The 24 schools from the Mississippi Valley Conference and the Mississippi Athletic Conference met with officials from the Iowa High School Athletic Association for more than three hours Wednesday and reached an agreement regarding Class 4A district football.

They agreed to meet again later this month.

"Honestly, I was hoping to come out of today with an answer," Kennedy athletic director Aaron Stecker remarked. "I don't hesitate to say I'm frustrated that we don't have an answer yet. I was wanting an answer today and didn't get it."

The debate is whether to retain conference affiliation for Class 4A football in the eastern part of Iowa or switch to districts, like the Class 4A schools in the western part of the state did two years ago when the issue was first batted around.

The clock is ticking, with everyone on hold for the 2014 campaign. The ultimate decision - whether to switch to districts, retain the status quo or perhaps allow for inter-divisional games between the Valley and the MAC - will dramatically affect the landscape and perhaps change the way teams qualify for the playoffs.

"We had a long discussion," Prairie athletic director Rocky Bennett reported. "A lot of different viewpoints. Both conferences. But really, there were no decisions made.

"Basically, I think we are going to have another meeting before Christmas and hopefully come to some kind of finalization. That was really it."

The conference officials met with IHSAA executive director Rick Wulkow and his top lieutenants at the Kirkwood Hotel in southwest Cedar Rapids.

"I think people are all over the board," Xavier athletic director Mike Winker said. "The reason a decision wasn't made, I think people want to visit and think about it a little bit more before anybody commits to anything. That's kind of my impression."

Xavier might hold a swing vote because it's small enough to play Class 3A football if it's released from conference obligations in the MVC, but Winker declined to tip his hand. "We are still thinking about all the options out there," he said. "I don't want to say either way."

It's not a simple case of the 24 eastern schools dividing neatly into four districts of six teams apiece. Xavier, Dubuque Wahlert and Davenport Assumption could drop to Class 3A if they are released from league obligations, leaving only 21 schools for Class 4A in the east.

The IHSAA could promote Council Bluffs Lewis Central, Newton and Norwalk from Class 3A to Class 4A, because they currently rank 46th, 47th and 48th in enrollment and could replace Xavier (52nd), Wahlert (69th) and Assumption (87th).

Lewis Central, Newton and Norwalk are all located in the western or central part of Iowa, so the IHSAA might have to switch schools like Marshalltown, Ottumwa or Mason City from Class 4A West to Class 4A East to make it work geographically.

"Great discussions," Stecker said. "One thing that comes out of meetings like these are a deeper understanding of each other's league. It's great from that standpoint, but we did not make a decision.

"I'm very much in favor of our league continuing," he said. "Our league is probably hanging on the tightest. A majority of the schools would like to see conference competition continue in football."

The Mississippi Valley Conference and Mississippi Athletic Conference are scheduled to hold their own league meetings next week to discuss the topic, then everyone will meet again with the IHSAA officials before the holidays.

It's up to the schools to make a decision, rather than the IHSAA telling the schools what to do.

"They're not going to dictate to us," Winker said. "It's kind of up to us. They only really help if you cannot come up with a schedule.

"If we can't decide on a schedule, then they'll step in and help us with a schedule. If we can come up with a schedule between our schools, the state is fine with that. They're not pushing us. It's kind of up to us to decide what we want to do."

The MAC has 10 schools and plays a simple nine-game round robin in football. The MVC has 14 schools that are split into two divisions. One proposal is to allow games between the two conferences during the regular season to appease a call for variety.

Wednesday's meeeting consumed most of the afternoon.

"We had a lot of different opinions and discussion," Bennett said. "At the end of the day, it was like deja vu from two years ago. But they did decide another meeting was imperative and it will be pretty important in December To come to some conclusions. That's it in a nutshell.

"It's very obvious the MAC and Mississippi Valley Conference schools respect the integrity of their leagues," he said, "and that's why this decision is so difficult. They are such great leagues."

The Central Iowa Metropolitan League (CIML) ceased to exist for football once the western teams opted for Class 4A district football in 2012. The same fate would await the Valley and the MAC if Class 4A district football happens here.