

November 7, 2022

Dear Dr. Glass and members of the BCSD Board of Education:

We are petitioning for the immediate improvement to safety and inadequacies of the Fox Lane Softball program and facilities. The unsafe, inadequate, and unequal conditions of Fox Lane Softball compared to the equivalent Fox Lane Baseball program are unacceptable and unlawful. The disparate treatment of our softball athletes evidences an intolerable level of gender bias in our schools. From this petition, we require equal opportunities for training, support, comparable equipment, and equivalent facilities for the athletes in the softball program as their schoolmates in the baseball program.

US federal law requires equivalence in athletics programs as part of educational opportunities. The equivalence requirement includes three factors that must be met: (1) equivalent opportunities for participation, (2) athletic financial assistance, and (3) other program components including benefits to, and treatment of, athletes. "Other program components" includes equipment and supplies, availability and scheduling of games and practice times, travel opportunities, coaching, locker rooms, practice and competitive facilities, training facilities and services, publicity, and support services. Although equivalence is not found in any of the three factors, Fox Lane Softball and Baseball programs are most prominently unequal in the third category. We are utilizing this petition to illustrate those blatant inequities and demand corrective action.

Inequalities at Fox Lane: Softball vs. Baseball

SOFTBALL	BASEBALL
No dedicated field or practice facilities	Dedicated field and practice facilities
Field conditions unsafe	Safe and adequate field conditions
Inadequate facilities for visiting teams	Safe and adequate facilities for visiting teams
Inadequate uniforms consisting of just shirts which need to be returned at the end of the season	Adequate uniforms consisting of shirts, pants, socks and hats with player names on the uniforms and the option to purchase
Single coaches for modified and JV level without continuity or adequate support; limits training and growth during practices with one coach: presents safety issue when at away games	Multiple coaches at each level allowing for more player safety and training
Field location – isolated and disconnected is a hinderance to spectators	Field location – prominent on campus, attracts spectators, easy access to high school facilities
Practice times/ fields dependent on availability	Preferential field time
Modified must travel to an off-campus field that was found inadequate by the town of Bedford in a 2009 park survey (no updates since)	Plays on a baseball field on campus
No Shelter from sun or elements	Dugouts to protect from sun and elements

We have an incredible group of athletes who play softball for Fox Lane and they deserve the same opportunities and consideration as their baseball counterparts. Like their baseball classmates, many

of the softball athletes began playing as five-year-olds. There are new recreation programs, servicing towns in our district, that are growing interest in softball. These programs are developing softball talent that is winning championships. Because of this, the FL softball program is on track to continue growing. Our softball players are a dedicated group whose passion for play is palpable year-round; many train 12 months out of the year. The softball athletes welcome skill building opportunities and advocate for advancement to the Fox Lane softball program and the athletic facilities at large. They are saddened and tired of being tucked away out of sight of their peers, limiting community support.

The players have called for change and action. Parents have been advocating for equality with little improvement. Players and parents alike were devastated that the BOE's plans for improvements with the recent bond only further the inequities as members of the baseball program were consulted about their wants and needs but no one on the building committee nor the athletic director came to the softball program to preview plans or ask for input. These are not minor plans, why wouldn't you invite the ones who will be utilizing and benefiting these improvements to the table?

There is a lot to be done. However, the safety issues and field conditions below are a major concern for the year ahead.

Current Conditions:

JV/ Varsity

There is no parity in field availability or conditions.

- Softball has only one field for all play and practice opportunities – a field that is shared with middle school recess and physical education classes
- The softball field is unsafe – because it is a multi-use area, there is frequent debris (like pencils and other school supplies) littering the field and creating unsafe conditions for our athletes
- The rocky, untreated infield creates unsafe, hazardous interference of play
- The field lacks proper infield mix and conditions deteriorate by the wear and tear caused by dual use by the middle school recess and physical education activities
- The field is not properly irrigated, and softball athletes must play under conditions creating risk in both visual and respiratory injury. Both practices and games are interrupted during “dust storms” on the inadequate softball field
- The field does not have proper fencing
- No dugouts or shelter
- No batting cages
- No safe place to warm up pitchers
- There is no handicap access to fields (parking or paths)
- Parking is limited
- Only one coach for JV, presenting safety and training issues

Modified Program

- Frequent forced cancellations because of transportation issues due to lack of bussing to their off-campus location at Bedford Memorial Park
- Lack of an alternative location for them to practice on campus when bussing is not available
- Inadequate facilities off campus (e.g., grass infields, lack of dedicated (fenced) space, unsafe conditions with simultaneous sports like recreational soccer, park visitors crossing the outfield during games and practices, etc.)
- Lack of qualified staff for training, coaching, and officiating has resulted in cancelled practices and games
- Only one coach is dangerous.

Softball is a positionally specific sport, coaches need to work closely with each girl on mechanics of those positions. One coach (Modified and JV) is not enough. Coaches should given support.

Off season Training opportunities for softball program are not equal. There is a stark contrast of quality and quantity of facilities and equipment between the baseball and softball programs. Even the

location of the softball field is hidden away as the baseball field is front and center. Title IX was developed to protect inequalities such as these. We must do better, **now**.

Solutions: The undersigned request Bedford Central School District make the following immediate improvements to facilities:

Fox Lane Softball Field

- Resurface and/or drag the current field with proper infield mix to prevent injuries
- Repair sprinkler and utilize it during the season to reduce dust; use Turface® or other field conditioners to further improve the infield
- Install Camera to record games equal to the baseball field
- Install a permanent outfield fence made of equal material to the baseball field
- Close the field to middle school recreation and physical education during the softball season
- New batting facilities that are of equivalent to baseball
- Immediate repair to the surface of the batting cage
- Install a warmup facility for pitchers
- Replace dugouts that are equivalent to baseball dugouts
- Install a Press Box and functional scoreboard of same quality as the one installed at the baseball field
- Ensure proper handicap accessibility paths to the field and handicap parking closer to the field for spectators.
- Consider new front and center relocation of the softball field

Modified Softball

- New field location with skimmed/clay infield - Grass infields slow the velocity of the softball. Players on 1st and 3rd are forced to move in to make the plays, putting them at closer range to the batter and higher risk of injury. A clay infield also speeds up play allowing the ball to make it into the outfield.
- New Field location with Dugouts
- Access to batting facilities

Training

- Provide adequate transportation to off campus field locations
- Provide alternate on campus practice locations for Modified in case of transportation issues
- Evaluate and provide equal athletic training opportunities
- Provision of assistant coaches for Modified and JV. Coaches should be encouraged to seek out volunteers as the Baseball program does.

We are confident that bringing this to your attention will finally give our girls a chance at a level playing field, and our coaches the support they need to build our program fairly.

Thank you,