

HIGH SCHOOL

How other state high school athletic associations handle public-private issue

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The Alabama High School Athletic Association is weighing [one of the biggest shifts](#) to its competitive structure in recent memory: a potential split between public and private schools.

Certain models being discussed could place [private schools](#) into a standalone league for postseason play or the entire season, removing them from competition against public schools. The conversation follows months of growing tension between independent schools and AHSAA leadership, with private-school representatives formally raising concerns over policies they believe disproportionately affect them. A final decision on the reclassification structure could come at a rescheduled meeting on Jan. 23, when classifications for the 2026-27 and 2027-28 school years are expected to be set.

As that debate plays out across the state, the USA TODAY Network's Alabama preps team set out to answer a simple question: How do other

states handle it?

Only four states split public and private schools completely – or with rare, specific, exceptions – in all competition including regular-season play and postseason. Four others have use a partial-split model. The majority of states, 42 in all, group public and private schools together for all competition as Alabama currently does.

Our reporters created a database outlining how the primary high school athletic association in each state handles public and private school competition, whether through a fully combined model, a split that applies only in postseason play or a fully separate structure. Because many states have multiple governing bodies and private-school leagues outside their main association, this database reflects only how each state's primary high school athletic association structures competition, not every possible high school sports format within the state.

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This breakdown frames options that already exist nationwide as Alabama considers what could come next. Here's what we learned.

The blueprint: combination

The majority of the states fall in this category, with 42 state associations electing to have private and public schools competing during both the regular season and postseason.

Some states utilize a structure like Alabama's current model, where private schools are subject to a multiplier or competitive-balance factors to aim for fair play. States including New Mexico, Colorado, Oklahoma, New York and Wisconsin all have multiplier or competitive-balance rules enforced on member private schools.

In New Mexico, private schools are subject to a 1.3 multiplier in all sports besides football. For high school football in New Mexico, schools can move down one classification if their winning percentage is 20% or lower in three of the most recent four years.

Instead of a multiplier, New York uses competitive balance to access reclassification for private schools. If one of the following is met by a New York private school in postseason play, the school is subject to moving up a class: Team wins a state championship; is a sectional semifinalist; recognized as a league or playoff champion; or the team achieves a winning percentage of .750 or better in overall record.

Iowa has one of the more interesting models among states that combines private and public-school play. In that state, there are two separate state associations – one for boys and one for girls. Neither are subject to competitive balance or multipliers.

ESSENTIAL READING: [AHSAA discussing public-private split for championship competition](#)

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A middle-ground model

There are four states that keep private and public schools in the same association but split them for the postseason. The biggest example is Alabama's neighbor, Georgia, where private and public schools play in the same regions but private schools move into a different playoff bracket. For the most part, they combine multiple classes worth of private schools for the playoffs.

Louisiana keeps private and public schools together in districts, which are based on geography and enrollment, for the regular season. For the playoffs, teams are sorted into divisions and split between public and private.

New Jersey has separate championships for most sports but keeps teams together for the regular seasons. Maine keeps teams together for the regular season, but private schools have their own playoffs and championships.

Separate tracks from start to finish

A smaller group of state associations operate under a fully split model, meaning public and private schools compete on separate tracks in both the regular season and postseason.

In Maryland, that separation is reflected through three distinct leagues: one for public schools, one for private boys programs and one for private girls

programs, creating a clear divide between public- and private-school competition.

In Tennessee, public and private schools compete under the same independent body, the Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association, but are largely separated through a divisional system. Public schools generally compete in Division I, while most private schools compete in Division II. While some private schools are permitted to compete in Division I, those cases are only allowed under specific eligibility and classification requirements.

In Texas, the separation is more straightforward. Public schools compete under the University Interscholastic League, while most private schools compete in the Texas Association of Private and Parochial Schools. As many states do, Texas also includes smaller private-school leagues outside TAPPS, but UIL and TAPPS are the primary structures for high school athletics.

State-by-state breakdown

State	Full Split	Partial Split	Combined
Alabama	No	No	Yes
Alaska	No	No	Yes
Arizona	No	No	Yes
Arkansas	No	No	Yes
California	No	No	Yes
Colorado	No	No	Yes

Connecticut	No	No	Yes
Delaware	No	No	Yes
Florida	No	No	Yes
Georgia	No	Yes	No
Hawaii	No	No	Yes
Idaho	No	No	Yes
Illinois	No	No	Yes
Indiana	No	No	Yes
Iowa	No	No	Yes
Kansas	No	No	Yes
Kentucky	No	No	Yes
Lousiana	No	Yes	No
Maine	No	Yes	No
Maryland	Yes	No	No
Massachusetts	No	No	Yes
Michigan	No	No	Yes
Minnesota	No	No	Yes
Mississippi	No	No	Yes
Missouri	No	No	Yes
Montana	No	No	Yes
Nebraska	No	No	Yes
New Hampshire	No	No	Yes
New Jersey	No	Yes	No

New Mexico	No	No	Yes
New York	No	No	Yes
North Carolina	No	No	Yes
North Dakota	No	No	Yes
Ohio	No	No	Yes
Oklahoma	No	No	Yes
Oregon	No	No	Yes
Pennsylvania	No	No	Yes
Rhode Island	No	No	Yes
South Carolina	No	No	Yes
South Dakota	No	No	Yes
Tennessee	Yes	No	No
Texas	Yes	No	No
Utah	No	No	Yes
Vermont	No	No	Yes
Virginia	Yes	No	No
Washington	No	No	Yes
West Virginia	No	No	Yes
Wisconsin	No	No	Yes
Wyoming	No	No	Yes