



2026 OHSAA Referendum Issues

As of February 19, 2026

Throughout the 2025-26 school year, the OHSAA Board of Directors has approved the below referendum issues for membership vote in May 2026. Additional items may be added at the March special Board meeting. Prior to the vote, all issues will be explained in a public platform at the upcoming Athletic Discussion Meetings in April 2026.

**NOTE: All issue numbers (1B, 2B, etc.) are subject to change pending approval of additional items at future meetings.

7/8 GRADE BYLAW PROPOSALS (3)

ISSUE 1B – Modify Bylaw 4-2-2, Exceptions 1 & 2, 7/8 Grade Age Exceptions

If passed, effective August 1, 2026.

Initial Review- 8/23/2025

Approved for Referendum- 1/14/2026

EXCEPTION 1: If the student is a “child with a disability” as that term is defined within the Ohio Operating Standards for the Education of Children with Disabilities and Part B of the Federal IDEIA requirements and the student’s specific disability was diagnosed contemporaneous with the events which caused the student to be unable to meet the requirements of this bylaw; and whose disability is the primary reason for student’s inability to meet the requirements of this bylaw, that student may be declared eligible by the Executive Director’s office if, in the sole discretion of the Executive Director’s office, the Executive Director’s office determines that:

- a) the student does not pose a safety risk to himself/herself or others; and
- b) the student does not enjoy any advantages in terms of physical maturity, mental maturity or athletic maturity over other student-athletes; and
- c) the student would not likely participate in a way which **would significantly impact the outcome of the contest** in any contest or otherwise have any impact on the outcome of any contest in which the student does participate; and
- d) there is no evidence of “red-shirting” or other **indications** of academic dishonesty.

EXCEPTION 2: If a student has repeated any grade from kindergarten through grade 3 at the recommendation of the student’s teachers or other educational professionals and for purely academic reasons and, as a result of repeating any of these grades, the student cannot meet the age limitations of this bylaw in the student’s eighth grade year with the 7th & 8th grade school, the Executive Director’s office may declare the student eligible notwithstanding this bylaw 4-2-2 if, in the sole discretion of the Executive Director’s office, the following criteria can be met:

- a) the student does not pose a safety risk to himself/herself or others; and
- b) the student does not enjoy any advantages in terms of physical maturity, mental maturity or athletic maturity over other student-athletes of her/his grade level; and
- c) the student would not likely participate in a way which **would significantly impact the outcome of the contest** in any contest or otherwise have any impact on the outcome of any contest in which the student does participate; and
- d) there is no evidence of “red-shirting” or other **indications** of academic dishonesty.

COMMENTS:

1. This age rule most commonly impacts 8th grade students who have only experienced two semesters of 7/8 grade participation, but their age makes them too old to compete in their 3rd and 4th semesters. This is a rule of compassion for a student who would not impact the outcome of a contest, but it is challenging to enforce for a student who only gets 2 semesters of participation as compared to their younger peers.

2. The current language does not permit approval if the student would have ANY impact on the outcome of a contest. The proposed language changes the assessment criteria and requires a denial when the student would significantly impact the outcome of a contest. However, it does allow approval if their participation impact is not significant
 - a. (Ex. They are *in the rotation, but not one of the better players*).
3. The OHSAA Office, as we have done in the past, will reach out to area opponents to help make this assessment to keep the playing field level.
4. It should be noted that students impacted by this bylaw are allowed to play HS sports as an 8th grader, but most do not take advantage of that because it would impact their eligibility as a senior.

**ISSUE 2B – Modify Bylaw 4-3-4, Exception 1, 7/8 Grade Semesters Exception
If passed, effective August 1, 2026.**

Initial Review- 1/14/2026

Approved for Referendum- 1/14/2026

EXCEPTION: If the student is a “child with a disability” as that term is defined within the Ohio Operating Standards for the Education of Children with Disabilities and Part B of the Federal IDEIA requirements and the student’s specific disability was diagnosed contemporaneous with the events which caused the student to be unable to meet the requirements of this bylaw; and whose disability is the primary reason for student’s inability to meet the requirements of this bylaw, that student may be declared eligible by the Executive Director’s office if, in the sole discretion of the Executive Director’s office, the Executive Director’s office determines that:

- a) the student does not pose a safety risk to himself/herself or others; and
- b) the student does not enjoy any advantages in terms of physical maturity, mental maturity or athletic maturity over other student-athletes; and
- c) the student would not likely participate in a way which **would significantly impact the outcome of the contest** ~~in any contest or otherwise have any impact on the outcome of any contest in which the student does participate; and~~
- d) there is no evidence of “red-shirting” or other **indications** of academic dishonesty.

COMMENTS:

1. The current language does not permit approval if the student would have ANY impact on the outcome of a contest. The proposed language changes the assessment criteria and requires a denial when the student would significantly impact the outcome of a contest. However, it does allow approval if their participation impact is not significant
 - a. (Ex. They are *in the rotation, but not one of the better players*).
2. The OHSAA Office, as we have done in the past, will reach out to area opponents to help make this assessment to keep the playing field level.

**ISSUE 3B – Modify Bylaw 4-4-5, Exception 1, 7/8 Grade Academic Hardship Exception
If passed, effective August 1, 2026.**

Initial Review- 8/23/2025

Approved for Referendum- 10/23/2025

BYLAW 4-4-5, EXCEPTION 1: The Executive Director’s Office may waive the requirements of this bylaw provided the student ~~has been withdrawn or removed from school because of circumstances due to~~ **experienced a** personal accident, illness or family hardship **during the immediately preceding grading period which can be supported by documentation contemporaneously created at the time of the hardship**. An appeal for such a waiver must come from the principal of the school and be in writing **using the form prescribed by the Executive Director’s Office and shall include contemporaneous documentation regarding the circumstances of the hardship**. The appeal for waiver shall contain documents with school and medical supporting evidence.

COMMENTS:

1. The current exception allows the Executive Director’s Office to waive the 4-subject standard at the 7/8 grade level ONLY if the student was withdrawn or removed from school during the immediately preceding grading period due to

the referenced hardships. However, the Office has encountered several cases of students who have continued to be enrolled in school despite significant family hardships or personal illness/accident. This continuing enrollment precludes such a student from utilizing the exception under the current language.

2. The proposed referendum issue would allow a member school principal to make a request to the E.D.'s Office to waive the 4-subject standard for a 7/8 student who continued to be enrolled in school, but perhaps took a reduced courseload or struggled in a class(es) resulting in a failing grade.
3. In lieu of withdraw or removal from school, the student/family would have to show documentation of the hardship which was contemporaneously created at the time of the hardship.
 - a. Example: A sibling experienced a cancer diagnosis and although the student continued to attend school, there was serious disruption to their schoolwork and home life resulting in them failing to meet the 4-subject standard.

HIGH SCHOOL BYLAW PROPOSALS (6)

ISSUE 1B – MODIFY BYLAW 4-1-4, Member of an Interscholastic Team

If passed, effective August 1, 2026.

Initial Review- 1/14/2026

Approved for Referendum- 1/14/2026

4-1-4 A student is a member of an interscholastic **team** squad when the student participates in an interscholastic contest. Such status as a **team** squad member continues until the start of the next school season in that sport. An athletic contest involving participants from another school or any non-interscholastic or any organized adult team is a game, preview or a scrimmage.

Notwithstanding the definition of an athletic contest above, if an interscholastic team only participates in a preseason event (preview, scrimmages, etc.) and does not participate in a regular season contest before dropping the sport and/or cancelling their season, the school will not be considered to have “sponsored the sport” for purposes of the application of Exception 6 (and/or 8) to Bylaw 4-3-1. Such a student will still be considered to have “participated in the sport” for purposes of the transfer bylaw, but shall still be permitted to participate at a different school during the same season, subject to available opportunities afforded under an exception to Bylaw 4-3-1.

For purposes of General Sports Regulation 7, these students will count towards the team membership of the school at which they participate in a regular season contest.

COMMENTS:

1. The situation the proposed language is trying to address is when a private school tries to offer a sport, but ultimately ends up cancelling the season before playing in a regular season game. The proposed clarifying language will allow students to attempt to play elsewhere (i.e. their local public school) during the same season, subject to enrollment & attendance bylaw (Exception 6 & Exception 8, if Issue 2B passes), SO LONG AS the team of the school of attendance does not play in a regular season game before cancelling their season.
2. This proposed language provides clarity and fully establishes an interpretation that was previously only outlined with an FAQ document on OHSAA.org

ISSUE 2B – ADD EXCEPTION TO BYLAW 4-3-1

If passed, effective August 1, 2026.

Initial Review- 8/23/2025

Approved for Referendum- 2/19/2026

4-3-1 All students participating in a school-sponsored sport must be enrolled in and attending full-time in accordance with all duly adopted Board of Education or similar governing board policies of that school.

EXCEPTION 8: A student enrolled in an OHSAA member public school that does not sponsor a team sport in which the student desires to participate may petition to play that sport for a different member school if all of the following conditions apply:

(1) The public school in which the student is enrolled does not offer the team sport as an interscholastic athletic activity and:

(2) The public school in which the student is enrolled is located less than twenty miles away from the public school at which the student is petitioning to play (most direct route) and;

(3) The superintendents of both public schools enter into an agreement approving the student's participation at the school in which the student is not enrolled.

Participation opportunities within a district with multiple high schools shall be governed by the applicable OHSAA business rules for non-enrolled students.

For purposes of this bylaw, "TEAM sports" include baseball, basketball, bowling, field hockey, football, ice hockey, lacrosse, soccer, softball, tennis and volleyball.

If the student is enrolled in a school within a multi-high school public school district that does not offer a TEAM sport in which the student desires to participate then the Superintendent may assign the student to play that sport for a different public school located within the district. Assignment of these students shall be governed by the applicable OHSAA business rules for non-enrolled students. If no school within the multi-high school district sponsors the sport in which the student desires a participation opportunity, only then the student is permitted to utilize the process outlined above.

IF PASSED: Add Exception 8 Students to Tier 2 Group for Competitive Balance Sports

2-2-4 For public member schools, Factors shall be assigned as follows:

—Tier 0 – the student and at least one legal custodian currently reside within the school district/designated/assigned attendance zone (unless the student is participating as a non-enrolled student at the member high school in accordance with state law).

—Tier 1 – the student and at least one legal custodian currently reside outside the school district but the student has been continuously enrolled in the district since the beginning of 7th grade OR 2) the student, who is attending a school in a multiple-high school district, and at least one legal custodian currently reside outside the school's designated/assigned attendance zone but still live within the school district OR 3) the student is participating as a non-enrolled student at the member high school in accordance with state law, **the student lives inside the district and is participating in accordance with Bylaw 4-3-1, Exception 8,** or the student is participating on a J1 Visa.

—Tier 2 – the student and at least one legal custodian currently reside outside the school district and/or designated/assigned attendance zone and the student has not been continuously enrolled in the district since 7th grade, **or the student lives outside of the district and is participating in accordance with Bylaw 4-3-1, Exception 8.**

IF PASSED: Modify Definition of Transfer within Bylaw 4-7-2

Definition of Transfer: A student is considered to have transferred whenever a.) enrollment is changed from one school to another school and the student attends a new school, or b.) enrollment is changed from one school to become homeschooled or vice versa, or c.) the student participates in a practice, scrimmage or contest in an OHSAA recognized sport with a school-sponsored squad of a school in which the student has not been enrolled and attending, or d) the participation opportunities afforded a student pursuant to state law change...

Note 2: Notwithstanding (c) and (d) above, if a non-enrolled student's participation is pursuant to O.R.C. §§ 3313.5311 (Ohio non-public school students), or O.R.C. §§ 3313.537 (Ohio community/STEM school students), or if the student is participating as a non-enrolled student in accordance with Bylaw 4-3-1, Exception 8, the non-enrolled student's participation opportunity shall transfer back and forth between the student's school of enrollment and the public school at which they are afforded a participation opportunity without transfer consequences based on sports offered at the school of enrollment. If the non-public school or Community/STEM school of attendance ever sponsors the sport/sports in which the non-enrolled student wishes to participate, the student's participation opportunity shall also be transferred back to the school of attendance without consequence.

COMMENTS:

1. The proposed exception is being put forth because under ORC 3313.5311, students attending a non-public school are permitted to play at their local residential school. Conversely, students who attend a traditional public school are not permitted to participate in a sport elsewhere if the school they currently attend does not offer the sport.
2. The proposed language would provide interscholastic participation opportunities to students who would otherwise not have it at the school they attend. It would provide more participation opportunities for students, especially for those who attend smaller schools that don't offer as many sports.
3. The proposed language only applies to team sports, plus bowling and tennis due to their scheduling preferences for "duals." Limiting this exception to team sports will allow for the majority of students to be captured in Competitive Balance counts to increase applicable divisional placement numbers. The only team sports where the participation will not be captured is Field Hockey, Ice Hockey, Lacrosse and Boys Volleyball.
 - a. Not extending this exception to individual sports encourages schools to sponsor the sport and hire a different school's coach to provide the participation opportunity for students. It is not feasible for schools to hire a different school's coach in a team sport, in the majority of instances.
4. If passed, the proposed language would only apply to a student actually enrolled at the member public school which does not offer the sport. It would not be applicable for students attending a non-public school who play sports at their residential district but whose residential district school did not offer the sport. That student is not enrolled in the public school so the proposed exception would not apply to that student.
5. The proposed language requires students within a multi-HS district to explore participation opportunities within the district first. If no school within the district sponsors the sport, only then would the student be permitted to explore neighboring district participation opportunities.
6. By only applying it to member public schools, it prevents application for online charter public schools who are not members. Limiting it to member public schools also prevents potential abuse for any multi-HS districts that may look to drop sports to funnel students elsewhere for participation (i.e. they still need to offer enough sports to be members)
7. Not intended to enhance a team's standing, but to provide students with opportunities who would otherwise not have them.
8. The two "If Passed" items will only be necessary if the Issue passes. They are editorial changes which impact other bylaws.
 - a. These students would be coded as Tier 1 Non-Enrolled or Tier 2 for Competitive Balance sports, depending on if they live inside the district or outside the district.
 - b. These students would not be subject to a transfer consequence if they elected to utilize this exception to play sports elsewhere and then come back to their school of attendance to play sports which the school does offer. This concept is the same as non-public school students who are permitted to go back and forth between their school of attendance and their residential public school in accordance with state law.

ISSUE 3B – Modify Bylaw 4-4-1, Exception 1, HS Academic Hardship Exception If passed, effective August 1, 2026.

Initial Review- 8/23/2025

Approved for Referendum- 10/23/2025

BYLAW 4-4-1, EXCEPTION 2: The Executive Director's Office may waive the requirements of this bylaw provided the student had been physically withdrawn or removed from school experienced a personal accident, illness or family hardship during the immediately preceding grading period which can be supported by documentation

contemporaneously created at the time of the hardship because of circumstances due to personal accident, illness or family hardship. An appeal for such a waiver must come from the principal of the school using the form prescribed by the Executive Director's Office and shall include **contemporaneous documentation** documented supporting evidence regarding the circumstances **of the hardship**.

COMMENTS:

1. The current exception allows the Executive Director's Office to waive the 5-credit standard at the HS grade level ONLY if the student was withdrawn or removed from school during the immediately preceding grading period due to the referenced hardships. However, the Office has encountered several cases of students who have continued to be enrolled in school despite significant family hardships or personal illness/accident. This continuing enrollment precludes such a student from utilizing the exception under the current language.
2. The proposed referendum issue would allow a member school principal to make a request to the E.D.'s Office to waive the 5-credit standard for a HS student who continued to be enrolled in school, but perhaps took a reduced courseload or struggled in a class(es) resulting in a failing grade.
3. In lieu of withdraw or removal from school, the student/family would have to show documentation of the hardship which was contemporaneously created at the time of the hardship.
 - a. Example: A sibling experienced a cancer diagnosis and although the student continued to attend school, there was serious disruption to their schoolwork and home life resulting in them failing to meet the 5-credit standard.

**ISSUE 4B – Modify Bylaw 4-6-2, Exceptions 4 and 6, Residency Exceptions
If passed, effective August 1, 2026.**

Initial Review- 8/23/2025

Approved for Referendum- 1/14/2026

EXCEPTION 4: A student who enrolls at first the sixth grade level in a school/district consisting of grades 1-12 and who maintains continuous enrollment shall be eligible for interscholastic athletics in grades 7-12 in that school/district regardless of place or state of residence of parents. **A student who enrolls at the fourth grade level in a school/district consisting of grades 1-12 and who maintains continuous enrollment shall be eligible for interscholastic athletics in grades 7-8 in that school/district regardless of place or state of residence of parents.**

EXCEPTION 6: A student who has been continuously enrolled and attending a "parochial school" by the beginning of the sixth grade level and who has maintained continuous enrollment in that same system of education through grade 8 shall be eligible for interscholastic athletics in grades 9-12 if the student matriculates directly into a parochial high school in Ohio and maintains enrollment in that high school for the duration of their high school education. Should such a student ever break enrollment from the same system of education then they will no longer be eligible for residency eligibility under this exception. For purposes of this exception, a "parochial school" shall be defined as a school which is part of the Catholic Conference of Ohio, as denoted by the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce. **A student who enrolls at the fourth grade level in a parochial school and who maintains continuous enrollment shall be eligible for interscholastic athletics in grades 7-8 in that school system regardless of place or state of residence of parents.**

COMMENTS:

1. The current exception 4 provides participation opportunities for a student whose parents live outside of Ohio but who have shown a prior commitment to a certain school/district consisting of grades 1-12. The current requirement is that a student must attend this school/district beginning at the first grade level and maintaining continuous enrollment in that school/district through high school.
2. In order to be more consistent with other residency and transfer exceptions (Ex. Bylaw 4-6-2, Exception 6 and Bylaw 4-7-5, Provision 1), the proposed issue would change the enrollment requirements to sixth grade for a high school participation opportunity, and the enrollment requirement to fourth grade for a 7/8 grade participation opportunity, should the school/district opt to be members of the OHSAA at the 7/8 grade level.
3. The purpose of such an exception is to afford a participation opportunity to a student who has shown a previous commitment to the school/district through continuous enrollment, but would otherwise be ineligible due to residency regulations. And if the school/district opts to be members of the OHSAA at the 7/8 grade level, enrollment in the

school/district beginning in sixth grade does not reflect such a commitment. Therefore, additional language is being proposed to require enrollment beginning in the fourth grade if the student's parents live outside of Ohio and they want to participate in 7/8 grade athletics at the 7/8 grade member school.

- a. Though there are only 15-20 parochial 7/8 grade member schools in the state, comparable language is being added to Bylaw 4-6-2, Exception 6 to allow for 7/8 grade participation when the student enrolls in that system of education beginning in 4th grade.

ISSUE 5B – Modify Bylaw 4-7-2, Definition of Transfer

If passed, effective August 1, 2026.

Initial Review- 8/23/2025

Approved for Referendum- 1/14/2026

Definition of Transfer: A student is considered to have transferred whenever a.) enrollment is changed from one school to another school and the student attends a new school, or b.) enrollment is changed from one school to become home schooled or vice versa, or c.) the student participates in a practice, scrimmage or contest in an OHSAA recognized sport with a school-sponsored squad of a school in which the student has not been enrolled and attending, or d) the participation opportunities afforded a student pursuant to state law change.

Note 1: Notwithstanding (a) above, if enrollment is changed from one school to another school and the student attends a new school BUT returns to his/her prior school of attendance without playing interscholastic athletics for any school during the pendency of their withdrawal, such a student shall NOT be subject to the provisions of this section and shall be fully eligible, with respect to transfer, at the school in which he/she was initially enrolled.

Note 4₂: Notwithstanding (b) above, if a student is enrolled in a school located in his/her residential district and withdraws from the school for home education pursuant to division (A)(2) of O.R.C. §§ 3321.04, or vice versa, such a student shall NOT be considered a transfer student subject to the provisions of this section.

Note 2₃: Notwithstanding (c) and (d) above, if a non-enrolled student's participation is pursuant to O.R.C. §§ 3313.5311 (Ohio non-public school students) or 3313.537 (Ohio community/STEM school students), the non-enrolled student's participation opportunity shall transfer back and forth between the student's school of enrollment and the public school at which they are afforded a participation opportunity without transfer consequences based on sports offered at the school of enrollment. If the non-public school or Community/STEM school ever sponsors the sport/sports in which the non-enrolled student wishes to participate, the student's participation opportunity shall also be transferred back to the school of attendance without consequence.

Note 3₄: Notwithstanding (d) above, if a non-enrolled student's participation is pursuant to O.R.C. §§ 3313.5312 (Ohio home educated students), the non-enrolled student's participation opportunity shall transfer back and forth between the student's residential school and a non-residential school, pursuant to the residential school's sports offered, and no transfer consequence shall apply.

Note 4₅: Any in-season changes in the participation opportunities that may be afforded by state law shall be subject to Bylaw 4-7-3, unless otherwise specified within the Ohio Revised Code.

COMMENTS:

1. With the continuing evolution of alternative curriculum options, the E.D.'s Office has seen an increase in families withdrawing a child from their original school of attendance and transferring them to specialty schools/institutions that do not sponsor interscholastic athletics. Once the student has addressed the issue which caused their withdraw, they are frequently returned to their original school of attendance but do not always qualify for a transfer exception.

2. The proposed referendum issue would allow a student to leave their school, transfer to a different school for a period of time, but return to their original school of attendance without transfer consequence AS LONG AS they did not participate in interscholastic athletics
3. Rerumber remaining Notes accordingly.

ISSUE 6B – Modify Bylaw 4-7-2 Exception 1, Bona Fide Change of Residence

If passed, effective August 1, 2026.

Initial Review- 1/14/2026

Approved for Referendum- 2/19/2026

EXCEPTION 1: If a student is compelled to transfer to another high school as a result of a bona fide legal change of residence made by BOTH PARENTS (biological, adoptive or stepparents) from one public school district into another public school district, whether from outside the state of Ohio or within Ohio, the Executive Director's Office, in its sole discretion, may waive all or part of the period of ineligibility for one or more sport/sport seasons at:

- a) the public high school in which the new residence is physically located (or any school to which the student is placed and enrolled in a multiple high school district) or;
- b) any non-public high school if the family's new residence is at least 15 miles from their former residence, as determined by the most direct route when using Google Maps or other such navigational system, or;
- c) any high school, public or non-public, if the new residence into which the family has moved is more than 80 miles from the residence from which the family moved, as determined by the most direct route when using Google Maps or other such navigational system.

For purposes of this exception, a bona fide change of residence shall be defined as a change of residence during which the student's parents have relinquished any and all responsibility with regard to the prior residence, through a sale, lease agreement with a non-family member, the transfer of the prior residence to an LLC for business purposes, or the termination of the lease, while having established the new residence as their primary residence as defined within Bylaw 4-6-1 of the OHSAA Handbook. In cases where the prior residence has been transferred to an LLC, the student's parents must provide clear and convincing evidence that the prior residence is being utilized solely for bona fide business purposes and not for residential use. Evidence may include, but is not limited to, tax returns, commercial lease, commercial utility bills, etc.

In cases where the student's parents have not relinquished any and all responsibility, the Executive Director's Office may grant the student partial eligibility, not to include participation in the OHSAA post season tournament in any applicable sports, should all other requirements of this exception be satisfied. In such a case, full eligibility may later be granted should the student's parents provide proof that any and all responsibility of the prior residence has been relinquished since the original ruling.

The requirement that "both parents" make the move may be waived by the Executive Director's Office if the marriage of the parents has been or is in the process of being legally terminated or if the parents were never married. In addition, the Executive Director's Office, in its sole discretion, may extend conditional eligibility for up to 90 days immediately following the date of the student's transfer in cases where parents are making a bona fide move into a residence that is more than 80 miles from their former residence, and there are extenuating circumstances that are presented which prevent one of the parents from making the move immediately. This 90-day conditional provision may be extended for up to 90 more days ONLY in the case of medical or military obligations that prevent one of the parents from making the move at the same time as the other parent.

Note 1: Please refer to Bylaw 4-6-1 for a definition of bona fide residence. Also, the **The** student and the student's parents must reside in this new residence for a period of one year from the date on which this exception was applied to a given student in order to maintain eligibility at the school into which the student's transfer has been approved. The school district will have a continuing duty to monitor compliance with the residency requirements during this one year period.

COMMENTS:

1. This addition defines what a bona fide change of residence means within the OHSAA Office interpretation.
2. Recently adjusted internal review processes have a stricter application when a family is still responsible for their previous home, and this language is intended to codify this practice to provide transparency and clarity.
3. The proposed new language provides the OHSAA office with member approved requirements upon which we would lean when issuing a ruling.