

**Maryland Public Secondary Schools  
Athletic Association  
(MPSSAA)**



**Roadmap for Return to Interscholastic  
Athletics and Extracurricular  
Activities**

**Two-Semester Plan**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The Maryland Public Secondary Schools Athletic Association (MPSSAA) in late April turned its focus and all resources to developing guidance, contingencies, and strategies for the return of interscholastic athletics and extracurricular activities during the 2020-2021 academic year. This work has led to some unprecedented moves by the MPSSAA to maximize participation opportunities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

On June 23, 2020, the State Superintendent of Schools requested, at the recommendation of the MPSSAA, a set of COMAR waivers to alleviate logistical barriers that may present themselves as local school systems (LSS) develop educational plans. These administrative waivers focused on flexibility for athletic schedules, flexibility in the limits of participation, and flexibility in time frames during the course of the 2020-2021 academic year to allow for additional forms of student participation in lieu of traditional competition seasons.

The MPSSAA, on July 7, 2020, released a [\*Roadmap for the Return of Interscholastic Athletics\*](#) to guide LSS decisions as they determine the extent of student participation, even in a virtual school setting. This guidance provides preparation, preseason, participation, and postseason guidance to gradually increase the risk level of student engagement.

Recently the MPSSAA in consultation with the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) and the Public School Superintendent Association of Maryland (PSSAM), postponed the competition season for fall and winter sports. This decision provides an opportunity for each LSS to operate student engagement programs beneficial to the physical and social-emotional well-being of students based on the level of community spread and other factors identified by the local health department. This decision also affords a competition season for all sports during the second semester of schools, pending the amount of community spread and local health metrics.

The two-semester plan is built specifically for education-based athletic programs based on the fundamental values, structure, competition level, and logistical frameworks that separate interscholastic athletics from all other levels of sport offerings. The recommended guidelines found in this document represent options for each LSS to gradually resume interaction between student-athletes based on local and state health department guidance. All coaches, athletic directors, and principals should consult with their LSS on criteria in place that allow for increased socialization and use of facilities. This document is intended to be fluid and will be modified as needed based on guidance from the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), the PSSAM, and the MDH.

The health and safety of student participants, coaches, athletic administrators, and officials is a primary concern for the return of interscholastic athletics. The MPSSAA has been working with all 24 LSS, a medical advisory committee, and adjacent state high school athletic associations to guide our states return for extracurricular programs. The interagency work will continue as the MPSSAA, the MSDE, the PSSAM, and the MDH are committed to the return of these highly beneficial programs.

## Return to Interscholastic Athletics Decision Matrix

All decisions prior to step three can be reevaluated depending on emerging data and trends at the state level.

**STEP ONE:** The Governor’s Office, in coordination with members of the coronavirus recovery team and experts at the Maryland Department of Health (MDH), monitor key health metrics and identify the appropriate stage within Maryland’s *Roadmap to Recovery*. The State Superintendent of Schools, in consultation with the State Board of Education, subsequently determines the operational status of schools within each stage.

### Impacts on Maryland Public Secondary Schools Athletic Association (MPSSAA) and Local School Systems (LSS).

**When the State is in Stage 1:**

All school activities are to be conducted online and through distance learning platforms.

**When the State is in Stage 2:**

Some in-person school activities may commence, in accordance with the Governor’s gating and social distancing measures.

**When the State is in Stage 3:**

In-person activities may fully resume, and schools must comply with any State and/or local restrictions in place.

**STEP TWO:** When the State is in Stage 2, the MPSSAA will determine in consultation with the State Superintendent of Schools, the PSSAM, and the Maryland Department of Health as outlined in the *MPSSAA Roadmap for Return of Interscholastic Athletics*:

- Available segments of modified and gradual resumption and administration of athletic and activities.
- Defining sport seasons and timeframes.
- Define sport modifications necessary for maximizing participation.

**STEP THREE:** LSS make determinations regarding the extent of student participation based on the level of community spread and other factors identified by the local health department. LSS can be more restrictive than the requirements of the MPSSAA, the MSDE, or the State Recovery Plan’s health and safety measures outlined by the Governor and the MDH depending on conditions in their locality.

- Submit interscholastic athletic and extracurricular activity plans as part of the Maryland Education Recovery Plan requirements.
- Determine the extent of first semester interscholastic athletic and extracurricular activity participation through any combination of virtual practices or in-person conditioning, skill building sessions, sport specific practices, intramurals, intra-school/inter-school scrimmages.
- Submit out-of-season plan to MPSSAA Executive Director in order to utilize State Board of Education waivers to implement first semester out-of-season participation opportunities. Modifications and updates can occur at any time with resubmission of plan.
- Implement second semester competition seasons in accordance with the MPSSAA and the MDH regulations.
- The MPSSAA authorizes LSS plans for out-of-season practice within the first semester.

# Return to Interscholastic Athletics Two-Semester Contingency Plan

## I. First Semester - Effective Immediately - January 29, 2021

- A. Fall and Winter competition and championship seasons postponed.
- B. The following available opportunities for student engagement within the administrative MPSSAA COMAR Waivers approved by the State Board of Education on June 23, 2020. Effective immediately, the available student engagement opportunities may be any combination of virtual practices or in-person conditioning, skill building sessions, sport-specific practices, intramurals, intra-school/inter-school scrimmages.
- C. LSS determine the extent of first semester interscholastic athletic and extracurricular activity participation through any combination of virtual practices or in-person conditioning, skill building sessions, sport-specific practices, intramurals, intra-school/inter-school scrimmages based on the level of community spread and any other factors as identified by the local health department.
- D. LSS, before utilizing the approved State Board of Education administrative MPSSAA COMAR waivers, shall submit an out-of-season plan to the MPSSAA Executive Director in order to implement first semester out-of-season participation opportunities. Modifications and updates can occur at any time with resubmission of plan.
- E. High school teams that participate in non-school leagues or bona fide competitions will lose the ability to play in modified 2nd semester sport seasons. Non-school team rosters coached by any paid or volunteer coach at the school may not exceed 80% of the returning players of what would constitute a starting lineup in that sport OR a modified version thereof. I.e., 7-on-7 football, 3-on-3 basketball, indoor soccer, indoor lacrosse, etc. (COMAR 13A.06.03.04E(2)).
- F. Failure to comply with MPSSAA regulations shall constitute a violation which will result in penalties against the member MPSSAA school and either the student, coach, or both. The LSS superintendent or LSS superintendent's designee will investigate all alleged violations and apply penalties consistent with COMAR 13A.06.03.05 for any violation of these regulations.

## II. **Second Semester - Beginning February 1, 2021 - June 19, 2021**

- A. Fall, Winter, Spring Sport competition and championship seasons administered in modified formats.
- B. SEASON 1 - Sport Season Winter
  - 1. February 1 - February 21, 2021 - Sport Season Practice and Reconditioning.
  - 2. February 22 - March 27, 2021 - Sport Competition Season.
  - 3. 5 - weeks of interscholastic athletic competition available.
- C. SEASON 2 - Sport Season Fall
  - 1. March 15 - April 4, 2021 - Sport Season Practice and Reconditioning.
  - 2. April 5 - May 8, 2021 - Sport Competition Season.
  - 3. 5 - weeks of interscholastic athletic competition available.
- D. SEASON 3 - Sport Season Spring
  - 1. April 26 - May 16, 2021 - Sport Season Practice and Reconditioning.
  - 2. May 17 - June 19, 2021 - Sport Competition Season.
  - 3. 5 - weeks of interscholastic athletic competition available.
- E. Special Considerations and Accommodations - The MPSSAA is working with LSS, facilities, and health professionals regarding a variety of special accommodations and considerations. Examples include:
  - 1. The availability of facilities that are already at a premium (Swimming and Indoor Track Complexes).
  - 2. Additional training time for baseball and softball pitchers to prepare for a shortened 5-week season.
  - 3. Sport modifications for competition based on status of COVID-19 response.
- F. MPSSAA State Tournaments - The MPSSAA recognizes the highest risk, according to the [Center for Disease Control and Prevention](#), is increased participation opportunities that includes statewide competitions among different geographic areas. The MPSSAA will look for creative ways regarding these types of events and make decisions as we get closer to the second semester.
- G. Expectation Timeline - Additional guidance on the timeframe, scheduling, and second semester sport seasons will be available after continued assessment of LSS

educational plans, further consultation with the MDH, and review of all considerations and accommodations for the competition season.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Two-Semester Plan for Interscholastic Athletics**

The below frequently asked questions have been developed to provide feedback to school communities on the Maryland Public Secondary Schools Athletic Association (MPSSAA) two-semester plan for interscholastic athletics. This plan has been developed in consultation with the 24 Local School Systems (LSS), Public Schools Superintendents Association of Maryland (PSSAM), and the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE).

#### **What is the two-semester plan for interscholastic athletics?**

The two-semester hybrid plan has been developed in consultation with the MSDE, the MDH, and the PSSAM in light of the number of MPSSAA member schools starting the 2020-2021 academic year in a virtual setting. The plan is focused on student engagement options in the first semester and modified competition seasons for all sports during the second semester.

#### **Why was this plan developed?**

The MPSSAA developed this plan to allow for LSS flexibility to maximize participation opportunities for the engagement of students during the first semester and sets a plan for sport competition in the second semester. Consultation with the MSDE, the MDH, and the PSSAM made it evident that a continuity of a competition season in the first semester would be challenging. Each LSS is navigating various levels of community spread, positivity rates, and other factors identified by the local health department for school-based educational programs. This plan provides MPSSAA parameters for the resocialization of sport with LSS flexibility for the gradual engagement of students within each respective LSS educational plan.

## **FIRST SEMESTER QUESTIONS**

#### **What is involved in the first semester of the plan for all sports?**

The first semester utilizes MPSSAA waivers from the State Board of Education to allow for out-of-season plans by each LSS for the continued engagement of students in all sports. LSS are eligible to create any combination of virtual practices or in-person conditioning, skill building sessions, sport-specific practices, intramurals, and intra-school/inter-school scrimmages. LSS decisions for student engagement must be based on the level of community spread and any other factors as identified by the local health department.

**Can teams be established for the second semester during the first semester? Are coaches able to conduct tryouts during the first semester and establish the teams that will compete during the second semester?**

School teams may not be established for the second semester during the first semester. Team selection for the competition season will occur within the confines of the respective preseason as identified in the second semester plan. Coaches must operate within the defined plans of their respective LSS for the first semester with no implications on second semester student participation.

**What are MPSSAA Waivers?**

The regulations that govern the MPSSAA are found in section 13A.06.03 of the Maryland Code of Regulations (COMAR). These regulations are those of the Maryland State Board of Education and provide the parameters all member schools must comply with for the participation in extracurricular activities.

The MPSSAA requested [administrative waivers](#) of sport seasons, out-of-season practice rules, and required scheduling dates from the State Board of Education at their June 23 meeting in the event traditional competition seasons would be delayed. These administrative waivers are now being applied to provide options for LSS to engage students in out-of-season participation opportunities.

**What does the out-of-season practice regulation mean?**

The regulation waiver provides LSS the opportunity to create plans for all schools within their school system. The regulation does not give the authority for any coach or teams to operate outside of the defined sports season unless authorized by their LSS plan. Each LSS will submit a system wide plan for their respective school system to implement first semester student engagement.

**Why are club and travel programs able to have competition and the MPSSAA has postponed the competition season?**

The MPSSAA is the athletic association for public secondary schools in Maryland and does not have jurisdiction over private club and travel programs. The MPSSAA has consulted with the MDH, the MSDE, and the PSSAM and been advised on the postponement of competition for the first semester. Club and travel programs are subject to decisions of local health departments and local governments.

**Can my public high school team compete in a recreational league?**

Member school teams that participate in non-school leagues or bona fide competitions outside of LSS out-of-season participation plans will lose the ability to play in modified 2nd semester sport



seasons and be in violation of COMAR 13A.06.03. Member schools are reminded as of August 12, 2020, non-school team rosters coached by any paid or volunteer coach at the school may not exceed [80% of the returning players](#) of what would constitute a starting lineup in that sport OR a modified version thereof. I.e., 7-on-7 football, 3-on-3 basketball, indoor soccer, indoor lacrosse, etc. (COMAR 13A.06.03.04E(2)).

Member public high school teams may not compete in a recreational league or other developed league under the auspices of the public high school team. This provision will be strictly interpreted by the MPSSAA to ensure the integrity of the collective interagency public health decision between the MPSSAA, the PSSAM, and the MDH to postpone the MPSSAA competitive season. As used here, “auspices of the public high school team” is broadly interpreted to include any supervision by paid or volunteer coach, school support, sponsorship, funding, use of the high school name, high school mascot, uniforms, equipment and any similar attribute of public high school team involvement. Any leagues contacting and creating teams through high school representatives, or advertise their league and competition utilizing similar wording that would indicate a Maryland public high school participation will violate MPSSAA, State Board of Education, and LSS regulations and subject the school to local and Maryland regulation violations.

All member schools are expected to be in full compliance with local and Maryland regulations for interscholastic athletics unless operating within waivers as approved by the State Board of Education. These waivers for out-of-season practice require each member school to operate within the system wide out-of-season participation plans developed by each LSS.

### **Can my middle school team compete in a recreational league?**

Athletic participation eligibility under the MPSSAA regulations begins when a student in 9th grade is officially registered and attending an MPSSAA member school. The MPSSAA does not have jurisdiction over middle school teams or programs. LSS implement middle school programs at their discretion and should be contacted regarding the status of middle school teams or programs.

### **What is the definition of a scrimmage?**

Scrimmages are defined as a practice or modified game in which no score is reported, no admission is charged, no public report is made, and is conducted purely for instructional purposes. LSS that implement scrimmages or other authorized events must be in compliance with MDH orders as it relates to spectators at high school sporting events and gatherings. [MDH orders](#) as of September 1, 2020 do not allow spectators to attend any high school sporting event or gathering. The MDH order is interpreted to include scrimmages.

## **SECOND SEMESTER QUESTIONS**

### **What is involved in the second semester of the plan?**

The second semester plan provides three distinct competition sport seasons. Each sport season will have a 20-calendar day preseason and a five-week competition season. Winter sports will be administered first, followed by Fall, and finally Spring sports.

### **How many games can I play in my sports five-week competition season?**

Member schools will be subject to the MPSSAA defined weekly and seasonal contest limitations per sport within the five-week timeframe. Under this plan all sports will have an opportunity to play between 50 and 100 percent of their typical regular season allotment of contests.

### **What happens if a sport or the entire competition season is unable to take place?**

The sport or competition season will be cancelled for the year and the LSS will be able to operate any version of the first semester plans until the next sport season begins.

### **What happens if LSS are unable to participate in a defined sport season?**

If LSS are unable to participate in a sport season, the competition season will continue for those LSS that can compete. The LSS unable to compete will cancel the competition season and have the ability to operate under any version of the first semester plans. The LSS will have the ability to enter a sport season late, or the next available sport season. The 20-calendar preseason practice timeframe will not be waived for any LSS starting late.

### **Why was this order of sport seasons chosen as compared to a different order?**

Arguments can be made for any sport season to participate first, second, or third in this modified format. Consultation with the LSS, the PSSAM, and the MDH determined this was the best timeframe for all sports.

### **Will there be state tournaments or championships?**

The MPSSAA recognizes the highest risk, according to the CDC, is increased participation opportunities that includes statewide competitions among different geographic areas. This reality places state championships or culminating events in jeopardy depending on the sport.

Each respective sport will be evaluated by the MPSSAA on an individual basis to make calculated and informed decisions dependent on the characteristics of the MPSSAA-administered

sport, the number of programs being administered by member schools, and local and state health department guidance on the status quo of statewide participation. The MPSSAA will look for creative ways regarding these types of events and make decisions as we get closer to the second semester.

**In the event state competition is not possible, due to health metrics and participation restrictions, will LSS be able to conduct city/county/conference postseason tournaments or culminating events?**

Yes. If state tournaments or championships are not possible, LSS will have the flexibility to conduct culminating events in their respective city/county/conference. Additional guidance on the timeframe, scheduling, and second semester sport seasons will be available by mid-October after continued assessment of LSS educational plans, further consultation with the MDH, and review of all considerations and accommodations for the competition season.

## **ATHLETIC ELIGIBILITY QUESTIONS**

**What happens if my child graduates prior to the conclusion of the spring sport season?**

MPSSAA regulations allow graduates to participate in the remaining athletic contests of that semester in which they graduated (COMAR 13A.06.03.02K).

**What happens if I play a fall sport in another state or private school and transfer to a school that has the same fall sport in a different sport season?**

The MPSSAA regulations allow for four seasons of eligibility for any one sport beginning in 9th grade regardless of whether the student first played in a private school or in a school in another state and then enrolled in a Maryland MPSSAA member high school. A season of eligibility is determined based on the student's physical entry into a bona fide contest. Students who entered into a bona fide contest in a sport season in another state or private school will have used a season of eligibility in that sport. If the student enrolls in a school in the same school year and participates in a bona fide contest in a separate designated sport season, the student will use a second season of eligibility in the sport in the same academic year. After four seasons of participation in the same sport, the student will have exhausted his or her eligibility.

**What else do I need to know about my student/child's athletic eligibility?**

Pursuant to COMAR 13A.06.03.02, students must be officially registered and attending the member MPSSAA school they are authorized to attend under regulations of the local school system. The student may represent only the school in which they are registered and at which it is anticipated they will complete their graduation requirements. Each local school system shall establish standards of participation which assure that students involved in interscholastic athletics are making satisfactory progress toward graduation. Students who are 19 years old or

older as of August 31 are ineligible to participate in interscholastic athletics. Students in grades 9, 10, 11, and 12 may participate in interscholastic athletic contests for a maximum of four seasons in any one sport. Middle, intermediate, or junior high school students are not eligible to compete or practice with high school teams. Students shall maintain amateur status. The LSS may adopt rules governing their athletic programs that are more restrictive than those of the MPSSAA. Less restrictive rules may not be adopted. Schools and parents should consult with their LSS regarding any athletic eligibility questions as LSS can be more restrictive than MPSSAA regulations.

**What happens if there are positive developments regarding COVID-19 that allows Maryland schools to return to school earlier?**

The MPSSAA would work with the MSDE, the MDH, and the PSSAM to make appropriate changes based on the level of community spread and any other factors as identified by the local health department.

**Where can I stay up-to-date on the MPSSAA Two-Semester Plan?**

The MPSSAA has a [COVID-19 Updates](#) Webpage dedicated to keeping its school communities up-to-date. In addition, LSS have information pertaining to the specific policies of their school system on each of their websites.

## Local School System

### First-Semester Interscholastic Athletic and Extracurricular Activities Plan

Please provide information on the status of your current Local School System (LSS) First-Semester plan for the engagement of students in Interscholastic Athletics and Extracurricular Activities. LSS may attach a plan in lieu of filling out all the information found within.

**Local School System:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Point of Contact:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Contact information:** \_\_\_\_\_

**1. Please provide information on your plan for Interscholastic Athletics and Extracurricular Activities (Attached plans are acceptable).**

- a. Mode of Participation (Virtual engagement, In-person conditioning, skill development, conditioning, intramurals, team practices, intra-school scrimmages, inter-school scrimmages):
  
- b. List the interscholastic athletics and extracurricular activities available for your mode of participation during the first semester:

**2. Please provide the timeframes for your school system plan of student participation.**

Mode of Participation and Student Engagement	Timeframe
Virtual Engagement (at home practice, skill building, or other modes of virtual engagement)	
On School Campus Conditioning	
On School Skill Development/Team Practices	
On School Campus Intramurals	
On School Campus Intra-School Scrimmages	
On School Campus Inter-School Scrimmages	

**3. LSS plan is available on LSS website and includes protocols aligned with the MPSSAA Return to Interscholastic Athletics and LSS Return to Play Team.**

Please provide a link to your LSS Return to Play Information: