

Private schools: Allow merger with UIL

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Private schools in Texas should be allowed to compete in public school districts during extracurricular activities.

There's a bill before the Texas Senate to force the University Interscholastic League to accept private schools for district play.

The push, by private schools, has been defeated in both courtrooms and the Texas Legislature for years. Public school officials argue that private schools have the ability to recruit students, and that might give them an unfair advantage in both athletic and academic competitions.

They also argue that the private schools would not be subject to such state laws as "no-pass, no play."

But arguments favoring private school inclusion in the UIL outweigh those bones of contention.

Taking El Paso's Cathedral High as an example, here are two arguments:

Property owners pay taxes that support public schools. Sen. Dan Patrick, R-Houston, says since taxpayers are supporting public schools, their children should be allowed to compete in both the UIL's academic and sports competitions.

Among non-sports UIL competitions are: academics, music, theater/one-act-play, and speech/debate.

It's also a financial issue.

If Cathedral High could compete in one of the local school districts, it would not have to travel long distances for regular competitions.

Cathedral football players had three regular-season football games far away from El Paso: at Liberty Christian in Argyle, at Marfa and at Van Horn.

The bill does not call for changing state championship competitions. Cathedral students would still travel long distances for those academic and athletic competitions, but so do public schools who advance at state.

Last year's Cathedral football team played post-season state-competition games at Antonian Prep in San Antonio and at Trinity Christian in Addison (near Dallas).

There is no evidence that private schools would gain a competitive advantage when competing with public schools. Texas should approve this long-needed merger.

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