

Miller Place Union Free School District

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Educational Services**
Sandra A. Wojnowski

VIA Fax (631) 366-4334

Mr. Thomas J. Combs, Executive Director
Members of the Executive Board
Athletic Council
Section XI
180 E Main St, Suite 302
Smithtown, NY 11787

Re: Section XI Postponement of Athletic Seasons until January 2021

Dear Mr. Combs, Members of the Executive Board and the Athletic Council,

We are writing to express our concern over your decision to postpone the athletic season until January 2021. We understand that the safety of our student-athletes is of the utmost importance. We believe that there are sports that naturally lend themselves to social distancing, such as the lower and moderate risk sports approved by Governor Cuomo.

The experience of running lower risk sports will allow us to prepare for the higher risk sports in the future.

This pandemic has been an incredible challenge for our school district and students. Many of our students have not seen their classmates in many months. We have a hybrid start and are split alphabetically, so the difficulty for students to reunite remains. Athletics is a way to bridge that gap. There are so many students that have difficulty in social settings, and athletics gives them the ability to make new friends and be part of a group. Mental health is a significant concern in our District, as we have suffered through tragedies. The pandemic has had a substantial negative effect on mental health, and thus we need our students to get back to normal activities when possible. Athletics can make a positive impact on the mental health of student-athletes.

It is confusing that youth sports and travel teams are allowed to play and have been for some time. School districts that have much stricter safety protocols in place are not allowed to begin. This seems backward to us.

The Board of Education of Miller Place Schools is asking you to reconsider your stance on the postponement for the sports that can be run safely. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

The Miller Place Union Free School District Board of Education
The Miller Place Union Free School District Board of Education

SECTION XI

NEW YORK STATE PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL

ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION

180 EAST MAIN STREET, STE 302, SMITHTOWN, N.Y. 11787

THOMAS J. COMBS
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Dear Dr. Cartisano,

I am in receipt of your letter dated September 2020. I appreciate your feedback regarding an extremely difficult situation.

The Athletic Councils decision to postpone athletics until January was the result of months of research, intense dialogue and input from Superintendents, Athletic Directors, Physicians, athletic trainers and public health practitioners. The health and safety of our student athletes, coaches, staff and spectators was and continues to be the guiding force of all that we hold paramount. The guiding body of athletics, NYSPHSAA, in conjunction with NYSED, the Governor's office and the NYDOH decided on July 16th to move the fall sports season from August 24 to September 21. This delay afforded schools additional time to prepare for the upcoming year. At that time, we did not receive one objection or recommendation from our educational stakeholders. On August 24, Governor Cuomo announced that low-moderate risk sports could start on September 21. After this statement, NYSCOS wrote the governor to request that sports be delayed until January. At this time the Suffolk County Superintendents association sent a survey to its members and to date approximately 30 have responded.

As an educator, I am sure that you recognize the differences between interscholastic and youth sports. Being educationally based, our certified coaches, through planning centered on scientific guidelines and structure differentiate our coaches and youth coaches. The strict restrictions set by NYSDOH and SED places school districts into a different risk category in general.

The postponing of sports allows us to have three distinct seasons with no overlap. In the current structure high risk sports of football and volleyball were just recently moved to the spring where they can have a complete season. They will be joined by our other "fall" season sports from March 1 through April 24. The only exception may be football, where four teams may participate in a championship event if Nassau is able to develop a schedule which allows for the contest to be played. All other sports will have concluded their seasons by the time the spring season commences on April 26.

Until January, off season workouts are permitted, and we hope, used to develop the conditioning and hone skill development necessary to safely participate at a high level as long as they follow the out of season guidelines. Given the current climate, this will be all predicated on the hope that all parties abide by the out-of-season guidelines. The complete guidelines were published on September 5th and distributed to every Athletic Director the same date.

It is our hope that you support our decision to maintain the health and safety of all of Section XI's student athletes by adhering to the guidelines set forth by our Athletic Council.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Combs". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Tom Combs
Executive Director
Section XI Athletics