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ASHEBORO - The NCHSAA is about to go through some major changes and elected to lead the Board of Directors during this transition phase is Randolph County Schools Superintendent Dr. Stephen Gainey.

Gainey was named the president of the NCHSAA Board of Directors for the 2024-2025 school year at the annual Spring meeting held this week in Chapel Hill. Gainey, who served as the Board's vice-president this past school year, will take over July 1.

"I am honored, the NCHSAA has been a very special part of my life as far as influence as far back as from being a child," Gainey said. "I have known this organization since I was a boy. It's a thrill to be

involved in athletics. I loved coaching, I loved being an athlete in high school and middle school and there was no bigger thrill than being a principal after coaching. I am just glad to continue to be around the organization to help and be around the staff."

Although there are plenty of issues that will attract the Board's attention, including the always-present financial structure, realignment is certainly one of the biggest changes the NCHSAA has dealt with in years. With the NCHSAA voting to go from four to eight classifications for the 2025-26 school year, preparation and decision-making will take place over the next 12 months.

"Historic," is how Gainey described the realignment. "We have had four classifications for so long. Now we're going to roll out one through eight.

Realignment is going to be a big challenge. We do have a great staff and that is going to help. We are close to announcing a realignment committee, which I was on years back. They do a lot of work and then it comes to the Board."

In terms of realignment, the NCHSAA adopted what is known as the "Big 32" model. The "Big 32" means the largest 32 schools in the state will go into the 8-A



*Dr. Stephen Gainey, Superintendent of Randolph County Schools.*

classification. The remaining schools will go into the other seven classifications based on their average daily membership (ADM).

With the addition of a number of schools slated to join the NCHSAA for the 2024-25 year, there will be 443 schools when the new school year opens in August.

The committee will be in charge of placing the schools in conferences, which could include teams from multiple classifications.

Many details around the playoffs, such as how schools will qualify for the playoffs, cannot be determined until after the realignment process is complete.

Additionally, the Bylaws Committee recommended changing the realignment timeline from every four years to every two years. This would require a bylaws change to be approved by the member schools.

Gainey said there are pros and cons to the proposal.

"One positive is you can make the claim that the (ADM) numbers are going to be more accurate, which will decrease the discrepancy between the sizes of the schools within the same classification," Gainey said. "Another would be the two-year appeal process would probably disappear. But on the flip side, building a non-conference schedule will be very difficult. In football, finding six non league games can sometimes be tough. You don't want to spend your entire athletic budget on travel."

And then there's the amount of time the NCHSAA would have to spend on creating new conferences every two years.

"It takes a lot of time and you'd be doing it all the time," Gainey said.

Gainey, who gave a lot of praise to Commissioner Que Tucker and her staff, said the interaction with member administrations is a key reason he hopes to remain on the Board for as long as possible.

"I grew up in the Eastern part of the state and I know a lot of people in the Eastern part," Gainey said. "I get to see the athletic administrators and principals in the West that I wouldn't have been able to meet if I wasn't on the Board. There is tremendous talent at the high school principal level, the athletic directors level and the coaches. I have been around some great individuals."