

OHSAA's new competitive balance proposal

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In early May, members of the Ohio High School Athletic Association (OHSAA) will be asked to vote on the following new bylaw:

"Each school shall be placed into tournament divisions based on its sport-by-sport athletic count. The formula for determining athletic counts and to which sports the athletic counts shall be applied will be determined by the Board of Directors on a biennial basis. The formula for athletic counts and the sports to which they are applied are listed in OHSAA's General Sports Regulations – Tournaments."

This article provides a summary of the proposed new bylaw, its anticipated changes and its potential impact.

What changes does the proposed new bylaw make?

Currently, schools are placed into their tournament divisions based solely on the enrollment figures they submit to the Ohio Department of Education (ODE). Under the proposed new bylaw, school enrollment will continue to serve as the basis for placing schools into their respective tournament divisions. However, three additional factors will be considered that may add or deduct from these totals: "the boundary factor," "the socioeconomic factor" and the "tradition factor." These are explained in greater detail later in this article.

What prompted the proposed new bylaw?

In early 2010, OHSAA received a request from a group of Wayne County superintendents who asked OHSAA to do something to level the competitive playing field between private and public schools in Ohio. The group focused on the fact that over

the past 10 years, nonpublic schools have won 43% of the state championships in selected team sports, although they made up only 17% of the total OHSAA membership.

In response to the request, OHSAA formed a committee to identify the factors that accounted for the inequity and to determine what, if anything, OHSAA could do to balance these factors for its member schools. The committee identified the three aforementioned factors that they felt served as key factors for the competitive balance of OHSAA tournaments and set forth a proposal that required consideration of them in determining the school's tournament placement.

What is the "boundary factor?"

The "boundary factor" takes into account the area from which the school pulls its students. The argument supporting this factor is that schools that can "recruit" from a larger area have an advantage that could translate to on-field success.

The current proposal identifies five different boundary factors, with each having a different impact. Although they are subject to modification by the OHSAA Board of Directors, here is the proposal:

- Nonpublic schools with no boundaries: 10% times enrollment will be added.
- Nonpublic schools with limited boundaries: 8% times enrollment will be added.
- Public schools with statewide open enrollment: 6% times enrollment will be added.
- Public schools with adjacent district

open enrollment: 4% times enrollment will be added.

- Public schools with no open enrollment: no impact.



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The percentage will not be applied for those public schools whose net number of open enrollment students is negative. In other words, if the school has more open enrollment students leaving the school than coming in, the percentage will not be applied.

It's also important to note that the school boundary factor is gender specific. The percentage would be based on the

school's boys' enrollment for boys' sports and on a school's girls' enrollment for girls' sports.

OHSAA provides as an example a school that enrolls 388 boys and 330 girls. The school has statewide open enrollment and a positive net gain of open enrollment students. In this case, the "boundary factor" would add 23 to the boy athletic count (6% times 388) and 20 to the girl athletic count (6% times 330).

What is the "socioeconomic factor?"

The "socioeconomic factor" was included based on the argument that student athletes are exposed to varying degrees of opportunities based on the socioeconomic makeup of the district. An increased exposure to these opportunities arguably leads to an increased potential for success in interscholastic athletics.

As the measure for the socioeconomic factor, the committee chose the number of national free lunch participants in a high school or district that is reported to ODE. This

number multiplied by 10% is the number that is to be subtracted from enrollment.

As an example, suppose a school had 85 total students who are on the free lunch program. Ten percent of 85 is 8.5. The commission would round this number up to 9, which is the number that would be subtracted from the athletic counts.

What is the “tradition factor?”

The committee also determined that tradition is a factor that impacts athletic success, with the argument being that student athletes want to go to a program that has a tradition of success.

As the measure for the tradition factor, the committee elected to review the school’s most recent four-year tradition of advancement to a regional and/or state tournament. Although they are subject to modification by the OHSA Board of Directors, the current percentage proposed by the committee on a sport-by-sport basis is:

- Appearances in a regional final: 6% times enrollment will be added.
- Appearances in state tournament: 8% times enrollment will be added.
- Appearances in state finals: 10% times enrollment will be added.

While the highest percentage would be used for each individual year, the total percentage for all four years would be added together to arrive at the tradition factor.

As an example, the OHSA proposal provides that a school’s boys’ basketball team (with a boys’ school enrollment of 388) reached the regional finals one year and the state tournament two other years during the past four-year cycle. This equates to a total enrollment addition of 85 (6% of 388, plus 8% of 388, plus 8% of 388). The girls’ basketball team (with a girls’ school enrollment of 330) that reached the regional finals one year and did not advance to the state tournament during the past four-year cycle would have a total enrollment addition of 20 (6% of 330).

So what is the final formula?

The final formula is: beginning enrollment + boundary factor –

socioeconomic factor + tradition factor.

In our example, the boys’ basketball athletic count would be 487 (388 + 23 – 9 + 85) and the girls’ basketball athletic count would be 361 (330 + 20 – 9 + 20). This would place the two teams in different divisions.

If approved, when would the formula become effective?

The OHSA Board of Directors approved the basic concept of the committee’s proposal, with implementation scheduled no later than the 2013-14 school year (but possibly as early as the 2012-13 school year).

What sports will be affected?

The board’s current plan is that only team sports will initially be affected by the proposal. Those sports are football, soccer and volleyball in the fall; basketball in the winter; and baseball and softball in the spring. Consideration will be given to add other sports in the future.

Only time will tell whether the

proposed new bylaw will become a reality for OHSA’s members. Until then, if you have questions about OHSA’s proposal, please contact OHSA at (614) 267-2502 or OSBA’s legal services division. OSBA is sponsoring its annual Sports Law Workshop on June 24, 2011, in Columbus. We will provide an update on the proposed new bylaw at the workshop.

To register, contact OSBA’s **Laurie Miller** at (614) 540-4000, (800) 589-OSBA or lmiller@ohioschoolboards.org. To register online, go to www.ohioschoolboards.org and click on the “View all events” link on the “OSBA Events” bar.

We hope to see you there! □

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