

**BOARD OF REGENTS
BRIEFING PAPER**

1. **AGENDA ITEM TITLE:** CSN Athletics – NJCAA Region Change from 18 to 1

MEETING DATE: February 16, 2024

2. BACKGROUND & POLICY CONTEXT OF ISSUE:

The College of Southern Nevada (CSN) became a member of the Scenic West Conference (SWAC), the competitive conference of the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA), Region 18 in 2002. It is the sole conference in the NJCAA’s Region 18 encompassing colleges from Colorado, Idaho, Nevada, and Utah.

In late 2023, CSN began investigating a potential move from Region 18 to Region 1 to reduce travel time and competition costs while supporting student well-being. After performing its due diligence, CSN now seeks to be released from NJCAA Region 18/SWAC and move to NJCAA Region 1 to address increasing its concerns with travel distances, competition costs, and student well-being. NJCAA’s Region 1 encompasses colleges from Arizona. This move requires approval by the institution, under Title 4, Chapter 24, Section 1.1b of the Board of Regents *Handbook* requires Board action.

With approval by the Board of Regents, CSN will pursue joining Region 1 so that it can begin competition for its all its competitive sports for the 2024-2025 Academic Year.

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2. SPECIFIC ACTIONS BEING RECOMMENDED OR REQUESTED:

CSN Athletics requests NSHE Board of Regents approval to move from NJCAA Region 18 to NJCAA Region 1 pending NJCAA approval.

4. IMPETUS (WHY NOW?):

CSN Athletics currently competes in the NJCAA Region 18/Scenic West Athletic Conference, which added two additional colleges in the 2023-24 academic year – Northern Idaho College (Idaho) and Pacific Northwest Christian College (Washington State) – the addition of these 2 institutions has significantly increased travel distances and costs for men’s and women’s soccer, and these two colleges plan to add additional sports year over year. The geographic expansion of Region 18 and the Scenic West Athletic Conference has impacted CSN’s already stretched budget as well as students’ time away from classes due to additional travel time, threatening the sustainability of CSN’s student success programming. Division 1 colleges in Region 18 and Region 1 are currently planning their competition schedules for the upcoming 2024-25 academic year, and CSN is working with NJCAA leadership to complete this Region transition in time for CSN Athletics to align its sports schedules with Region 1 for the 2024-25 academic year.

5. CHECK THE NSHE STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL THAT IS SUPPORTED BY THIS REQUEST:

- Access (Increase participation in post-secondary education)
- Success (Increase student success)
- Close the Achievement Gap (Close the achievement gap among underserved student populations)
- Workforce (Collaboratively address the challenges of the workforce and industry education needs of Nevada)
- Research (Co-develop solutions to the critical issues facing 21st century Nevada and raise the overall research profile)
- Not Applicable to NSHE Strategic Plan Goals

INDICATE HOW THE PROPOSAL SUPPORTS THE SPECIFIC STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL

CSN Athletics is one of CSN's strongest student access and student success programs, fostering a local college-going culture in southern Nevada – more than 80% of CSN's 220 student-athletes are local southern Nevada high school graduates who enroll as full-time students, maintain a high GPA, complete their programs of study, and transfer to four-year institutions – and continue to play competitive sports at the four-year level.

6. BULLET POINTS TO SUPPORT REQUEST/RECOMMENDATION:

- Received letter of support from NJCAA Region 18 leaders, releasing CSN from Region 18/Scenic West Athletic Conference.
- Vetted with all CSN shared governance groups and received written support from ASCSN, Faculty Senate, Classified Council, and Administrative Faculty Alliance.
- Received support from NJCAA Region 1 Division I leaders, who are eager for CSN to bolster the competitiveness of Region 1.
- Received written support from NJCAA leadership – NSHE approval will allow CSN to seek formal approval from the NJCAA Board of Regents in February 2024.
- Transition will reduce travel costs - estimated annual budget savings for CSN Athletics is \$60,000.
- Transition will reduce travel distances and students' time away - estimated bus travel time is maximum 7.5 hours one way in Region 1 vs. maximum 15+ hours one way in Region 18.

7. POTENTIAL ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE REQUEST/RECOMMENDATION:

N/A

8. ALTERNATIVE(S) TO WHAT IS BEING REQUESTED/RECOMMENDED:

Continue to participate in Region 18 – possible pause or elimination of most recently added sports, impacting recruitment and graduation of underserved student populations in southern Nevada.

9. RECOMMENDATION FROM THE CHANCELLOR'S OFFICE:

The Chancellor's Office concurs with the request and recommends approval.

10. COMPLIANCE WITH BOARD POLICY:

- Consistent With Current Board Policy: Title # _____ Chapter # _____ Section # _____
- Amends Current Board Policy: Title # _____ Chapter # _____ Section # _____
- Amends Current Procedures & Guidelines Manual: Chapter # _____ Section # _____
- Other: _____
- Fiscal Impact: Yes _____ No _____
Explain: _____

REGIONAL REALIGNMENT FOR COLLEGE OF SOUTHERN NEVADA ATHLETICS

Enhancing the Student-Athlete Experience and Assuring a Sustainable Model by Moving from Region 18 to Region 1

Per NSHE Policy, CSN Athletics seeks NSHE Board of Regents approval to move from NJCAA Region 18 to NJCAA Region 1 in time to participate in Region 1 for the 2024-2025 academic year. A regional NJCAA change will benefit CSN student access, student wellness, and CSN Athletics' financial sustainability. This requested transition from Region 18 to Region 1 requires approval and alignment with multiple entities (NSHE, NJCAA, and Region 18 and Region 1 leadership). This agenda item is timely since all NJCAA schools are finalizing their competition schedules for the 2024-2025 academic year.

Background

College of Southern Nevada (CSN) Athletics was founded in 2000 and is recognized as an NJCAA Division 1 athletic program. CSN sponsors the following sports:

- Men's Baseball (est. 2000)
- Women's Softball (est. 2006)
- Women's Volleyball (est. 2015)
- Men's and Women's Soccer (est. 2016)
- Cheer and Dance (est. 2019)
- Men's and Women's Basketball (est. 2020)
- Men's and Women's Cross Country (est. 2021)

The purpose of this proposal is to outline the benefits and feasibility of College of Southern Nevada transferring its athletics program from Region 18 to Region 1. By making this transition, CSN aims to enhance its athletic opportunities for students, enhance competition level, and elevate the overall reputation of the college. CSN is designated as a Minority Serving Institution (MSI) and a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), providing the opportunity for access and success to underrepresented students who want to compete in athletics at the college level. More than 80% of CSN's student-athletes are high school graduates from Southern Nevada schools.

An increase in the number of institutional members in the Scenic West Athletic Conference (SWAC) has led to increased travel distances and students-athletes' time away from campus as well as increasing post-pandemic operational costs to support traveling sports teams. Additionally, a four-year significant enrollment decline at CSN has impacted CSN's Athletics funding model, creating existential fiscal threats to the operating budget of CSN's Department of Athletics and Recreation, necessitating immediate attention. To ensure the continued provision of quality student-athlete experiences while maintaining sound fiscal management, CSN Athletics must reevaluate its regional/conference affiliation. The primary objective of this briefing paper is to present the existing challenges for CSN's athletic department, outline compelling reasons for CSN's request for realignment, and emphasize the potential benefits to our institution and Division I programs that compete in Region 1.

Rationale for CSN's Realignment from Region 18 to Region 1

In late 2023, CSN began investigating a potential move from Region 18, taking into consideration the relevant factors "student competition in intercollegiate sports appropriate to the institution, fiscal resources available, and sound standards of student academic performance" articulated in Title 4, Chapter 24 of the Board of Regents *Handbook*.

Currently CSN is a member of the NJCAA Region 18 and Scenic West Athletic Conference (SWAC), which includes the following institutions: College of Southern Idaho, Colorado Northwestern Community College, Salt Lake Community College, Snow College, Truckee Meadows Community College, Utah State University Eastern, Pacific Northwestern Community College, California Christian Community College, and North Idaho College. The geographic nature of the location of the colleges presents a budgetary issue with our current funding model at CSN. Travel distances for student-athletes have led to increased absences from classes during the season and present more physical and mental fatigue, which hinders their academic commitments. The recent addition of Pacific Northwest Community College and Northern Idaho College to the Region 18/SWAC further exacerbates this challenge, as it increases travel costs and time on the road for CSN. The chart below details the driving time from the CSN Campus to both Region 18 and Region 1 competitors.

REGION 18		
<u>School</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Drive Time</u>
California Christian CC	Redlands, CA	3h 32m
Snow College	Ephraim, UT	4h 54m
Salt Lake Community College	Salt Lake City, UT	5h 49m
Utah State University Eastern	Price, UT	5h 54m
Truckee Meadows CC	Reno, NV	6h 54m
Colorado Northwestern CC	Rangely, CO	8h 35
College of Southern Idaho	Twin Falls, ID	8h 47m
Pacific Northwestern CC	Kennewick, WA	14h 28m
North Idaho CC	Coeur D'Alene, ID	15h 14m

<u>School</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Drive Time</u>
Yavapai CC (D1)	Prescott, AZ	3h 55m
Glendale CC (D2)	Glendale, AZ	4h 28m
Paradise Valley CC (D2)	Phoenix, AZ	4h 31m
Gateway CC (D2)	Phoenix, AZ	4h 34m
Phoenix College (D2)	Phoenix, AZ	4h 34m
South Mountain CC (D2)	Phoenix, AZ	4h 34m
Arizona Western CC (D1)	Yuma, AZ	4h 43m
Mesa CC (D1)	Mesa, AZ	4h 50m
Chandler-Gilbert CC (D2)	Chandler, AZ	4h 51m
Central Arizona CC (D1)	Coolidge, AZ	5h 21m
Pima CC (D1)	Tucson, AZ	6h 2m
Eastern Arizona CC (D2)	Thatcher, AZ	7h 7m
Cochise CC (D1)	Douglas, AZ	7h 24m

Enrollment at CSN has not recovered post-pandemic. Since fall 2019, CSN's unduplicated enrollment has declined from approximately 35,000 students in Fall 2019 to approximately 30,000 students year over year – a loss of almost 20,000 students. This significant enrollment decline impacts athletics since

CSN's Athletics funding model is driven primarily by \$2-per-credit athletics fee. Fewer students taking fewer classes results in fewer dollars coming to CSN Athletics. Our cushion has been depleted year after year since 2020, and we are at the brink of a budget shortfall before the end of FY 24.

Collaborative Advantages for CSN's Realignment from Region 18 to Region 1

To address these issues and prioritize student-athlete wellness, we propose a shift from Region 18/SWAC to Region 1, which consists of athletic programs located in Arizona. Transferring CSN's athletic programs from Region 18/SWAC to Region 1 offers several advantages for institutions in Region 1 as well as for CSN.

Benefit for Region 1 Division I schools:

1. **Enhanced Competition:** The competitive landscape will be enhanced by introducing CSN, its athletes, and its fan base to Region 1, which can lead to more exciting and diverse matchups.
2. **League Growth:** Expanding the league can contribute to its growth and sustainability, making it more competitive in the NJCAA and more attractive to sponsors.
3. **Opportunities for student-athletes:** Student-athletes can benefit from exposure to different competition styles and levels, broadening their experience and skill set, which could provide more visibility to recruiters at the next level.

Benefit for CSN Athletics:

1. **Reduced Transportation Costs:** Moving to Region 1 will result in reduced transportation expenses, including transportation costs and hotel rooms, allowing CSN Athletics to allocate a greater portion of our athletics budget toward other essential areas. Estimated savings are approximately \$60,000 annually.
2. **Improved Rest and Recovery:** Long bus rides to games can leave our athletes fatigued and less prepared for competitions. By competing against schools that are closer to CSN in Region 1, our athletes will have more opportunities for rest and recovery, enabling them to perform at their best.
3. **Increased Academic Focus:** The proximity of competing schools in Region 1 will significantly reduce travel time, allowing student-athletes to miss fewer classes. With less time on the road, our athletes can prioritize their academic commitments and reduce absenteeism from classes, thereby fostering their graduation success.

Transition Status

Because of the interdependent nature of membership in an NJCAA athletic conference, the departure from one NJCAA Region to another requires several steps as determined by the NJCAA, which are not necessarily sequential:

- Secure a letter of support from Region 18/SWAC leadership, supporting CSN's departure from Region 18/SWAC membership - Completed.
- Secure a letter of support from Region 1 leadership, supporting CSN's transition to Region 1 – In Progress.
- Submit letter from CSN to NJCAA leadership to request transition from Region 18 to Region 1 – Completed.

Additionally, NSHE requires that the CSN President communicate the desire to change athletic conferences to the NSHE Chancellor and secure Chancellor approval for the transfer; if supported, the Chancellor will seek approval from the NSHE Board of Regents.

At this time, the following steps have been completed:

- In September 2023, CSN Athletics leaders began informal discussions with CSN, SWAC, and Region 1 leaders to discuss the possibility of CSN's transitioning from Region 18 to Region 1.
- In November 2023, President Zaragoza sent a letter to all required leadership to request an exploration of CSN's transfer from Region 18/SWAC to Region 1 and the Arizona Community College Athletic Conference (ACCAC):
 - All Region 18/SWAC College Presidents and Athletic Directors
 - All Region 1/ACCAC College Presidents and Athletic Directors
 - NJCAA President
 - NSHE Chancellor
- In November-December 2023, CSN Athletic Director Yvonne Wade and President's Designee Dr. Margo Martin presented this proposed regional realignment to all CSN stakeholder groups (Association of Students at CSN, Faculty Senate, Classified Council, and Administrative Faculty Alliance) and received unanimous support.
- President Zaragoza participated in a discussion with Region 18/SWAC Presidents and Athletic Directors in December 2023, which resulted in a letter of support sent from SWAC leadership directly to NJCAA leadership; NJCAA acknowledged receipt of this letter in December 2023.
- CSN Athletic Director Yvonne Wade has engaged in recurring discussions with Region 1/ACCAC leadership between October 2023-January 2024; while CSN has received support from Region 18 and NJCAA leaders, CSN awaits a formal decision from Region 1 Division I leadership to support CSN as a member of Region 1 and a subsequent vote by the NJCAA Board of Regents to move CSN from Region 18 to Region 1.

CSN's Next Steps

While CSN awaits approval from Region 1 leadership, discussions have been positive with both Region 1 and NJCAA leadership. **Additionally, CSN now seeks support and formal approval from the NSHE Chancellor and NSHE Board of Regents.**

The proposed regional realignment will allow CSN to optimize resources and improve the student-athlete experience, ensuring the sustainable operation of CSN Athletics while helping to build the competitive strength of Division I schools in Region 1.

Conclusion

CSN's request to move from Region 18/SWAC to Region 1 stands as a strategic realignment that promises substantial benefits for both CSN and Region 1 schools that participate in Division I competition. The proposal addresses the financial challenges faced by CSN Athletics, focusing on academic and physical wellness for student-athletes while optimizing budgetary resources. By enhancing the student-athlete experience, this transition would empower athletes to thrive academically and athletically, fostering a more holistic approach to their development. In addition, it strengthens the league, creating an environment where institutions can compete at their best, maintain a competitive edge, and ultimately contribute to the growth and success of Region 1 Division I schools. The request to move reflects a commitment to the broader mission of collegiate sports, where the well-being of student-athletes, financial prudence, and the overall advancement of the league take center stage.