

To the Great People of the Columbus Independent School District:

Recently, I became aware of some concerns regarding the new turf project. While I understand projects like this can create a situation where people choose sides, I would like to ask that we stay on the side of students. At Columbus ISD, we make every decision based on what is best for our students.

Before we approved going forward with turf, we made sure that we were taking care of safety / security and maintenance issues on our elementary, junior high and high school campuses. This was of critical importance to all of us. The board approved a budget transfer of \$700,000 for these improvements. For example, all three campuses will have security vestibules installed. These security vestibules will be designed to keep people out of the main parts of the campuses until the controlled access is granted and they can come into the office area. Should enough of the projects listed below come in under the estimated budget, we could consider adding 6-8 card access readers on each of the campuses.

Columbus Elementary School Campus:

Total for the CES campus is an estimated - \$414,000

- Security Vestibule and security software at the main entrance.
- HVAC (Air Conditioning) improvements to the chiller and air handler units in the older part of the building.
- Halls and cafeteria to be painted in the older parts of the building.
- New Restroom exhaust systems
- Metal roof extended to the edge of the gym
- Replacement of ceiling tiles in restroom
- Replacement of ceiling tiles in kitchen area

Columbus Junior High School – Riverside Campus:

Total for the CJH-RS is an estimated \$134,000

- Security Vestibule and security software at the main entrance.
- Addition of a Canopy at the bus drop off / pick up area, perpendicular to the building
- Painting the Exterior HM Doors and Frames
- Painting the halls and Cafeteria
- Addition of an exterior alarm speaker
- Roof repair at the old gym tie in
- Replace existing ceiling in the kitchen area

Columbus High School:

Total for the CHS campus is an estimated \$98,000

- Security Vestibule and security software at the main entrance.
- Painting the halls and cafeteria
- Replacement of ceiling grid and ceiling tiles (The ceiling cannot be raised due to AC duct work and technology cabling.)
- Repair the leak around the auditorium between 1st and 2nd floor.
- Addition of 3 automatic card access entry doors for ADA purposes.

As you can see, our board is careful to take care of the needs of the district. All the above-mentioned projects will create a better learning/working environment for our students and employees.

Employee raises:

With that thought, I want to mention that during the regularly scheduled board meeting in April, our board approved raises for all our hourly personnel, technology personnel, para-professionals and secretarial staff. I am also very excited to say that at the upcoming May board meeting, our professional staff, teachers, librarians, nurses, counselors and administrators will be getting a raise. Our teachers, nurses, librarians and nurses will, for the second year in a row, get a raise due to having the pay scale adjusted. We are excited to do what we can for all our wonderful employees. Two years ago, a beginning teacher with no experience would be paid \$37,500 annually. Currently, a first-year teacher with no experience, makes \$40,000. We are working to get that up to \$41,000 for the 2018-2019 school year. We will also adjust every step up through year 30. It may not be a \$1,000 annual raise for each step, we plan to do everything we can.

Taxes:

Since the 2013-2014 school year the Tax Rate set by the Columbus Independent School District has been reduced or stayed the same every year. The total tax rate is a combination of the M&O rate, which is used to fund our day to day operations, and our I&S rate which is used to pay off our bond debts. The M&O rate has stayed the same at \$1.04 per \$100 value. The I&S rate was \$.14 for the 13-14 and 14-15 school years, \$.13 for the 15-16 school year, \$.12 for the 16-17 & 17-18 school years. Essentially, the total tax rate that the CISD Board of Trustees has approved has gone from \$1.18 per \$100 value, to \$1.16 per \$100 value. The tax rate is all that the school can control.

The district is using monies that are in our current budget to fund the safety/security and maintenance projects. We received more than we anticipated in SHARS funding, we had money budgeted for positions that we have not hired, and our values have gone up which has created a greater return on our investments. The turf funding will have to come from our fund balance, (basically our savings account). This is money that we have not spent over the last several years.

The best part of this project is that we are not coming to the tax payers to ask for more money. We can do this because our board and employees have been prudent, and we are in a position to be able to do good things for students, employees and community.

Who benefits:

We have seen concerns pertaining to the amount being spent versus how infrequently the stadium is used. Coach Bonewald gave the numbers of students who would be using this new turf. The approximate numbers are 90 students for high school football, 75 for junior high football, 200 for youth football, 20 for St. Anthony's football, 60 for boys' and girls' soccer, 150 for JH/HS Track, 300 for athletic workouts. It will also be available to be used by the band, Cardinal Belles, our community walkers and runners. With the addition of Soccer, we have seen a growth in the youth soccer numbers as well. This past year, St. Anthony's played their home games at our stadium on Wednesday nights, Columbus ISD played 1-3 sub-varsity games on Thursday nights. We had five varsity games on Friday nights plus we hosted one football scrimmage. We played our first full UIL Soccer season for both boys and girls. Currently, when it is too wet to get on the softball and baseball fields, our students and coaches must go into a gym to work out. A turf field at the stadium would provide an opportunity for them to be able to throw and take ground balls outside.

With our location and proximity to Houston, Austin and San Antonio, we host basketball playoff games all the way up until the regional tournaments. We would expect to host soccer and football playoff games as well. Bringing in more playoff games will help our local businesses as well. The fans traveling to watch their respective teams will want to eat, need to buy gas, see our beautiful town and potentially want to come back and visit our shops, live oaks, etc. Our community benefits.

Injuries:

There are studies that have concluded that natural grass fields cause more injuries than artificial turf, and that turf causes more injuries than natural grass. Injuries occur on both fields. With natural grass you have worn out spots, sprinkler heads and gopher holes. The turf field is a truer field. It is flatter and smoother. In my experience, most knee and ankle injuries have occurred because of a collision. I have seen very few knee injuries that were non-contact injuries, and they all occurred on natural grass fields. I am not saying that these injuries cannot or will not happen on turf, my point is they happen on all surfaces, and regardless of where they occur it is devastating for the kid and family.

Academic Improvements Made During School Years 16 – 17 and 17 – 18

Columbus Elementary School:

- Introduction and training of Balanced Literacy Program for Reading
- Training on effective use of small group instruction to assist students with individual needs
- Use of instructional coaching for Reading instruction
- Purchase of and training on Guiding Reading assessment kits for individualized instruction (Running Records)
- PTO purchase of hundreds of leveled reading books in support of Guided Reading Initiative
- Development of Co-teaching Initiative supporting special education students in Grades 2 - 5
- Purchase of and training on state adopted math curriculum materials for grades 2 – 5
- Purchase of hands-on, manipulative Math materials for grades K - 5
- Training and implementation of state adopted pre-K curriculum
- Use of grant funding to send Pre-K – Grade 5 Reading and Math teachers to professional development sessions
- Training on and re-implementation of teacher curriculum for Reading, Math, Science, and Social Studies
- Purchase of additional Chromebook carts/tablets for student use of technology in instruction

Columbus Junior High School – Riverside Campus:

- Development of pre-AP courses in grades 6 – 8 in all core content areas (Reading, Math, Science, and Social Studies)
- Pre-AP teacher professional development for all core teachers
- Inclusion of year-long Reading course for Grade 6
- Bought updated graphing calculators for the 8th grade students
- Additional Math courses in Grades 7 and 8 for students needing extra assistance
- Purchase of additional Grade 6 Social Studies textbooks
- Purchase of additional Chromebook carts/tablets for student use of technology in instruction

Columbus High School:

- Pre-AP and AP teacher professional development for all core content teachers
- Development of lab classes for students needing additional support
- Purchase of Chromebook carts/tablets for all core content classes
- Bought graphing calculators for all math classes.
- Replaced outdated Spanish I and Spanish II student and teacher curriculum materials (textbooks and online resources)
- Replaced outdated World Geography student and teacher curriculum materials (textbooks and online resources)
- Replaced outdated Integrated Physics and Chemistry student and teacher curriculum materials (textbooks and online resources)

District-wide:

- Implementation of online compliance courses for state-mandated staff trainings
- Development and support of district-wide, teacher-led back-to-school conference
- Increased emphasis on district benchmark testing and data analysis (including teacher input)
- Purchase of software and curriculum materials for bilingual and ESL students

With all things considered, I want to express that the CISD Board of Trustees, Administration, Faculty and Staff, will always look at all sides of a situation, prior to making a decision. Without a doubt, we will always keep our focus on students and do what is best for them. I can list many reasons to have this turf, those who are against it, can list their reasons for not having it. Are there other things that we need to take care of? Absolutely. We chose to address these safety/security and maintenance areas, along with the turf at this time, due to available money and time, as well as the impact on the number of students. I would love to do everything that our facility study recommended, but we can't at this time. Everyone has their prioritized list, and everyone has valuable input. I welcome anyone to come to me and tell me what you would like to see our district address.