

Executive Summary: Football Tournament Proposal (April 2026)

This proposal outlines a comprehensive restructuring of the high school football postseason format. The primary objective is to address issues brought forward by Association schools including: competitive imbalances, streamline logistics, and maximize the relevance of the regular season through realignment and bracket adjustments.

Core Objectives

The subcommittee identified several critical areas for improvement within the existing framework:

1. **Divisional Alignment:** Creating a more balanced field by ensuring each division contains a minimum of 30 schools.
2. **Competitive Integrity:**
 - Reducing the frequency of mismatched games, particularly those involving seeds 9 through 16, which historically have shown a significantly lower winning percentage (approximately 8.7% combined).
 - Address the frequency of schools representation at the D1 and D2 Finals
3. **Logistics and Participation:**
 - Eliminating multiple consolation games and reducing "opt-outs" by teams not qualifying for the main bracket.
 - Focus on the importance of Thanksgiving games for local communities

Key Proposed Changes

The proposal introduces a revised calendar and qualification structure designed to increase parity across all divisions:

1. **Regular Season & Qualification:**
 - **9-Week Regular Season:** All regular season games will contribute to a team's Power Ranking, which remains the primary metric for postseason qualification.
 - **Elimination of Minimum Wins:** The previous requirement for a minimum number of wins to qualify for the tournament will be removed.
2. **Postseason Bracket Structure:**
 - **Introduction of the "Division 1A":** A top-tier bracket for Divisions 1 and 2. The top eight teams in these divisions, identified by Power Rankings after Week 9, will compete in this 1A format.
 - **Standardized Playoff Field:** For Divisions 1 through 8, the top eight teams in each division (plus 1A teams) will qualify for the postseason.
 - **Total number of teams:** 72
 - **Consolation Games:** 1 game prior to Thanksgiving
3. **Proposed Calendar for Implementation:**
 - **Week 10:** Round 1 of the Playoffs and Consolation Games.

- **Week 11:** Final Four (Round 2).
- **Week 12:** Dedicated to traditional Thanksgiving rivalries.
- **Week 13:** State Finals (9 total games across all divisions, approximately 7% or 18 of 269 teams participate in finals).

Impact and Benefits

By realigning divisions and focusing on the top eight seeds per division, the proposal aims to provide greater access to the state finals for a wider variety of schools while maintaining a highly competitive environment for the state's elite programs. Additionally, the proposal provides teams one more week (9 week regular season vs. 8) of games to contribute to their power ranking. Recognizing the importance of the tradition of Thanksgiving to local communities and wrapping up the season with minimal impact to start of the winter season.