

# Syosset Central School District

Dr. Thomas L. Rogers  
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## Board of Education

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SENT VIA EMAIL

September 10, 2020

Mr. Patrick Pizzarelli  
New York State Public High School Athletic Association  
71 Clinton Ave.  
Garden City, NY 11530-9195

Dear Mr. Pizzarelli,

We wish to express our appreciation for the work that Section VIII does to provide our students with the best interscholastic athletics experience possible, and especially for attempting to do so in these unprecedented circumstances. While we are writing to request that you reconsider the decision to postpone the start of sports until next January, we do not fault you for making the health and safety of our athletes your first priority. We too hold our responsibility for the safety and health of our students seriously and have given great time and consideration to developing a plan to safely commence fall sports this September. For the reasons we share in this letter, we recommend commencing fall sports as originally intended on September 21, 2020, to fulfill the critical and worthy interests of our students' health, well-being, and future.

The administration met with our coaches to get their feedback on the decision to delay the resumption of interscholastic athletics, and to assess their readiness should that decision be reconsidered. Our coaches raised a number of pro-social issues for us to consider:

- Although there have been summer leagues, students benefit from the sense of camaraderie and shared purpose that comes from being on a team. Team practice is in many ways more important than competition, particularly as these students have lived through such an unusual circumstance for the past 6 months. There is a strong mental/emotional health component that cannot be overstated. Athletes derive a significant level of self-worth and purpose from their participation in sports. Sports boost confidence; communication skills; and interpersonal relationships. The sooner sports are resumed, the sooner our students will feel like themselves, with resulting academic performance benefits as well.
- Undoubtedly, if interscholastic sports are delayed, students will find other opportunities to pursue their sports. However, these private opportunities will disadvantage some students from an equity standpoint, whereas school programs ensure all students have an equal opportunity to participate. Students unable to take advantage of these private opportunities over the summer will see their opportunities delayed further still.
- Students take pride in being a part of something greater than themselves. We need students' cooperation to stay safe by making good decisions (not to attend risky parties, etc.). Knowing that the decision to forego a party might be linked to the resumption of sports may give students an added incentive to think and act responsibly.

- Of necessity, students are experiencing a highly structured classroom environment. Providing physical outlets for students at the end of these days can be an important component of their health.

They have also been actively thinking about health and safety considerations:

- Our coaches and athletic trainers have all prepared “return to play” guidelines unique to their sport – to reduce the risk of participation given the current environment. As we know from reopening schools, we cannot eliminate all risk, but we can lower it, sometimes significantly. Our programs will be the most controlled settings possible for our athletes. Students’ participation in an outside program may pose elevated risks that could have been mitigated by presenting a better option.
- Our coaches have also been devising practice and workout plans that emphasize wellness, fitness, and fundamentals, to again reduce risk during the practice time. For example, one of our coaches led virtual fitness workshops for students all summer long.
- As some point, sports will resume. We see advantage to restarting while outdoor sports remain viable, given the reduced risk of outdoor activity vs. indoor activity. It may be more challenging for our first experience with resumption of athletic activities to take place in January.
- In a similar vein, community transmission of COVID-19 remains low. Perhaps our best opportunity to resume sports is during such a period.

Lastly, we must be mindful of the risks that weigh upon the alternatives:

- In addition to the health benefits of commencing sports in September, we also recognize the recruitment disadvantage our athletes may face for NCAA athletics. Athletes elsewhere who develop videos for recruiting reels and are observed by recruiters will undoubtedly have an advantage over those who do not, or who do so very late in the year. This may jeopardize scholarships that our students might have otherwise earned based on their talent and hard work.
- Physically, our athletes may find other, less organized, unsupervised ways to continue to play and in doing so, may not only develop bad habits, but elevate the risk of injury.

Our coaches have developed both risk mitigation return-to-play protocols specific to their sports (in the hope that Section VIII would reconsider its decision), and an outline of an intramural program (in the event Section VIII does not). Our hope with the latter approach would be to capture some of the pro-social aspects of athletics, and perhaps evaluate the efficacy of our return-to-play protocols. We recognize, based on the most recent (9/9/20) NYSPHSAA guidance, that some sports present much more challenging risk profiles than others; but we believe it’s just as notable that NYSPHAA had the opportunity to suggest that all fall sports should be delayed, but chose not to.

We appreciate your attention to our thoughts and would be happy to assist in any way you deemed helpful.

With best wishes for a safe new year,  
Syosset Board of Education