



August 25, 2025

By Dennis Garcia

SportsTone.net

ASHEBORO - Citing a "mass exodus" from Randolph County schools by students, teachers and coaches to Asheboro City schools and Uwharrie Charter Academy, the Randolph County School System Board of Education voted unanimously to exclude current members North Asheboro, South Asheboro and UCA from the Randolph County Middle School League effective for the 2026-27 school year.

In the Board's annual monthly meeting on August 18, Superintendent Dr. Stephen Gainey brought up the concern of the Randolph County Middle School League having included the three non-Randolph County schools in the conference and stated there were enough middle schools in the county to have what would be a true county league.

Gainey said he added the item to the meeting's agenda because, "I've been approached with this conversation many times."

Currently, there are 10 schools in the Randolph County Middle School League. Participants include middle schools from Southwestern Randolph, Randleman, Trinity, Wheatmore, Northeast Randolph, Southeast Randolph, Uwharrie Ridge, North Asheboro, South Asheboro and UCA. Beginning next season, the conference will become a seven-team league.

The new league may require teams to play the same team more than once in football or twice in other sports. Currently, the home teams receive the revenue for that event. That means, when county schools travel to play Asheboro City schools or UCA in regular-season games, that gate and concession money goes to ACS or UCA.

"We need to keep as much money in the Randolph County school system as we can," Board member Fred Burgess said. "I'd rather have two of our middle schools play each other again for a second time and keep the revenue there versus splitting with another school system."

The discussion quickly turned in another direction as Burgess talked about how in the time he has been on the Board there have been multiple instances when an administrator or teacher left a county school for one of the other two school systems in the county and took a number of other teachers/coaches with him.

Burgess "led" a more than 40-minute discussion about how students have been leaving the county system only to enroll in Asheboro City Schools or UCA, strongly hinting, and getting reassurance from Board member Shannon Whitaker, the reason was purely athletic-based.

The word recruiting was used a number of times in the meeting and Board members were seeking a way to slow down what Burgess said was a "mass exodus" from the county schools by students, coaches and teachers.

Although the decision was to omit NAMS, SAMS and UCA from the middle school league, most of the discussion centered around instances in which the non-Randolph County school systems hired coaches away from the county system.

It was not directly mentioned, but one of the incidents referred to was Asheboro High School hiring then-Providence Grove head football coach Calvin Brown, who took a number of coaches/teachers with him when arriving at AHS in 2023.

"We need to do something to stop that," Burgess said. "The Charter school, we talked about earlier, they play by a different set of rules. They don't make the rules, they are given a different set of rules.

"We've had students over this past year who have transferred into those systems ...," Burgess continued. "I'm sure if there is a thorough investigation done, just like a lot of athletic things, we'd find out that it did not meet criteria for a transfer. But we didn't do anything to stop it. We don't need to make it easy for them to do. We don't need to put our kids on their fields, a nice complex down there, nice astro turf. ... We don't need to put our kids in front of their coaches on a regular basis."

The Board also discussed the possibility of going to the all-county league this season, but Board member Phillip Lanier said that it would be unfair to make that change at this late date.

"Moving forward, if we want to take them out of our conference the next school year, that's fine," Lanier said. "It's too late to do it now. Regardless, we say students first in all we do. They are kids in this county. If we take them out now, everything for the kids is going to be uprooted and messed up. We shouldn't be penalizing the kids. The kids are just doing what the adults are telling them to do."

The Board, in the same motion, passed a stipulation that requires all middle school tournament championship games this year to be played at a Randolph County facility.

Asheboro City Schools Superintendent Dr. Aaron Woody said the decision to remove SAMS and NAMS from the conference was a surprise.

"It's disappointing because we never had any type of discussion, we weren't brought into that conversation," Woody said. "We have always worked to try and come together. But it's okay. We're looking at it as an opportunity for young people to expand their horizons. We try to look at things as opportunities."

ACS and UCA administrators said they have already begun to reach out to other schools concerning possible conferences for next season.

Woody said he doesn't expect this decision by the Randolph County School System to affect scheduling on the varsity level.

"There will not be a backlash from Asheboro City Schools," Woody said. "Our entire existence is about our students and their families."