

# Competitive Balance of Schools Remains Issue in Several States

BY Cody Porter ON March 12, 2019 | 2019, HST, MARCH

The pursuit of competitive balance among schools in state associations that comprise the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) membership continues across the country.

In the past 30 years, states have adopted plans such as multipliers and success factors – all with the goal of addressing the perceived imbalance between the athletic programs of private and public schools.

A poll conducted for the March 2017 issue of *High School Today* revealed that 21 state associations use a multiplier or other plan to level the playing field among their schools. Among those were Indiana and its “tournament success factor;” Oregon, which had adopted a school socioeconomic status (SES) factor; and Ohio with its “Competitive Balance Plan.”

“Our ‘Competitive Balance Plan’ came about when some school administrators raised the concern that non-public schools had won nearly 43 percent of the state championships in all OHSAA sports, yet make up only 16 percent of the OHSAA membership,” said Bob Goldring, Ohio High School Athletic Association (OHSAA) associate commissioner.

The OHSAA’s “Competitive Balance Plan” is a spinoff of Indiana’s success factor. Implemented for the 2017-18 school year, the plan assigns students in grades 9-12 to a tier system of zero, one or two across eight team sports (football, volleyball, boys soccer, girls soccer, boys basketball, girls basketball, baseball and softball).

“For public schools, factors can be added to the enrollment based on the residence of the students on the particular sport’s roster and his or her parents,” Goldring said. “For non-public schools, factors can be added to the enrollment based on the educational history of the students on the particular sport’s roster.”

From 2007-08 through 2016-17, non-public OHSAA member schools claimed the majority of state championships in football (56 percent), boys soccer (80 percent), girls soccer (77 percent) and volleyball (55 percent). In boys basketball (40 percent), girls basketball (35 percent) and baseball (40 percent), non-public schools experienced slightly less success, while non-public softball programs captured only one state championship in that 10-year span.

Since the “Competitive Balance Plan” became effective, early results indicate a higher percentage of public schools are winning championships. However, Goldring noted that the committee that established the plan believes those results remain inconclusive since they span only two fall seasons, one winter season and one spring season.

Pennsylvania has also been addressing competitive balance. In July 2018, the Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association (PIAA) adopted a new provision to its existing eligibility rules that addresses transfers. In doing so, the newly added “Competitive Classification” formula

implements a success factor that determines new classifications in football and basketball. Moving forward, the PIAA is tracking data involving the new formula.

The PIAA membership includes 583 public high schools and 186 non-boundary schools. From 1972-73 through 2017-18, non-boundary schools won 23 percent of the PIAA championships; however, that percentage has risen since the introduction of the Philadelphia Public League and Catholic League to the PIAA membership in 2008, which paved the way for the “Competitive Classification” formula.

According to PIAA Associate Executive Director Melissa Mertz, an increase in non-boundary schools winning championships – 33.1 percent from 2008-09 through 2017-18 – led to the addition of the “Competitive Classification” formula. Among those championships were 28 (63.6 percent) in boys basketball, 26 in girls basketball (59.1 percent) and 22 in football (50 percent).

Prior to the addition of the Philadelphia schools in 2008, non-boundary schools had captured only 17.8 percent of the state’s titles. In that time, the success of non-boundary schools primarily occurred in girls basketball with 66 championships (52.8 percent). Girls golf (two titles) was the only other sport in which non-boundary schools outnumbered public schools with state titles.

While the Illinois High School Association (IHSA) uses several strategies to address competitive balance of its public schools, private schools and non-boundaried schools, IHSA Executive Director Craig Anderson said there’s only so much his association’s multiplier waiver or success factor can do when there remains a perception that private schools must recruit to survive.

“Due to private schools needing to recruit students, and many times getting affluent families who choose to come, those same affluent families are able to provide a lot of resources to students in the form of participation, lessons and all those things that help a student become skilled at particular sports,” Anderson said. “The watchdogs of our public schools always feel like there’s an advantage at the private school level because of the clientele that they’re able to attract and the geography of which they’re able to attract students. I think at the core, this is what creates this public and private struggle.”

Illinois’ multiplier was implemented as part of a bylaw more than 15 years ago, according to Anderson. Through an Ad Hoc Committee, the success factor was later adopted.

Anderson said one year ago another Ad Hoc Committee was assembled to review the classification of the IHSA’s team-bracketed sports, as well as language relating to the multiplier waiver and success factor, both of which are moving to a two-year snapshot. Through changes recommended by the committee beginning in the 2019-20 school year, Anderson said he believes waivers will be more readily available to private and non-boundaried schools.

Previously, the IHSA used a four-year snapshot of an athletic program’s success in regional championships, sectionals, super sectional and state championships. Teams earned points in that four-year span, and at which time they reached a plateau, they could continue to be multiplied. If a set amount of points were not attained, teams could receive a waiver.

“Moving into next year, we made it – in my opinion – more available to more private, non-boundaried schools because we’re looking at a two-year snapshot as opposed to a four-year snapshot for points,” Craig Anderson said.

Referencing the April 2017 comments of Bobby Cox, Indiana High School Athletic Association (IHSAA) commissioner, Anderson said while there is some validity to the competitive balance issue being about winning – not necessarily public and private – he has some concerns that the IHSA’s success factor only applies to non-boundaried schools.

“We’ve been able to work together with private- and public- school administrators to figure out a way to have more non-boundaried schools’ programs be relieved of – in the thoughts of the private schools – the punishment of where they are classified and, as a result, fewer non-boundaried schools are being multiplied or success factor adjusted,” Anderson said. “Philosophically, it continues to be a question as to what extent do non-boundaried schools have an advantage, and as a result, need to have some kind of multiplier or success factor implemented for sports programs. Discovering what that is continues to be a moving target, and for probably 25-30 years within our association, we’ve seen that evolve in all kinds of different directions.”

States like Kansas and Wisconsin remain among those without a specific plan for competitive balance. Although these state associations continue to battle outside criticism in everything from football and basketball to tennis, golf and swimming, outside groups have played a role in keeping the states from adopting a formula of some kind.

“Absent a statute change, we can’t put in a multiplier, we can’t have a success factor, we can’t have poverty reduction, we can’t have schools separate; if they’re members, they’re members,” said Bill Faflick, Kansas State High School Activities Association (KSHSAA) executive director. “One of the things that we’re exploring is do we want to ask that of Kansas legislators?”

As it is referenced by Kansas Statutes Annotated (K.S.A.) 72-7114, Faflick said the KSHSAA can have as many classes and schools as it wants, “but bottom line is I must have a descending order list and then I can draw as many lines as I want, wherever I want. It also has to be done by student enrollment or student attendance.”

In Kansas, which features 354 member schools, a large percentage of KSHSAA championships has been won by the 27 private schools that comprise 7.6 percent of its membership. In 2017-18, private schools won 30 of 133 (22.6 percent) championships, which Faflick said is representative of recent trends.

Meanwhile, the Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association (WIAA) has slightly more than 80 private schools stirring up strong feelings over the state’s basketball championship, as well as in tennis, golf, soccer, and boys and girls volleyball.

“In the 1980s, language was inserted into the state budget bill that gave private schools a WIAA membership opportunity, or at least a tournament opportunity,” said Dave Anderson, WIAA executive director.

“That’s been more than 25 years ago, so there’s a lot of parents of today’s school-age student-athletes who don’t know that. When some of those parents call, I inform them how in the time since the membership option was provided to private schools in 2000, no legislator has introduced legislation to change, alter or reverse those previous legislative efforts.”

In years since, the WIAA has attempted to address the issue with a multiplier and rural-urban plan; however, each was eventually voted down. Anderson believes a “success factor” mirroring the one in Indiana would work well in Wisconsin. While the naysayers believe it punishes successful programs, Anderson said it features no discrimination of the WIAA’s public and private members.

“I recognize that there are other states with multipliers, reducers and other handicapping techniques for their tournaments, and in those states the courts and legislators have given consent,” Anderson said. “However, every state and jurisdiction is different. The culture and climate are different. I think here in Wisconsin we want to be mindful and careful that to this point there has been no appetite in our membership to treat any segment of it differently from the other.”

Faflick said for Kansas, as well as those in any school community, it's important to maintain the perspective that all schools need to define a healthy interscholastic activity program. Success for a school, team or individual participant in the KSHSAA's highest classification of 6A may mean something different than at a private school in Class 2A.

"I don't know of very many schools that have an interscholastic activity program for the express purpose of winning championships," Faflick said. "Do they want to win championships? Absolutely. That's the goal. That's what you strive for. You want to be the best you can be. We don't exist to win championships. We exist to connect kids to school because we know that kids involved in activities receive the short-term and long-term benefits of graduating at a higher rate, boasting higher grade-point averages, having fewer discipline problems, are involved in more community activities, and are healthier. We're developing leaders, we're teaching kids how to collaborate, how to communicate and how to overcome adversity. That's why we have our program – not to win championships."