

**UNLEVEL PLAYING FIELDS  
SIX MONTH UPDATE**

District of Columbia High School Athletic Programs, Facilities, and Funding

A Report by  
The Level Playing Fields Foundation and  
Parents United for the DC Public Schools  
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**Prepared by:**  
Washington Lawyers' Committee  
For Civil Rights & Urban Affairs  
11 Dupont Circle, NW, Suite 400  
Washington, DC 20036  
(202) 319-1000

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

In the spring of 2002, Parents United assisted in the formation of the Level Playing Fields Foundation. The purpose of the foundation is to supplement the DC Public Schools budget for athletics and monitor the District's progress in obtaining adequate levels of regular school budget funding for high school athletic programs and needed improvements in athletic facilities. The foundation's board members are: Terry Lierman, President of Health Ventures, Inc. and former Congressional staff member and candidate; Abe Pollin, Chairman of Washington Sports and Entertainment and principal owner of the NBA Washington Wizards; Jay Silberman, President of Alliance Management Corporation and former member of the DC Board of Education; and Iris Toyer, Director of the Public Education Legal Services Project for the Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs and Co-Chair of Parents United for the DC Public Schools.

Parents United is a citywide parent advocacy organization, established in 1980, to work with parents in support of quality public education within the District of Columbia. Over the years, Parents United has issued numerous reports on various issues affecting schools in DC. Issues addressed have included: adequate funding for teacher and principal salaries, early childhood education, correcting pervasive fire code violations, and improving school personnel evaluation procedures.

In the case of many reports, major assistance has been provided by the Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs and leading Washington law firms serving on a pro bono basis. This update was prepared with the assistance of David Pruitt from the office of Kirkland and Ellis, and contributions from the Washington Lawyers' Committee were provided by Rod Boggs, the Committee's Executive Director; Mary Levy, Director of the Committee's Public Education Reform Project; and Lori Jackson, Project Assistant.

## **Unlevel Playing Fields Six Month Update**

For the past two years Parents United and a group of civic leaders have evaluated the state of inter-scholastic athletic programs in the DC Public Schools, providing a comprehensive comparison of DCPS' athletic programs and those in neighboring school districts, and formulating recommendations for reform.

This is a six month update to our second report, "Unlevel Playing Fields II." This report reviews the state of DC Public Schools athletics and the status of the proposed reforms mid way through the 2002-2003 school year. It also focuses attention on next year's (FY 2004) proposed budget for athletics.

### **Comparison Review**

As described by the reports, "Unlevel Playing Fields" and "Unlevel Playing Fields II," DCPS athletic programs are significantly inferior to those in surrounding counties in every essential category, funding, staffing, coaching stipends, facilities, and the number of sports teams. A Washington Post editorial cited, "This shameful neglect has consequences. For many youths, the absence of high-quality athletic program weakens the motivation to stay in school." (June 2, 2002, p. A18)

A brief overview illustrates the challenges:

- Athletics spending is "65% to 90% more per high school student-athlete in the suburbs than in DC."
- "Most DC coaches make less than half the pay of their suburban counterparts."
- The rate of student athletic participation is two to three times higher at the suburban high schools than at a typical DC public high school.
- DC Public School athletic facilities are in the absolute sense woefully deficient. Gyms, fields, tracks, locker rooms and showers, training facilities, bleachers and stands, pools, and tennis courts are commonly in disrepair or non-existent in the District, while generally available and well-maintained in the suburbs.
- In 2001, only 13 teams were fielded at a typical DC public high school, while a comparably sized suburban school fielded 33 teams.
- Most suburban high schools enjoy far greater community and business support and have far more revenue from booster club activities, gate receipts, and concession sales.

## **Recommendations**

The “Unlevel Playing Fields” report made three recommendations for reform:

- The first was that the city government should allocate an additional \$900,000 to \$1,250,000 to the DC Public Schools’ athletic programs annually in order to reach a level comparable to those in the suburban counties. This increase in the operating budget was to be a net infusion of funds and not simply a shift of money away from other school programs.
- The second recommendation proposed identifying and obtaining long-term capital funding for major repairs and involving local sports organizations, governments, and community groups in setting standards for athletics facilities and assessing the individual needs of each DC high school.
- The third recommendation was to create a private foundation to provide supplemental funds to benefit DC Public Schools athletics in the same fashion that private money from booster clubs and concession sales supplement suburban school athletics. This foundation has now been established and is in a position to begin raising private supplemental funds.

## **Progress Report mid way school year 2002-2003**

A few minor general improvements to a few DC Public School athletic fields have been implemented. However, that is the extent of the changes toward meeting the first two of the recommendations for improvements.

- The DCPS operating budget for this year actually designates \$235,000 *less* for athletics and activities than it did at the time of our original report (2001).
- In inflation-adjusted dollars, this year’s athletics/activities budget is about 60% of what it was ten years ago.
- A \$2.5 million stadium budgeted for Anacostia High School is the only capital project for athletics this year.
- The number of DCPS students participating in high school athletics has remained virtually the same.
- All facilities at Cardozo High School, the school featured in the “Unlevel Playing Fields” report, have remained in the same dilapidated and, in many cases, unusable condition that they were in two years ago.

## **Moving Forward to 2004**

The successful formation of the Level Playing Fields Foundation was completed in early 2002. The purpose of the foundation is to supplement the funding for DC public high school athletics to at least the level of private funding routinely provided to public high schools in neighboring counties. Paul Vance, Superintendent of Schools, stated, “I am very receptive to the creation of a private foundation of the sort you have recommended to help our schools achieve the

supplemental funding and increased revenues through a combination of gate receipts, concession sales and fundraising activities, regularly provided to suburban high schools.” The Level Playing Fields Foundation is positioned to begin the efforts to help DC athletics. It has however been asked by the school officials to condition the start of any grant making on the provision of added funds from regular school budget sources.

The proposed FY 2004 athletics budget of \$4,640,000 includes an increase of \$1,013,000 for DCPS athletics, approximately the amount recommended by the “Unlevel Playing Fields” report to begin repairs to athletic facilities, increase programs for girls, purchase safety athletic and medical equipment, and provide increased stipends for coaches. This budget request is now pending before DC Mayor Anthony Williams and will soon be considered by the DC City Council. A comparative review of the DC Public School athletics budget can be found in the appendix of this report.

The ultimate goal of Parents United and the Level Playing Fields Foundation is to look beyond sports for the sake of sports. Rather, these organizations believe improved and well-supported athletic programs in our schools will help nurture healthy, productive young people and a stronger community. Fully funding the school system’s FY 2004 budget request for high athletics is a matter of priority for the Level Playing Fields Foundation and Parents United.

## Appendix

### DCPS ATHLETICS BUDGETS

\$\$ in thousands

Category	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	Rev'd bud 2002	Appr'd bud 2003	Prop'd bud 2004
<b>Athletics Dept.</b>													
PS			\$939	\$1,112		\$927	\$704	\$620	\$974	\$1,073	\$961	\$944	\$1,184
OTPS			\$1,729	\$1,498		\$800	\$1,000	\$950	\$1,105	\$868	\$868	\$1,087	\$1,559
Total	\$2,999	\$2,918	\$2,668	\$2,610	\$1,766	\$1,727	\$1,704	\$1,570	\$2,079	\$1,941	\$1,829	\$2,031	\$2,744
<b>Coaches/sponsors stipends</b>		\$1,688	\$1,688	\$1,688	\$1,688	\$1,679	NA	\$1,600	\$1,670	\$1,920	\$1,920	\$1,596	\$1,896
<b>Total Athletics/activities</b>		<b>\$4,606</b>	<b>\$4,356</b>	<b>\$4,298</b>	<b>\$3,454</b>	<b>\$3,406</b>	<b>NA</b>	<b>\$3,170</b>	<b>\$3,749</b>	<b>\$3,861</b>	<b>\$3,749</b>	<b>\$3,627</b>	<b>\$4,640</b>
Total DCPS budget (local funds)	\$519,300	\$513,500	\$517,600	\$542,681	\$503,270	\$482,514	\$460,143	\$545,000	\$599,636	\$641,388	\$751,749	\$740,494	\$847,875
Athletics Dept as % of total local budget	0.58%	0.57%	0.52%	0.48%	0.35%	0.36%	0.37%	0.29%	0.35%	0.30%	0.24%	0.27%	0.32%
Athletics Dept + stipends as % of total local budget	NA	0.90%	0.84%	0.79%	0.69%	0.71%	NA	0.58%	0.63%	0.60%	0.50%	0.49%	0.55%
US CPI	140.3	144.5	148.2	152.4	156.9	160.5	163.0	166.6	172.2	177.1	179.9	182.4	184.5
US CPI base/2002	78.0	80.3	82.4	84.7	87.2	89.2	90.6	92.6	95.7	98.4	100.0	103.0	104.2
<b>Athletics Dept budget in Year 2002 \$\$</b>	\$3,845	\$3,633	\$3,239	\$3,081	\$2,025	\$1,936	\$1,881	\$1,695	\$2,172	\$1,972	\$1,829	\$1,972	\$2,634
<b>Stipends budget in Year 2002 \$\$</b>		\$2,102	\$2,049	\$1,993	\$1,935	\$1,882	NA	\$1,728	\$1,745	\$1,950	\$1,920	\$1,550	\$1,820
<b>Athletics Dept + stipends budget in Year 2002 \$\$</b>		<b>\$5,734</b>	<b>\$5,288</b>	<b>\$5,074</b>	<b>\$3,960</b>	<b>\$3,818</b>	<b>NA</b>	<b>\$3,423</b>	<b>\$3,917</b>	<b>\$3,923</b>	<b>\$3,749</b>	<b>\$3,522</b>	<b>\$4,454</b>

\*As % of expenditures when available; otherwise as % of budget

Source: Annual DCPS budgets supplemented by documents issued by DCPS Divisions of Budget and Finance.