

SOUTHERN WORCESTER COUNTY LEAGUE

“Achieving Excellence Through Athletics”

Auburn * Bartlett * David Prouty * Grafton * Leicester * Millbury

Northbridge * Oxford * Quaboag * Southbridge * Tantasqua * Uxbridge

December 4, 2020

Dear Student-Athletes, Families, Coaches, and Extended Community:

We hope this message finds everyone doing well amidst these very challenging times, particularly as the number of positive cases of COVID-19 continues to surge across our towns, state, and nation. The reality of keeping everyone safe and minimizing risks continues to be challenging, and we realize that there are many interests and passions within our communities.

We wanted to share with you some updates regarding the winter athletics season. Given the challenges we are facing with respect to the winter season, we want to be transparent regarding the process being employed by the Southern Worcester County League, which has spent literally dozens of hours attempting to prepare for the start of the winter season.

First, given the current metrics of the pandemic and the need for our communities to work collaboratively with School Committees and Boards of Health to support athletics, the start of the winter season is **being delayed until January 4**. In the interim, student-athletes will begin the process of registration for winter sports. This year, the winter sports being supported at the state level are basketball, ice hockey, skiing, gymnastics, and swimming and diving. These next few weeks will give nurses and athletic trainers adequate time to check medical paperwork and physical exams. Please be aware that many other leagues (and states) have already taken the step to delay.

Meanwhile, we are listing below a number of the concerns which we will be addressing over the next few weeks, with the possibility of a winter season cancellation very much a possibility. Below are some of the points that have been considered in attempting to safely hold any winter sports:

- Safely engaging in indoor sport activities, given the nature of an aerosol virus and potential close contacts for those in a closed indoor space
- Ventilation capacity of the sports facilities, gyms, etc.
- Concerns regarding close physical contact, compared to the safety guidelines required of the classroom

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- Determining if the safety modifications required of each sport can be implemented with fidelity
- Identifying the opportunity cost and challenges should we not have sports, considering the desire to have safe physical activities for student-athletes
- Working with non-school facilities and cooperative programs, particularly in hockey and swim
- Ironing out transportation guidelines, compared to school-day requirements
- Geographical POD structure for competitions
- Recommended to limit, if not deny spectators

Given all of our communities' passion for sports, and reconciling that emotion with the reality of the pandemic, we are recommending the following, based on a unanimous league vote:

- Delay the start of the winter season until January 4, including all practices
- Monitor pandemic data
- Work with our athletic directors and facilities staff to determine the extent of facility and sanitization needs
- Work with our respective business offices to determine transportation needs
- Make determinations regarding cooperative sports, including those with schools outside the schools herein represented
- Provide all requisite information for our superintendents to share with School Committees
- Partner with Boards of Health to ensure that sport guidelines can meet, with fidelity, any safety recommendations
- Provide all stakeholders with confidence in a best-faith effort to ensure that safety can be maintained
- Provide all stakeholders with confidence in a best-faith effort to advocate for extracurricular opportunities seen as critical to so many students

Our first and top priority for our communities remains the safety and well-being of our communities at large, and, as a result, are proceeding with an abundance of caution, particularly when we discuss the many variables at play with winter sports.

If, in the next several weeks, we find that we cannot answer affirmatively the following questions, there will be no winter season:

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- How have the metrics for COVID leveled, improved, or gotten worse, both within our individual communities and across the league?
- To what extent have we reviewed game and facility modifications, in order to pass muster with local Boards of Health (and do they do so)?
- Can we realistically support interscholastic activities, given the reality of the pandemic and the challenges faced by mixing cohorts?

To those who may question the decision on the basis of MIAA approval, please know that the process undertaken by the MIAA Sports Medicine Committee, COVID-19 Task Force, and Board of Directors was to ensure that sport modifications met the standards established by the Massachusetts Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, and did not contextualize those recommendations to the requirements imposed by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). As a result, these guidelines are not consistent with the many steps we have had to put in place simply to keep classes running on a daily basis. [The sport modifications are linked here.](#)

Finally, we know that sports, in general, are sources of pride, structure, and benefit to our student-athletes, the lessons of which extend far beyond the actual experience of practices and games, and there are many principals and superintendents in our league who are products themselves of athletics, as participants and coaches. These discussions and decisions are not entered into lightly, and we appreciate everyone’s shared passion and energy.

Please know that difficult decisions are made with respect to the safety of our communities, and we will do our best to weigh all options in the coming weeks, while hoping for the situation to improve. We hope that this delay will, at best, provide us with the time and space needed to confidently support the start of a season, or, at worst, provide us with the information we need to know that cancellation is in the best interests of our collective communities.

Sincerely,

The undersigned athletic directors and principals of the Southern Worcester County League, inclusive of Bay Path Regional Technical High School and North Brookfield Junior-Senior High School, as affiliate members for the winter.

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Daniel Delongchamp - Principal Auburn High School
Brian Davis - Athletic Director Auburn High School
Fran Thomas - Principal Bartlett High School
Tony Paranto - Athletic Director Bartlett High School
Elizabeth York - Principal David Prouty High School
Charles Fahey - Athletic Director David Prouty High School
James Pignataro - Principal Grafton High School
Kevin Anderson - Athletic Director Grafton High School
Tracey Kenny - Principal Leicester High School
Theodore Zawada - Athletic Director Leicester High School
Christopher Lowe - Principal Millbury Memorial Junior-Senior High School
Josh MacCreery - Athletic Director Millbury High School
Tim McCormick - Principal Northbridge High School
Jeff Kozik - Northbridge High School
David Nugent - Principal Oxford High School
Kevin May - Athletic Director Oxford High School
Steve Duff - Principal Quaboag High School
David Bouchard - Athletic Director Quaboag High School
Dawn Micco - Director of Operations for Secondary Schools, Southbridge Public Schools
Frank Koumanelis - Athletic Director Southbridge High School
Mike Lucas - Principal Tantasqua Regional High School
Karrah Ellis - Athletic Director Tantasqua Regional High School
Mike Rubin - Principal Uxbridge High School
Chris Carbone - Athletic Director Uxbridge High School
Richard Lind - Interim Principal North Brookfield High School
Kevin Sloan - Athletic Director North Brookfield High School