

Petition seeks a vote on separate OHSAA public and private state tournaments

Northeast Ohio group leads effort in gathering support for potential referendum item

By: [Mike Dyer](#)

SHARONVILLE, Ohio — A petition that seeks a vote on whether the Ohio High School Athletic Association should have separate public and private high school postseason state tournaments is circulating around the state.

The organizers face a Dec. 1 deadline to gather enough support in order to have a referendum item on the May 2027 ballot for high school principals. If it passes in May, then it would be implemented during the 2028-29 school year. That would align with the new two-year Education Management Information System (EMIS) cycle. The competitive balance process would end after the 2027-28 school year.

Only principals can sign the petition. If 75 signatures - five from each district - are secured then the petition language will be placed on the May 2027 ballot for full membership vote.

WATCH: OHSAA Executive Director Doug Ute discusses the petition

The petitioners are superintendents, principals and athletic directors from Northeast Ohio schools in the Suburban League. Those schools include Aurora, Barberton, Brecksville-Broadview Heights, Copley, Highland, Hudson, Kenston, North Royalton, Nardon, Mayfield, Medina, Revere, Solon, Stow-Munroe Falls and Twinsburg.

"It's a league in Northeast Ohio that have some pretty passionate people about the split between private and public and we'll make it clear it's not to remove anyone from our association; it's just to separate the tournaments," OHSAA Executive Director Doug Ute told WCPO 9 Sports.

"And so our role with that is to assist our membership and making sure they understand how to put something on a referendum in May to go out to vote."

Ute said the OHSAA office is not taking a position on the petition. Ute said there is a meeting this fall regarding competitive balance.

"You can't just look at who is winning a state tournament," Ute said. "I think you really got to

look at that regional level and things like that. We have data on every year from every sport on the competitive balance piece on private and public. And so that's the kind of information we want to get out if they meet the Dec. 1 deadline."

The OHSAA included the rationale for the petition in a slide presentation Tuesday morning.

"The purpose of the referendum is to provide equal opportunities for all schools throughout the state of Ohio to compete for a state championship. The referendum seeks to work within the current divisional framework established by the OHSAA and its member schools. While Competitive Balance was adopted a number of years ago to keep the playing field equal, the current system has only pushed the inequities up into different divisions. The Suburban League's view is that public schools have been placed at a competitive disadvantage when competing in OHSAA tournaments."

The petition aims to include the following language to a referendum ballot in May 2027:

2-2-1 For OHSAA tournament competition, all member schools shall be classified into one of two categories based on the following criteria:

Public School: *To include any school operated by or under the authority of an Ohio public school district or established under Ohio law as part of the state's system of public education, including but not limited to traditional district schools, community (charter) schools, and STEM schools.*

Non-Public School: *To include any school not operated as part of Ohio's public education system and instead operated by a private entity, including both chartered nonpublic schools and nonchartered nonpublic schools as recognized under Ohio law.*

There are three ways an OHSAA rule changes. That includes a legislative action or court order, membership vote via referendum (board of directors approved items) and amendment considerations.

The petition was discussed at the OHSAA regional administrator update meeting on Tuesday at Princeton. It was the final meeting of six events to start the school year that the OHSAA organized among administrators.

The meeting at Princeton was intended to address key issues for school superintendents, principals and athletic administrators in each of the OHSAA's six athletic districts. Another primary topic of this year's meeting was a focus on the newly implemented Student Athlete Mobility (SAM) Act, which has extended participation opportunities for students attending public schools.

The OHSAA's annual referendum voting period is from May 1 through May 15. Each member school has one vote on each referendum issue, which is cast by the high school principal.

OHSAA Constitution Article 8-1-9 requires every member high school to submit a ballot. This

past May, OHSAA member schools passed 11 of 12 proposed revisions to the OHSAA Constitution and Bylaws.

This is not the first time the OHSAA membership has discussed a potential separation of member schools.

There were also petition attempts to separate in 1978 and 1993. Both attempts were voted down by the OHSAA membership. There were discussions to propose separation in the late 2000s, which led to the formation of a competitive balance committee in January 2010.

In May 2014, member schools approved competitive balance, a process that makes modifications to how schools are placed into tournament divisions in the team sports of baseball, basketball, football, soccer, softball and volleyball. The modifications are based on which students are actually on each respective roster. It was implemented during the 2017-18 school year.

The OHSAA is a voluntary, unincorporated and nonprofit membership organization. The organization regulates interscholastic athletic competition for its member schools, consisting of 813 high schools and 741 7th and 8th grade schools.

Currently there are 121 non-public high schools in the OHSAA. There are 691 public schools. (812 total member schools). Only four to five other states in the country separate public and private state tournaments, according to the OHSAA.

With almost 350,000 high school student-athletes during the 2025-26 school year, Ohio ranks as the third-largest state for high school sports participation in the annual National Federation of State High School Associations' athletics participation survey, trailing only Texas and California.

Among boys' sports in Ohio, the top sports for participation include football (40,302), track and field (28,964), baseball (20,892), basketball (20,246) and soccer (17,540).

Top sports for Ohio girls' participation include competitive spirit/cheerleading (26,635), track and field (23,739), volleyball (19,867), soccer (14,605), softball (13,977) and basketball (12,879).

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