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HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS

UHSAA Executive Committee proposes notable changes to eligibility rules for transfer students and foreign-exchange students

A vote on the proposal by the Board of Trustees will take place on May 1

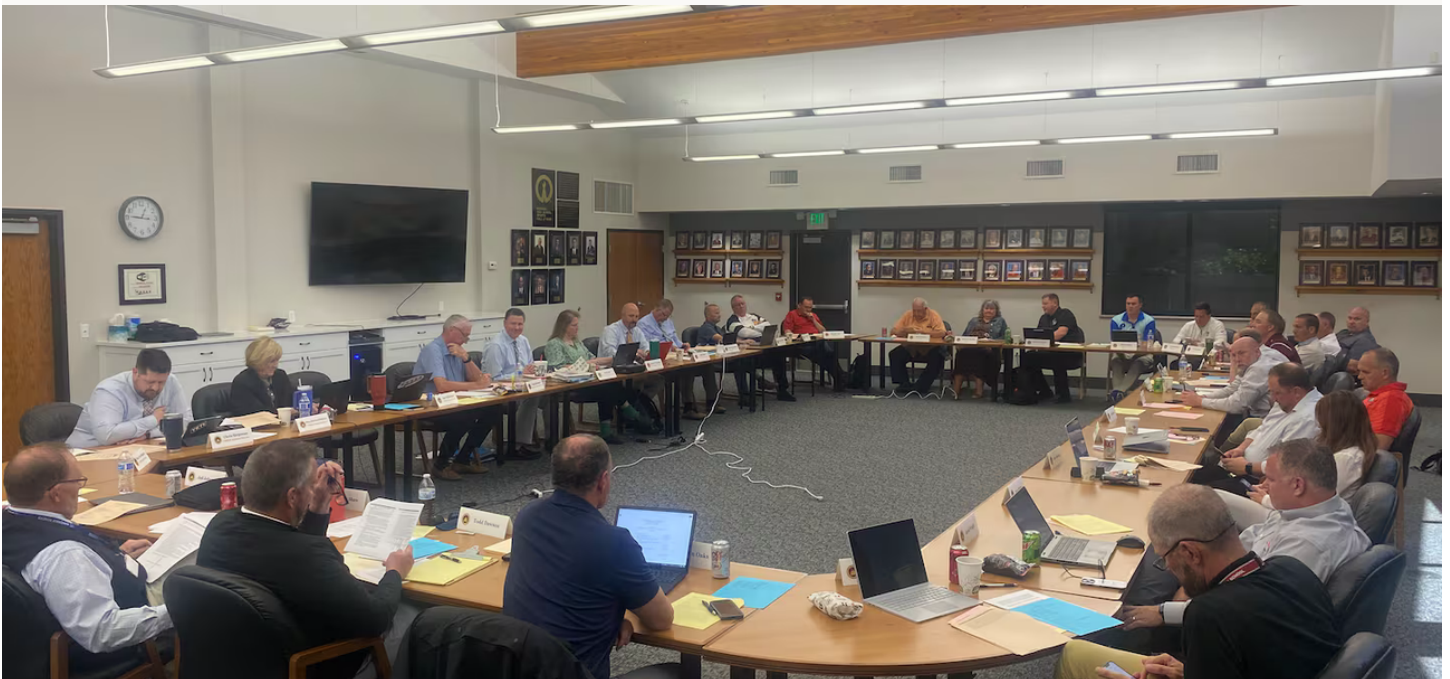
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The UHSAA Board of Trustees meet on Wednesday, April 24, 2024, to discuss new proposed transfer rules. | James Edward



By James Edward

The UHSAA Executive Committee met Wednesday and proposed significant rule changes that will have a big impact on how the UHSAA handles transfers for athletic reasons and foreign-exchange students.

The proposal is meant to close many of the loopholes that have contributed to increasing athletic transfers through the years. It's also meant to reduce the number of transfer hearings the executive committee hears on a monthly basis. Most transfers will now be a documented administrative exchange between schools.

The executive committee approved the proposal, which will be discussed further and voted on by the Board of Trustees on May 1. If approved, a ballot will be sent to the 158 member schools, with a two-thirds majority needed to approve the changes to begin for the 2024-25 school year.

The UHSAA has been criticized for years for its “loose” transfer rules, which have allowed players to seemingly transfer freely. The basis for the proposal listed below is meant to “fix” those problems.

“The Transfer Rule is an integral part of the Association’s ability to create, administer and maintain the valuable and unique form of competition it offers. This unique form of competition is a carefully constructed system that promotes

competitive balance and serves the mission and purpose of education-based sports and activities. Association sports and activities are intended to foster a sense of community as well as to teach teamwork and discipline.

“Other sporting organizations exist which promote free player movement and are primarily designed to promote athletic development of the individual and provide a showcase for the athletic talents of those individuals. These organizations do not share the primary purposes of the Association and therefore cannot provide the unique type of competition created and maintained by the Association. Efforts randomly to impose adjustments or favoritism on these rules damage the Association and, in turn, damage all the students who either participate in an Association sport/activity or who support them, from cheerleaders to band members to drill teams to parents. The Association is committed to maintaining its unique form of competition.”

If the proposal is finalized, students can transfer freely for athletic reasons from one school to another, but they must sit out the first 50% of that season's varsity or sub-varsity competitions, or 30 days, whichever is greater. This is assuming they've competed in a game in that sport in the immediate preceding 12 months. If they haven't, they are varsity-eligible immediately.

For students who seek a second transfer, they will be ineligible for one year from the date of enrollment at their third school.

Students can still transfer without the 50% penalty if they are granted a transfer waiver, but the process of obtaining those waivers will be much more stringent, and mostly handled by the schools involved and not Executive Committee meetings.

Under the proposal, no more guardianship changes will be allowed if a student still has a living parent, unless there has been determination of abandonment,

or the student is a dependent juvenile as determined by the Utah Code.

Secondly, family moves can only be approved if it involves a full family move and meets Bona Fide Change of Residence guidelines in the proposal. Applications for the family move waiver will only be approved by the UHSAA if it receives certification in writing from both schools. There are five bullet points in the proposal that went into great detail about what qualifies as a bona fide move.

Changes to the anti-bullying waiver will now require documentation from the sending school's administration for the waiver transfer to be approved. There will no longer be executive committee hearings on the matter. Several principals on the executive committee discussed how oftentimes when a player requests a bullying transfer, they've never heard about the bullying until accusations came out in the UHSAA hearing.

Other exceptions to transfer rules still include death, divorce and school closure.

Another major proposal change that was approved and sent to the Board of Trustees involved visa-exchange students, something that could have a major impact on Layton Christian, Juan Diego and Judge Memorial.

The proposal states, "The UHSAA recognizes the concerns of its member schools related to displacement of Utah students by students from foreign countries as well as recruiting of foreign players to be placed with Utah high schools. These rules are intended to preserve interscholastic competitive opportunities for Utah students and promote the unique competition fostered by the UHSAA."

To do that, the executive committee proposed that student-athletes who are enrolled at a school on an F-1 visa can no longer play at the varsity level, unless

that team no longer wants to be eligible for state tournaments. Wasatch Academy boys basketball has fallen under that criteria for nearly a decade.

Layton Christian, Juan Diego and Judge Memorial boys basketball teams all had players with F-1 visas on their varsity teams this past school year, which would've forced them to play an independent schedule and not participate in the state tournament. Layton Christian won the 4A state championship.

An F-1 visa allows foreign-exchange students to come to the United States and choose the school they enroll at and their host family. Some believe the program opens the door for schools to possibly "recruit" foreign players, and UHSAA attorney Mark VanWagoner is investigating some of those accusations.

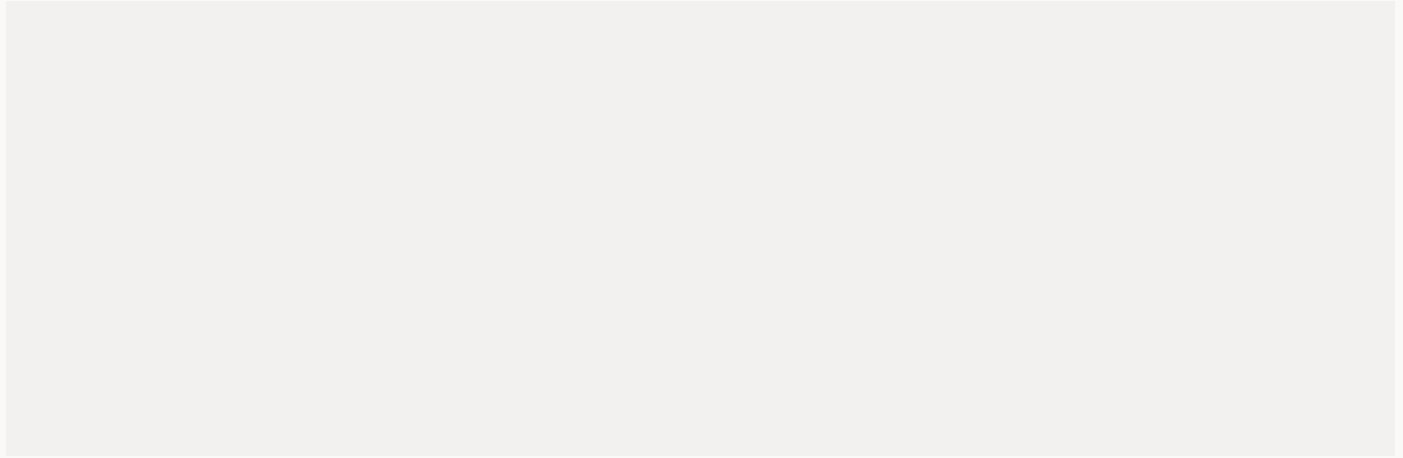
If the proposal is ultimately approved by the Board of Trustees and approved by two-thirds of the schools, visa-exchange students with F-1 visas will no longer be eligible to play varsity sports in Utah during any of their four years of eligibility. They can still play sub-varsity.

The principals for Juan Diego, Judge Memorial and Layton Christian all were given five minutes to speak to the executive committee about why they disagreed with the proposal. One of the missions of these three schools is to cultivate an international student body, something the F-1 visa change will have an impact on as certain students won't want to enroll in their schools to just play sub-varsity sports.

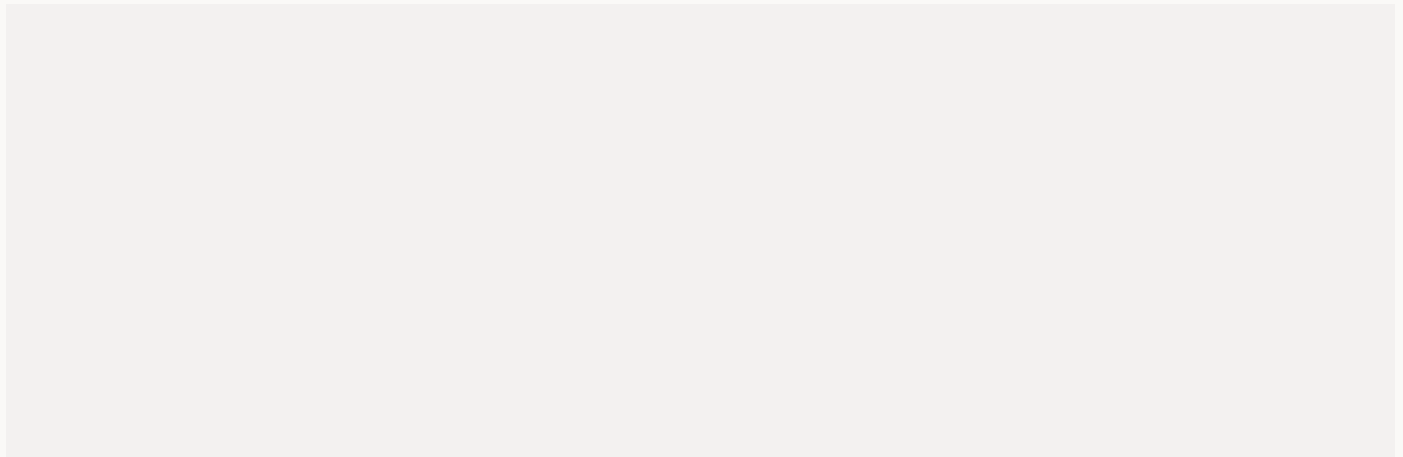
The committee approved it anyway.

Students who come to the United States on J-1 visas will continue to be eligible to play varsity sports. Those students come to the U.S. through an agency and they don't get to pick which school or state they're sent to. Those visas are only good for one school year (August-June).

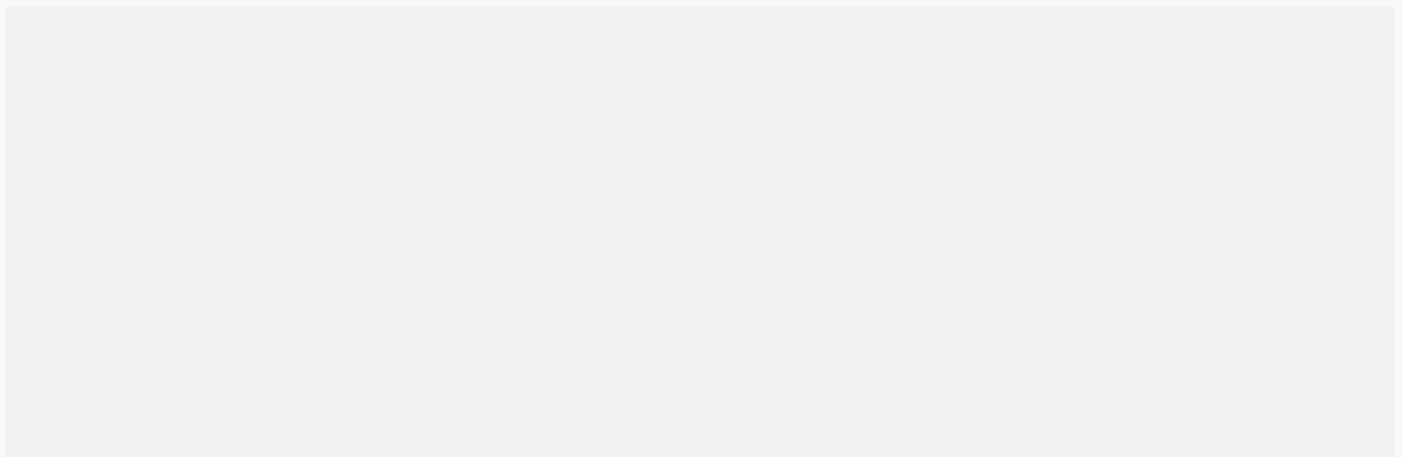
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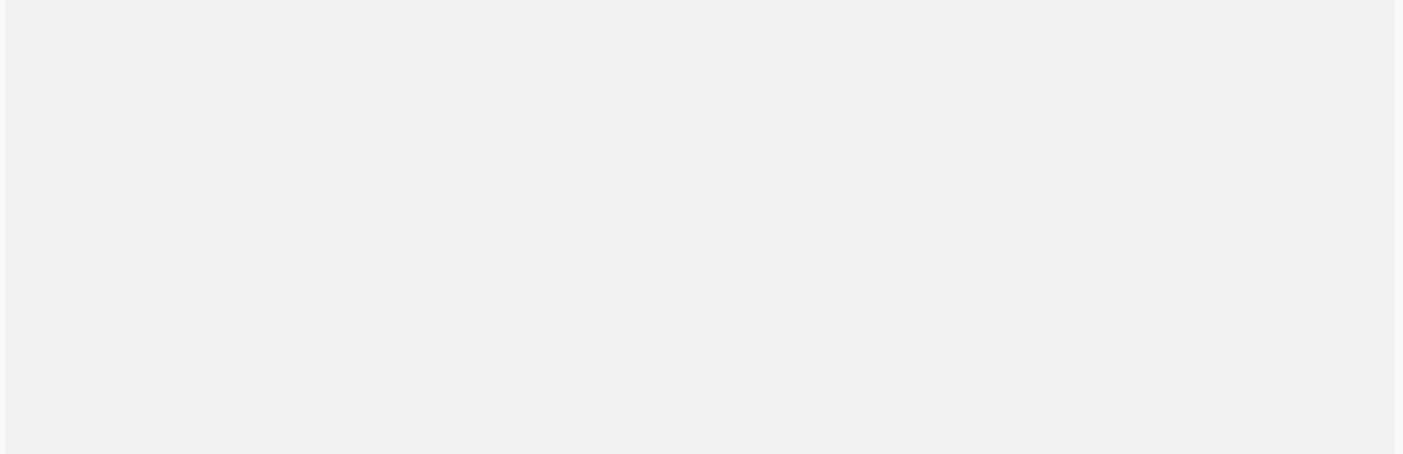
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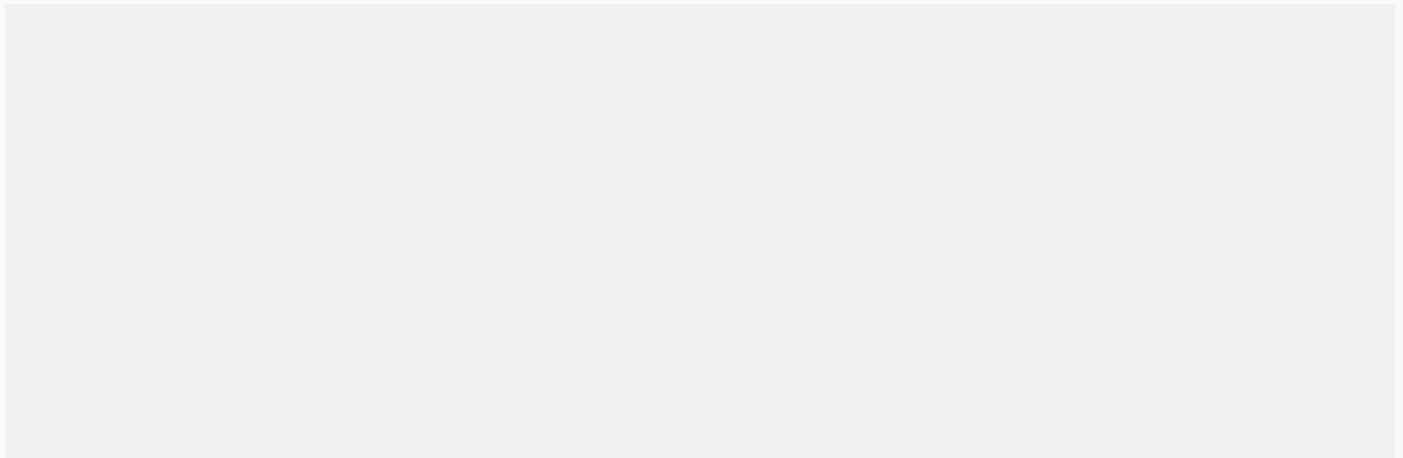
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