

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

Minutes of the MPSSAA Executive Council Meeting
January 29-30, 2026

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

Districts Represented: (District 1) Kevin Kendro, (District 2) Kathy Green, (District 3) Brian Moore, (District 4) Rich Pauole, (District 5) Adam Eldridge, (District 6) Jeff Markle, (District 7) Debbie Basler, (District 8) Bryan Ashby, (District 9) Tiffany Byrd

Also Present: Jeffrey Sullivan, President, MPSSAA
Debbie Basler, President Elect, MPSSAA
Michael Sye, Past President, MPSSAA
Donna Clabaugh, MASSP
R. Andrew Warner, Executive Director, MPSSAA
Jason Bursick, Assistant Director, MPSSAA
Melissa Miranda Jones, Program Specialist, MPSSAA
Melissa Mertz, Director of Compliance & Communications, MPSSAA
Ken Kazmarek, Coordinator of Officials, MPSSAA

1. **Call to Order:** President Sullivan called the meeting to order on January 29, 2026, at 12:38 p.m. Twelve voting members were present to start the meeting. Dr. Sullivan thanked everyone for being present, especially considering weather issues.
2. **Approval of Minutes:** Dr. Sullivan requested a motion to approve the minutes of the September 2025 meeting. Mr. Sye made a motion to accept, followed by a second from Ms. Sexton. The minutes were approved 12-0.
3. **District Updates**

District 1: Garrett County added swimming in 2026. Washington, Frederick, and Carroll counties are expanding their conferences and realigning using a classification and success point system (6 classes for football and 4 for all other sports). The district is working with RefReps in the Physical Education department and using Arbiter for scheduling.

District 2: Unveiled a new MCO and launched a student-led media team. The Student-Athlete Council is hosting a conference in February. They are currently advocating for turf fields at all 25 high schools and potentially piloting stunt this spring. ADs and Principals voted to move forward with JV Girls' Flag Football. They are also looking into revamping middle school programs with different offerings.

International Outreach: Dr. Sullivan will conduct a Chinese Diplomacy tour visiting four cities in China. Chinese students will visit Montgomery County to explore their programs.

Facilities: A task force is looking at bringing an indoor facility to Montgomery County.

District 3: No Report

District 4: Facing budget cuts and recently lost an athletic trainer. Flag football is now in Charles and Calvert Counties; St. Mary's will add it next year. They are hosting wrestling duals and adding a fourth pool in Charles County.

District 5: Ongoing budget discussions. Working to bring athletic trainers to Howard County and moving forward with the Girls' Flag Football initiative. Conducted a study on the administrative workload required to change a single game under the current system.

District 6: Baltimore County is looking to use Dragonfly for track coaches' certifications. Mr. Sye recently presented information on turf fields to the board. Staff met with the Ravens regarding Girls' Flag Football; there is an 80% chance of joining. Lansdowne is opening a new school, potentially by next spring.

District 7: Cecil County has implemented budget cuts. Girls' Flag Football will not be ready for the 2026 school year but will be added later. The county is conducting a study regarding a new indoor track facility.

District 8: In Wicomico, Steve Ramono conducted a pilot with RefReps and is launching a full pilot this year. Coach William "Butch" Waller announced his retirement after 60 years in interscholastic athletics; the county will celebrate his career on February 7, 2026.

District 9: Conversations regarding budget issues and examining potential teams for Girls' Flag Football.

Principal's Association Updates (MASSP): Ms. Clabaugh provided updates upcoming leadership academy, aspiring leader conference, women's leadership, and student councils leadership conferences. The NAOSSP is considering combining high school and elementary organizations, though Maryland is not looking to combine yet. Budgeting is a major concern; while Title I, Title II, and Career & Tech funding were included in the Jan. 30 extension, there are worries about future cuts. There is also legislative movement regarding an amendment to not abolish the Department of Education.

- Academic & Athletic Correlation: Graduation Rates: Dr. Sullivan noted that Montgomery County's rates were lower than desired. He emphasized that interscholastic athletics positively impact graduation rates.
- Howard County Data: Mr. Eldridge reported that 38% of students participate in athletics. Athletes outperformed their peers in every metric, maintaining a 95.2% attendance rate.
- Participation: Ms. Clabaugh noted that Girls' Flag Football increased overall female athletic participation without taking away from other sports.
- Future Initiatives: The MPSSAA is discussing "Report Cards" for schools to highlight the link between athletics and academic success (attendance, GPA, and graduation).

4. **Executive Council Review of Goals & Objectives:**

Dr. Sullivan reviewed the Executive Council goals and objectives established for the 2025-26 academic year.

- The council work on a number of the goals and objectives as part of the meeting agenda.
- Mr. Warner updated the progress of COMAR amendments.

- Student Leadership programming: Dr. Sullivan confirmed Montgomery County is hosting student leadership conference. Mr. Kendro said April 3rd Washington and Frederick have student leadership initiatives.

Mr. Warner shared with the Council that Districts can take advantage of participating in National Leadership Summit and have chaperones come back and share initiatives in their local jurisdictions. Mr. Warner also stated that NFHS Foundation has money that can be directed to local constituencies to help offset costs for student leadership. Ms. Byrd shared “project Rampart” that is sponsored by Under Armour. They run student athlete leadership conferences.

Mr. Warner shared that Ms. Miranda Jones and Ms. Mertz will be presenting to the National Student Services Committee in Indianapolis in February.

5. **Winter & Spring Championship Site Discussion:**

Mr. Warner shared information on state championship venues.

- Basketball Championships:
 - Rising costs at current university sites (notably Univ. of Maryland) are making it difficult to keep ticket prices affordable for spectators.
 - The MPSSAA requested proposals from other venues.
 - A proposal from UMBC provides a viable solution.
 - The committee asked the following questions:
 - Discussion included concerns regarding parking and seating capacity for high-classification sellouts.
 - To manage seating, the committee discussed removing standard coaches' passes and potentially moving from general admission to assigned seating.

Result: A motion was made by Mr. Kendro, seconded by Ms. Sexton to support a potential move of the championships to UMBC. Motion passed 12-0.

- Wrestling Championships:
 - The committee discussed similar expenses and profit challenges with the wrestling state championships.
 - The MPSSAA requested a proposal from other venues.
 - A proposal from Wicomico Civic Center is a viable solution.
 - Council Feedback:
 - Ideal with the increase in girls' wrestling participation to return to two-day tournament and increase number of wrestling mats.
 - Plenty of seeding.
 - Wrestling is a destination championship event. Many stay overnight regardless of travel distances.
 - Transportation concerns were raised (though sharing buses between counties was suggested as a solution).
- Track & Field: An update was provided on the Track and Field committee's desire to return to Morgan State U. and ongoing contractual negotiations are taking place with the venue.

6. **State Semifinal Basketball Sites:**

Mr. Warner reiterated the requests of districts to provide potential sites for state semifinal games. Mr. Warner stated that we now have at least 17 potential sites. Some sites might not have ability to meet all requirements but might still be host sites if needed.

7. **RefReps Update:**

Ms. Mertz and Mr. Kazmarek shared an update on RefReps partnership. Ms. Mertz provided a visual “roadmap” detailing the process of school’s integrating RefReps curriculum into their physical education departments. Mr. Warner opened the floor for discussion on the concept of offering a junior officials license for students under the age of 18 that successfully complete the officiating course.

Ms. Clabaugh suggested the possibility of scrimmages for junior officials. Ms. Mertz shared that there is a concern about losing a student that is under the age of 18, that successfully completes the program but cannot get officiating assignments. Ms. Basler agreed that we need to get students under 18 involved right away. Ms. Basler also reiterated she strongly feels they need to be graduated and removed from high school to do varsity and junior varsity games.

Mr. Kazmarek shared that he is getting the state rules interpreters engaged in the RefReps curriculum. Mr. Kazmarek shared that there will be another RefReps webinar February 9th at 10:00 am. Mr. Warner stated that we need to have our officials’ associations on board with RefReps to bring the students into the fold and help them get assignments.

Ms. Sexton reiterated the value of this platform and bringing students certified to be an official and be able to officiate middle school/elementary games. She indicated this would be a benefit in terms of budgets. Ms. Sexton agreed that students should not do a varsity or junior varsity game.

Mr. Kendro shared that Frederick County has already partnered with their officials’ organizations and began discussions on what process could look like for students that successfully complete RefReps certification.

8. **MPSSAA Website Update:**

Ms. Mertz provided the council with an update on the progress of the new MPSSAA website. Ms. Mertz shared a few of the pages that have been developed to date. Ms. Mertz reviewed many of the new features and functions that will be available with the new site. Mr. Warner shared concerns when you use 3rd party websites if those parties are removed.

9. **Legislation Update:** Mr. Warner provided an update on current legislation introduced to date during the Maryland Legislative session.

10. **Financial Considerations:
Official Ball Sponsorship**

MPSSAA staff will be collecting Request for Proposals for football, basketball, baseball, tennis and soccer.

25/75 Split Fall Recap

Mr. Warner shared the 25/75 financial split for the football championships. Mr. Warner summarized that MPSSAA has paid out more to districts based on the 25/75 formula. Mr. Warner reminded council that the 25/75 split will be in place for basketball championships.

Sponsorship Growth

Mr. Warner shared information on current financial support from sponsorship organizations, including state championships merchandise, ticketing, official state balls, and state tournament broadcasting.

Mr. Eldridge asked if there is a straight comparison of NFHS Network versus Hudl. Dr. Sullivan shared that Montgomery County uses Maxpreps Advantage and that this platform can do everything Hudl can do. Mr. Warner stated that currently there are 150 member schools that are using the NFHS Network.

Mr. Warner shared with the council a meeting that MPSSA staff had with TPG. Mr. Warner emphasized key points of the proposal from TPG. This would include a dedicated TPG manager to oversee and sell sponsorships on MPSSAA's behalf. Additionally, there would be championship branding, signing bonus and MPSSAA would retain all authority on final decisions. TPG has a successful history with over 37 state athletic associations.

Ms. Clabaugh discussed the sponsorships that her school uses to help offset expenses on equipment and game management tools. Mr. Kendro added they are meeting with other Revenue Share companies. Dr. Sullivan shared the company called National Amateur Sports. Montgomery county signed with them last spring. Dr. Sullivan said this has expanded beyond just sponsorships, such as building the Montgomery County website.

Motion by Mr. Sye, second Ms. Green to support MPSSAA staff moving forward with TPG Sponsorship agreement discussions. Motion passed 12-0.

11. Discussion on Technology Platforms:

Dr. Sullivan opened discussion on what technology platforms are being used by other school systems. Dr. Sullivan shared concerns over issues with PlayOn platform. Dr. Sullivan asked the council if it would be feasible to get to a place where all counties/districts would be using same platform for schedules, rosters, websites etc. Mr. Warner shared the current Smartsheets platform is only a temporary way to achieve schedules and results statewide, and better solutions may be needed.

Mr. Eldridge commented that he agrees with the concept. Mr. Eldridge shared the amount of duplicated work that must be done when one game gets changed. Mr. Pauole also agreed with the concept but shared concerns over these companies always getting bought out by one another. Dr. Sullivan emphasized the importance of all counties using same platform and the leveraging that could play out.

12. Girls Flag Committee Update:

Mr. Warner provided the council with updates on the progress of Girls Flag Football. Mr. Warner shared that the Girls Flag committee met on January 21, 2026. Mr. Warner pointed out the minutes shared in the electronic binder.

Mr. Warner indicated there is some real growth that is occurring around the state. Potentially looking at 120 schools sponsoring girls flag football. The committee agreed to make girls flag a fall sport.

Mr. Kendro emphasized the energy and support behind girl's flag. Mr. Kendro also stated the support by the Ravens has been invaluable. Mr. Warner added that the Ravens have expressed support in other areas to assist MPSSAA, such as hosting Women's Leadership Conferences and Officials Clinics.

Dr. Sullivan discussed the “wins” of adding girls flag football despite budget concerns or field availability issues in the fall. Dr. Sullivan pointed out the number of girls playing that do not play any other sport. Dr. Sullivan emphasized that the trend is showing same disciplines of football – scouting, breakdown film, coaches’ boxes in press box etc.. Mr. Warner shared that playoffs should mimic regular season in terms of number of games per week.

13. **Sport Season Policy:**

Mr. Warner explained next steps in the event of the COMAR amendments passed by the State Board of Education. The MPSSAA Board of Control will need to ratify the current sport season limitations into a standalone policy, which would help emerging sports as well.

14. **Misconduct Detrimental to the Tournament Considerations:**

Mr. Warner advised the council that MPSSAA receives several withdrawals by schools once playoffs begin for any number of reasons. Mr. Warner stated that MPSSAA applies Misconduct Detrimental to the Tournament policy as applicable. Mr. Warner asked the council to discuss all issues regarding the policy and when it is appropriate to enforce penalties and not enforce penalties. Dr. Sullivan charged the council with having in-depth discussions during breakout sessions.

15. **Classification Review & Considerations:**

Mr. Warner explained next steps in the event of the COMAR amendments passed by the State Board of Education. The MPSSAA Board of Control will need to ratify the classification guidelines to include the current definition of school enrollment for MPSSAA member school data.

Ms. Basler has provided the committee with discussion items to be considered during the breakout sessions. Mr. Warner suggested the council build the framework on what a potential classification review would look like. Ms. Basler commented on some of the criteria and how much of an effect those criteria have on an athletic program. Ms. Byrd added the concerns that were discussed on percentages of students that may never participate in sports due to physical or learning disabilities but are counted in school population.

Dr. Sullivan spoke to the fact that it seems to be ever evolving.

Adjourned at 4:50 pm today

The Council readjourned at 9 a.m. on January 30, 2026

16. **Breakout Sessions:**

Council members divided into breakout sessions to discuss Misconduct Detrimental to the Tournament, Classifications and COMAR Interpretations and Amendments.

Feedback from Breakout Sessions:

Misconduct

- Mr. Kendro reported from his group that all withdrawals after seeding are all considered misconduct. However, the penalty may be appealed. The group also discussed the term “beyond the team’s control” e.g. a tragic event. An example of what would not be considered beyond the team’s control would be academic ineligibility.
- Mr. Sye reported that his group agreed that all withdrawals after seeding would be considered misconduct. The group also discussed establishing a check list for guidance for teams to know what is expected upon entering the tournament. This would be sent from Supervisors to Athletic Directors and Athletic Directors to Coaches.

- Ms. Byrd reported that her group also agreed that withdrawals after the seeding are considered misconduct. The group reiterated that if a school is anticipating issues, they should simply withdraw.
- The council discussed providing a definition or list of examples for “Beyond the Team’s Control.” Mr. Warner has opened discussion on whether the current system is antiquated and if there is a need to update the systems by possibly communicating only with the 24 local school system athletic supervisors.
- The council discussed the concept of forcing teams that violate the policy to play all away games the following year. There was additional discussion on possibly applying a fine to schools that violate the policy. Mr. Warner expressed concerns with fining member schools.
- Ms. Basler summarized that all the groups agreed to the following: 1. Misconduct refers to withdrawals after the seeding; and 2. Provide guidelines to teams on what is expected upon entering the tournament.
- Mr. Warner suggested the policy that schools that need to withdraw would notify the County Supervisor of their request to withdraw. The process would then be vetted through each LEA’s and subsequently submitted to the MPSSAA office.
- The council discussed what the appropriate penalties would be and whether there be an appeal process. Possible penalties included letter of censure, probation and removal from post season tournament.
- The council discussed whether there should be an appeal process. Mr. Eldridge said that there needs to be due process provided to member schools. Mr. Warner shared that language on COMAR provides for Executive Director to be able to make emergency decisions.
- Mr. Warner suggested the council review a Guidance Document at their April meeting. MPSSAA staff will work to develop a one-page Guidance Document. Mr. Warner discussed the concept of the penalty for teams under Misconduct Detrimental to the Tournament would be the following season the team has a reduction of regular season games. The council discussed how that would affect football versus other sports. Ms. Byrd suggested using a percentage by sport. Dr. Sullivan suggested we develop a chart similar to the 80% rule. MPSSAA staff will create the chart and present it at the Executive Council April meeting. The council supported the loss of seasonal limitations for misconduct detrimental to the tournament violations.

Classifications

- Ms. Byrd opened discussion on removing geographic naming to classifications. The council agreed to keeping classifications numerical. Dr. Sullivan brought forward changing the numeric classifications by removing the 4A/3A. Classes could each be just one number.
- The council discussed criteria for determining enrollment data, such as socioeconomic factors, farms and special education programs. Mr. Eldridge shared concerns over where the count of various criteria stops. Ms. Byrd shared that she would like to see data that supports the advantage perceptions that are out there. Dr. Sullivan added other factors such as access, club environment and other factors that might be difficult to measure. Members discussed the use of a multiplier for non-boundary/magnet schools. Mr. Eldridge reiterated the ease of understanding of the current formula. However, questions were raised on using gender specific enrollment and should the council review that data.

- Ms. Basler asked the council to discuss the Cooke classification formula and whether it is antiquated. This opened discussions on whether we keep the tournament as an open tournament where all schools qualify.
 - Dr. Sullivan brought forward the concept of two tournaments, taking the top 8 teams to enter the state championships and the remaining teams would compete in a different tournament. This would need to consider the regular season level of competition. Mr. Warner added that it is difficult to compare to other state tournaments since they do not have the same large school system design that MPSSAA has. Mr. Markle offered the concept of an opt-in for either tournament.
 - Mr. Warner added that consideration needs to be given that the top 8 would be a tournament in which teams have to qualify and the other tournament would be an open tournament. Mr. Paule offered consideration of a format like California Interscholastic Federation (CIF) that has an open division which most of the successful programs participate in.
 - Mr. Warner clarified staff will provide information at April meeting on the following:
 1. Enrollment data – full classification review prior to collecting member school data this fall.
 2. Guidance on classifications policy renaming the classifications.
17. Ms. Byrd brought forward concerns over schools that are congratulated for records such as most points in a season, most goals scored and how that ties into sportsmanship. Mr. Kendro shared a situation where an individual player was going for a state record, and the coach kept her in a game that was a blow out. The council agreed to the concerns that this raises with acting in a sportsmanlike manner.
18. Dr. Sullivan requested a motion to adjourn the meeting at 12:47 pm. Motion by Mr. Sye, second by Mr. Eldridge to adjourn. Motion passed 12-0.