

Maryland Public Secondary Schools Athletic Association
(MPSSAA)
Baltimore, MD

Minutes of the MPSSAA Executive Council Meeting
January 25-26, 2024

Refer Questions: R. Andrew Warner, Executive Director, 410-767-0376

Districts Represented: (District 1) Kevin Kendro, (District 2) Kathy Green, (District 3), Shirley Diggs (day 1), (District 4) Michael Watson, (District 5) John Davis, (District 6) Jeff Markle, (District 7) Debbie Basler, (District 8) Bryan Ashby, (District 9) Tiffany Byrd

Also Present: Michael Sye, President, MPSSAA
Jeffrey Sullivan, President Elect, MPSSAA
Michael Duffy, Past President, MPSSAA
Patrick Saunderson, Principal Representative
R. Andrew Warner, Executive Director, MPSSAA
Jason Bursick, Assistant Director, MPSSAA
Melissa Jones, Specialist, MPSSAA
Lynette Mitzel, Secretary

1. President Sye called the meeting to order on January 25, 2024, at 12:33pm. Thirteen voting members were present to start the meeting. President Sye reminded the council set the agenda, and therefore the expectation is good conversation will be had during the meeting.
2. Mr. Sye requested a motion to approve the minutes from the August 2023 meeting. Mr. Duffy made a motion to accept, followed by a second from Ms. Byrd. The minutes were approved 13-0.
3. The council shared important updates around the state.
 - District 1: Washington County will be working with the Ravens to potentially start girls flag football.
 - District 2: After a successful fall pilot season, they will be transitioning to pickleball for their fall corollary sport. MCPS will be holding an aspiring athletic director workshop in February and a student leadership conference in March.
 - District 3: The superintendent has added full-time athletic trainers to the budget and an additional position in the office of athletics.
 - District 4: There is concern for next year's budget.
 - District 5: Howard County will hold county championships next year; Anne Arundel will begin funding middle school sports programs.
 - District 6: Six additional athletic trainers will be added for the 24-25 academic year.
 - District 7: Cecil County is considering cutting JV and middle school programs due to

budgets; Cecil County potentially has three athletic directors retiring at the end of the academic year.

- District 8: Will be talking to officials groups in the spring to discuss contracts.
- District 9: Middle school sports were started this year; three athletic trainers are officially working in schools while five others have also been hired.
- Principal Association: MASSP would like to continue building connections and thanks the Executive Director for meeting in the fall.

4. The topic of sports committees was asked to be discussed by two members of the council.
 - Ms. Green would like to know what the region director's new role is with the change in how score reporting is done. Mr. Warner informed her there was documentation sent out in December to inform all region directors what their responsibilities would be during the regular and post season.
 - Mr. Duffy requested a job description for the district representatives on sports committees. He also would like to see minutes kept at the sport committee meetings so the entire membership can view them when meetings have concluded. Mr. Bursick mentioned when he came to the office he offered to take notes at meetings. Following a sports directors meeting a few years ago, the sports directors said they would do it, but it has not taken place. Mr. Warner believes the role of the district representative differs based on the make up of each district. While Mr. Duffy agrees there are some differences, he does believe the general role is the same across the board. He offered to compile the basic things that should take place and share. Ms. Diggs and Dr. Sullivan agree it would be a helpful tool. Mr. Warner requested those with current job descriptions be sent to him and he will share with Mr. Duffy for the April meeting.
5. Mr. Sye indicated the next topic for discussion was emerging sports.
 - Ms. Mitzel provided an update on the status of moving cheerleading to the MPSSAA. Mr. Kendro asked why the two seasons could not be the same in fall and winter. Mr. Warner said the main reason is due to legal sufficiency in COMAR. When you run two seasons of the same sport, student athletes would exhaust their eligibility after their 10th grade year. Mr. Duffy also mentioned indoor and outdoor track are viewed as two different sports by the NFHS, with two different sets of rules. Cheerleading is only recognized as one sport – spirit. Another issue is if schools decide to only participate in one season, the regulations don't provide opportunities for sideline in the winter. If schools do participate, they can do sideline until the end of the sports season. The group agree COMAR needs to address the permission of sideline cheer if a school decides to only participate in the fall season. Dr. Sullivan suggested mirroring the wrestling policies in COMAR. Mr. Sye recommended the group meet to discuss COMAR language for cheer. Mr. Kendro provided an idea for new language: "local school system supervisors of athletics, in consultation with their superintendent may permit MPSSAA member teams to participate in non-competitive promotional opportunities, community events, and other good-will activities."
 - Mr. Warner indicated several people on the council went to the event held in the fall by the Ravens to showcase girls flag football. Several jurisdictions have potential to move towards offering it. Several school systems are also experiencing budget freezes which could cause them to hold off for another year. Mr. Davis said their school system

would probably not be adding anything for the foreseeable future. With the way the blueprint is written, position cuts, and teacher salaries remaining the same, it's hard to add sports. Mr. Duffy said facilities, coaches, and transportation is also a concern about adding a fall sport. Dr. Sullivan told the group the Ravens offered \$5000 per team, but after their grant is gone it will cost nearly \$120,000 to run the program.

6. Dr. Sullivan requested the next agenda item which was a brief discussion on the NFHS Network across the state. He has had several issues this year, especially with the functionality of the camera. Several others are having problems as well. Some mentioned moving to Hudl. Mr. Warner reminded the group of the Playon sports contract, which generates sponsorship revenue for the MPSSAA. If people continue to have problems, please notify the MPSSAA who will reach out to the NFHS directly.
7. Dr. Sullivan's topic of officials' expenses and tournament fees was discussed next. He wanted to know if others thought the rate for region contests should be increased. He stated many states have centralized rates for officials. He feels as though when opportunities strike for officials to make more money, they are going to work that game and potentially create shortages for certain jurisdictions. The council would like to see a chart of officials' fees from around the state. Ms. Byrd asked if people are paying the same rate for game workers. Mr. Warner stated the fees go through the finance committee and no changes will be made at this time. He also cautioned against state wide officials groups, which could create gray areas between employee and independent contractors. He reminded the group it is hard to put the MPSSAA in the same light as other states due to the way the organization is structured.
8. Ms. Basler and Ms. Byrd requested the agenda include discussion on violations, appeals, and the hearing format. Ms. Basler indicated she has been at two appeal hearings in the last month and the issue she finds frustrating is the timeframe for the hearing to take place. She feels having a hearing within five days of the allegation being brought to her attention is very difficult. Ms. Byrd appreciates the template for appeals but would like to hear how other counties handle appeals. Dr. Sullivan mentioned the local school system has the last say, to which Mr. Warner indicated the COMAR rules, when applied, are being done so as part of the MPSSAA, not as a local school system. Mr. Duffy suggested this topic would be a great agenda item for the supervisor summit in June.
9. Mr. Sye indicated the next agenda item, the way in which classifications are done, was requested by Dr. Sullivan. Dr. Sullivan stated the topic was briefly discussed at the fall meeting and he would like further discussion as to how the classifications have been done in the past, and the potential need to make a change for the future. He commented other states take various factors into account when classifying schools; items such as socioeconomic status of the school, FARMS rates, students with disabilities. Mr. Warner shared with the committee how other states structures and inclusion of private schools use various multiplier factors, some of which are being challenged in court. Ms. Basler indicated this was a hot topic with the equity committee as well. A few committee members inquired as to how that would work when those things consistently fluctuate. Dr. Sullivan also said some states allow schools to move up in classification if they would like to complete at a higher level. There was concern about that with most of the council.

10. The following agenda item was also brought forth by Dr. Sullivan. He believes the sanction language isn't aligned with new language to allow schedules to be changed after the start date. Mr. Warner clarified that changing contests and sanctioning events are two separate items. Dr. Sullivan would like to know as to whether it should be changed to allow more flexibility. Mr. Bursick voiced concern over receiving a sanction request on a Friday night for a Saturday event. He would not be able to approve that. Dr. Sullivan asked for parameters – maybe 10 days or two weeks. Mr. Bursick indicated there are already parameters – before the first play date. Mr. Warner reminded the council in 2012 three council members made COMAR edits that were approved by the Executive Council and Board of Control. One such change was moving sanctioning from 45 days to prior to the first play date. He asked if there was a need to review COMAR again and make updates. After a brief discussion about what the timeline should be, it was agreed that there should be a COMAR review to see if other items need to be updated as well.
11. Conduct detrimental to the tournament was the next on the agenda, brought forward by Mr. Sye. He told the group two years ago Baltimore County had a wrestler ejected from the state tournament who didn't wrestle last year. Per the rules, when the state tournament starts, he must be entered in the county tournament. His coach didn't want to enter him since the state tournament starts with the county championship. Mr. Duffy said the solution would be to remove the county tournament as the starting point and make it the region tournament instead. Mr. Sye said the second part of the issue is if a student athlete is ejected at the state championship, why wait an entire year for the student athlete to have to sit out the state tournament? If a student athlete gets ejected during the last game of the regular season, that student athlete must sit out the first game of the playoff series. Mr. Sye wants to know why this can't be consistently the next event for all sports. The MPSSAA is structure to operate postseason play, not regular season contests of the local educational agency.
12. Mr. Warner indicated he would like to take a few minutes to discuss the Washington County proposal that was brought up at Board of Control in December. He said a delegate reached out on the outcome of the Board of Control Meeting. Mr. Warner feels if the council doesn't review and make a proposal, this could turn into a legislative bill. Mr. Ashby asked if this was something the local school system can correct itself. Mr. Warner indicated yes and that no student is currently unable to participate. Ms. Byrd has concerns about determining where students should and do go. Mr. Warner said this might be something else for the comprehensive review of COMAR. Mr. Duffy, Mr. Sye, Ms. Byrd, Mr. Watson, and Dr. Sullivan will convene in February to begin the process. Ms. Basler asked if athletic directors could have input. Mr. Sye will send template to people by February 1st.
13. The meeting was paused for the day at 4:49pm and will resume Friday morning.
14. At 9:05am on Friday, Mr. Sye welcomed the council back for day two. Ms. Diggs is not present, nor is a representative here from District 3, therefore there are 12 voting members.
15. Mr. Warner began the meeting with legislative information. There are two bills currently on the table. House Bill 047, which is about student participation designed by sex assigned at birth

– fairness in girls sports act. It is cross filed at Senate Bill 381. Neither have had hearings to date. Senate Bill 165 and House Bill 204 have both had hearings. Both are about student mental health, particularly about coach training to recognize signs and symptoms of student mental health issues. Senate Bill 433 is a replication of the lacrosse grant opportunity bill, but for soccer. The grant will supply the state department of education with \$80,000 to distribute to local school systems with 80% minority students. Based on data, only Baltimore City, Charles County, and Prince George’s County qualify for the grant.

16. Mr. Warner informed the board the medical advisory council has a virtual meeting set for January 30th to review the pre-participation physical form (PPE) and work on the medical timeout form. The medical timeout is a pre-event meeting to ensure all personnel working at the event understand how to act in the event of an emergency. Ms. Basler asked if this was the same as an emergency action plan to which Mr. Warner said yes, the medical timeout is to ensure everyone is on the same page.

The Medical Advisory Committee is working on a new PPE through what needs to be returned from the doctor, what stays with the doctor, what the school health personnel needs, what the athletic trainers need, and so forth. They have also been discussing if there should be a timeframe for when the physical needs to be done. He asked if there should be a recommended timeframe or should the local school systems control that piece? Mr. Sye believes it will be tough to standardize across the state. Mr. Davis agrees but says there should be a standard length of time the physical is good. Ms. Byrd voiced concern over 14 months as the permissible timeframe because that means if a student got a physical for a spring sport, that student would not get another one for the next fall or winter sports seasons. Is that a safety issue? Mr. Warner said currently students return the page that states whether they can participate and everything else stays with the doctor. The medical advisory council wants to look at the portion of the form that states if there are other things about the student the athletic director and athletic trainer should know when the student participates in athletics. Mr. Warner said he will send guidance on the medical timeout. Mr. Sye asked if anyone else was utilizing them now? Ms. Byrd said her jurisdiction would probably move toward it. Mr. Warner reminded the group the medical advisory committee is just a recommendation group, and items still need to be passed by the Board of Control. The goal is to get things in place prior to the start of the 2024-2025 academic year.

17. Mr. Duffy recommended the next topic, which is student athlete mental health. He believes this item is going to be put on everyone’s plates soon so it’s in the best interest of the group to get in front of it. He also feels there should be some level of expectation for the coaches. Mr. Watson asked if this is something other jurisdictions require of teachers. Most do not. His concern is coaches are already asked to do so many trainings, is this just one more to add to their plate. Ms. Byrd agrees and wonders how it could be made impactful. Mr. Davis indicated district five will be having a meeting in February with a doctor to speak on mental health and training for coaches. Ms. Balser asked if the bill discussed earlier was mental health certification or training. Mr. Warner said he believes it’s training to recognize signs and triggers. Mr. Warner told the group he just received an email with House Bill 686, which states if your venue offers practice and/or games for youth sports, you must purchase an AED for them to use and include it in your emergency action plan. Dr. Sullivan said more requirements

- are being added to the coaches' requirements, and while all are important, things need to be streamlined. Mr. Warner said an audit of the care and prevention courses probably needs to take place and all requirements for coaches should be included in that course. He said care and prevention is also a good topic for the supervisor summit.
18. Mr. Kendro requested a brief discussion on how he can get assistance in getting approval for full time athletic trainers. Mr. Watson told him the Southern Maryland Athletic Conference put something on paper to indicate the necessity of having athletic trainers. Mr. Saunderson said the topic should be presented to MASSP since they have a presence in Annapolis. Dr. Sullivan told Mr. Kendro he would be happy to assist in any way he can and share the methods he utilized to get it passed in the budget.
 19. Mr. Kendro asked the council how many jurisdictions are applying the playoff egregious ejection standard to their regular season games. About half are, but more are moving to it for the 2024-2025 academic year. Mr. Duffy also asked if coaches are being held to the same standards. Some said yes.
 20. Ms. Green inquired about honoring a sportsmanship district champion. Three jurisdictions are currently doing it, but Mr. Warner pointed out only some areas are currently using the sportsmanship survey. He said report cards could be layered in, but it would need more participation, as only about 30% of the membership does the survey on a regular basis. The sportsmanship committee will continue to monitor through this year and then meet to make changes if necessary. Ms. Green asked if a jurisdiction wanted to add questions would that be possible. Mr. Warner stated they could be incorporated into the current survey, depending on the length. Mr. Ashby told the group their conference has been doing sportsmanship award for a long time and they think it has helped with positive behavior from student athletes.
 21. Mr. Duffy inquired about restarting the coaches conference that took place several years ago. He suggested seasonal conferences or clinics more about relationship building between coach and player, review of COMAR regulations and MPSSAA rules versus the strategy of the sport. Mr. Davis said it is becoming more difficult to get coaches to do things out of season because the covet off time. Ms. Green suggested a preseason kickoff versus a conference to get coaches excited for the season. She mentioned the kickoff could focus on mental health, an MPSSAA update, student leadership, and those type of topics. Dr. Sullivan sent everyone an example of what Texas Coaches Association does for their coaches. Mr. Sye asked if this is something people would like to see occur. Enough people agreed further discussion would be beneficial.
 22. Mr. Sye asked the group if they found last year's supervisor summit impactful and would they like to see it take place again. Everyone agreed and would like to see encouragement for all 24 supervisors to attend. He said maybe an overnight format could be used to promote camaraderie after the work sessions were completed. Mr. Watson asked what topics are being considered. Mr. Sye shared: appeals hearings, care and prevention audit, sport committee member appreciation, COMAR review, classifications, how to recruit and retain coaches.
 23. Dr. Sullivan would like to brainstorm on how to recognize and show appreciation to the athletic directors who host state playoff events. He is not looking for an extravagant display, but

something to show gratitude toward their benevolent actions. Mr. Sye asked Dr. Sullivan what he thinks would be appropriate, to which he replied he wasn't sure, but thinks it is becoming increasingly difficult to find people willing to host and those who do should be recognized for it. This could be another summit topic. Ms. Basler would also like to see recognition for the coaches who create positive culture, are giving back to the community, and show good character. She is unsure how that could happen but believes there is value in it. Mr. Warner informed her there is an NFHS Spirit of Sport award handed out yearly for individuals, coaches, or teams who exemplify those types of characteristics. This is something we could do at the district level and then have the nomination committee select a state winner to pass on to the NFHS.

24. Ms. Byrd would like to gather information and brainstorm on how people are counting participation numbers and where people are collecting student athlete data. Several people have platforms they are using. Ms. Green told her they also athletic director data such as certification, NFHS coaching certification, sportsmanship data, and a few other items. Some people simply ask the people in charge of data to pull certain things. Mr. Warner told the council one of the reasons individual school numbers are requested is so over time they can see trends per school and merge those indicators from MSDE – things such as FARMS and ESOL percentages. He also told the group he could transition the data to a smartsheet for people to view.
25. Mr. Warner informed the group there is more opportunity this year for student athletes to attend the National Student Leadership Conference in Indianapolis. Ms. Byrd and Ms. Mitzel were apart of the first group from Maryland and recently Montgomery County has been sending students. The NFHS pays for the hotel and incidentals while at the conference. The district would pay for flights. Mr. Warner said he isn't sure on exact numbers but thinks it could be as high as 10 from each district. He will find out more information and get back to everyone.
26. With no further agenda items or new business, Mr. Sye asks for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Duffy makes a motion to adjourn, followed by a second motion to adjourn from Ms. Byrd. At 11:40am, with a 12-0 vote, the meeting adjourned.