

With smaller crowds, NJSIAA looking to hike high schools' fees

[Dino Flammia](#) March 27, 2019



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One of the biggest statewide championship events run by the New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association, a little more than 27,500 people attended the three-day wrestling individual finals in Atlantic City late February into early March.

Last year, attendance topped 30,000. The year prior, more than 31,400

visitors filled the stands.

Ticket sales for championship events like these, which the NJSIAA tracks, have dwindled over time in a number of sports, figures show. From 2015 to 2017, gate receipts for football showed a drop-off of more than \$100,000. Attendance for boys basketball championships fell from 10,259 in '16-'17 to 7,381 in '17-'18.

"You have a lot of families that are just busier," said Colleen Maguire, director of finance administration for the NJSIAA. "Accessibility with streaming now probably factors in."

Maguire said the trend obviously doesn't bode well for the participating student athletes who appreciate support from the crowd, but it's also taking a chunk out of the association's bottom line.

NJSIAA handles ticket sales for postseason high school events. A little over 20 percent of its budget is driven by these sales, Maguire said.

Dwindling attendance during the regular season has also been cited by local athletic directors. Maguire noted. But attendance numbers aren't officially tracked; some schools don't charge for tickets to see any sport.

To make up for rising costs and shrinking revenues, NJSIAA is looking into increasing how much they charge in membership fees and tournament participation. Maguire said the association has been in talks with the education commissioner to adjust the fees, which have not changed since 2010.

Schools currently pay an annual membership of \$2,150 to NJSIAA.

Entering their football team into the postseason, for example, costs \$80. Entering a running into a track-and-field meet runs schools \$14. Those participation costs could jump to, say, \$90 and \$16, Maguire said.

Maguire said the proposed changes would ideally occur in the 2020-2021 academic year.

Increasing ticket prices has not been part of recent discussions, she added.

"It's very difficult to budget for your ticket sales revenue," she said, noting foul weather could kill an event's sales in an instant

Daniel DiMino, director of athletics in Old Bridge, said he'd understand and "be behind" an uptick in fees from the NJSIAA.

"I don't think the NJSIAA is trying to sneak one past any of the athletic directors," DiMino said.

Old Bridge high school athletics, DiMino said, has seen promising, and even growing, attendance at its games. For the major sports, the school attempts to devote each home game to a theme or cause.

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