



Dear Neighbor:

On March 12, the school board is holding a referendum asking voters to approve a **PROPERTY TAX INCREASE** to fund an **\$18 MILLION BOND** that will be used to build new stadiums at Whippany Park and Hanover Park High Schools. I urge you to go to the high school on March 12 and **VOTE NO!** to this tax increase. Consider the following:

- **THE PLAN IS OVERLY EXPENSIVE:** The current plan is based on three components: repairs to the grass fields, expansion of the parking lots and the construction of new stadiums. The costs provided by the school board demonstrate that just \$2.5 million is needed to repair eight baseball and softball fields, four soccer fields, two practice football fields, two field hockey fields and ten tennis courts. That represents just 14% of the \$18 million that the school board is seeking. The majority of the cost is set aside for the construction of world class stadiums that include such luxurious amenities as turf fields, stadium lighting, seating for thousands, new audio systems, press box, running track and a field house that includes locker rooms, showers, team meeting rooms, concession stand and rest rooms. Fully \$15 million dollars is allocated to build a stadium at a field that is currently utilized for five home games a year.

To put that cost in perspective, the residents of Parsippany, which is the largest school district in Morris County, just voted down a plan to spend \$7.7 million to build stadiums at their two high schools. Our school district and tax base is nearly half the size of Parsippany, yet the Hanover Regional school board wants to spend twice as much taxpayer money on its football fields.

What's more, the NY Red Bulls (a professional soccer team) are building a new training ground in Hanover at a cost of \$6 million for turf fields, two new grass fields, lighting, fencing and an administrative building that includes offices, restrooms, locker rooms and team meeting rooms. The plan proposed by the Hanover Regional School Board costs three times more than the amount being spent by a professional athletic team for similar accommodations.

- **IT IS THE WRONG PRIORITY:** In 2010, the NJ State Legislature passed a law that caps the annual property tax increase at 2% per year, which has forced the municipal government, local school district and high school to eliminate programs to keep costs down. As a community, we have reduced garbage collection to one day a week, we have eliminated 10 positions in the

municipal government, cut the resource officer that taught drug abuse education and provided security at the high school, reduced language classes in the grade schools, eliminated intramural sports, hired fewer and less qualified teachers, and even cut funding for the annual fireworks – all in an effort to keep costs down.

The budget constraints have had an impact on the performance of our schools. In 2003, Whippany Park was ranked in the top 10% of high schools in New Jersey based on standardized tests that are administered throughout the state. By 2011 (the last year that records are available on the internet), Whippany Park had fallen to number 103 out of 378 schools. We are no longer in the top 10%. In fact, we are no longer in the top 25% of schools in New Jersey based on the standardized test scores. In the last few years, the ratio of students to teachers has increased nearly 20% as enrollment has increased and we have deferred hiring. In addition, we are ranked in the bottom half of the state for hiring teachers with advanced degrees.

Given the current academic performance of the high school, it is outrageous that the school board is asking taxpayers for a 5% to 7% increase in funding for the purpose of building a new stadium.

- **THERE ARE CONCERNS ABOUT THE SAFETY AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF TURF FIELDS:** There is significant debate and concern about the toxicity of turf fields and the impact on surrounding neighborhoods. Turf fields are made of plastic blades of grass and “crumb rubber” that is raked between the blades. A single turf field contains crumb rubber from as many as 10,000 discarded tires. These tires are made from petroleum based compounds and can contain chromium, arsenic, cadmium and selenium. Studies by the Sierra Club have found that water run-off from turf fields has resulted in elevated levels of toxicity in the ground water surrounding the fields. In addition to the toxicity of turf fields, studies have demonstrated that fields based on crumb rubber absorb heat, resulting in the fields being 37 degrees hotter, on average, than the outside air temperature. On warm days, the temperature on a turf field can reach 120 degrees, making the fields unsafe for our athletes. What’s more, the combination of dust from crumb rubber and the higher levels of heat from the field have been demonstrated to result in breathing problems for people with asthma. The reality is that we don’t know enough about the impact of turf fields to feel confident installing them in our residential neighborhoods.
  
- **THE TURF FIELDS WILL COST MORE TO MAINTAIN – AND THE SCHOOL HAS NOT ACCOUNTED FOR THE ADDITIONAL COST.** The material distributed by the school board implies that turf fields require less maintenance than grass fields, therefore, the school will save money by building the stadiums. The savings are based on industry averages for a single field, and a majority of the savings comes from eliminating the labor required to cut the grass and paint the lines on the field. The school board has admitted that those industry averages do not apply because the high school needs to maintain an entire campus, not just a single field. Even if the school converts one field to turf, it still needs to keep someone on payroll to cut the grass and paint the lines on the other eight fields on the campus. As a result, the superintendent admitted that the school will not achieve the savings projected in its pamphlet.

What is more troubling is that the school has not accounted for its increased cost of maintaining a turf field. The architect for the plan has stated that the useful life of a turf field is only eight to

ten years, and at a minimum, the replacement cost is at least \$350,000 per field, and can increase to up to \$1,000,000 depending on the condition of the underlayment. The superintendent has admitted that this cost is not accounted for in its current budget, as a result, the school will need to either set aside money each year, or the school will need to ask the taxpayers for another tax increase when it comes time to replace the fields.

- **IT WILL HAVE A NEGATIVE IMPACT ON THE SURROUNDING NEIGHBORHOOD.** Whippany Park High School is located in the middle of a residential neighborhood. The new stadium is designed to accommodate thousands of people and provide luxurious amenities so that the school can attract statewide events and rent the field to other organizations. The school board is on record stating that it plans to “maximize the use of the field.” This will bring a greater number of people into the town at night and on weekends, and will cause more traffic on our streets. The stadium lights and sound system will be utilized as late as 10pm at night, for up to six nights per week. This type of development is out of character for the neighborhood and will have an adverse impact on the people who live near the high school.

On March 12, you will have an opportunity to vote on this referendum. VOTE NO! and tell the school board that this plan is too expensive, the wrong priority and goes well beyond what is required to ensure that our kids have safe and adequate athletic fields.

Voting will take place from 7am to 9pm at Whippany Park High School, Bee Meadow School and Mountview Road School.