

Are there more private schools set to move from the AHSAA to the AISA?

By

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AISA's Michael McLendon speaks during the Alabama Sports Writers Association awards banquet for Mr. and Miss Basketball, at the Renaissance Montgomery Convention Center in Montgomery, Ala., Tuesday, April 14, 2026. (Vasha Hunt | [preps@al.com](#))(Vasha Hunt | [preps@al.com](#))

Last week, [Autauga Academy announced it was moving back to the Alabama Independent School Association](#) for athletics after two years in the Alabama High School Athletic Association.

The surprising announcement came in the wake of the [AHSAA Central Board's January vote to split public and private schools for championship play](#) for the first time in that Association's history.

Are there more moves on the way?

That seems to be the prevailing question at this point.

"Not that I'm aware of," AISA executive director Michael McLendon told AL.com on Monday.

McLendon said the first he heard of Autauga Academy's possible return was earlier this summer. He said Lakeside's decision to drop from 11-man to 8-man football this fall opened a slot for Autauga Academy to slide in without issue.

The Generals, [one of four AISA schools to join the AHSAA in October of 2023](#), were slated to be in the AHSAA's Single-A Private School division along with Ellwood Christian, Holy Spirit Catholic, Hope Christian, Pickens Academy, Donoho, Tuscaloosa Academy and Victory Christian.

Instead, they apparently will compete in AISA AA Region 1 in football along with Abbeville, Chambers, Hooper and Valiant Cross. AHSAA executive director Heath Harmon has not returned phone calls or text messages from AL.com in recent days.

McLendon said he doesn't believe there will be additional private schools who will transition from the AHSAA to the AISA this year.

"We are kind of late in the summer," he said. "People will be starting practice in two or three weeks. I don't think there will be any more. If someone was really in a situation that was already a member and came to us and wanted to work something out ... The problem on our end would be it would require us basically blowing up an entire football schedule and starting over. With so few schools, it would essentially affect everybody."

He said he wouldn't rule out the AISA working with a school in the future if the need arises and acknowledged there have conversations about the future of private school athletics following the AHSAA's announced split.

"There have been dozens of conversations since all that developed," he said. "There have been meetings all over the state about it. I haven't been involved in all of them. There have been lots of conversations for sure. I know we've had some members who have met with some Alabama High School private school members to talk about some ideas and share some thoughts on what the future might look like for private schools. I haven't been involved in those conversations. They've kind of happened outside of the sphere of the Association."

McLendon said he believes there will be an opportunity to add more AISA athletic teams in the future.

"I think a lot of it will depend on what this next year looks like for everybody," he said. "I think there is a lot of that wait-and-see mentality. There is a lot of opportunity out there for sure, but if you find anyone who can predict what will happen, I'd like to talk to them."

AHSAA private schools are divided into a 17-team Double-A, though only 16 field football teams, and a 28-team Single-A following Autauga Academy's announcement.

The AHSAA has formed an 8-member private school advisory committee to address that group's concerns moving forward. Harmon also announced the [hire of former Lee-Scott football coach Buster Daniel as assistant director for independent schools](#).

There also have been discussions, [per River Region Sports](#), about teams forming a new private school league separate from both the AHSAA and the AISA. St. Paul's athletic director Shane Sullivan, a member of the AHSAA private school advisory committee, said he is not aware of any schools in the Mobile area talking about joining a new organization at this point.