



FROM THE DESK OF
JEFF BEHRENS

September 29, 2021

To our Pirate athletes, families and community members,

This school year has presented challenges that we have never experienced. I want to reach out to you to shed some light on these challenges and assure you that we are doing everything we can to continue to provide the great opportunities we have for our students and athletes. To put it simply, things have become more challenging this year and I encourage you to be patient and flexible as we search for solutions to these challenges. This dynamic has led to questions, concerns and frustrations from coaches & athletes to families & spectators. While our athletic and activities department works feverishly to find solutions, you deserve to hear this additional context. This is the aim of my letter to you today.

Bus Driver Shortage. There is a very real shortage in both the number of buses available as well as the number of bus drivers available. While we are in better shape than a lot of our surrounding districts who are struggling to provide routes for school, let alone their after school activities, it is still affecting us. Many days, we find that a bus may not be available for our teams until 4:30 when the school routes are finished because there aren't enough drivers to cover our trips. Though we wrestle with these external factors - which are beyond our control - we understand that it can be frustrating and disappointing and it impacts our coaches, kids and parents. Please know that we continuously work to find solutions to maintain our opportunities.

Action Steps

We are profoundly empathetic to the fact that this may mean that plans have to be changed at the last minute. When we find out that we will experience a bus issue, we do everything in our power to find a solution. We explore other modes of transportation, including district owned vehicles. We contact other bus companies. We explore the possibility of changing the start time of the contests to a later time. We look at changing the venue of the contest from an away game to a home game. I, along with other administrators, have even sat behind the wheel of a shuttle van to make sure that our teams get to their destination.

Officials Shortage. Unfortunately, the officials shortage is now having an impact on us. The WIAA is down 40% in registered officials this year. Most of the officials who have left were in their first couple years of officiating, and 75% of those officials who have left state that the biggest reason is the treatment they receive at games. As the shortage has an impact on us, we need to recognize that there will be a competition between schools to get officials. So please, if you feel the urge to yell and scream at an official, please know that your actions at a game as a spectator have a direct impact on whether officials want to choose officiating our games vs other local schools.

Action Steps

When faced with this challenge

- I first look to fill the game with any available official
- I reach out to other officials' assignors to help find an official
- I send emails to all officials in the WIAA directory
- We look at changing game times or changing the date of the game
- And lastly, we explore running contests with a lower number of officials (which results in us having to call it a scrimmage rather than an official game).

The bottom line is that we need to continue to make Pewaukee a place where officials *want* to officiate.

Event Worker Shortage. First and foremost, we strive to make Pewaukee athletic events as professional as possible. Athletics are referred to as the "window into a district" and I want to make our events something that people enjoy. I strive to provide a great experience for our athletes, families and members of our community. However, finding enough staff members to cover all of our game positions is proving harder than ever before. These positions range from scoreboard operator to announcer to admissions to crowd control.

Action Steps

We try to hire staff members as much as possible. When we can't fill all of the positions, I have been asking parents to fill in. Please know that I do not want to do this, because I understand that parents want to come and enjoy watching their kids play. However, for those parents who are willing to fill in, I certainly appreciate your willingness to help.

What you can expect from me and our athletic department

At the heart of our work in the Athletic & Activities Department is the unwavering goal to provide opportunities for our students to reap the benefits of all that education-based athletics and activities have to offer. Our purpose is for students to learn the skills to compete, commit, contribute, care and connect. The shortage of officials, bus drivers and event workers are going to continue to produce some serious challenges for us moving forward. However, you can expect that we will do everything in our power to continue to provide these great education-based opportunities for our students and athletes. Please be flexible, patient and understanding as we navigate through these challenges.

Thank you and as always....*GO PIRATES!!*

Jeff Behrens, CAA
Athletic & Activities Director
Pewaukee School District