

CONFERENCE REALIGNMENT COMMITTEE

March 25, 2026

The conference realignment committee meeting was called to order at 8:00am by Marty Fonley (West Monona, West Harrison, Whiting). Members in attendance included Brent Jorth (Central Lyon), Brandon Ruffridge (Fort Dodge), Deron Durflinger (Van Meter), Bill Watson (Martensdale-St. Marys), Scot Lamm (Mount Pleasant), Barb Schwamman (Osage, Riceville), Tara Paul (Indianola), Zach Clark (Central Decatur), Adam Riley (Decorah), Eric Boyle (Waukee), Trevor Miller (Exira-EHK, Audubon), Tara Williams (Pleasantville), Julie Girsch (Columbus Catholic), Jeff Bissen (Glenwood), Cade Lambert (Des Moines Christian), and Andy Crozier (Central Lee). Representing the IGHSAU: Erin Gerlich, Kylee Walker, and Elise Boulton. Absent: Tom Keating (IHSAA).

The following guests were also in attendance: Timothy Brown, Joe Griffith, Brendan Knudtson, Micah Gearhart, Tim Dugger, Kasey Huebner, and Jay Mathis.

Motion by Durflinger, second by Miller to approve the March 25th Conference Realignment Committee agenda. Approved unanimously.

Motion by Durflinger, second by Watson to approve the minutes from the March 5th Conference Realignment Committee Meeting. Approved unanimously.

Prior to beginning discussion of applications from school districts, Fonley asked that those members who believed a potential conflict of interest recuse themselves from the discussion. At 8:02am members Girsch, Schwamman, Riley, and Cook chose to recuse themselves.

Decorah's application and identification of conferences for possible placement was discussed. The committee discussed whether the legislation afforded the committee the power to create a new conference. Fonley shared that he had reached out to the Department of Education as well as the Representative that managed HF783 for clarification on this question and had heard back from the legislator that the intent of the legislation was to place schools in conferences, that the committee could recommend to the legislature suggestions for a better way to organize conferences, and could recommend creation of new conferences but not force schools into them.

Girsch was allowed to re-enter the discussion at 8:22am after discussion by Durflinger, Miller, and Fonley stating that the North Iowa Cedar League is not mentioned in Decorah's application at this time so should not have to recuse.

Each member was asked to give their opinion on Decorah's application request to create a conference. Each member was requested to share their viewpoint. The overwhelming majority felt the option of creation of a new conference should remain an option with comments including; wanting further legislative clarity, concerns about future

concerns this could create, belief that creation of conferences is allowed in the statute, and concerns of impact on schools forced to move. One member was opposed to the concept of creating new conferences.

Fonley led discussion on the schools listed in Decorah's application (Charles City, Waukon, Crestwood, North Fayette Valley, New Hampton, and Osage). Crozier suggests that Decorah's application should be considered as it is proposed. The committee discussed the options for Decorah and the surrounding schools. It was determined that a number of conferences including the Iowa Star Conference, the Mississippi Valley Conference and the North Iowa Cedar League did not make sense for Decorah as options, but the committee will consider the North Central Conference, Upper Iowa Conference, Top of Iowa Conference, and the WaMaC.

The presentation and amount of time given to each school at the April hearing meeting was discussed by the committee. It was determined that a subcommittee would be created to determine guidelines to be given to schools and conferences that could be impacted by another school's application. Paul, Boyle, and Williams will make up the subcommittee.

Motion by Durflinger, second by Crozier to consider Decorah's request for consideration of a new conference and to consider placement in the North Central Conference, Upper Iowa Conference, Top of Iowa Conference, and the WaMaC, unanimously approved. Abstained: Schawmann, Cook, and Riley.

Waverly-Shell Rock's application and identification of conferences for possible placement was discussed. Waverly-Shell Rock applied to be placed in the WaMaC, Mississippi Valley Conference, and a conference yet to be created in Northeast Iowa.

Motion by Miller, second by Durflinger to consider Waverly-Shell Rock's request for consideration of a new conference and to consider placement in the WaMaC, Mississippi Valley Conference, and Upper Iowa Conference. The potential new conference was defined to include Waverly and the schools identified in Decorah's application (Osage, Charles City, New Hampton, Waukon, North Fayette, Decorah and Crestwood). Unanimously approved. Abstained: Schawmann, Cook, and Riley.

Riley, Schwamann, and Cook are allowed to re-enter the discussion at 9:04am after discussion concerning Decorah's application and Waverly-Shell Rock's application have commenced.

Before discussion on Ankeny Christian's application, Durflinger, Watson, Williams, and Lambert recused themselves from the discussion at 9:05am.

Ankeny Christian's application for expedited conference placement to the West Central Activities Conference was discussed.

Motion by Jorth, second Crozier to deny Ankeny Christian's expedited conference placement application. Unanimously approved. Abstained: Durflinger, Watson, Williams, Lambert.

Durflinger, Watson, Williams, and Lambert are allowed to re-enter the discussion at 9:08am after discussion concerning Ankeny Christian's application was completed.

The communication strategy regarding the Conference Realignment Committee was discussed to ensure member schools are aware of the requirements Gerlich and Keating will be leading a discussion on the topic at the AD convention. It was also suggested that committee superintendents bring the topic up at AEA meetings. Fonley has met via zoom with several schools regarding the process. All members are encouraged to share information and to refer to Fonley or Durflinger when needed.

The hearing for a decision for schools applying through the modified process will be held at 9:00am on April 29, 2026 at the IHSAA in Boone. Schools and conferences that could be affected will be contacted by the committee prior to the meeting.

With no further business, Jorth motion to adjourn at 9:13am, second by Miller and approved unanimously.

Elise Boulton

Recorder