



MEMORANDUM

TO: BCSS ADMINISTRATORS & COUNSELLORS & ATHLETIC DIRECTORS
FROM: JORDAN ABNEY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
SUBJECT: ELIGIBILITY POLICIES AS A RESULT OF COVID
DATE: JANUARY 25, 2021
CC: DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENTS, BCSS SPORT COMMISSIONERS

This memo is to provide guidance to **school administrators, counsellors and athletic directors** on the effects of COVID-19 on BCSS eligibility policy so that you can provide accurate information to any families or students that inquire about enrolling at your school for the last 2 quarters/semester of the current academic year, or for the 2021-2022 academic year. In a normal year, we remind schools that the BCSS AGM is in the spring, and any of the eligibility rules are subject to change, however, in most years, there is little likelihood of a significant change to our core eligibility rules.

The BCSS Board of Directors met virtually on January 18, 2021 and reviewed the feedback from the eligibility questionnaire sent to school administrators and ADs on January 7. Thank you to those that participated in the survey and provided great insights and considerations. We received 229 responses, from AD's and Administrators, which gave the results strong diversity and validity. The results clearly indicated a desire to see modifications to the transfer rules in response to COVID-19 with 79.4% of all respondents indicating a desire to see a modification to prevent 70,000+ student-athletes from being able to transfer next year.

There are **three different changes** to the Eligibility policies. Two will be brought forward at the AGM, the other is an emergency resolution by the Board of Directors and is effective immediately. As is BCSS standard procedure, any emergency policy by the Board of Directors will be subject to ratification or repeal at the next meeting of the membership. The desired effect of all three changes is to achieve a consistent application of the existing BCSS transfer rules, allowing those transfers that have traditionally been allowed, while limiting the opportunity created by COVID-19 for a high number of athletically motivated transfers.

Knowing this is confusing to many, here are two proposed policy changes and the emergency policy summarized.

1. A proposed change to transfer policy pertaining to sitting out 12-months in any sport played in 12 months prior to a transfer
2. A proposed change to expand the ability for students to receive a 6th year of eligibility if meeting certain criteria
3. Emergency Policy by Board of Directors relative to eligibility for the Spring Season of Play in the current school year

Student-athlete eligibility post-transfer due to COVID-19

This policy will be coming forward to the May 1, 2021, AGM. The Board is bringing it forward based on the very strong feedback from the membership about this unprecedented situation created by COVID.



Draft language of the policy (subject to change): A student-athlete who was unable to participate in interschool competition in the Fall 2020 or Winter 2021 seasons of play due to COVID-19 and transferred schools on or after October 1, 2020, will not be eligible for the 2021-2022 year as per section 612.0 unless they're approved by an Eligibility Officer to have met one of the approved exemptions in 620.0, or by a positive ruling by the Eligibility Appeal Committee. Student-athletes participation from the last unaffected season of play will be used to determine sports that they are considered to have been participated in.

[This section will be automatically removed following the 2021-2022 academic year]

Intent and Rationale: The intent here is to state that missing a season of play due to COVID-19 cancellations, does NOT allow a student to transfer schools without restriction. BCSS will use the last unaffected season of play to determine participation for the purpose of a transfer.

The October 1 date is to recognize that many students may have transferred prior to the 2020-2021 academic year and were expecting to either go through the eligibility process to obtain eligibility due to a valid transfer, or to sit out a year already, and we know that most student movement that occurs in the first few weeks of the year is normally done by the October 1 date for 1701 submission to the Ministry of Education.

Sixth (6th) year of Eligibility due to loss of COVID-19 cancelled season of play

This motion will also be brought forward to the membership at the May 1, 2021, AGM for consideration.

At last year's AGM (June 2020), the membership ratified the Board of Directors' emergency policy from March 2020 to provide the BCSS Eligibility Officer with the ability to grant a 6th year of eligibility for students in their fifth (5th) year of eligibility who were unable to participate in the 2020 Spring season of play due to the COVID-19 pandemic; and who remain eligible by all other BCSS policies (i.e. minimum enrolled credits, age eligibility etc.) to participate only in the Spring 2021 season of play. This policy is only in effect for the 2020-21 school. Being that COVID-19 has now impacted both the Fall 2020 and Winter 2021 season and will possibly affect the Spring 2021 season the BCSS Board of Directors will be bringing forth the following resolution to be voted on by the membership at the May 2021 AGM.

Draft language of the policy (subject to change): A student-athlete who was in their 5th year of eligibility during the 2020-2021 school year and was prevented from participating in interschool competition due to the COVID-19 pandemic that returns to their home school in the 2021-2022 school year and had not satisfied their graduation requirements as outlined by the Ministry of Education as of the end of the 2020-2021 school year and remains eligible by all other BCSS policies (i.e. Age, credits enrolled, residence etc.) may apply for a sixth (6th) year of eligibility.

Eligibility Officers are given the ability to grant this exception without requiring an appeal only for the 2021-2022 academic year, if the application, after review, meets the above requirements.



A student-athlete who was not in their 5th year of eligibility in 2020-2021, will not be granted a 6th year of eligibility by the Eligibility Officer unless meeting one of the already established criteria in the BCSS Handbook, or by a positive ruling of the Eligibility Appeals Committee.

A student-athlete who was in their 5th year of eligibility 2020-2021 and has met all the criteria for graduation as outlined by the Ministry of Education, shall not be granted a 6th year by the Eligibility Officer, without meeting one of the already established criteria in the BCSS Handbook or by a positive ruling of the Eligibility Appeals Committee (EAC)

[This policy will be automatically removed after the 2021-2022 academic year]

Intent and Rationale: The Board desires to ensure that those students who miss a season of play in their final year of eligibility, and who legitimately have to return to school next year, are allowed to participate, while also ensuring that students who would have otherwise graduated, can't decide to come back simply for the purpose of playing high school sport. As was the case last year, the Board does not expect there to be a significant number of students in this situation.

Emergency Board policy for the 2021 Spring Season

This policy is in effect immediately, until ratified or repealed by the Membership at the May 1, 2020, AGM.

The BCSS Board of Directors recognized that should we have any interschool competition in the Spring 2021 season of play there is also the need to address the same transfer issue resulting from the cancellation of the Spring 2020 season of play due to COVID-19, and as such the Board has passed the following emergency policy which will be brought to the membership at the Annual General Meeting in May 2021 for approval or repeal by the membership.

A student-athlete who was unable to participate in interschool competition in the Spring 2020 season of play due to COVID-19 and transferred schools on or after October 1, 2020, will not be eligible for the 2021 Spring season of play as per section 612.0 unless they approved by an Eligibility Officer to have met one of the approved exemptions in 620.0, or by a positive ruling by the Eligibility Appeal Committee. Student-athletes participation from the Spring 2019 Season of Play will be used to determine eligibility.

[This policy will be automatically removed after the 2020-2021 academic year, unless repealed by the membership at the May 1, 2021, AGM at which time the policy will be immediately removed.]

Intent and Rationale: It should be noted that interschool competition remains very much up in the air at the time of this memo. We remain hopeful and continue to work with the government, but if no school sport returns in Spring 2021, then this emergency policy is moot. Also, until there is clarity on the school sport situation, BCSS is not accepting transfer documentation.

This policy has the same intention as those above and is supported by the 79.4% of respondents to the questionnaire, this is to limit the number of athletically motivated transfers, that may have happened due to the opportunity created by COVID-19.



Conclusion

Across all walks of life and throughout education, COVID-19 has presented unprecedented challenges. We as an organization continue to adapt to those and the constantly changing timelines, expectations and health guidance. We realize this memo is quite technical, but we hope it provides some clarity around what to expect at the AGM and looking ahead to next year so you can assist your students and families by providing quality information. There is no “ideal” in this situation, and the Board has attempted to find a middle ground in supporting the interests and needs of student-athletes balanced against the need to ensure there remains a competitive balance in school sport.

It's important to remember that if a student-athlete hasn't transferred, there is no impact, and if a student-athlete has transferred for one of the normally approved reasons in the BCSS handbook, those students will generally be granted eligibility. This only affects those students who have, for a reason not listed as an exemption in our policies, decided to transfer schools. They too will still have the option of an appeal to the EAC available to them, if their unique circumstance warrants an exception.

To summarize, here are the effects of the motions:

1. Students who transferred before October 1st, 2020, will be eligible to play next year.
2. Students who transferred on or after October 1st, 2020, will not automatically be eligible to play next year and will have to go through the eligibility process; not participating due to COVID-19 is not a reason for eligibility to be granted after a transfer
3. Students who transferred on or after October 1st, 2020, will not be eligible to play in the 2021 spring season of play (should there be competition) automatically and will have to go through the eligibility criteria
4. Students currently in Grade 12, who will not graduate, may be granted an additional year of eligibility if they meet strict criteria.

As always, we are here to serve our member schools, and should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the office. We continue to commend leaders across the education system for the incredible resilience and adaptability you have shown this year. We will continue to work together and get through this.

Sincerely,

Jordan Abney
Executive Director