and sprinting.

Meet participation is strongly encouraged. The goals of this group are to promote good swimming technique, prepare the athletes for the next level of swimming in Bowfin or Redtail, prepare for high school competition, increase the athlete's fitness level, and foster a life-long love of swimming.

Bass Practice Group

Bass is the monthly commitment group for **high school athletes** and is capped at 20 athletes per group. Practices are offered *five times per week with an hour of water time for each practice. An hour of dryland training is offered *weekly.

Meet participation is encouraged for the Bass group, especially those planning to swim for their high school teams. This group is ideal for swimmers who are not interested in the commitment level of the Senior groups (Gold, Silver or Onyx) and want to improve their skills for the high school swimming season OR other athletes who want to cross-train during their chosen sport's offseason or maintain a high fitness level. The overall goals of this group are to promote good swimming technique, prepare the athletes for high school swimming, and promote a life-long love of swimming.

***Note: No practices are offered on meet weekends for groups eligible to attend the meet. Practice length (water time and/or dryland exercise) may be altered at the discretion of the coaching staff during taper periods, meet weekends and other season transitions.**