



Karen B. Salmon, Ph.D.
State Superintendent of Schools

TO: Members of the State Board of Education

FROM: Karen B. Salmon, Ph.D.
Maryland State Superintendent of Schools

DATE: October 26, 2020

SUBJECT: Request from the Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland regarding the interscholastic athletics second semester competition season

PURPOSE:

To review a request from the Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland (PSSAM) to move the second semester start of the interscholastic athletic season from February 1, 2021 to December 7, 2020.

BACKGROUND/HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE:

On June 10, 2020, the State Superintendent of Schools in conjunction with a Maryland Department of Health (MDH) Order, authorized local school systems (LSSs) to engage students in conditioning and skill-development training. Since June 10, 2020, LSSs have had the ability to administer in-person coach and student-athlete engagement.

On August 3, 2020, the State Superintendent authorized the Maryland Public Secondary Schools Athletic Association (MPSSAA), at the request of PSSAM, to postpone the fall and winter interscholastic athletic competition seasons for the first semester. The MPSSAA provided a plan, agreed upon by all 24 local Superintendents and authorized by the State Superintendent of Schools, for three equitable sport seasons during the second semester beginning February 1, 2021.

On August 28, 2020, the MDH announced health metrics for the return of students to in-person learning and programs. On September 24, 2020, the State Superintendent of Schools authorized the fall high school sports competition season to begin as early as October 7, 2020. The decision was based on a combination of factors, including the State of Maryland in stage three of the recovery plan, 22 LSSs under a 4.0 positivity rate, and the MDH continued guidance that interscholastic athletic events and gatherings may take place.

Three LSSs have since begun a high school fall sports season, 15 LSSs are currently providing practices and skill development training, and six LSSs remain in virtual athletic engagement with

student-athletes. The Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland, requested on October 5, 2020, to move up the second semester interscholastic athletic start date from February 1, 2021, to December 7, 2020.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Local School Systems, per COMAR 13A.06.03, are required to participate within the defined sports seasons established and need approval of the State Board of Education or the State Superintendent of Schools to redefine previously established sport seasons. The State Superintendent, based on current information and health metrics from the MDH, has authorized LSSs to start a fall competition season as of October 7, 2020, or continue to offer conditioning and skill development programs and start on February 1, 2021. Three LSSs started a high school fall sports season on October 7, 2020. Twenty-one LSSs opted to begin on February 1, 2021. The Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland has requested to move the February 1, 2021, second semester first practice date, to December 7, 2020.

ACTION:

To take action on the request of the Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland to move the February 1, 2021, second semester interscholastic athletic first practice date to December 7, 2020.

ATTACHMENT:

Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland's Proposal

Dr. Kelly L. Griffith

President, PSSAM
Superintendent of Schools
Talbot County Public Schools
12 Magnolia Street, P.O. Box 1029
Easton, MD 21601
Phone: 410-822-0330
E-Mail: kgriffith@talbotschools.org



October 5, 2020

Dr. Karen B. Salmon, State Superintendent
Maryland State Department of Education
200 West Baltimore Street
Baltimore, MD 21201

Sent via electronic mail only

Dear Dr. Salmon,

The twenty four superintendents have met and discussed the attached correspondence from the state's athletic directors. A vote was called and we are supportive of the attached proposal. We greatly appreciate their work on an alternative return to in-person activities that would allow for more systems to prepare for, and participate. We hope you will strongly consider this proposal, which we see as a carefully crafted compromise authored by our highly trusted and skilled athletic directors.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Kelly L. Griffith'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr. Kelly L. Griffith
PSSAM President

Cc: Maryland Superintendents
Andy Warner, Executive Director, MPSSAA
Board Members, Maryland State Board of Education
Dr. Miya Simpson, Executive Director, Office of the State Board of Education
Frances Hughes Glendening, Executive Director, MABE
Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director, PSSAM

September 29, 2020

Dr. Kelly Griffith
President, Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland
Superintendent, Talbot County Public Schools

Dr. Griffith:

The purpose of this letter is to provide potential considerations for superintendents regarding the reinstatement of interscholastic athletics in the wake of last week's announcement by the governor and state superintendent of schools that local school systems have the option to begin fall sports on October 7, 2020. We as supervisors of athletics share similar concerns as superintendents regarding the quick turn-around of this date and the presence of two options for local school systems. We feel it is important for us to work together on a plan that allows for unity across Maryland and represents the collective voice of superintendents, supervisors, and the stakeholders we serve.

The collective supervisors of athletics, representing the 24 local school systems in Maryland, are committed to returning students to in-person activities and operations as soon as possible, in alignment with local health metrics and school system operations. However, there are concerns regarding the current start date of October 7th, given the need to allow for the appropriate reconditioning of students and effective preparation for the safe return of activities, in compliance with state and local COVID-19 guidelines. For many reasons, we feel it is in the best interest of all stakeholders in the 24 jurisdictions in Maryland to unite around a consistent set of three MPSSAA competitive seasons. We understand not all counties may be able to begin operations in those seasons at the same time. However, we feel having multiple options will further diminish the quality of what will be offered in each scenario and exacerbate inequities across the state. Additionally, we have significant concerns around the availability of facilities, officials, and other staff needed to properly administer athletics, if two separate options are implemented.

We propose the following calendar and timeline for consideration by superintendents as the one option and calendar for interscholastic athletics for the 2020-2021 school year.

Modified 2nd Semester Competitive Season Plan

Season	First Practice Date	First Play Date	Last Play Date
Winter	*December 7, 2020	January 4, 2020	February 13, 2020
Fall	February 13, 2020	March 5, 2020	April 17, 2020
Spring	April 17, 2020	May 7, 2020	June 19, 2020

*Note – for the winter season, there is an additional week of preseason than the required 20 calendar days due to the need to provide student-athletes with an additional week for reconditioning and concerns regarding operations due to local school systems being on winter break. This would allow for buildings and facilities to be cleaned and maintained as appropriate.

The proposed calendar includes the following features:

- Aligns with the action of the MPSSAA Executive Council on September 21, 2020, supporting this calendar as a preferred option for consideration
- Provides local school systems with a reasonable start date for formal seasons
- Allows local school systems to continue with the current progression of the Two-Semester model, which includes conditioning and skill-based activities in advance of the start of the winter season
- Provides no overlap between the seasons - which is a concern with the current Two-Semester calendar, which includes a 2-week overlap between seasons
- Allows for 6+ weeks of competition (6 full weeks plus one Friday/Saturday)
- Accounts for the health & safety of student-athletes by eliminating overlap and providing additional time for students to recondition prior to participating in the formal seasons
- Relieves facility conflicts and coaching conflicts for those who coach multiple sports

Regarding state tournaments and competitions, supervisors recognize that health metrics would need to support such events from operating, as they feature significant travel concerns. The administration of such events would only occur with the collective support of superintendents and through the appropriate established procedures of the Maryland Public Secondary Schools Athletic Association (MPSSAA). This process includes the collective voice of stakeholders across the state, including sport committees, the Executive Council, and the Board of Control.

Furthermore, supervisors request the Maryland Department of Health and MPSSAA Medical Advisory Committee include statements and guidance addressing concerns with the use of indoor facilities and the administration of the high-risk sports of basketball and wrestling, along with gathering sizes in indoor track & field. Such guidance would assist local school systems in safely administering the return of winter sports, in alignment with COVID-19 protocol and procedures.

In closing, we appreciate the ongoing support of superintendents throughout these unprecedented times. Thank you for your consideration of this proposal; we look forward to working with you and our stakeholders to lead the safe return of interscholastic athletics across Maryland. We are available to superintendents to answer questions and provide insight regarding this proposal and the next steps regarding the return of sports.

Sincerely,

The Supervisors of Athletics Representing the 19 Local School Systems Below:

Anne Arundel County
Baltimore City
Calvert County
Caroline County
Cecil County
Charles County
Dorchester County

Frederick County
Howard County
Kent County
Montgomery County
Prince George's County
Queen Anne's County
Somerset County

St. Mary's County
Talbot County
Washington County
Wicomico County
Worcester County

Update on Interscholastic Athletics

State Board of Education

October 26, 2020

Background

- **June 10, 2020** - The Maryland Department of Health (MDH) issued a Health Order regarding community, recreational, leisure, cultural, and sport gatherings, stating, “*High school and college athletics may resume sports gatherings and events.*” The Health Order, last amended on September 24, 2020, has been modified to provide additional updated guidance related to face coverings, social distancing, and spectator limitations.
- **June 10, 2020** – The Maryland State Superintendent of Schools authorizes all local school systems (LSSs) to bring students back onto school campuses for student conditioning, training, and other student engagement options. Sixteen LSSs prior to the academic year brought students on campus for in-person activities and athletics.

The importance of Dr. Salmon’s decision was to ensure student-athletes were being engaged for their mental health, physical well-being, and profiting from the intangible benefits found in social engagement and athletic participation. As noted in a recent study from the University of Wisconsin of Health and Wisconsin School of Medicine study, completed by a team of physicians, child health experts and researchers, approximately 68 percent of the 3,243 student-athletes surveyed reported feelings of anxiety and depression at levels that would typically require medical intervention, an increase of 37 percent from past research studies conducted by the University.

Background

- **June 23, 2020** - The Maryland State Board of Education approves a set of waiver regulation requests to provide flexibility for LSSs in the implementation of interscholastic athletic and extracurricular activities. The approved waivers allow for LSSs to maximize participation opportunities through out-of-season participation, flexible seasonal scheduling within defined sport seasons, and for various reimagined participation opportunities.
- **July 7, 2020** - The Maryland Public Secondary Schools Athletic Association (MPSSAA) releases a [*Roadmap for the Return of Interscholastic Athletics*](#). The guidance issued provides health and safety measures to gradually return students to participation through the plans developed by each LSS's Return to Play Committee. Local school system Return to Play Committees are designed to advise the LSS on ways to maximize participation based on state and local health department guidance and local health metrics.

The MPSSAA *Roadmap for the Return of Interscholastic Athletics* was a collaboration with all 24 LSSs, athletic administrators, and medical professionals, including a cohort of sports medicine and pediatric infectious diseases professionals from the University of Maryland Medical System, Johns Hopkins Hospital, Medstar Health, and Lifebridge Health. The document encourages return to full competition in Stage Three of the Governor's reopening plan.

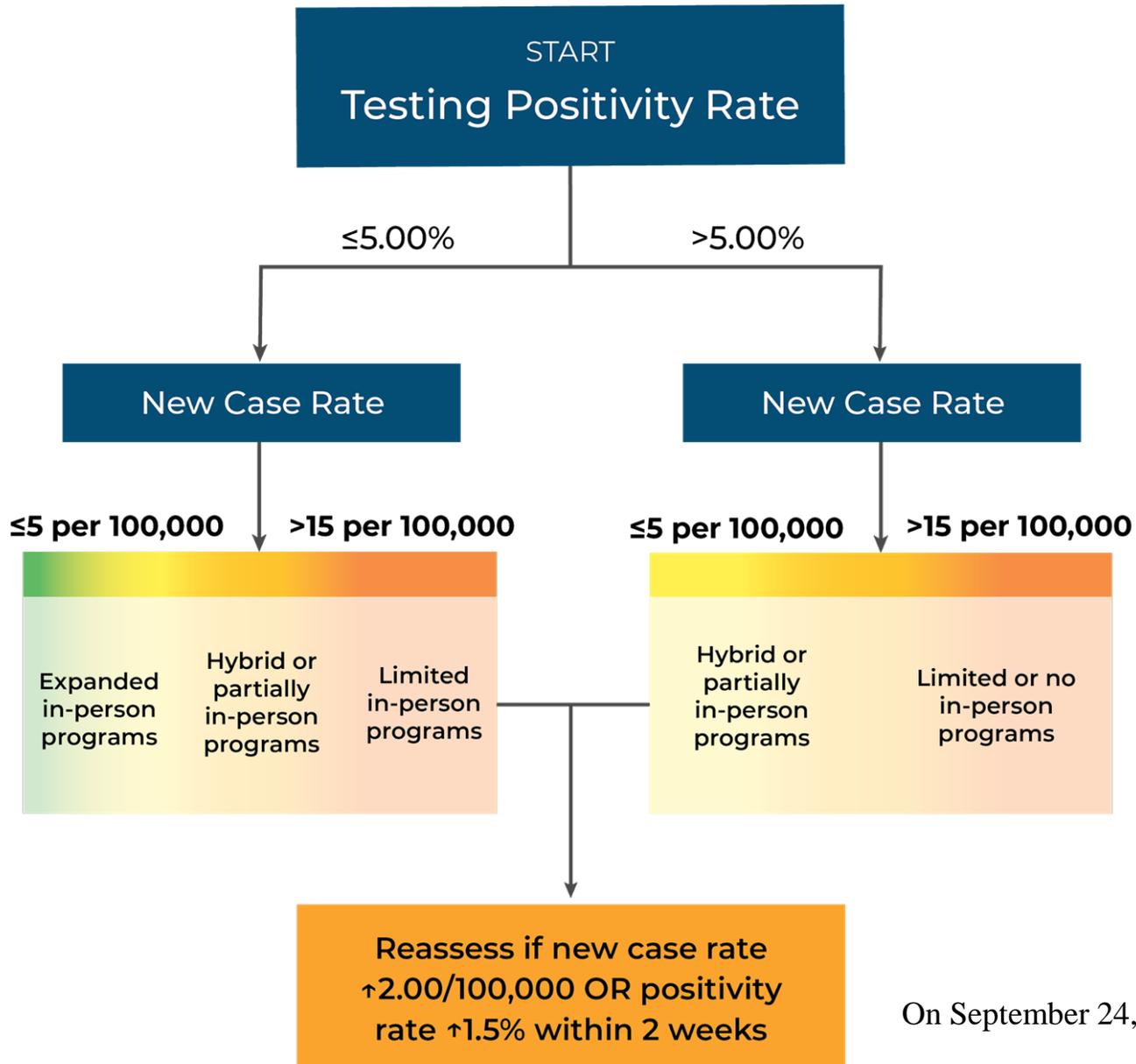
Background

- **August 3, 2020** - The MPSSAA in consultation with the State Superintendent, the MDH, and the Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland (PSSAM) postpone the 2020 high school fall and winter competition season during the first semester.
 - The MPSSAA, with support of PSSAM and the MSDE, released a Two-Semester Plan that provides opportunities for student engagement during the first semester, with a designated competition season start date of February 1, 2021.
- **September 24, 2020** - Based upon the current information and health metrics released for the reopening of schools on August 28, 2020, by the MDH, the State Superintendent authorized LSSs to immediately begin in-person engagement in conditioning for any LSS not currently operating in-person programs, and to begin a fall competition season as of October 7, 2020. The decision also affords greater opportunities for winter and spring sport competition during the 2020-2021 academic year.

Decision to Start Athletics

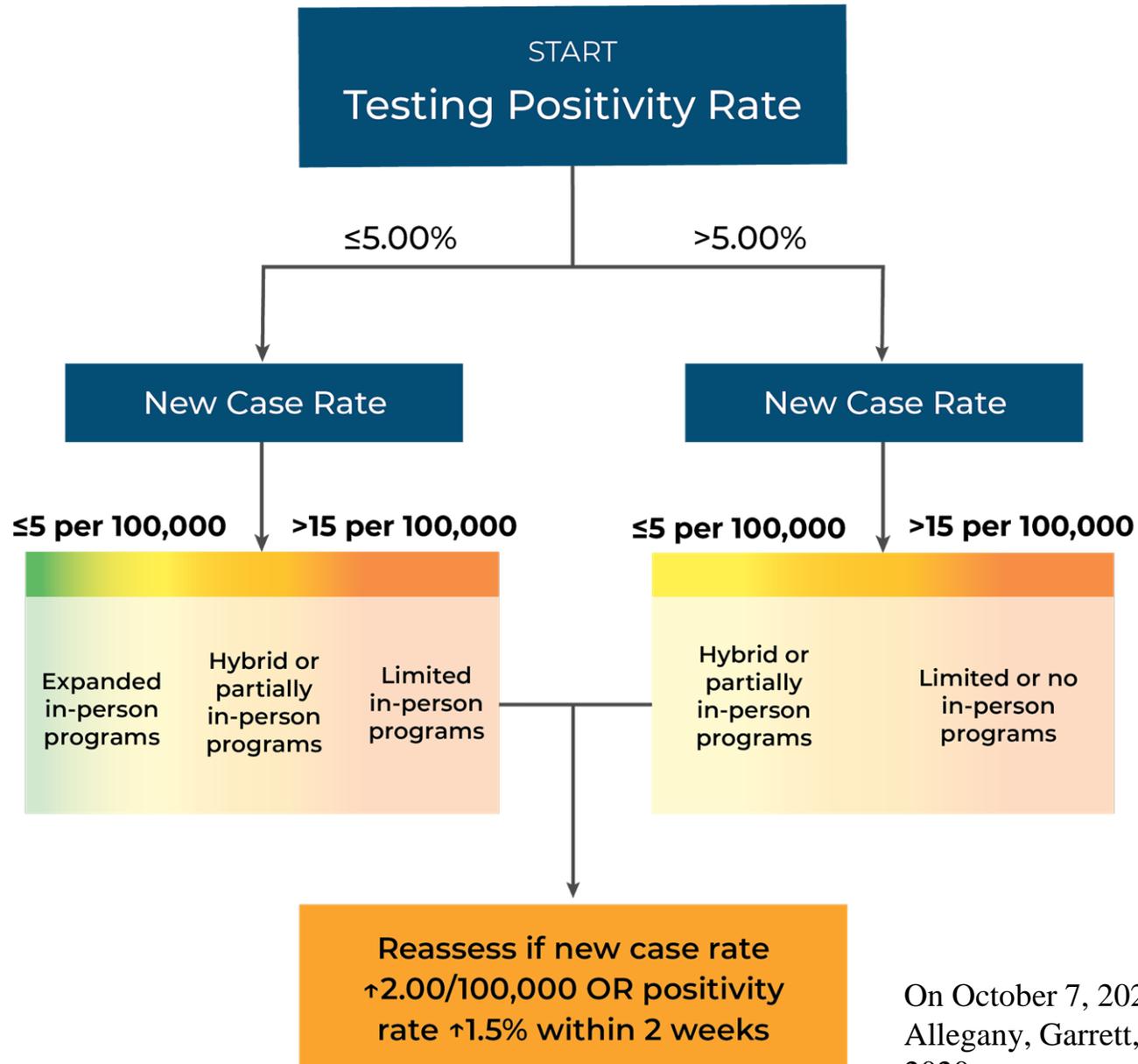
Based upon the current information and health metrics released for the reopening of schools on August 28, 2020, by the MDH, the State Superintendent of Schools authorized LSSs systems to immediately begin in-person engagement in conditioning and skill-based training for any LSS not currently operating in-person programs and to begin a fall competition season as of October 7, 2020.

- The decision aligns with the MPSSAA *Return for Interscholastic Athletics* of maximizing participation opportunities by allowing LSSs that can start athletics to resume, while retaining the last possible opportunity for three equitable sport seasons previously agreed upon by Local Superintendents.
- The decision was based on the State of Maryland in Stage Three of the recovery plan.
- The decision was based on 22 LSSs under a 4.0 positivity rate.
- The decision was based on the MDH continued guidance that interscholastic athletic events and gatherings may take place.



September 24, 2020 Metrics		
	Positivity Rate	Per 100K
Allegany	1.727	4.87
Anne Arundel	3.289	8.88
Baltimore Co.	2.236	7.49
Baltimore City	1.736	5.9
Calvert	2.437	4.63
Caroline	2.737	8.55
Carroll	1.206	3.14
Cecil	4.697	9.72
Charles	2.939	7.96
Dorchester	3.427	12.53
Frederick	2.456	7.76
Garrett	0.036	0.049
Harford	2.12	4.47
Howard	1.866	5.88
Kent	1.733	5.15
Montgomery	2.35	6.85
Prince George's	3.404	10.76
Queen Anne's	3.391	6.81
Somerset	3.669	7.81
St. Mary's	1.617	3.78
Talbot	2.896	11.14
Washington	3.513	14.09
Wicomico	3.974	12.41
Worcester	7.469	14.46

On September 24, 2020, 23 school systems were under a 5.00 percent positivity rate.



October 7, 2020 Metrics		
	Positivity Rate	Per 100K
Allegany	1.15	5.48
Anne Arundel	3.25	10.11
Baltimore Co.	2.687	9.12
Baltimore City	2.63	11.34
Calvert	3.177	9.26
Caroline	3.51	4.7
Carroll	1.88	5.85
Cecil	2.73	6.81
Charles	2.74	7
Dorchester	2.89	10.29
Frederick	2.62	8.86
Garrett	0.093	0.098
Harford	2.418	7.33
Howard	2.247	7.54
Kent	2.41	7.36
Montgomery	2.43	8.29
Prince George's	4.27	11.5
Queen Anne's	3.097	6.24
Somerset	4.47	26.77
St. Mary's	2.238	6.29
Talbot	1.797	3.84
Washington	1.911	8.51
Wicomico	3.79	17.37
Worcester	3.9	12.84

On October 7, 2020, all 24 school systems were under a 5.00 percent positivity rate. Allegany, Garrett, and Washington County began high school fall sports on October 7, 2020.

Seasonal Options

On September 24, 2020, LSSs were given the option to follow either plan based on local health metrics and the LSS's ability to offer interscholastic athletics and extracurricular activities.

- **October 7, 2020**
 - LSSs authorized to start a fall competition season.
 - All three defined sport seasons (fall, winter, spring) will have 7-9 weeks of available competition.
 - The decision affords greater seasonal opportunities for winter and spring sport competition during the 2020-2021 academic year.

- **Two-Semester Plan**
 - LSSs may begin winter sports on February 1, 2021.
 - All three defined sport seasons (fall, winter, spring) will have five weeks of available competition.
 - Provides a last possible date agreed upon by LSSs to provide three equitable sport seasons during the 2020-2021 academic year.
 - LSSs are expected to provide some form of virtual engagement or in-person conditioning, practice, skill development, intramurals, or scrimmages during the first semester.

Current Status

- Maryland is in Stage Three of the Governor's recovery plan, providing more opportunities for high school sports.
- All 24 LSSs have health metrics for assessing the return of in-person engagement, guidance from the MDH, MSDE, and MPSSAA.
- Three LSSs have started a fall high school sports season (Allegany, Garrett, and Washington Counties).
- 15 LSSs are engaging students with in-person conditioning or skill development practices. (Anne Arundel, Calvert, Caroline, Carroll, Cecil, Charles, Dorchester, Frederick, Kent, St. Mary's, Queen Anne's, Talbot, Somerset, Worcester, and Wicomico Counties).
- Six LSSs (Baltimore City, and Baltimore, Harford, Howard, Montgomery, and Prince George's Counties) are currently providing virtual opportunities for students.

Local School System Superintendent Request

PSSAM sent a letter to the State Board of Education and the State Superintendent on October 5, 2020, requesting authorization to move up the current February 1, 2021, first available competition date in the Two-Semester Plan to December 7, 2020.

Positives

- Sets a firm date earlier than first announced for the remainder of LSSs not currently playing to be required to start a competition season.

Concerns

- Equity concerns based on the six LSSs that have not started any form of conditioning or skill training during the first semester, thus creating uncertainty in the ability for all LSSs to be able to start a competition season by December 7, 2020.
- Unknown health metrics will play a factor into LSS's ability to participate on December 7, 2020.