

## **CAMBRIA HEIGHTS SCHOOL BOARD STATEMENT REGARDING SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS**

This is an official statement developed collaboratively and approved by the Board of School Directors of Cambria Heights School District regarding recent social media posts.

In recent weeks, there have been several posts on social media that misrepresent the current renovation project at Cambria Heights and in some instances are outright false statements. We feel that these inaccuracies need to be addressed so that the public has the correct information.

First, there have been statements that the school board does not want the public at board meetings. The school board has never denied anyone the opportunity to speak at any of the school district board meetings. In fact, Cambria Heights School Board made the rare move of appointing a Citizens Advisory Committee to assist in planning our renovation project and to tap the expertise that we have in the residents of our district. This rarely happens in other districts, but we wanted this process to be as transparent as possible from the beginning. The community members of that committee included Wayne Adams, Patrick Illig II, Nancy Behe, Martin Westrick, Brian Kosicki, Wendell Rouch, and Victor Beach.

At the August 2017 meeting of the Citizens Advisory Committee, the Committee, and School Board members were provided with the results of a pool study commissioned by the Board. The study was undertaken by Aquatica, a firm specializing in swimming pool renovation and construction. The 36-page report detailed the current condition of the pool with photos and analysis. That report was never hidden from anyone and was again presented at the regular August Board meeting. Even though nearly \$250,000 had been spent over the previous five years in maintenance, operation, and upkeep, including repairs to the pool pack and heater, and the installation of a new chemical feeder, the needs detailed in the Aquatica study were significant. We had a second more in depth study of the pool completed by Wallover Architects. Again, this report was made public. We have tested the gutter system and did core drilling around the pool. We have tested the soil around the pool and even water inside the sewer lines to try to locate the source of the pool leak. I don't think this level of diligence is indicative of a board that is turning its back on a school swimming pool.

Just as with a municipal pool, an annual inspection of the school district pool is required before; it is opened for the year. Social media posts have indicated that someone sabotaged the pool and called the state when in fact the district employee was simply doing what they are required to do by law.

Pictures posted on social media show the area around the pool and the bleachers being used as storage just like almost every other square inch of the high school has been used at some point or another during the renovation project. One of the photos shows a record board from inside the pool area with many of the girls records blank. Instead of trying to find out the truth about why those records were blank, the commenter simply said that there was a pile of stuff at the bottom while others' banners are still displayed, and then asked how many school officials ever attended swim meets. First, the swim boosters purchased the record board in question in 2008 and it is their property. The official high school records are in the main lobby of the high school in front of the entrance to the gym. All the records for all sports, including swimming, are intact. As a Board member and parent of a swimmer, I have attended 72 Cambria Heights swim meets either at home or on the road including invitational and district meets. I sold 50/50 tickets, helped time swimmers, announced the meet and helped report results to the

newspapers. Many times, I would see district administrators, the athletic director and other CH coaches in the stands. For most of these meets, the district's business manager served as either the head coach or an assistant coach of the swim team.

Posts also talk about grants being available. This past spring, Cambria Heights applied for an RACP grant of \$1 million from the state to renovate the pool. As of today, we still have not received a decision if that grant has been approved or not, and our grant application is still active and under consideration. Until we have an answer, we cannot move forward because grants will not reimburse you for money that you have expended before the grant is approved.

Please, stop trying to divide the students and parents in this district. A situation has never existed at Cambria Heights where we were forced to decide to move and renovate the high school stadium or renovate the pool. The stadium was moved because the school district does not own the Patton Stadium and efforts over several years to secure it proved fruitless. In July 2015, the board allocated funds from the 2015-2016 budget for lighting and other improvements at the high school stadium. None of the \$26 million bond issue has been used for work on the high school stadium. The high school stadium will be used by boys and girls high school soccer, junior high soccer, all teams in the district's football program, the band, track and field and it will be used by girls softball and boys baseball for spring practices. Elementary students in the school district will have the opportunity to use the stadium for their events, too, such as Kidskins Football and AYSO soccer. In addition, with the new lighting the track at the field is open for walkers and runners of all ages to use when it is convenient for them, up until 10pm.

There are several other points that need clarification, and one is the decision to move forward with artificial turf. Again, several social media posts stated that none of the Big Ten football stadiums has artificial turf when in fact 10 out of 14 do. Another post stated that the Steelers took artificial turf out of their stadium when in fact Heinz Field has always had a grass surface from the time it opened in 2000.

Cambria Heights participates in the Laurel Highlands Athletic Conference. Of the 12 schools in the conference, Somerset, Greater Johnstown, Richland, and Forest Hills currently have artificial turf at their athletic stadiums. Bishop Guilfoyle and Bishop McCort, play football, and soccer, at stadiums with artificial turf. According to local newspaper reports, Central Cambria is currently in the process of installing artificial turf at their high school field.

In addition, social media posts also quoted the figure of \$1 million to turf the high school stadium. The correct figure to put a new playing surface on the high school stadium has never approached that number. The figures to properly grade and drain the high school stadium along with placing sod on the playing field totaled \$600,000. If we went with a sod field, we would have to continue to maintain, insure, and pay utilities for both the high school stadium and the Patton Stadium since neither field could stand up to the wear and tear of all the fall athletic contests. The cost just to maintain the Patton Stadium, not including insurance and utilities or any improvements, is \$20,000 annually. Turf will last 12 years or longer. Both Richland and Somerset recently replaced their existing artificial turf surfaces at a cost of \$400,000. Over the 12-year life span, that \$600,000 now becomes \$840,000. Going with turf makes financial sense.

In conclusion, at the June 2019 regular meeting, the board voted 5-4 not to renovate the high school swimming pool at the current time. At that same meeting the Board voted 9-0 that the pool be placed

on the agenda at the end of each construction phase so that the board is able to reconsider action relevant to the pool renovation as more information becomes available.