

## **Competitive Equity Discussion Engages Membership**

The turnout for the 2014 Annual Meeting goes down as the most attended and with the most member schools represented in the history of the association, according to membership records.

A contingent of 546 delegates representing 443 of the 505 schools currently comprising the senior high membership were determined to exercise their responsibility to engage in the Association's business. While other items of interest were on the agenda, the one topic creating the most pre-meeting buzz was the proposed amendment to alter the landscape of competitive equity for the membership's Tournament Series.

A petition to apply a 1.65 multiplier to nonpublic member schools for tournament divisional placements served as the catalyst to form an ad-hoc committee to re-examine the competitive equity perception. The membership voted 352-77 to establish the committee.

The fact that a resounding 82 percent voted not to support the petition-driven amendment as written may have had as much to do with the general acceptance of our decision-making process as anything else. The timing of the petition prevented any review through the customary course of discussion with Area Meetings in the fall, proceeding through the elected committees and presented to the membership for a vote at the Annual Meeting.

Despite the comments of two delegates at the Annual Meeting claiming the contrary, the topic, and the opportunity to express opinions and concerns, have been available in a number of different forums each year. In addition, the topic has regularly been part of executive staff and committee discussions over the past decade. In fact, the move to five divisions in basketball in 2011 was the result of competitive equity concerns.

At its May meeting, the Board of Control deliberated to carefully determine the parameters that will comprise a representative ad-hoc committee and study the current state of competitive equity. To alleviate any hint of inappropriate influence, the Board concluded that no current members of WIAA committees or executive staff will serve on the committee, but act only in a resource role.

The criteria and the appointments to the committee may be the easiest steps in the process.

The membership included specific timelines that would produce recommendations to be voted on by the 2015 Annual Meeting. To have the membership review and react to any recommendations by this fall's Area Meetings, the recommendations would need to be available by the beginning of September. In recognition of the challenging timeline, the committee may request additional time if needed. We can appreciate how the volunteer committee appointees will spend their summer.

Reviewing the original competitive equity committee's minutes from 1996-2000, the insight of that committee was remarkable. With the amount of language and administrative policies that needed amending to accommodate a membership option for private schools, the transition went as well as could be expected. As we can now identify with, the most difficult aspect of the transition planning was with divisional placement of the private schools in the Tournament Series. Ultimately, it was determined that all members would be placed in divisions based on their face value enrollments with the exception of single-gender schools. The general consensus of the group was that all members were to be treated uniformly.

Nearly two decades later, we are having the identical discussions on this topic. It has proven to be an extremely complexing topic with various ideological perspectives and data that may be twisted to fit any predisposition. Moreover, the committee is tasked to review the data and produce a recommendation that is best suited for the membership as a whole, all with the knowledge there will be the perception of winners and losers by respective interests. Whether or not any recommendations for change comes forward, the committee has its work cut out for them.

State associations that include both public and private schools in their membership have wrestled with the same concept of competitive equity long before 2000, when private schools were first provided a membership option in this state. Many hours and many intelligent individuals, nationwide, have yet to discover a magic solution. There have been multipliers and various success factors implemented to impact tournament placements elsewhere, but have failed to produce desired results. Therefore, to do something for the sake of just doing it—even if it isn't the right solution—is a bit counter intuitive.

To address the competitive equity concern, the first consideration is to determine if there truly is a "problem," and if so, define it. Consensus on either of these initial steps may be a challenge in themselves. If one can assume moving beyond those discussions, what will fix the issue with the least amount of divisiveness within the membership? And lastly, any plan to improve the perceived inequities must contain an evaluation plan to measure and define success within a specific timeline.

It has often been expressed, and reiterated by a delegate at the Annual Meeting, that this may be less of a public/private issue than an urban/rural or socio-economic one. It was also stated by a member delegate that students in private schools are different from the students in small public schools based on various circumstances and available resources.

However, one thing is for sure. The desire to play in the State Tournaments and win championships is something every student-athlete shares. Whether those ambitions become reality or not usually depends on many factors, including the time and effort invested by individuals, tradition, and quality coaching. That's just another concept to add to an already complex set of dimensions the competitive equity committee can consider in their deliberations this summer.