



BISHOP CARROLL

CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL

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As a 40-year veteran teacher, coach and administrator, I am saddened by the possibility of the Kansas State High School Activities Association attendance modifier being passed. I believe the proposal is punitive and needlessly targets kids whose parents choose a faith based education for their children. The student athletes at the 28 private high schools work hard and play under the same rules as every other public school in the state. Public schools largely operate with open enrollment and charge no tuition to attend. We do not charge tuition but operate on stewardship. KSHSAA has long proclaimed that the primary reasons for participating in sports is character development and learning life skills. KSHSAA encourages participation in multiple sports and repeatedly states that winning is not the most important thing. However, this proposal says to all the kids in Kansas that it is more important to win state championships than it is to participate. This is the opposite message KSHSAA is trying to send.

This proposal looks at only one factor, private vs public, and punishes private schools who have won five or more state championships in the last five years. There are 28 private schools in the state. From 2015-2021, they won 25% of all state championships. However, 23 public schools meet the criteria of winning five state titles in the last 5 years. Between 2015-2021, those 23 public schools won 28% of all state championships. This raises two questions. First, why are those 23 public schools not subjected to the same multiplier? Second, what do all of these successful schools have in common? If five state championships in the last five years is too many, then there is no just reason why KSHSAA should not apply the modifier to all schools. The common denominator between almost all these successful schools is that they are almost all suburban schools with low free and reduced lunch counts. It is not surprising that schools and communities where students have high rates of participation in youth and club sports from a very young age have high school teams that win more often, especially in specialized sports like tennis, golf, swimming, volleyball and soccer. In 1A, Claflin-Central Plains has won nine titles in the last five years and Hanover has won 11, in five different sports, including four of the last five in football. In 6A, Derby has won five of the last six Football championships. In 5A, Goddard has won six consecutive titles in wrestling. In 4A, Andale recently won a football game 108-0. To characterize this issue as exclusively a private vs public school issue is untrue.

If what the advocates for this proposal suggest is true, that higher classifications lead to tougher competition, the real losers in this proposal are the low-income kids in Wichita, Topeka, and Kansas City who will be facing tougher competition. 6A is primarily made up of inner city schools from these three cities and this proposal will primarily push 5A private schools up to 6A. Assuming this is a private school issue, the private schools will continue to win in 6A and our inner city schools will win less state championships so that our already successful suburban and small town schools, like Paola, can win more.

This policy forces all sports in private schools to move up a classification even if the success is only in one sport. For example, Sacred Heart in Salina has won the last five boys golf state championships. However, in addition to the boys' golf team having to move up a classification, this bill would require the girls' basketball team with a losing record and the football team who has not had a winning season in almost a decade to move up a classification as well. This is unfair to all the other athletes in the school and is the sort of arbitrary implementation that demonstrates a vendetta against private schools, not a desire for equality. Even before forwarding this proposal by the narrowest of margins, a majority of State Board of Education expressed extreme reservations with the KSHSAA proposal as presented. We hope the Legislature will take a hard look at this unnecessary, punitive, and counterproductive proposal.

Sincerely,

Vanessa M. Harshberger
Principal