

PRINCE Leadership MONTHLY

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PACS & GHSA

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Since the fall of 1999, Prince Avenue Christian School has competed in the Georgia High School Association. At that time twenty years ago, PACS was one of the ten smallest schools in the entire GHSA. Constantly evolving regulations pertaining to private school membership in the GHSA has caused me to reflect on why we chose to make such an ambitious decision to join the GHSA some twenty years ago.

PACS decided to jump straight to the GHSA from the very small Christian Athletic league in 1999 for a multitude of reasons. Even though we were small, we had out-grown our competition. My belief was that our students were missing an opportunity to work and train hard to be able to compete. Winning had become almost automatic, and I could see complacency in the students' work ethic. Other factors, including travel distances and facilities, played a part in the decision, but the most important reason was the need to push our school to work to reach new levels of success. Success was not going to come in great numbers of wins on the courts and fields. Success was going to come from the lessons we learned while fighting to improve.

Fast forward twenty years to 2019. Even though PACS has not littered the walls with state championship banners, it would be hard for anyone to deny how far our school has come athletically. The quality of student-athletes, the level and depth of coaching, and our improvement in facilities are just some of the obvious ways we have improved.

As I look to the next twenty years, I wonder what the future holds for PACS and its membership in the GHSA. In recent years, the GHSA has slowly been moving the "goal line" for private schools while trying to pacify its public school members. While not totally by their own doing, the GHSA has now become an organization that is awash in a sea of constant public and political pressure to keep everyone happy and by doing so, has begun to isolate their private school

members. Here is a condensed, chronological listing of how we got to this point:

*Spring 2000: Tom Murphy, the Speaker of the State House, threatened to shut down the GHSA because of the "unfair advantages of private schools." In response to the threat, the GHSA passed an enrollment multiplier system for private schools. Each GHSA private school student counted as a student and a half in regards to reclassification numbers. This forced many private schools to play in higher classifications.

*Winter 2007: The Georgia State Legislature again pressured the GHSA by requesting that they eliminate the multiplier because of its ineffectiveness.

*2009: Larry Campbell, the head football coach at Lincoln County, went on a year-long campaign to try and push all private schools out of the A classification.

*February 2011: The A public schools met and threatened to leave the GHSA and form a new league called the Georgia Public School Association. The public schools were fine with



playing private schools in region contests, but they wanted total separation of public and private schools in the state playoffs. In response to this threat, the GHSA passed new rules that stated, "At the end of the regular season, Class A is to be divided into separate public and private playoff brackets for all activities".

*March 2012: The GHSA amended their rules on separate public and private championship brackets to include only football, softball, basketball, and baseball because there weren't enough public schools participating in volleyball, swimming, soccer, lacrosse, riflery, or gymnastics to have viable state playoffs. They also began using power rankings for Class A. Cross country, track, golf, tennis, one act play, and literary ceased being region activities and were divided into separate public and private "areas."

*August 2015: The GHSA raised the number of playoff teams for public and private championship brackets in football, softball, basketball, and baseball from sixteen to twenty-four teams.

*February 2017: State Representative John Meadows introduced HB415 that "...calls for the State Board of Education to form a new athletic agency to replace the GHSA." He was quoted as saying, "This bill is a stick and I won't swing it unless needed." HB415 meant to force the resignation of the GHSA Executive Director, Gary Phillips. Representative Meadows felt like Mr. Phillips had not done enough to address the

concerns of his public school constituents. One week later, Gary Phillips stepped down as the Executive Director.

*February 2018: State Senator Jeff Mullis introduced SB 456 which "calls for separate playoffs for all public and private schools with a population of 640 or less." In response, the GHSA separated Soccer and Volleyball into public and private championship brackets. By adding these two sports, public and private schools now have completely separate state championship brackets in all activities.

*January 2019: The GHSA has now given the Reclassification Committee a proposal to separate all public and private schools into separate regions. If adopted, GHSA private schools will have been isolated to compete only with other private schools for region and state contests. This is early in the process, but all indications are that the GHSA is doing everything it can to appease the state legislature and Class A public schools.

GHSA private member schools face many challenges, and there is uncertainty about what the future holds athletically for PACS. I look forward to working with other private schools, public schools, and the GHSA to come up with a solution that keeps PACS in an athletic association that supports us, challenges us, and strengthens us. PACS does not run from competition, we embrace it.