

Alabama bill would not count immigrant students for AHSAA classification purposes

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The Alabama House of Representatives has passed a bill that would not count students who are English language learners toward enrollment for the purpose of classification by the Alabama High School Athletic Association.

The AHSAA opposes the bill.

Rep. Brock Colvin, R-Albertville, said schools with a high proportion of

immigrant students can be at a disadvantage because those students generally have a lower level of participation in sports.

That means the enrollment number at those schools overstates the actual pool of athletes, Colvin said.

The AHSAA ranks schools in Class 1A through Class 7A for sports competitions, with Class 7A schools having the largest enrollments.

Read more: [Which Alabama schools have more English language learners? See the numbers](#)

Colvin said Albertville High School, for example, has a disproportionately large number of students who are children of immigrants because of the poultry plants in the area.

Colvin said the influx of immigrant students moved Albertville up from Class 5A to Class 7A. He said the school is not competitive in football at the 7A level.

"Albertville hasn't won a football game in three seasons," Colvin said.

Colvin said Crossville High School, a one-time powerhouse, dropped its football program for the same reason.

Colvin's bill, HB298, says English language learners do not count toward enrollment for AHSAA classification purposes except for those students who play a sport.

Colvin stressed that his bill does not prohibit the English language learners from participating in sports.

Heath Harmon, executive director of the AHSAA, issued a statement

explaining the organizations opposition to the bill.

"While disappointed with the House of Representatives vote today passing HB298, which states Athletic Associations must adjust a public high school's athletic classification by not counting English language learners, I believe in the legislative process established by our member schools allowing our schools to govern themselves," Harmon said.

"It is important to remember the Alabama High School Athletic Association is a private association governed by member schools and does not accept public funds in any capacity."

Harmon said AHSAA member schools voted on a similar rule proposal, and that only 27% supported it.

Harmon also noted that the bill would add a member of the House and a member of the Senate to the AHSAA's board.

"In closing, a classification directive that does not go through our democratic legislative process and classification committee lacks the support and thorough vetting that is necessary for successful implementation," Harmon said.

"As an Association, we are committed to supporting all member schools in all sports in addition to promoting participation. This bill is in direct opposition to those commitments."

Colvin later issued a statement about the bill and about the AHSAA's position.

"I appreciate my colleagues for supporting HB298 and taking an important step to restore fairness and safety to high school athletics,"

Colvin said. "For over three years, legislators have relayed their concerns regarding schools being forced to move up in classification due to a rise in English Language Learners enrollment to the Alabama High School Athletic Association.

"Time and time again, our concerns of fairness, safety, and the discouragement of student athletes have fallen on deaf ears. Members of the Legislature would have preferred this issue be a priority of the association and handled through its governing body, so to say this legislation is the product of necessity is an understatement."

The House passed Colvin's bill by a vote of 72-1. It moves to the Senate.

This story was updated at 10:24 p.m. to add a statement from Rep. Colvin.

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