

NCHSAA says it will govern high school sports 'for now,' senator believes association will last for years

By Nick Stevens & Laura Leslie 1:01:23

Gov. Roy Cooper (D) allowed [Senate Bill 452](#) to [become state law without his signature](#) this week, and that brings a new reality for high school sports in the state — even if the reality is unclear.

[During a news conference on Tuesday morning](#), N.C. High School Athletic Association Commissioner Que Tucker said the restrictions and new requirements the law places on the association will make things difficult.

"This legislation handcuffs the NCHSAA. It handcuffs the means through which the association can raise funds. It prevents the NCHSAA from giving grants and scholarships back to students and schools, unless they are donor directed," Tucker said. "The NCHSAA has a difficult task ahead, but for now, we are committed to continuing to operate under the standards of excellence as we have since its inception in 1913."



Bill strips NCHSAA of rule-making authority

Ultimately, the decision about whether or not the NCHSAA continues to be the administering organization for high school sports in North Carolina will lie with the state superintendent of public instruction, Catherine Truitt. The new state law gives the superintendent the authority to enter into agreements with organizations to administer high school sports — or not.

According to the N.C. Department of Public Instruction, Truitt and her staff are still reviewing the law.

"This legislation does not take effect until July 2024, so the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction will address any needs with the General Assembly as needed in the coming months," the department said in a statement.

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"Most people go to games and they don't think about what happens on the backside," Tucker said. "You have to have rules and regulations. Somebody has to oversee those rules and regulations, and for all these

many years that's been the NCHSAA ... if we go away, or if we're not that organization, there still has to be someone who is determining eligibility. There has to be someone who is putting in place the administrative rules."

Tucker said the NCHSAA believes it will be able to continue governing high school sports for the remainder of the school year as it has the last 15 months under the current agreement with the state board of education. What happens after that is uncertain though.

After legislation passed in 2021, the NCHSAA was required to enter into a memorandum of understanding with the state board of education before the 2022-2023 school year. That agreement was signed in March 2022, and was supposed to be valid for four years.

"That memorandum is still in place, but everywhere in the memorandum the words 'state board of education' appear, it's to be replaced with 'the superintendent of public instruction.' So we're still under that current memorandum, we believe," Tucker said. "But with all the other things that are now included in the bill, it will mean we must renegotiate that memorandum, and so there is that possibility that, if we don't sign that memorandum of understanding, then we wouldn't be that administering organization for 2024-2025."

- **WATCH: [NCHSAA press conference discusses new state law overhauling role of association](#)**

Senator says they want NCHSAA to continue operating for "many, many years"

Sen. Todd Johnson (R-Union) has been one of the leaders in the

investigation into the NCHSAA the last few years, and he was one of the sponsors of the initial legislation to change how high school sports operate in the state.

Johnson told WRAL News on Tuesday that it was not his goal to replace the NCHSAA, but to make the association a better partner of the state government and the schools.

"90% of what they do, they do it really, really well. But the issues that we're having are over in that 10% portion of it, so that's what we're really trying to address," Johnson said. "Changes have been made as a result of us delving into this issue — and positive changes. I'm not going to say the (NCHSAA) or the state board of education has done nothing that we've asked, I think they've attempted to while trying to preserve the way they've always done business."



Sen. Todd Johnson explains goal of new legislation, wants NCHSAA to stay in place

Johnson said some of the members of the legislature have been in contact with at least one other organization that could serve as an administering organization in the NCHSAA stopped governing high

school sports in North Carolina, but emphasized that was not the goal of the new legislation.

"Let me be clear, we want the high school association to do this for a long time, we want them to be successful. So there is no goal to try to move them out and move somebody in, but we also wanted to have that safety net just in case," Johnson said. "But we do have fall back plans if that's the case. I don't think it's going to come to that, that's not the intent of the legislation, that's not the legislative goal behind this. We want the high school association to be a true partner with the state for many, many years to come. I think we can achieve that."

Johnson said he believes the NCHSAA will continue running high school athletics in North Carolina, and he thinks ultimately the legislation that has passed will make the association better.

"We just made, maybe what some would see as major changes, so I know there's emotions that are flying, a lot of animosity around this, but at the same time, once things settle down, it's going to be good for everyone involved," he said.

Tucker says state championship experience could change

Over the years, the NCHSAA has worked to improve the state championship experience for teams who qualify. This includes the venues in which state championship games are played.

Many state championship contests are held at college and professional facilities. Football state championships will be held at Kenan Memorial Stadium in Chapel Hill and Carter-Finley Stadium in Raleigh this fall,

soccer state championships will be held at MacPherson Stadium near Greensboro, volleyball championships will be at Reynolds Coliseum, girls golf championships will be played at some of the state's best courses like Pinehurst No. 6, and the cheerleading invitational will be at the Raleigh Convention Center.

The NCHSAA has also informed schools that a new final four format will be held over a six-day period in March, likely at Lawrence Joel Veterans Memorial Coliseum in Winston-Salem.

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There have even been discussions about playing future football state championships at Bank of America Stadium in Charlotte.

However, Tucker says all of this is now up in the air, and state championship may have to return to high school facilities in the future because the new state law prevents the association from making revenue from corporate sponsors, which makes up about one-third of the association's operational budget.

"You have to pay to be able to play at N.C. State, at Wake Forest, at Duke, to wrestle in the Greensboro Coliseum. Those don't just come to us free of charge," Tucker said. "It might mean now that we do have to go back and have some of those championships in our member schools."

Tucker said it has been suggested that the NCHSAA just take money from its endowment fund to cover the expenses, but she says that is not possible.

"It doesn't work that way. People don't understand the endowment," she said. "We can't use it to operate. We never have, and we never will be able to."

Sen. Johnson said allowing the NCHSAA to have corporate sponsors for the state playoffs and giving the NCHSAA 33% of the ticket revenue from state playoff games should help offset those costs.

"In addition, the state of North Carolina owns quite a number of nice facilities through our university system to play at — Kenan Stadium, or Carter-Finley, or Dean Smith Center, or RBC Center — a number of these venues. I have a feeling, as we work through this process, those arrangements can be made," Johnson said. "If that's a problem, we can work through that."

Johnson acknowledged that those facilities do charge rent, and that there are other expenses such as staffing and cleanup that are associated with those games.

"I would have no problem advocating to make sure that these universities were open to and very realistic in trying to help these folks, keeping in mind we will have full access to audits, we'll see the figures ... we'll know if there's actually a financial problem there," Johnson said, describing the concern as "a little bit of the sky is falling."

The situation could become more complicated as the NCHSAA expands to at least even classifications, and possibly more, in the 2025-2026 school year. That will result in more state championship games, which means more facilities will be needed.