



To: NJSIAA Advisory Committee

From: Colleen Maguire, Executive Director

Date: December 2, 2024

RE: Competitive Balance Formula – Public Schools – Football and Basketball

NJSIAA staff proposes amending Article III of the Bylaws, which outlines how public schools are classified into groups (based on enrollment) and sections (based on geography). The amendment would allow the NJSIAA to adjust the group classification of certain public schools based on their competitiveness as determined by a “competitive balance formula.” The types of schools and specifics of the “competitive balance formula” would be set forth in the Association’s Policies and Procedures.

If adopted by the membership at the May 2025 Annual Meeting, **the proposal would take effect with the 2026–2027 classification cycle**, and the formula’s “success factor” would be calculated using 2024–2025 and 2025–2026 state tournament results.

Background

NJSIAA currently classifies its member schools in accordance with Article III of the Association’s Bylaws, which requires that member schools first be divided equally into Groups and then equally divided into Sections. For public schools, enrollments used in the classifications are based on those submitted by the member school to the New Jersey Department of Education during its annual fall survey. Grades 9–11 enrollments are used to calculate every member school’s enrollment in the classification process. Classifications are sport-specific.

These Bylaws have been in place and relied upon for many years and have traditionally served to create a level playing field by ensuring that public schools with similar student populations compete against each other in state tournaments. They are also based on the assumption that public schools are similar to each other because they generally draw their enrollment from a fixed sending district.

However, the rules regarding public school enrollment have evolved, and new types of public schools have emerged. In addition to traditional high schools—those whose students attend based solely on geographic residence and do not enroll students using any other criteria—there are now non-traditional high schools—such as charter schools, choice schools, schools with board approved tuition policies, school districts with open enrollment policies, county-based magnet, vocational and technical schools, and schools serving as satellite campuses for county-based academy programs—which may enroll students from beyond a fixed sending district.

Simply put, non-traditional schools have the opportunity to gain a competitive advantage over other similarly-sized schools. The purpose of this proposed amendment is to identify those non-traditional

schools that may be gaining a competitive advantage by virtue of their enrollment policies, and adjust their group placement accordingly.

This proposal was developed by staff after surveying the membership, consulting with the Leagues and Conferences, reviewing similar provisions in other states, and discussion with an eight-member classification review committee. It would initially apply only to the sports of football, boys basketball, and girls basketball.

As proposed, a competitive balance formula will be used to identify non-traditional schools that should move up to the next highest classification group based on state tournament success. The formula will initially identify schools based on a success factor. Schools that meet the success factor will be further reviewed to determine whether the school is a non-traditional school, and if so, the type of non-traditional school it is. Schools that do not meet the success factor will not be considered for any further action. Based on the formula, a non-traditional school may move up one classification group. Lastly, the formula is not applicable to traditional schools – traditional schools will not move for any level of success.

Proposed Bylaw Amendment

Article III “Classification of Member Schools”, Section 3, shall be amended to include the following new paragraph:

C. Competitive Balance. A public school’s classification may be changed based on a competitive balance formula as approved by the Executive Committee and set forth in the Policies and Procedures.

Proposed Competitive Balance Policy

The following Competitive Balance Policy shall be included in the Association’s Policies and Procedures, and may be amended from time to time by the Executive Committee:

Competitive Balance Policy

To ensure that non-traditional public high schools compete on a level playing field with traditional public high schools, the following competitive balance policy shall be applied to non-traditional public high schools participating in the sports of football, boys basketball, and girls basketball.

Competitive Balance Formula

A public high school will move up to the next highest classification group when the school meets the success factor and meets the requirements of a non-traditional school.

Success Factor:

Points will be awarded for participation in the NJSIAA state tournament based on the following scale:

- One point for a win in each preliminary round (i.e., all rounds prior to the sectional final).
- Two points for winning a sectional final.
- Three points for winning a state semifinal.
- Four points for winning a state championship.

During the previous two-year classification cycle, the following sport-specific point totals will be used to determine what schools will be further reviewed for a possible move to the next highest classification group:

- Football – cumulative total of six points or more
- Basketball – cumulative total of seven points or more

Non-Traditional Schools:

For purposes of the competitive balance formula, there are three categories of non-traditional schools—non-defined geographic area, county-based geographic area, and school districts with open enrollment policies. These categories are further defined below.

1. Non-Defined Geographic Area

These schools can enroll students beyond a defined geographic area and are listed below:

- Charter Schools
- Choice Schools
- Schools that Permit Tuition-Paying Students

2. County-Based Geographic Area

These schools can enroll students from an entire county and are listed below:

- County Vocational-Technical Schools
- County Magnet/Academy Schools
- Schools with Satellite Campuses for County-Based Academies

3. School Districts with Open Enrollment Policies

These school districts have multiple high schools and allow students to choose which school they attend or allow students to apply to schools within the district. Schools districts with multiple high schools that enroll students based solely on their home address are not included in this category.

Application of Competitive Balance Formula for Non-Traditional Schools:

The following schools will be automatically moved to the next highest classification group if the school has accumulated six or more points in the sport of football, or seven or more points in the sport of basketball, during a two-year classification cycle:

- Charter Schools
- County Vocational-Technical Schools
- County Magnet/Academy Schools
- School Districts with Open Enrollment Policies

The following schools will be moved to the next highest classification group if it has accumulated six or more points in the sport of football, or seven or more points in the sport of basketball, during a two-year classification cycle:

- Choice Schools
- Schools that Permit Tuition-Paying Students
- Schools with Satellite Campuses for County-Based Academies

And three or more student-athletes playing football, or one or more student-athlete(s) playing basketball, are enrolled as choice students, tuition students, or via county academy programs. The school will have to provide a varsity roster and attest to the type of enrollment for each student-athlete.

Non-Resident students who are children of school district staff, as defined by NJ statute, and attend one of these types of schools shall be excluded from the minimum number of student-athletes required to move to the next highest classification group.

Once a school is subject to the competitive balance formula and moves to the next highest classification group, varsity rosters will not be reviewed during the one-year review or two-year review periods. Potential moves to the next highest classification group, or remaining in the new classification group, will be based solely on points earned in the new classification group. When a school moves back to its original classification group based on its natural enrollment, then varsity rosters will be subject to review when the school earns the required number of success points by sport.

This policy does not apply to NJSIAA member schools with student-athletes participating in interscholastic sports who are enrolled in a charter school and/or county vocational-technical/public academy schools and return to their home district when their charter school and/or county vocational-technical/public academy school does not offer the sport (*NJSIAA Bylaws Article V – Eligibility of Athletes – Paragraph G. Enrollment – CL 2 – 4*).

Future Classification Cycles:

First-Year Review – One Year Point Total

Once placed in the next highest classification group, if the school earns four or more points in football, or five or more points in basketball, in the first year of the next two-year classification cycle, then it will move up to the next highest classification group for the second year of the next two-year classification cycle. If the school does not earn any points in the first year of the next two-year classification cycle, then it will move down to the next lowest classification group for the second year of the next two-year classification cycle. Otherwise, the school will remain in the next highest classification group for both years of the next two-year classification cycle. The varsity rosters will not be reviewed for Choice Schools, Schools that Permit Tuition-Paying Students, and Schools with Satellite Campuses for County-Based Academies, during the first-year review—any move will be based solely on points earned during the first year in the new classification group.

Two-Year Review – Cumulative Point Total

During the two-year classification cycle, if the school earns six or more cumulative points in the sport of football, or seven or more cumulative points in the sport of basketball, then the school will move up to the next highest classification group for the next two-year classification cycle. If the school earns three, four, or five cumulative points in football, or three, four, five, or six cumulative points in basketball, then the school will remain in the same classification group for the next two-year classification cycle. If the school earns two or less cumulative points in either sport, then the school will move down to the next lowest classification group for the next two-year classification cycle. The varsity rosters will not be reviewed for Choice Schools, Schools that Permit Tuition-Paying Students, and Schools with Satellite Campuses for County-Based Academies during the two-year review—any move will be based solely on cumulative points earned during the two-year review in the new classification group.

Football:

- 6 or more cumulative points – move to next highest classification group
- 3–5 cumulative points – remain in current classification group
- 2 or less cumulative points – move to next lowest classification group

Basketball:

- 7 or more cumulative points – move to next highest classification group
- 3–6 cumulative points – remain in current classification group
- 2 or less cumulative points – move to next lowest classification group

At no point will a school be eligible to move down to a classification group that is lower than its natural classification group based on enrollment.

Appeals:

This provision is meant to be applied objectively. Therefore, a school that is subject to this provision may appeal only (1) the determination that it is a non-traditional school; (2) the calculation of the competitive balance formula; or (3) the application of the competitive balance formula.

NJSIAA Classification Review Committee:

Michael Ben-David, Superintendent, Tenafly Public Schools
Carol Birnbohm, Superintendent, Lenape Regional High School District
Brian Brotschul, Superintendent, Somerset Hills School District
Jorge Diaz, Superintendent, Middlesex County Magnet Schools
Judy Finch-Johnson, Assistant Superintendent, Elizabeth Public Schools
Michael Rossi, Lenape Valley Regional High School
David Salvo, Middle Township Public Schools
Greg Troxell, Phillipsburg School District