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## MEMORANDUM

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**TO:** BCSS MEMBER SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS AND ATHLETIC DIRECTORS  
**FROM:** JORDAN ABNEY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
**SUBJECT:** PLANNING FOR RETURN TO PLAY IN FALL 2020  
**DATE:** JULY 9, 2020  
**CC:** DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENTS, BCSS SPORT COMMISSIONERS, LOCAL ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION PRESIDENTS, ZONE PRESIDENTS, PARTNER STAKEHOLDERS

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I hope this finds each of you safe, healthy and settling into some summer downtime. It certainly has been a strange few months that have been different and challenging in many ways.

In a usual year, BCSS would provide some end of year clarity on various topics to assist with planning before year-end. As a result of the AGM moving to mid-June, and the new Board of Directors meeting on June 30, our normal updates are a little later than normal. We ask that you share this with your coaches, parents and other stakeholders as necessary.

At the June 30 BCSS Board of Directors meeting, the Board decided to leave the emergency policy of **the full stoppage of all in-person school sport-related activities in place until further notice**. While not commonplace, some schools do have sports programs that convene over the summer. This is not an option at this time. There are various reasons for this Board decision, the primary factor being safety. Without schools functioning regularly over the summer, the ability for schools to ensure full adherence to any protocols is significantly reduced. School sport experiences should be grounded in education, which is difficult to achieve when schools are not in session. Secondly, many districts around the province have decided to close their fields and gyms to all users over the summer. This can lead to some potential competitive balance issues, should there be a return to competition this year. Finally, the Board has put in this emergency policy in response to the pandemic, as BCSS does not have a policy prohibiting school sport activities over the summer. It should be noted however, it is extremely common in most school sport governing bodies across North America that school sport activities over the summer blackout period are prohibited. Given the pandemic and state-of-emergency BC still in place in BC, there is little need to run team activities during this time. If a coach wishes to run virtual team meetings to discuss technical or tactical strategies, or simply just to provide a level of engagement and positivity around the team, they are able to do so. Coaches may also provide strength and conditioning workouts for their athletes to conduct individually but there should be no bringing student-athletes and coaches together physically in any way at this time. We encourage any coach in contact with student-athletes to remind them of the physical distancing guidelines that are in place for the health and safety of all.



With that said, we recognize the massive importance of co-curricular activities such as school sport to the mental and physical health of the students. In recent weeks there have been studies published noting the significant decline in the mental health of students in the absence of normalized education and specifically the lack of co-curricular engagement over the past 4 months. These red flags demonstrate a dangerous reality our students are living and BCSS has a responsibility to ensure we bring back as much sport and normalcy as we can to support their well-being. We remain committed to this while also acknowledging that we will not sacrifice the health and well-being of our student-athletes, coaches, officials and administrators.

Our reality is that school sport is going to look different in the fall. Having our traditional celebrated provincial championships is going to be unlikely in most, if not all sports. We know that the football programs around the province are preparing for a return on August 24 for their traditional two-weeks of pre-season camp, and our football commission has already done a tremendous amount of work preparing to safely do this. We know the rest of our fall sports are anxious to start once school opens in September. The BCSS staff are working hard on detailed return to sport plans for each of our fall sports. Each of our 19 sports has a different risk profile dependent on its characteristics. Some are easily adaptable while others are more challenging to change. As a school sport community, we must be prepared to embrace change this year and realize this will not be business as usual, but in service of our school communities and especially our students, we are each called to create the very best experience we can.

I have been in regular contact with our BCSS Superintendent Representative as well as leadership from FISA (independent schools) and we plan to bring the plan forward to these groups in early August for review. Any plan brought forward will require the buy in from these groups to be successful. We will focus on fall sports to begin with, and evaluate the risk factors and modifications required to make school sport viable. In some sports, this may mean access to some localized competition. In other sports, this may mean being limited to training and only in a very controlled setting. There are many factors beyond our control that will dictate what we and our member schools can safely deliver. However, our plan will provide continuums for each sport that will provide viable options depending on the progression of the pandemic and the accompanying

We have been receiving pressure from parents and coaches encouraging us to push the boundaries of the guidelines. We understand the frustration that comes with the current restrictions and urgency for clarity of what our realities will be in September. We also recognize the great significance of school sport to our school and greater communities. Lisa Beare, Minister of Tourism, Arts, and Culture (where Sport Branch resides) has indicated that while the Province has recently moved to Phase 3 of its re-opening plan, Sport and Recreation remain in Phase 2, which still has strict limitations on organized sport activities. While BCSS is an independent organization, we will be using the guidelines and direction from the Provincial Health Officer in conjunction with the Return to Sport Guidelines from the Provincial



Government as the foundation for our return to sport plan. We will adapt and modify to deliver what we can within the educational environment, but BCSS will not be ignorant of these guidelines which have been developed for the safety of the citizens of BC.

We are also aware that many private entities which are unaffiliated with a provincial sport organization (PSO) or other sport governing body are disregarding the provincial return to sport guidelines entirely. These entities, often focused on generating profit are using messaging suggesting that school sport will not happen to recruit students to their programs. This approach from those parties is unfortunate and is no doubt opportunistic. School sports has always and will continue to provide the lowest barrier entry to sport, and the significance of representing one's school on a team is a privilege that still holds great esteem to our student-athletes. With over 70,000 student-athletes participating annually in our 19 sports, we are confident that the importance of representing one's school will remain and those who have taken on coaching and leadership roles will continue to do so.

Once we have reviewed the plan with representatives from the Ministry of Education, Provincial Health Office, our 60 school districts and independent school member schools, we will wait for the Ministry's announcement in mid-to-late August surrounding the return to education for September. The BCSS Board of Directors will then announce the plan for return to sport shortly thereafter.

We understand the frustration, but we ask for your continued patience as we work to build a structure of modifications and protocols that can be delivered across the province to provide the best opportunity for our student-athletes to safely experience the amazing benefits of school sport.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jordan Abney", is positioned above the printed name.

Jordan Abney  
Executive Director