



THE OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

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Dr. Joris M. Ray
Superintendent

August 24, 2020

Dear Mr. Childress and Members of the Board of Control:

I hope this letter finds you well and in good health. On July 22, 2020, the Board of Control of the Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association (TSSAA) decided to permit students across Tennessee to engage in interscholastic athletics during the pandemic. While I recognize that the TSSAA implemented some protocols to prevent the spread of COVID-19, the decision lacked scientific support, did not account for the varying COVID-19 statistics among counties in Tennessee, and, most importantly, failed to prioritize the health and safety of children. As we see now, many districts across the country that have also implemented similar protocols as the TSSAA have failed to limit the spread of COVID-19. I had hoped the TSSAA would revisit its decision in light of rolling school closures, but the TSSAA has remained silent, seemingly standing behind its decision.

As I have reflected on the TSSAA's decision, I was reminded that this is simply one of many decisions that have adversely affected Shelby County Schools (SCS) and the Memphis community. For example, recent decisions regarding [Memphis East's James Wiseman and Ryan Boyce](#) deemed both students ineligible and in violation of Tennessee law on grounds that were not set forth in the TSSAA Constitution and Bylaws.

SCS currently has more than 100,000 students enrolled. Of those enrolled, over 90 percent are students of color and more than 60 percent are economically disadvantaged. As the leader of the state's largest school district, I have grown increasingly concerned by the TSSAA's inattention to equity and the impact of antiquated rules and regulations that penalize our students, particularly students of color from disadvantaged homes and neighborhoods.

I know that the City of Memphis is committed to being a premier destination for high school, college and professional sports competition; yet, the TSSAA repeatedly insists our student-athletes travel hours from their homes for play that is frequently less competitive and severely less diverse, limiting the ability for parents and community alike to support their cherished teams. Based on recent financial statements, SCS and its families incur more than \$150,000 in additional costs each year due to TSSAA requirements. As a District, SCS has also incurred exorbitant costs in legal fees challenging TSSAA decisions and travel/commuting to areas outside of Memphis to engage in competition. This financial burden, coupled with the lack of urban district representation on the Board of Control for the largest school district in Tennessee, makes it abundantly clear that student-athletes, particularly students of color, cannot rely on TSSAA to consider them or their interests.

I am overwhelmed with complaints about the TSSAA from parents, students, community members, and SCS staff. However, as Superintendent, I have been limited in my ability to address these concerns. Today, I am requesting that the TSSAA, in accordance to the TSSAA Constitution and Bylaws that pledge to

“enhance the educational experiences of students,” immediately consider and deliberate on the following non-exhaustive list of demands:

- Implement equitable rulings and fair treatment for all students;
- Establish new bylaws and restructure the governing body;
- Rotate tournament schedule; address the limitation on national scheduling impacted by a maximum mileage, that, if exceeded, leads to forfeiture of games and/or fines; and
- Lift the inequitable twelve-month wait period for students transferring into public schools from private schools.

I am charged with representing the interests of students in SCS, especially when others do not. Therefore, I am announcing today the formation of an exploratory committee to evaluate SCS's continued participation in the TSSAA. Members of the exploratory committee are:

- Elliot Perry, **Retired NBA Player; Part Minority Owner of Memphis Grizzlies**
- Cedrick Wilson, **Former NFL player, Superbowl XL Champion; SCS football coach**
- Dr. Rochelle Stevens, **Two-Time USA Olympic Gold & Silver Medalist; Philanthropist; Author**
- Reneice Morris, **SCS Parent**
- Kevin Kane, **President/CEO Memphis Convention & Visitors Bureau**
- Malvin Gipson, **Vice President Sports, Large Tournaments & Events at Memphis Tourism**
- Paul Young, **Director of the City of Memphis Division of Housing and Community Development**
- Jack Sammons, **Memphis-Shelby County Airport Authority**
- Betty Booker Parks, **University of Memphis All-time Leading Basketball Scorer; Former SCS Basketball Coach; SCS Administrator**
- Willie Gregory, **Director of Global Community Impact at Nike, Inc.**
- Mona Mansour, **Mid-South Attorney; SCS Parent**
- Billy Orgel, **SCS Board Member; CEO Tower Ventures; Part Minority Owner of Memphis Grizzlies**
- James Bacchus, **SCS Principal**
- Zuzanna Armstrong, **SCS Volleyball Coach**
- Travis Haddock, **CEO National Hoopfest**
- Willis Reed, **SCS Baseball Coach**
- Elizabeth Key, **SCS Volleyball and Basketball Student-Athlete**
- Tommy Perry, **SCS Football Student-Athlete**

This committee will return a recommendation to me this fall, after which I will provide an update on the future of our continued participation in TSSAA.

Respectfully,



Dr. Joris M. Ray
Shelby County Schools
Superintendent