



October 7, 2020

Dear MAS Parents, Students and Staff Members:

In the last few days, we have received questions from parents, students and staff related to whether or not they can attend Minnewaska Area Schools extra curricular activities as spectators. The purpose of this letter is to explain the answer and also provide some insight into what the school board did to try to make it safe and possible.

First, please know we are absolutely thrilled MAS students have now been given the opportunity to participate in activities again. It was difficult to say the least, but we survived last spring when students lost their chance to compete in winter/spring activities and we don't want to be shut down again. With that in mind, there is some information about restrictions we want to share.

MAS is legally required to concur with the requirements set forth by the Minnesota State High School League (MSHSL) and the Minnesota Departments of Health (MDH) and Education (MDE). This includes specific requirements, some of which we are not accustomed. For example, there are strict expectations/requirements for locker room usage; for the number of fans that can attend outdoor events; NO fans attend indoor events; no concessions; participants practicing social distancing when not competing; and facemasks being required.

Recognizing MAS has large facilities in which we could safely socially distance spectators who attend events, the MAS School Board directed the administration to appeal to leaders of all three of the governmental entities identified above. The School Board asked us to make sure governmental leaders knew what was possible at MAS, both indoors and outdoors. They wanted us to inform leadership that while the school board is committed to following the requirements, they also believed, given our amenities, we could safely plan for attendance at outdoor AND indoor events.

We conversed with the Deputy Commissioner of Education, the President of the MSHSL Board of Directors and the regional MDH leader for our area. In the end, it should be acknowledged each of the individuals with whom we communicated has broad responsibilities to demand the safest guidance. Each of these leaders is currently a parent or grandparent whose children/grandchildren are engaged in MSHSL activities. I can tell you they "get it" and they also intently listened to us.

All three of the leaders communicated the expectation that the MDH, MDE and MSHSL guidance/requirements are to be followed. When they were asked about consequences for districts not in compliance, the list of possibilities included, but is not limited to the following:

- MSHSL can make a determination to shut athletic programs down for a school district not adhering to requirements.
- Possible loss of school revenue (Foundation Aid) if schools are willingly in violation of Executive order 20-82
- Not adhering to requirements/guidance of MDH, MDE or MSHSL would be fertile ground for potential lawsuits or legal implications if the school board took action in direct violation of guidance/requirements.

The governmental leaders identified above also recognize there are other clubs or athletic organizations that operate under different rules. It is our feeling, from the conversations we had with them, that those inconsistencies are going to be addressed.

In the end, MAS school board members are in agreement that given the shut down we experienced last spring, student participation in our schools during the day as well as their participation in after school activities are the absolute highest priorities. The school board is resolute in their commitment not to do anything that will jeopardize our programs being closed down thereby preventing our students from participating in them. However, they also want you to know that anytime we are requested or required to do something that doesn't make sense to the leadership of our school district, they will be equally resolute in respectfully challenging those requirements to ensure we do our absolute best on behalf of our students and families.

We very much appreciate your support and cooperation as we navigate the unique landscape of the 2020-2021 school year.

Most Respectfully,

Rick Ellingworth

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