



E.H. Mellon Administrative Center  
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February 10, 2015

Mr. Joe DeLuce  
Executive Director  
Champaign Park District  
706 Kenwood Road  
Champaign, IL 61821

Dear Mr. DeLuce:

I am writing to follow up on my request from July 2014 regarding the use of a portion of Dodds Park for the new Champaign Central High School. I am compelled to come forward once again with this request due to an overwhelming community response for this option to become available in order to address a long-standing community issue.

As you are aware, the School District has been actively searching for a new Central High School site for more than 10 years. The process has been exhaustive—involving many Superintendents, Boards of Education, and input from thousands of community members. The process has been particularly challenging due to the limited available space within the core of the community to house a comprehensive high school for 1,700 students. In its search, the Board of Education has had to weigh this reality with the community's desire to keep the new Central High School as central as possible while remaining responsible to the taxpayers we serve.

### **Steps Taken by the Board of Education in Selecting a Site for a New Central High School**

In 2013, the Board of Education contracted with Champaign-based Gorski Reifsteck to review and uncover any interior high school sites that were not yet under consideration and assist the Board of Education in identifying the site that best fits the School District's needs. The Board began with a list of 16 possible sites.

Of the available sites, the Board of Education examined each site objectively, looking at factors such as transportation costs, size, and accessibility. It narrowed the list to six and then four, taking the time to further examine the final sites with a team of engineers. The Board of Education determined that the School District would purchase the site on Interstate Drive due to its proximity to the community compared to other available sites, existing city infrastructure, and room for future growth.

At the time the Board of Education made this decision, the School District had been informed on several occasions that Park District property would not be available for this use. However, since that time, representatives of the Park District have come forward with interest in working together on potential siting options.

### **Community Response**

While the site on Interstate Drive would adequately house the new Central High School, the purchase of the site has prompted considerable community discussion on why alternative infill

options were not made available or were not possible, namely properties held by the Champaign Park District.

In order to fully explore the available options, the District fully investigated the option of utilizing Spalding Park for the new high school site. However, for the reasons outlined in our correspondence from July, that site would be inadequate for a new high school and would come at a considerable additional cost to taxpayers that would put the needs of other school facilities in jeopardy.

After ruling out the possibility of Spalding Park and receiving proposals on a number of other less feasible options, many began to ask why a portion of Dodds Park could not be used for the new high school.

The issue of where to build the new school is dividing our community. An overwhelming majority of community members are voicing their understanding that a new Central High School is needed. However, the lack of an infill location has held many back from supporting this project despite the clear need. Parties on all sides of the issue are passionate, informed, and intelligent. We have continued to listen to the diverse community voices on this issue and as Superintendent, I believe there is one option that can bring us together to support the needs of our children: Dodds Park.

### **A New Central High School Campus at Dodds Park**

Having thoroughly examined all possible options, the School District now comes back to the Park District once again to request the use of 40 acres of the 110-acre Dodds Park for the siting of a new Central High School. The School District has been urged by a diverse group of community leaders to provide a creative, innovative, and sustainable solution to this ongoing community discussion. The School District views Dodds Park as a game-changing opportunity to provide the community, staff, and students with unprecedented collaborative and academic advantages that are unavailable at any other site. In addition, this option presents a worthwhile compromise for community members by offering a site that has the available space to implement the educational program while retaining many of the benefits of an infill site.

From the outset, it is easy to articulate a variety of reasons why Dodds Park would be a superior site for locating a new Central High School.

#### Collaboration with Parkland College

With the national push for our students to be “College and Career Ready”, Dodds Park would be an ideal location for a 21<sup>st</sup> Century high school. A high school co-located with Parkland College would benefit students District-wide by creating a space where existing partnerships, collaborations, and relationships can develop in real-time as both institutions work together to realize their respective educational missions.

- **Teacher Collaboration** – Locating a new Central High School next to Parkland College would allow high school and Parkland faculty in similar disciplines (English, Math, Science, Computer Science, Technology, etc.) to collaborate as they prepare students for the rigors of college.
- **College & Career Center Collaboration** - Collaboration between the Parkland College Career Center and the Central High School College & Career Center would be very beneficial in preparing high school students to be career ready and create a post-secondary plan.
- **Dual Credit Courses** – This would allow easier access for high school students to participate in Dual Credit courses offered through Parkland College, not just in the Career and Technical Education areas but in all curricular areas of Parkland College. Presently Education for Employment #330 is developing an “Early College & Career Academy” for high school students who want to take Dual Credit courses at Parkland College. An

increased number of students would be able to take advantage of this new academy due to the location of our high school across the street.

- **Workforce Development and the P-20 Pipeline** - The Illinois P-20 Council was established by the Illinois General Assembly in 2009 to foster collaboration among state agencies, educational institutions, local schools, community groups, employers, taxpayers, and families. Parkland College is leading the way in this area and having a new Central High School in close proximity would allow School District staff to be intimately involved with the design of the P-20 program in the area. One of the highlights of the Parkland College P-20 Action Advisory Group is the establishment of Programs of Study (starting with grade 9 through 14) for all schools in the area.
- **Addressing the Readiness of High School Graduates for College-Level Coursework** - A concern shared by the School District and Parkland College is the number of students requiring remedial coursework once they reach Parkland College. By working more closely and exposing students to the academic expectations of post-secondary coursework, the School District and Parkland College can work together to address this issue.
- **Exposure to New Academic Areas** – With a new Central High School in close proximity to Parkland College, students would have the opportunity to be exposed to new subject areas not typically offered in a high school setting, including agriculture, horticulture, and diesel mechanics among many others.
- **Shared Facilities** – Parkland College and Central High School would have the opportunity to share some athletic and arts facilities in order to maximize taxpayer investment in a new Central High School.

#### Additional Advantages to the Dodds Park Option

There are several other notable advantages to the Dodds Park site. First, the land is already owned by the taxpayers in our community. With enough acreage available at Dodds Park, the School District would be able to appropriately implement its educational program for high school students without all the obstacles present in attempting to develop at Spalding Park or other infill locations. Thus, building at Dodds Park comes at a comparable cost to building on a greenfield site, meaning no additional tax burden on the community to locate the campus at an infill location.

Acquisition of homes and businesses and displacement of residents would not be required, as would be the case for any other infill site. Premium acquisition, development, demolition and construction costs would not be necessary to utilize the Dodds Park site.

There would be no negative impact on other existing campuses. There would be no need for a parking deck as there would be sufficient space for parking and long-term expansion if necessary. The proximity of Dodds Park to the School District's most densely populated neighborhood (Garden Hills) is ideal.

Siting a new Central High School at Dodds Park would be the most exciting, yet sensible option for our community.

The School District is also committed to discussing land trade options that would allow for the joint relocation of the displaced fields at Dodds Park due to the construction of the new school. The District believes the Dodds Park name would remain and be appropriate given the majority of the park would remain in place.

In closing, I hope that you and your Board of Commissioners will take the time to fully consider the positive impact a Central High School at Dodds Park would have on the community and make this property available for this use. I believe this is our opportunity as community leaders to come together to build a better Champaign for generations to come.

We also urge the Park District to hold a public discussion involving the Board of Commissioners to fully examine this option and hear from the community. I would appreciate if you would contact me following your February 11 Board of Commissioners meeting to discuss the School District's request and how we may move forward together.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Judy Wiegand". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Dr. Judy Wiegand  
Superintendent