



To: NJSIAA Program Review Committee

From: Colleen Maguire, Executive

Director Date: April 13, 2026

RE: G Volleyball – B/G Tennis – B/G Swimming – Public School Classifications

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### **Background**

The 2026-2027 school year is the first in a new two-year classification cycle. Prior to each new classification cycle, NJSIAA staff reviews the number of schools competing in each sport and the number of schools entering each state tournament to ensure the classifications used are consistent, where appropriate, and lead to an efficient and competitive state tournament.

Therefore, in an effort to continue to normalize its classifications and enhance the level of competitiveness, NJSIAA staff recommend the following changes to the girls volleyball, boys/girls tennis and boys/girls swimming public school classifications. The recommendation is based on factors that impact each sport.

### **Proposal**

This proposal recommends changes to the current classifications for three sports.

1. G Volleyball (Public Schools) – the total number of public schools hosting girls volleyball is approximately 280, which includes 20 charter schools. The current classification model uses four sections across four groups – close to 90% of schools are seeded in the state tournament. For comparison, approximately 360 public schools host girls basketball while approximately 70% of schools are seeded in the state tournament across four sections and four groups. The current girls volleyball classifications have led to uncompetitive preliminary round matches – during the 2025-2026 season, approximately 15% of schools seeded had five or less wins.

NJSIAA staff recommend using a north/south sectional model across all four groups, starting the 2026-2027 classification cycle. The north/south classification model will ensure that all brackets are filled, improve competitiveness in preliminary rounds and will eliminate the state semifinal round – schools will advance from the sectional final to the state championships. The elimination of the state semifinal round will allow more scheduling flexibility during the tournament, allow for additional rest days and reduce travel expenses for member schools participating. Lastly, the north/south classification model will reduce the number of first round matches (approximately 115 matches v. 64 matches) which will help ensure quality officials are available to assign to every match.

2. B/G Tennis (Public Schools) – the total number of public schools hosting girls tennis is approximately 280 and boys tennis is approximately 270. The current classification model uses four sections across four groups – which allows approximately 90% of schools to be seeded in the state tournament. However, there is an increasing trend in the number of tournament brackets that are not full – some with as few as 11-teams seeded.

NJSIAA staff recommend using a north/south sectional model across all four groups, starting the 2026-2027 classification cycle. The north/south classification model will ensure that all brackets are filled, improve competitiveness in preliminary rounds and eliminate the state semifinal round – schools will advance from the sectional final to the state championships. Currently, the state semifinal is held on the same day as the state championship at Mercer County Park. This a long day for the student-athletes and provides little flexibility to navigate weather or graduations.

3. B/G Swimming (Public Schools) – the total number of public schools hosting girls swimming is approximately 175 and boys swimming is approximately 210. The current classification model uses four sections across three groups – approximately 50% of schools are seeded in the state tournament. However, for competitive balance, the tournament currently provides double byes to the higher seeded teams in each section.

NJSIAA staff recommends moving to a north/south sectional model across all three groups, starting with the 2026-2027 classification cycle. The north/south sectional model will better ensure that the best teams qualify for the tournament, will eliminate the costly state semifinal round, eliminate the sectional fee assessment on participating schools and provide scheduling flexibility during the state tournament.

### **Rational**

NJSIAA staff continues to move sports to the north/south sectional model based on the number of schools participating in the sport. NJSIAA staff feels that the four sectional model should be reserved for sports with large participation, such as: soccer, cross country, basketball, track and field, baseball and softball. These sports have at least 315 schools, or more, participating which is approximately 85% of total member public schools.

It is also important to note that elimination of the state semifinal round in these sports will result in reduced travel for member schools, increased scheduling flexibility to help with inclement weather, and additional rest between later rounds in the tournament.

Lastly, this proposal will provide NJSIAA staff with the ability to schedule play-in rounds where circumstances warrant. Such as the Group 1 tournament in volleyball which has a significant number of charter schools participating relative to the other Groups. The tournament could seed additional teams to participate in a play-in round in a competitively balanced match – many leagues and conferences use play-in rounds in their own tournaments. NJSIAA staff will determine the number of play-in rounds in consultation with the sport committees and will be established prior to the start of each season.