

To All IESA Member Schools:

The IESA Board of Directors held a special meeting on Thursday, July 23. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss fall sports and whether those activities could be held in accordance with the current limitations placed on schools and activities by the Illinois Department of Public Health.

After much discussion, the Board unanimously approved to cancel the regular season and IESA state series in the sports of boys and girls golf, boys baseball, girls softball, and boys and girls cross-country for the 2020-21 school year. There are no plans to try and re-schedule the activities or conduct them later in the school year in part due to if and when high schools in Illinois play their contests. Girls softball practice was scheduled to start July 27. The baseball and cross-country seasons were scheduled to start August 3. The Board delayed any decision on girls basketball. The first day of girls basketball practice is scheduled for August 31. The Board will meet again in late August to make a decision regarding girls basketball. The Board did review and approve a plan submitted by the Speech Advisory Committee that allows schools to hold their own speech contest during the upcoming school year. Schools that participate in speech will receive information at a later date. No decisions regarding any other activities were made.

We know that there will be many people within the school system who will applaud this decision and there will be many who will be strongly opposed. At the forefront of the Board decision is that the activities must be conducted within the current limitations that have been placed on the schools by the IDPH. In particular, the mandate that there can be no physical contact between athletes and that students must be socially distanced (6 ft. of separation) makes the administration and conduct of games and contests very difficult and in some cases impossible to adhere to the mandates. While there are plenty of youth league baseball and softball teams playing games and tournaments this summer, many are not adhering to the same stringent guidelines. Because summer leagues and travel ball are taking place, this may make the decision of the IESA Board of Directors seem odd. The difference is that schools will be held to the IDPH mandates and the youth summer contests are not. It would make little sense for IESA to move forward with these activities that would require schools to be in direct conflict with mandates by state agencies that have regulatory control over the schools.

COVID-19 has changed the world. However, this decision is not the end of the world. It is not the news that most students and parents want. At the end of the day, we work with junior high and middle school students. They are not professional athletes; they are not college athletes; they are not high school athletes. They will not be missing out on any college scholarships. These are mainly 12-14 year old kids who will have many more opportunities to participate (perhaps even later this school year in other activities). We recognize that athletics play a huge role in the lives of students. Activities, despite their importance in the development of students, can never take precedence over the health and safety of those same students as well as the health and safety of contest officials, game management, and parents/fans who attend contests. The IESA Board of Directors made a difficult decision but in the end they simply felt that there are too many unknowns to proceed safely at this level of play. As you process this information, I hope you will keep in mind that the Board believes they made the best decision for jr. high/middle school students.

I know this announcement will generate many questions. I respectfully ask that you email me and I will do my best to address those in the days ahead. I wanted to get this information to the membership as soon as possible today and so I ask for your patience to address your questions. We will continue to keep the membership informed of the status of other activities for the 2020-21 school year as those decisions are made.