

TALKING POINTS ON H.827 “AN ACT RELATING TO PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC SCHOOL ACTIVITIES BY STUDENTS ENROLLED IN INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS”

- current VPA policies allow for participation by Independent School students through the use of cooperative teams (middle level) and cooperative teams/Member to Member Programs (secondary level). For 2013-14, there are 15 cooperative teams in place within VT schools and over 60 MTM agreements. These are voluntary programs, but we have not seen a case yet, where a student has been unable to participate in an activity if the school’s Athletic Director is able and willing to go and talk with other schools.
- these agreements (Member to Member and Cooperative Team) are voluntary as issues of displacement may arise within a local community. The argument that “we pay taxes” is offset by the argument that the parents “made a decision” when they chose to send their student to a private school. As a result, some communities will not allow these agreements due to displacement, while many others embrace the addition of other students. It is tough to explain to a parent of a public school, whose son/daughter has been displaced by a private school student, why this is allowed to occur.
- comparison to Home School students – home school students, by state law, have access to their public school extra/co-curricular programs. Home School students usually have a connection with their public school as in many instances they are taking classes at the public school as part of their program. Home school students do not have access to any extra/co-curricular programs.

Independent school students do not have a connection with the local school. Independent schools may develop and offer extra/co-curricular programs whenever they would like. Some choose not to do this for financial reasons or because they do not have facilities.

- current bill/amendment does not differentiate between middle school and high school activities. Many Independent schools are already members of the VPA and have active extra/co-curricular programs in which a number of them currently have Member to Member Agreements or Cooperative teams (Examples - Spring 2014 Craftsbury Academy/United Christian Academy have MTM in baseball, Whitcomb HS/Mid-VT Christian School has a MTM in baseball, Chelsea HS/Sharon Academy have a MTM in baseball, Bellows Falls UHS/Compass School have MTM’s in baseball and softball)

At the middle school level, the VPA promotes participation as there are no state championships. At the high school level, this is different. Issues of displacement will surface at both levels and at the high school level, issues of recruitment may arise.

Example of possible displacement/recruitment situation. Five students from Winooski attend Rice HS in South Burlington. They know they will not make the Rice team, so all 5 decide to go out for basketball at Winooski. In the end, potentially, the starting line-up for Winooski is now made up of Rice students (also could use the example of St. J. Academy/Danville, MSJ and/or West Rutland/Proctor, etc.). This would be allowed by current bill/amendment.

Possible solution (if bill/amendment goes forward) – add stipulation that Independent School students would only have access if their Independent School does not offer the sport or activity desired. Under the way the current bill is written, there is no mention of what happens if the Independent school has a team, but the student decides (for whatever reason) that they would rather play on the local public school team.

Second possible solution – limit this bill to grades K-8 and do not include high school (as the issue of state championships is present, this would also reduce recruitment issue).

- in its current status, there are many unanswered questions about what can be done or not done based on the current wording of the bill/amendment. Vermont State Athletic Directors unanimously voted to oppose this legislation at their meeting in January 2014.

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