

*Devoted to the
Recreational
Interests of the
Catholic
Grade School Youth*



INTER-CITY CATHOLIC LEAGUE



July 24, 2020

Dear Catholic School parents,

The principals of the South Bend and surrounding area Catholic Schools along with ICCL leadership are writing to update you about the situation regarding fall sports for our schools. First of all, thank you so much for your heartfelt participation in our survey. Unfortunately, the combination of these results, operational complications, and recent COVID trends in St. Joseph and Elkhart Counties will require us to cancel our fall sports season. We will elaborate on some of these points below and indicate what is still up for consideration in the coming school year.

Responses to the survey included a wide range of viewpoints, from those who see no risk at all in reopening athletics to those who expressed in the strongest terms that the risks are unacceptable. We reiterate our own conviction that all viewpoints are to be respected and that people's opinions about the best way forward are passionately and sincerely held. Furthermore, as parents and administrators of our Catholic Schools, let us remember that we profess to be part of One Body in Christ, and we must prayerfully ask the Holy Spirit to bless and guide our choices, also praying for the intercession of St. Michael the Archangel as we all grapple with the challenges of this pandemic.

As far as general feedback, we received 626 responses representing all of our constituent schools, evenly balanced among Grades 5-8. For all fall sports in which a child would be interested in participating, the ratio of those who feel the risk of participation with precautions in place is acceptable compared to those who feel the risks are unacceptable was at least 4:1 or higher. When asked about people's comfort with combining teams from different schools, while 65% were okay with such an arrangement, notably, 35% did not feel comfortable allowing their child to join a combined team.

While this data at first glance appears to show an encouraging picture, that so many families are wanting and willing for their children to participate, the hard reality of the numbers predicts that we would lose anywhere from 20-30% of our participation base, if people's choice to hold their children from playing is anywhere close to what the responses suggest. Given below are just a few of the problems this would present as well as other factors we have had to weigh:

- Formation of full competitive teams, even in a normal year, is a challenge, and losing 20-30% of our numbers makes this even more problematic.

- We as school leaders in particular share many parents' concerns about the effects of mixing rosters from different Catholic schools. It will be hard enough to contain potential or realized COVID cases within the individual schools, much less exacerbate that effect by risking outbreaks that span multiple schools. If this occurs through social networks beyond our reach, we cannot help that, but we must still do what is responsible within our local control.
- The potential loss of athletes and gate revenue would put the ICCL (and possibly some schools' athletic funds) in an adverse financial position, and we do not want to make budgetary decisions that would compromise the safety or availability of our usual resources, facilities, or officials.
- Beyond that, many of the venues the ICCL uses to host competitions are within our high school campuses (St. Joe and Marian). Given the already extraordinary efforts and precautions being taken to open fall sports in those schools, we are not expecting those facilities to be made available to our grade school athletes this fall.
- Lastly and most critically, the St. Joseph County Health Department has indicated there is an upward trend of new COVID-19 cases (even within the span of days since the onset of this survey), thereby increasing the risk of students becoming exposed. As a result, our schools are already reassessing how they will safely reopen, taking into account recommendations from our local health departments, Governor Holcomb's Executive Orders, and Diocesan Guidelines. Our schools are looking at offering parents more options to consider, thus requiring our immediate attention. The inability to socially distance and wear masks when students participate in athletics has increased our concerns for their health. We must also take into account the potential impact for spread those athletes could still have on students who choose not to participate.

Looking ahead to the rest of the school year, what we have decided to do is monitor data and trends from the fall and continue conversations within the ICCL and Catholic schools to assess the potential for holding late fall/winter sports. We will also be evaluating the possibility of hosting certain cancelled fall sports during the spring semester.

We appreciate the passion and desire that we all share for our students to experience a well-rounded education through the exploration of their athletic and cooperative abilities. While this year, unlike any other, has taken that opportunity from us, we take heart from the fact that our teachers, parents, and students are working together to remain healthy and ready to rejoin those activities once the dangers of this current situation have been brought under control.

Most gratefully yours,

South Bend area Catholic School Principals and
The ICCL Leadership Board