

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

Dear Mr. DeLuce:

I am writing to keep you apprised of the School District's continued efforts to investigate potential opportunities for addressing the future needs of its facilities.

As you are aware, the School District has been actively engaged in identifying properties that will assist in ensuring appropriate capacity and educational spaces for the School District's growing student population. The last three years have produced the largest Kindergarten enrollments in the School District's recent history. The School District has added bubble classes and portable classrooms at the elementary and middle schools to address this need and will be adding portable classrooms at the high school level this coming school year. In August, the School District will begin growing a 12<sup>th</sup> elementary school, the International Prep Academy, out of its Kirby Avenue facility, formerly Carrie Busey Elementary School. The School District's high schools are currently at 103% capacity and issues of capacity will only continue to grow as the wave of students currently in Kindergarten through 2<sup>nd</sup> grade matriculate through to high school. If the population of this cohort remains the same and nothing is done to address this growing population, the School District's high schools will be at 120% capacity in less than ten years.

Since School District and community conversations around a new Central High School began several years ago, community circumstances and enrollment patterns have changed. Given the number of students already present in our schools, the School District must act now to address the capacity issues the District is set to face in the coming years.

### **Discussion of the Future of Central High School**

Since 2006, at the forefront of the discussion surrounding the future of the School District's facility needs has been the relocation of Central High School. During this time, the Board of Education has held numerous community meetings in addition to its regular meetings to discuss the topic more in depth. During the 2012-2013 school year, the School District began the Future Facilities process in which more than 1,500 individuals participated in community meetings, online questionnaires, focus groups, and phone polls conducted to gather feedback about the School District's facilities and what its priorities should be moving forward.

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

This past year, 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.

### **Review of Newly Available Park District Sites**

Following selection of the Interstate Drive site in January of this year, you and Park Board President Joe Petry approached the School District regarding the potential for siting the new Central High School at either Spalding Park or Dodds Park – both sites which previously were unavailable. The School District was also contacted by a number of individuals who had been in communication with Park District representatives about the Spalding Park site.

While the Board of Education had selected a site, the School District believed it important to fully investigate these options. School District representatives attended the April 23<sup>rd</sup> Board of Commissioners meeting to express the School District's desire to work with the Park District to explore opportunities at Spalding Park and Dodds Park.

The School District then began its review of Spalding Park and Dodds Park consistent with the analysis that had previously been conducted on the other potential sites. Shortly thereafter, the School District was told by Mr. Petry that the Park District was not prepared to discuss the Dodds Park option until the Spalding Park option had been thoroughly reviewed by the School District. Mr. Petry indicated that if and when it became apparent that the Spalding Park option was not feasible for the School District, the Park District would then be open to discussing the possibilities at Dodds Park.

### **Review of Findings – Spalding Park Option**

In moving these discussions forward, I want to first express my appreciation for the Park District's willingness to come to the table to discuss potential options to partner with the School District in its efforts. You and other Park District representatives have been involved in a series of meetings related to these opportunities and have provided valuable feedback.

I also wanted to share with you some of the School District's findings related to the Spalding Park option. Over the past several months, Gorski Reifsteck and nationally renowned DLR Group have been working with School District administrators, teachers, staff and students as

well as community members to develop the comprehensive educational program to be implemented at Central and Centennial High Schools. They have also been working with a team of industry professionals to examine the feasibility of siting a new Central High School at Spalding Park and the surrounding area consistent with that program.

The review from the design, engineering and construction management consultants indicates a series of limitations present with siting a new Central High School at Spalding Park based on the community-based decisions and programmatic needs for Central High School moving forward. While this is by no means an exclusive detailing of the limitations inherent with the Spalding Park option, listed below are examples of some of the obstacles and complications the School District would have to overcome in electing to further pursue it.

### Cost

The Board of Education and School District administration take seriously their obligation to be responsible financial stewards of taxpayer dollars. We firmly believe that the most important use of School District revenues is the support of the daily teaching and learning that are at the heart of the School District's mission.

That said, facilities which are appropriately equipped to deliver the instructional and support services needed for students to be successful in 2014 and beyond are a critical investment. As the School District may look to seek voter approval for additional property tax revenue to support these facilities, its decision to do so must be prudent and well-researched and allow the community to receive the highest return on its investment.

In striving to achieve that goal, the Board of Education must weigh the upfront costs of developing and constructing a new Central High School at Spalding Park against the same upfront development and construction costs at the Interstate Drive site. District funds have already been dedicated for the purchase of the Interstate Drive site. While there are some inherent development costs at the Interstate Drive site, this property is largely unimproved and such costs would be minimal.

In contrast, the envisioned Spalding Park option would require the acquisition of more than 60 residential and commercial properties as well as the acquisition of Judah Christian School. In addition to the money spent acquiring these properties, additional School District funds would be necessary for basic development costs, including demolition. Further, development of the site would require escalated costs for certain site requirements – such as a parking deck and underground storm water detention – to accommodate the site's constraints.

In addition, the fact that the available acreage at the envisioned Spalding Park site is less than half the available acreage at the Interstate Drive site presents more limited and expensive options for construction under the Spalding Park option. A four-story building would be required at the Spalding Park site to accommodate the capacity and educational program developed whereas a

two or three-story building would be possible at the Interstate Drive site. Certainly, costs for building “up” escalate significantly as opposed to costs for building “out.”

The Board of Education’s decision must also be viewed in the context of the School District’s overall facility plan. While the prospect of a new Central High School has received a great deal of community attention, the School District has many additional facility needs which must be addressed, most notably a renovation and addition to Centennial High School and construction of a new Dr. Howard Elementary School. In the future, the Board of Education will also need to thoroughly examine the future of Edison Middle School, South Side Elementary School, and the elementary facility on Kirby Avenue.

Taken together, the tens of millions of dollars required for site acquisition and development and construction of the Spalding Park option over and above the Interstate Drive option present a high premium for the School District given the available option at Interstate Drive. In keeping with the School District’s goal of being responsible financial stewards, it will be very difficult for the Board of Education to commit to spending a premium eight-figure amount to deliver the exact same educational program when, as stated above, the School District has numerous other significant facility needs elsewhere.

#### Logistics of Site Acquisition

While the School District has committed to the acquisition of the Interstate Drive site, acquisition of all the properties necessary under the Spalding Park option present a number of logistical challenges.

While the School District appreciates the Park District’s offer to investigate acquisition of Spalding Park, the schematics prepared by Gorski Reifsteck and DLR Group as well as the Park District’s proposal prepared by Neil Strack show that the Park District owns less than half the land that would be required under the Spalding Park option.

Acquisition of the more than 60 additional properties necessary for the Spalding Park option to be successful would take many years and push back the timeline for being able to effectively address the School District’s capacity issues. In time, the District may be forced to exercise eminent domain over some of the properties, potentially uprooting and displacing residents, many of whom are renters.

The specific timeline and cost for acquiring the Judah Christian site is unknown at this time but would be significant.

Finally, given the tight parameters of the Spalding Park site, the School District would likely have to first acquire homes adjacent to the site simply for the purpose of construction staging.

#### Impact on Franklin Middle School

Construction of a new Central High School on the Spalding Park site would provide no opportunity for the expansion of Franklin Middle School. In addition, given the constraints and layout of the Spalding Park site, it is not clear that the more than 600 Franklin Middle School students and staff would be able to remain on campus during the anticipated two years of construction of a new Central High School on the Spalding Park site. The logistics of relocating Franklin Middle School to an alternate site for these two years would be incredibly challenging and the costs associated with such a move would be significant.

### Parking

The lack of currently available parking in the Spalding Park area and the lack of otherwise available space within the site would present a significant challenge for the School District in providing the necessary parking for a new Central High School. It is clear that a parking deck would be required to accommodate parking needs. Such a deck would come at a significantly increased cost and present real challenges in supervision and traffic. Other opportunities for parking, including off-site parking with a pedestrian tunnel under railroad tracks and parking on the railroad right-of-way, carry significant costs, present student safety concerns, and simply are not feasible.

### Long-Term Expansion of Central High School

The Board of Education recognizes that the decision to locate a high school will impact several generations of students in our community. One of the reasons the School District needs to relocate Central High School is because there is not enough property available to sustain the necessary educational programming. The School District does not want to find itself in that position again. Even if the District were able to acquire all the property necessary to make the currently envisioned Spalding Park option feasible, the additional homes that would have to be acquired for expansion and the location of the rail lines adjacent to the site greatly limit the School District's ability to expand the high school site in the future.

### Neighborhood View of Spalding Park

The School District has heard many residents of the Spalding Park neighborhood who are concerned about losing their neighborhood park as well as many memorial trees that had been planted in honor of neighborhood citizens. The School District understands these concerns and was committed to investigating options for continued use of the site by neighborhood residents. While the School District was hopeful that a site plan could be developed which would have preserved aspects of existing park space or structures on the site, given the many other existing site restrictions, it is clear that this will not be a possibility.

### Miscellaneous Issues

Issues presented by the existing rail lines, projected traffic to the residential area, existing infrastructure, and the previous landfill present on the site also would all have to be addressed were the School District to locate a new Central High School at the Spalding Park site.

While some members of the community have suggested some of these obstacles may be overcome, we trust in our consultants' experience in the education field and the information they have provided to us, which is grounded in sound experience and consistent with the instructional program.

As we have discussed previously, the School District has been committed to reviewing and examining the Spalding Park option consistent with the review it undertook of other sites this past winter. The School District has been very thorough in conducting its due diligence related to the site and the opportunities it presents for accomplishing the educational program the School District envisions for its high school students.

This siting decision is one that will impact the community for the next several generations. The primary objective of the School District is to find a site that will allow for a school facility to suit the learning needs of students and meet the community's expectation for academic excellence.

The School District is hesitant to shoehorn its educational program into a site with the numerous fundamental problems discussed here. Given the compromises and logistical challenges necessary to make the Spalding Park site a viable option, it is difficult to endorse the Spalding Park site as the best option for our community.

The School District understands the desire of some in our community to locate a new Central High School nearer to the center of the city. The School District searched for a property for many years that would help accomplish this objective. Unfortunately, the level of existing development surrounding Spalding Park and its relative size would make it exceedingly difficult to develop a high school site at this location.

Simply put, while Spalding Park may be a good location, it is not a good site for a new Central High School.

### **Review of Information – Dodds Park Option**

Having thoroughly examined the Spalding Park option, the School District now comes to the Park District to request the use of 60 acres at Dodds Park for the siting of a new Central High School. Throughout this process, 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. Most importantly, 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 the Spalding Park site.

Acquisition of homes and business and displacement of residents would not be required. Premium acquisition, development, demolition and construction costs would not be necessary to utilize the Dodds Park site as opposed to the tens of millions of dollars in such costs required for the Spalding 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. Many of the other fundamental issues with the Spalding Park site would not be present at the Dodds Park site.

Siting a new Central High School at Dodds Park would be the most exciting, yet sensible option for our community. The School District is committed to engaging in discussions with the Park District on the potential relocation of Dodds Park and acknowledging the Dodds family name through recognition on the new campus.

I would appreciate if you would contact me following your July 9<sup>th</sup> Board of Commissioners meeting to discuss the School District's request.

Sincerely,

Dr. Judy Wiegand  
Superintendent