

# Proposal To Change Football Format To Districts Voted Down By IHSA Member Schools

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BLOOMINGTON - A proposal to change the IHSA football scheduling format to eight districts in all eight classes was voted down by member schools in voting, of which the results were released on Tuesday afternoon.

The proposal, which would have seen all football-playing schools divided into eight districts, was rejected 379-272, with 76 abstentions, during a voting period that ended on Monday night at midnight. The proposal, which would have begun in the 2024 season, would have had schools in each district play each other from weeks three through nine, with the top four teams in each district qualifying for the playoffs. It would have eliminated traditional conference set-ups, and in some cases, long-standing rivalries that have done much to enhance the sport's appeal over the years.

"The IHSA Board of Directors has already had discussions about the potential of forming a football ad-hoc committee in 2024 in the event that this district proposal failed to pass," said IHSA Executive Director Craig Anderson in a press release put out by the organization this afternoon. "They want to be proactive in trying to address the issues that are at the root of different football proposals seemingly being brought forth each year. They recognize the myriad issues in IHSA football are unique, and can be based on geography, school size, conference affiliation, and the traditional success of a program, which is why no recent proposals have garnered enough support to pass.

"There is likely no singular answer to these issues," Anderson continued, "but the board wants to explore the idea that a large and diverse group from around the state might be able to find some solutions that the high school football community in the state would support."

In the case of Class 7A and 8A, in which schools such as Edwardsville, Alton, Collinsville and Granite City, among others, would compete in, the vast majority of those schools are located in suburban Chicago, which in district play, would have required those school to travel for up to five to six hours to be able to play in games that could have playoff implications if played later in the season. The current format, with conference champions receiving automatic berths to the playoffs and teams requiring at least five wins to qualify as at-large teams, will be in effect for the 2024 season.

Edwardsville High School Principal Dr. Steve Stuart said: "I believe it is what is best for our student-athletes and the continual development of our under-class programs. I also feel that this will help us keep up the healthy rivalries that have been established within the conference and will allow us to keep parents and students connected to the team as it is much easier driving to Belleville or Alton than potentially having to drive two to three hours north upwards of three or four times during the regular season. I commend our Athletic Director Amy Boscolo for taking the stance she did to fight for what is right for our student-athletes."

Alton High School Athletic Director Chris Kusnerick made these comments about the IHSA decision: "Alton High School was hoping that it would pass since it would

alleviate some of the scheduling issues schools face. Each year we (Alton High School) have to find four non-conference opponents, which can be difficult. I wish we would just go to all teams making the playoffs as we do in all other IHSA-sponsored sports. No matter whether it is districts, our current system, or even all teams in the playoffs there is not a system that will satisfy each member school and schools have to be willing to make concessions for the betterment of high school athletics."

The district football proposal was only one of two proposals that failed to pass, the other that would have reduced the number of summer contact days between players and coaches from 25 to 18 days.

Proposals that passed now allow coaches to conduct out-of-season strength and conditioning sessions of up to 90 minutes a day for four days a week and will also not count against summer contact days, with no coaching of skills for a specific sport, allow student-athletes to meet the residence by-law when they attend an out-of-district public school a parent or guardian works at, provided the local school board allows such attendance tuition-free and also modifies the rule to allow all All-Star Game participation in all sports, not just football, basketball, soccer and volleyball.

Other proposals that were passed include restrictions against a physical exam from deciding if a student-athlete is eligible to play in a game, with exceptions for sports that require weigh-ins and both nail and skin checks, such as wrestling, modified the participation of a student-athlete that plays under an assumed name, eliminates the In-season tournament restriction rule for all sports, creates the chances to hold football scrimmages against other schools, with certain restrictions, eliminates contest limitations for boys gymnastics and match limits for boys and girls volleyball tournaments, increases the girls wrestling schedule from 18 to 25 meets and tournaments and also establishes girls flag football as a fall sport, starting in week six and going through week 21 of the IHSA calendar, with a minimum of nine practices before starting a season, and not playing more than 25 games before the IHSA state series begins.

Complete results and proposals can be seen on the organization's web site, [www.ihsa.org](http://www.ihsa.org)

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