

# Board of Education rejects proposal to factor direct certified numbers into enrollment

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The classification of high school athletic programs across West Virginia has been a hot topic since expansion to a four-class system in sports beyond boys and girls basketball surfaced in advance of the 2024-25 school year.

On Wednesday, the West Virginia Board of Education rejected a [classification proposal that had been approved by the West Virginia Secondary Schools Activities Commission Board of Control last year](#).

That proposal, put in place by Spring Valley principal John Hayes and heavily influenced by Timberwolves' athletic director Tim George, called for the removal of location score factoring into enrollment and sought to alter the socioeconomic status factor to include direct certified numbers from the state department of education.

The proposal was for modified enrollment that would be used to determine classifications statewide consisting of a school's enrollment minus students receiving direct certification services multiplied by 0.5. (An example for a school with an enrollment of 1,000 of which 300 students receive direct certification would be  $300 \times 0.5$  equaling 150, which would be subtracted from 1,000 for a modified enrollment of 850.)

Debra Sullivan

"There are some things that are very problematic and need to be addressed," said BOE member Debra Sullivan, a former principal at Charleston Catholic High School. "That has to do with how you will count students. I'm sure I'm not the only one that feels this way. I find it alarming, demeaning in ways. I hope that's not something that's going to be approved."

Shortly after, Michele Blatt, State Superintendent of Schools, made her stance known.

"I would like to recommend to the board that we reject putting this out on comment and return it back to the SSAC for further deliberation on this policy," Blatt said.

The WVSSAC was represented Dr. Cindy Daniel, Assistant Executive Director of West Virginia's governing body for high school athletics. WVSSAC Executive Director David Price was not present due to sickness.

Daniel noted the WVSSAC has a meeting scheduled for late March, at which time separate classification proposals based solely on enrollment will be heard.

"A lot of folks have a misconception or misunderstanding when they

hear WVSSAC," Daniel said. "We are an organization made up of our member schools — both high schools and middle schools. There are four administrators in the office in Parkersburg and our charge is to interpret and enforce the rules that are in fact voted on by the membership. The proposals that are before you for consideration came from a principal. We have a meeting annually and they're discussed and voted upon and then they come to you. The proposals that are before you are not necessarily something we endorse or we approve of. It's simply, we're charged with going through the process, which we did."

Sullivan praised the WVSSAC for a proposal that passed in October 2024 to reclassify schools every two years as opposed to four starting at the end of the second school month in 2025 and every odd-numbered year thereafter.

"With all that's going on in our schools, as you look at the numbers, the decreases to enrollments, the ups and downs and mostly the downs, I think that's such a wise thing," Sullivan said. "I applaud your members for thinking about that."

Sullivan added that she's hopeful the WVSSAC can work to create more equitable balance among classifications.

As a result of the reclassification of 23 programs days before the start of 2024 regular season competition, there were 16 schools competing in Class AAAA, 31 in Class AAA, 30 in Class AA and 35 in Class A throughout the most recent high school football season. Every team competing in Class AAAA qualified for the postseason.

"I care deeply about our extracurriculars, but something that appears to be in place is a bias to our larger schools," Sullivan said. "You have 16

quadruples, and they have more than twice a shot at championships than these schools in the other classes.”

Sullivan expressed optimism over what could come from the WVSSAC’s meeting next month.

“I feel very strongly that our sports make a difference in children’s lives,” she said. “They want to go to school because they want to play sports. They behave better. They work harder. It’s so critical, so that we give everybody the best opportunity we can. I’m glad to hear you’re going to be meeting again. I’m delighted.”