

**EDUCATION DEPARTMENT[281]**

**Adopted and Filed**

**Rulemaking related to extracurricular athletic activity conference for member schools**

The State Board of Education hereby rescinds Chapter 37, “Extracurricular Athletic Activity Conference for Member Schools,” Iowa Administrative Code, and adopts a new chapter with the same title.

*Legal Authority for Rulemaking*

This rulemaking is adopted under the authority provided in Iowa Code section 280.13.

*State or Federal Law Implemented*

This rulemaking implements, in whole or in part, Iowa Code section 280.13.

*Purpose and Summary*

After review pursuant to Executive Order 10 (January 10, 2023), the Department of Education revised Chapter 37 related to activity conference membership by removing unnecessarily restrictive language, as well as consolidating rules for improved organization.

*Public Comment and Changes to Rulemaking*

Notice of Intended Action for this rulemaking was published in the Iowa Administrative Bulletin on December 13, 2023, as **ARC 7163C**. No public comments were received. No changes from the Notice have been made.

*Adoption of Rulemaking*

This rulemaking was adopted by the State Board on February 8, 2024.

*Fiscal Impact*

This rulemaking has no fiscal impact to the State of Iowa.

*Jobs Impact*

After analysis and review of this rulemaking, no impact on jobs has been found.

*Waivers*

Any person who believes that the application of the discretionary provisions of this rulemaking would result in hardship or injustice to that person may petition the State Board for a waiver of the discretionary provisions, if any, pursuant to 281—Chapter 4.

*Review by Administrative Rules Review Committee*

The Administrative Rules Review Committee, a bipartisan legislative committee which oversees rulemaking by executive branch agencies, may, on its own motion or on written request by any individual or group, review this rulemaking at its [regular monthly meeting](#) or at a special meeting. The Committee’s meetings are open to the public, and interested persons may be heard as provided in Iowa Code section 17A.8(6).

*Effective Date*

This rulemaking will become effective on April 10, 2024.

The following rulemaking action is adopted:

ITEM 1. Rescind 281—Chapter 37 and adopt the following **new** chapter in lieu thereof:

CHAPTER 37  
EXTRACURRICULAR ATHLETIC ACTIVITY  
CONFERENCE FOR MEMBER SCHOOLS

**281—37.1(280) General.** It is the policy of the state of Iowa that each school desiring to be a member of a conference providing extracurricular athletic contests and competitions for students is granted this opportunity. For purposes of this chapter, “member school” means a school or school district granted such status by any corporation, association, or organization registered with the state department of education pursuant to Iowa Code section 280.13 and includes associate members.

**37.1(1) Criteria.** To the maximum extent appropriate, membership shall be with other schools of comparable size and within reasonable geographic proximity.

**37.1(2) Initial responsibility.** The initial authority and responsibility for conference development, membership, and alignment rests with the board of directors of each public school district and the authorities in charge of each nonpublic school.

**281—37.2(280) Complaint to the director, department of education.** A member school that believes it has been unfairly excluded or prevented from obtaining membership in an athletic activity conference that would provide the opportunity for participation of its students in athletic events or contests with students from other member schools of comparable size and within reasonable geographic proximity may file a complaint stating this concern with the director of the department of education. The complaint is to set forth in a plain and concise manner the reasons the member school believes the director should intervene in conference alignment decisions and the specific relief requested by the member school. The complaint is to be signed by the president of the board of directors of a public school district or a representative of the officials in charge of an accredited nonpublic school. The director or the director’s designee will, within ten days, acknowledge to the member school receipt of the complaint in writing.

**281—37.3(280) Mediation.**

**37.3(1)** The director of the department of education will establish a mediation team consisting of the executive director of the Iowa high school athletic association (hereinafter association) and the executive secretary of the Iowa girls’ high school athletic union (hereinafter union) organizations recognized in 281—Chapter 36, or their designees, to meet with the complainant and representatives of other affected member schools. If the complaint involves conference alignment for athletic activities represented by only one of the organizations, only that organization will be involved in the mediation. A copy of all materials filed with the director by the complainant member school will be provided to the mediation team.

**37.3(2)** The mediation team will meet with administrators or board members of schools potentially affected by changes in conference alignment related to the complaint. Schools will send representatives who have knowledge of the impact of a conference realignment and full authority to respond on behalf of their member school. Factors to be weighed in reaching resolution include school enrollment figures (current and projected), travel distances, comparability of instructional programs, traditional rivalries, number of existing and proposed schools in the conference, and comparability of athletic programs and other school-sponsored programs.

**281—37.4(280) Resolution or recommendation of the mediation team.** If mediation results in resolution of the complaint, no further action is necessary on the part of the director and the implementation of the mediation agreement will be left with the boards of directors of school districts and the authorities in charge of nonpublic schools. If no resolution is reached within 50 days of the

start of the mediation process, the mediation team will make a recommendation to the director as to the best resolution of the complaint. Copies of this recommendation will be given to all affected member schools. The director will establish a time for a hearing on this recommendation within 45 days of the receipt of the mediation team's recommendation. The director or director's designee will conduct the hearing, at which time all affected parties will be given the opportunity to provide oral or written testimony or submit other evidence. The director or director's designee reserves the right to establish time limits on appearances at the hearing.

**281—37.5(280) Decision; effective date.**

**37.5(1)** In reaching a decision on the complaint, the director will consider information gathered by the mediation team and its recommendation as well as the written and oral testimony from the hearing. In addition, the director or the director's designee may consult with other individuals, organizations, or conference representatives able to provide input on a decision. If a designee of the director conducts the hearing and review process, the findings of the designee shall be reviewed by the director. A final decision on the complaint will be made by the director. The decision may affect conference realignment or direct other appropriate relief to remedy the complaint. The director will make a decision within 60 days of the hearing, and copies of the decision will be provided to all affected parties.

**37.5(2)** If the decision results in conference realignment, the date of this change shall be made with deference given to existing contracts and commitments. Alignment changes will be made for four-year periods with automatic review by the director after two years so that further necessary changes take effect at the conclusion of the four-year period, unless agreement exists that implementation of the changes can occur at an earlier date.

These rules are intended to implement Iowa Code section 280.13.

[Filed 2/9/24, effective 4/10/24]

[Published 3/6/24]

EDITOR'S NOTE: For replacement pages for IAC, see IAC Supplement 3/6/24.