



MEMORANDUM

TO: BCSS MEMBER SCHOOL ATHLETIC DIRECTORS
FROM: JORDAN ABNEY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
SUBJECT: POLICY CHANGE SUMMARY
DATE: NOVEMBER 15, 2017
CC: ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION PRESIDENTS, SPORT COMMISSIONERS

BC School Sports (BCSS) recently held its annual Fall Council meeting. This is a meeting where the Athletic Association Presidents, Sport Commissioners, Advisory Committee Members and the Board of Directors come together to get updates on various activities of the organization and engage in discussion on topics that the Board and staff may be looking for feedback on. It was a positive meeting with plenty of information being communicated out to the attendees.

One challenge BCSS faces is how to get all 460+ member schools engaged and educated on the constantly changing policies, procedures, and contacts. Like all good organizations, we constantly strive to improve ourselves, whether that be through updating policy, adding programs and services, or adjusting operations to make it easier for AD's to do their jobs. However, one challenge we face is, with AD's already finding it tough to find time to perform the basics of their job, it is exceedingly difficult for them to find the time to be engaged with what is being voted on, and understand the effects of proposed policy before a vote. To help with this, BCSS hosted two webinars last year prior to the AGM, which we will do again in the future in an effort to allow those who wish to advance vote, or simply know more, inform themselves on the issues.

An even bigger challenge is communicating to the members what has passed, and what the day-to-day effects of those changes may be, whether it be in policy or operations. To add further challenge, nearly a quarter of our member schools have first-time Athletic Directors this year, who weren't just trying to learn the new policies, but all of them. Despite our best efforts to communicate the outcome of the changed policies, this is an area where we can improve on in the future for both new AD's and for existing ones. Although we are nearing the completion of our first season of play, it is our hope that this memorandum will provide clarity on some of the changes and what the effects are.

1) *Clarity and parameters around transfers*

Prior to the AGM last year, significant feedback was received related to concerns over the ease of which students were moving schools, using some of the very loose rules that were in place. There was a feeling that student-athletes could move anywhere without much issue and often sport was the reason for the transfers that were occurring. In response, there were some motions drafted, not to change the core foundation of the rules, but to better establish some parameters on how they would be applied. We researched similar rules in other provinces and states, spoke to the Eligibility Officer about his application of the rules and what made sense and we also proposed a change to the Board that would add some clarity around academic



related transfers. The changes were intended to maintain the original intent of the rules, but cut down on the use of such rules in situations that fell outside their intent.

When examining the Financial Hardship rule, we examined the challenges with it, and that BCSS doesn't wish to conduct means testing of a family's financial situation. We examined the intent of the rule and felt it was there to allow students to move when life's incidents happened to them or their families that were unforeseen and generally out of their control; whether that be a loss of job, an illness, or another circumstance of that nature. We added such language to provide clarity to the membership by adding this language to the policy. Both of these changes were passed overwhelmingly at the AGM.

2) *Moving to a new School District*

One area that we received constant feedback and complaints about last year was when a student moved to a new school district, that in most districts, they were allowed to essentially choose their school. The membership voted to put in place rules that for a principal residence or parent-to-parent move, that the student-athlete will be immediately eligible only in their catchment area school, and if the family chooses, and is allowed by the district to enroll in their non-catchment school, that they are subject to the one-year ineligibility period for any sports played in the previous 12 months.

We strive to treat independent schools and public schools as equitably as possible. However, independent schools have no catchments, so it was established that a student would be eligible at their closest independent school. We realized that in some cases if a student was moving as a change of principal residence, and was leaving a faith-based school, and arriving in a new town, and there were other independent schools closer than the nearest same faith-based school, that this would have to go to appeal. While creating an extra step, it was the best way to maintain the fairness between the two different types of institution. We are working with our Eligibility Officers, Staff and the Ministry of Education, to investigate whether we can use the funding level or other Ministry designation, to explore if we can eliminate the extra step for independent schools, while still maintaining the intent of having the independent and public schools treated in a similar fashion.

3) *The Role of the Eligibility Officer*

Another area that was identified as problematic was the authorities of the Eligibility Officer (EO) and Eligibility Appeals Committee (EAC) and how they both had the ability to make exceptions to the rules. Often what was being granted and the reasoning for those decisions were inconsistent between the two bodies and it led to a lack of understanding and was a source of confusion and frustration for the members. When looking at other governing bodies, and simply what made sense from a procedural standpoint, changes were proposed and passed to limit the Eligibility Officer to approve only what the membership has approved in the BCSS Handbook. Essentially, the role of the Eligibility Officer is to measure the merits of an application against the standards in the handbooks and make a judgment on whether they meet that standard or



not. The Eligibility Officer no longer has the ability to make exceptions to rules in the BCSS Handbook.

The Eligibility Appeals Committee is the second level available for a school to submit information to, in the form of an Eligibility Appeal. This committee is made up of seven people who are Principals and Athletic Directors from around the province. They take this responsibility extremely seriously. When reviewing an appeal, they have the option to uphold the ruling of the Eligibility Officer, change the ruling of the EO based on the information provided to them and deem the situation to meet the standard in policy, or lastly, they have the ability to grant eligibility based on an exemption, usually on extraordinary or compassionate grounds.

As an Athletic Director, Principal, Coach, or Counsellor, it's important to communicate the proper information to a student-athletes and their family before they make a decision to transfer. A good starting point for any conversation is a reminder to all involved that for any sports played in the previous 12 months prior to the transfer, the student-athlete is ineligible. Of course, then the school can work with family to engage in submitting the appropriate documentation to BCSS to attempt to gain eligibility immediately. Stating to a family that they will be eligible sets an expectation that may be problematic if additional information comes to light when submitting the documentation or if it is ruled that the situation doesn't meet the standard of the policy.

We have had a lot of feedback this year. If I were to generalize what we are hearing, then I would say that people are generally supportive of the changes. However, understanding the changes and how they have affected an AD's role and the student-athletes was the toughest part.

Moving forward, we believe it would be beneficial for student-athletes and AD's for the Eligibility Officers to have more policies under which they could approve transfers. In order to facilitate possible changes, the BCSS office is doing some research and will be consulting with the membership on which circumstances they would feel comfortable with the EO approving so we can look to bring policy changes forward at the next AGM.

Hopefully this brief summary helps the membership understand some of the more significant changes to our eligibility policies from our AGM. Again, we will work to find new ways to present this information in the future. Should you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact the BCSS office.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jordan Abney".

Jordan Abney
Executive Director
BC School Sports