



# **Letter To The Editor: Area Superintendents Urge Governor To Move Region 4 To Phase 4 To Allow Student-Athlete Participation**

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**Letter To The Honorable JB Pritzker**

**Office of the Governor**

**207 State House**

**Springfield, IL.**

**Dear Governor Pritzker:**

Thank you for your work to mitigate the risks of COVID-19 and the continued vaccination of Illinois residents. As school district leaders, we are committed to helping Region 4 and the entire state achieve Phase 4, while assisting in the vaccination of our communities.

We appreciate the guidelines for low, moderate, and high risk sports to practice, scrimmage, and compete. These guidelines provide hope for our students and our families to see athletics return this school year. However, regardless of our efforts, Region 4 may not achieve or maintain Tier 1 or Phase 4 due to ICU bed availability, which means our student athletes could miss out on the opportunity to participate in sports during the 2nd semester.

This restriction does not take into account the availability of additional ICU beds in the nearby St. Louis Metropolitan Area. As advocates for the well-being of our students, we are suggesting additional mitigation strategies to ensure our student athletes have the opportunity to not only practice, but scrimmage and compete, providing a sense of normalcy during exceptional times.

**The following are additional mitigation strategies to ensure our student athletes are able to compete regardless of our Region's Phase or Tier Mitigation:**

1. No Spectators - limiting the opportunity for community spread.
2. Health Screenings prior to competition - preventing potentially infected athletes from spreading the virus.
3. Antigen Testing - to isolate and prevent the spread of the virus.
4. No locker rooms - limiting the opportunity for spread.
5. Additional time between JV and Varsity Games or 7th and 8th - providing an opportunity to clean in between competitions.
6. Limiting Transportation for Teams - teams travel separately.

We appreciate your administration's efforts to curb the spread of the virus, but please be aware our Region 4 hospital systems serve not only our residents, but also residents outside of our region.

Patients from Illinois counties outside of Region 4 have negatively impacted our ICU bed availability, inflating our overall numbers. As a result, school districts outside of Region 4 will be competing in the weeks ahead, while sending patients to our community health systems.

This negatively impacts our students' opportunity to compete and denies equitable opportunities for our student athletes. Since the pandemic began, families that could afford club sports have and continue to provide their children extra-curricular activities in basketball, soccer, volleyball, and wrestling in Illinois and neighboring states.

However, the cost itself denies the same opportunity for all families. GoFundMe is one example of how communities have helped ensure students were given the opportunity to play because the cost of club sports was too expensive for families. Sadly, absent of this type of support, students are being denied equitable opportunities that our public high schools and middle schools provide during a normal school year.

As an advocate for families of all income levels, we know you would desire a more equitable solution. Throughout the pandemic, school districts have provided a safe environment for our students.

This has occurred for high school graduation, in-person learning, and fall athletics. We are asking for the same opportunity for not only basketball and volleyball teams, but the entire list of winter and spring sports. This will allow our students a viable physical and mental outlet during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Governor Pritzker, the Southwestern Athletic Conference needs your help!

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**Darcy Benway**, Ed.D., Superintendent, O'Fallon Township High School

**Arthur Culver**, Superintendent East St. Louis District #189

**Jason Henderson**, Ed.D., Superintendent Edwardsville CUSD #7

**Brian Mentzer**, Ed.D., Superintendent Belleville TWP HS #201

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