

OSAA Classification Proposal (2026–2030): Executive Summary

This proposal is a comprehensive plan aimed at restructuring the OSAA classification system to restore competitive balance and integrity in high school athletics across Oregon. It moves beyond simply listing teams and schools—this is a systemic change to how conferences are aligned and how state championships are determined.

Quick Overview

The current system is designed to operate within the existing rules, but not necessarily to promote fairness. A small number of schools consistently dominate state championships, often benefiting from either high athletic participation despite lower overall enrollment, or from unchecked student transfers and structural advantages unique to private schools. This has created a competitive imbalance, leaving many public schools—especially those in rural or geographically isolated areas—at a distinct disadvantage.

Self-policing of transfer rules is ineffective, and the existing policies no longer reflect the realities of the schools. This proposal offers a new framework that addresses these disparities while maintaining flexibility and honoring competitive traditions.

Key Issues Identified

- **Transfer Abuse:** Student-athlete transfers are increasingly common and often strategically motivated. These practices undermine fairness.
- **Private School Advantage:** Private institutions have no boundary restrictions and some can offer “scholarships,” which effectively enables recruiting. This leads to significant and consistent competitive advantages.
- **Outdated Enrollment Metrics:** Using total school enrollment (ADM) to classify teams is misleading. Athletic participation numbers are a more accurate reflection of competitive capacity.
- **Ineffective SES Adjustments:** Socioeconomic status adjustments have not meaningfully changed competitive balance.

Proposed Solution: Tiered Classification System

Rather than attempting to enforce inconsistent and often unenforceable rules, this proposal introduces a choice-based system. At the start of each school year, schools must declare their competitive pathway—either the OSAA State Championship or the OSAA Cup—based on the composition of their athletic programs and the guiding philosophy of their school or district.

- The **OSAA State Championship**, or
- The **OSAA Cup**, a separate bracket designed for teams with active transfer students or private school advantages.

To ensure fairness:

- **Transfer athletes** may compete only at the **JV level** if their school chooses the State Championship bracket.
- All schools with **transfer students playing at varsity level** are automatically placed in the **OSAA Cup** bracket for that year.

This allows competitive alignment based on roster makeup—not assumptions based on enrollment size or school type.

New Classification Structure

- **Five Classifications:** 5A through 1A, based on **actual athletic participation**, not enrollment.
- **Private School Separation:**
 - Small private schools (10–367 participants) have their **own divisions and OSAA Cup playoff brackets**.
 - Large private schools (368+) compete in the **5A OSAA Cup**.
- **Transfer-Based Bracketing:**
 - Schools with transfers (public or private) are sorted into the **Large School or Small School OSAA Cup** depending on size.
 - Public schools without active transfers, or transfers that compete at the varsity level will compete for the **traditional State Championship**.

Schools may continue to schedule games across classifications, with the RPI remaining the standard metric for playoff seeding.

Playoff Format

All classifications will have **16-team brackets**, regardless of total number of schools.

State Championship Brackets:

- 5A–1A: Top 16 schools from each class (no transfers or JV-only transfers)

OSAA Cup Brackets:

- **Large School Cup:** 5A & 4A teams with transfers (public/private)
- **Small School Cup:** 3A–1A schools with transfers and small private schools

This system ensures high-level postseason competition among schools with similar circumstances.

Data & Supporting Evidence

- **Championship Disparity:** Private schools have won a disproportionate number of state championships across all levels—6A–1A and especially within the Combination Classes.
- **Enrollment ≠ Participation:** Real athletic participation numbers (from 2024–2025 OSAA data) better reflect a school's competitive strength.
- **Transfer Trends:** The COVID-19 pandemic and the NCAA Transfer Portal have both accelerated student transfers, significantly affecting the integrity of competitive balance.

Click on the following links for more information:

- [[DATA POINTS](#)] – State title distribution by school type; two tabs...one from 2021 forward
- [[TOTAL PARTICIPATION](#)] – Verified 2024–2025 athlete participation by school
- [[PROPOSAL](#)] – Classification breakdown and bracketing

Additional Notes

- Schools cannot opt to “play down,” but may opt to “play up.”
- Conferences may still include private schools if approved by conference member vote.
- No mid-season bracket changes are allowed—schools must declare at the start of fall practices.
- Non-playoff schools can participate in an end-of-season “Endowment Game” for added competition and OSAA support.

Conclusion: Rebuilding Trust Through Real Reform

This proposal directly confronts the imbalances that have challenged Oregon high school athletics for years. It offers **modern solutions for modern problems**—without sacrificing tradition, flexibility, or student opportunity.

By grouping schools with similar structures, resources, and student-athlete profiles, we can finally restore competitive balance and protect the integrity of our championships—for all Oregon schools, rural or urban, public or private.

Let’s lead the nation in building a classification system that’s not just compliant—but truly **fair**.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Q: What is a transfer student?

A: A student who did not begin 9th grade at their current school.

Q: When does a transfer student stop being considered a transfer?

A: One calendar year (365 days) after enrolling at the new school. A sophomore entering school on September 1, 2026 would not be considered eligible until September 1, 2027.

Q: Can a transfer student become eligible for the State Championship Bracket?

A: Yes, if their move was over 100 miles from their old school to their new school.

Q: When must schools declare which bracket they will compete in (Championship or Cup)?

A: Before the first day of the fall, winter, or spring practice.

Q: We chose the Championship bracket and later had a mid-year transfer. Are they eligible?

A: Only if the move was over 100 miles. If not, the school would need to wait until the next option period to move brackets.

Q: How is the 100-mile rule calculated?

A: By the most direct and commonly used driving route from the previous school to the new school.

Q: What about McKinney-Vento students?

A: They are not automatically exempt. Unless they enroll as a 9th grader on the first day of school, they are considered transfers. This removes the labeling of any students.

Q: What if a school with transfer students wants to remain in the Championship bracket?

A: Transfer students would be ineligible for varsity competition (non-league, league, and playoffs).

Q: What level can transfer students play if the school is in the Championship bracket?

A: JV level only — even seniors.

Q: What if a bracket has too many or too few schools?

A: Brackets are capped at 16 schools. If fewer than 16, byes will be used.

Q: Can schools choose to play in the Cup bracket instead of the Championship bracket?

A: Yes, this must be decided before fall practices begin. Schools can opt in to the Cup Bracket.

Q: Can schools switch brackets mid-season?

A: No. Once selected, the bracket applies for the full season.

Q: Can the conference a school plays in override eligibility?

A: Yes, but only for the conference — not non-conference or playoffs.

Q: Can the OSAA override eligibility for playoffs?

A: Yes, but only for playoff eligibility — not league or non-league play.

Q: If OSAA grants playoff eligibility, does it apply to all competition?

A: No. Students would still be ineligible for league play if not approved by the conference. Non-conference play will not be an option for transfers in the Championship Bracket.

Q: What if competition is unbalanced in a school's conference?

A: The school may choose to play an independent schedule and can play an extra game vs. other independent schools at season's end.

Q: Can a public school keep a private school in its league for rivalry reasons?

A: Yes, by a conference vote. This applies to all sports for the school year and not just the season.

Q: If an 8-team conference has four teams in each bracket, how will they get a league schedule?

A: They can still play in the conference but when the playoffs come, they will be in different brackets...schools can always opt to not play in conference and schedule outside of their conference since the RPI determines playoff bracket placement.

Q: Are intra-district transfers considered transfers?

A: Yes. Moving from one school to another within a district still counts as a transfer.

Q: A student transferred from a private school to their home district school. Are they eligible?

A: Yes, if they enroll during the non-association year. They are treated like a 9th-grade entry, regardless of grade level.

Q: Will students from private schools playing a sport not offered at their school impact our bracket?

A: No. These students may compete at their public school without affecting the school's bracket choice.

Q: Our school is in a co-op. Are those students considered transfers?

A: No. Co-op students remain enrolled at their home school and are not considered transfers. Enrollments are combined for classification.

Q: Are associate member students considered transfers?

A: No. Like co-ops, students remain enrolled in their original school, and enrollments are combined for classification.

Q: Our classification seems incorrect — what can we do?

A: Participation numbers are based on the most accurate data available. Schools must submit rosters yearly to help set a 3-year average for future classification adjustments.

Q: What if schools report inaccurate rosters?

A: OSAA may issue warnings, fines, or ban schools from postseason competition.

Q: When are rosters due?

A: Four weeks after the sport's first practice. Late submissions will result in fines. Sharing rosters with the conference would be encouraged as well.

Q: What about recruiting, scholarships, and NIL offers?

A: These are no longer relevant for bracket placement. Schools will declare brackets in advance, and competition will reflect those choices.

Q: What if an athlete is suspected of not living in the district?

A: If they enrolled as a 9th grader, they are eligible regardless of residency. Transfers enrolling after 9th grade follow the transfer rules.

Q: How do the individual (Cross Country, Swimming, Wrestling, Track and Field, Tennis, and Golf) sports adjust to this?

A: Athletes from all schools, whether they are in the Championship or Cup division, will compete against each other. Team championships will be awarded based on a school's division (Championship or Cup). However, individual titles will go to the top-performing athletes no matter which school they attend. This way, there will only be one state champion per event, keeping the title meaningful and prestigious.