

## **Olentangy Schools Public Participation Comments for March 25, 2021**

3/12/21 13:52:52

Lisa Heintz Lee-sah Hients (rhymes with pints)

3457 McCammon Chase Drive, Lewis Center

Esteemed Board members, Words can be powerful. Words have longevity and can be immortalized. Language is a living entity; it changes and morphs over time, until some words have completely changed their meaning. Words can become weaker or stronger in meaning, too. With this in mind, I implore you to rename the mascot for Olentangy High School. While “brave” (lower case b) is not offensive, “Brave” and “Braves” (capital B) still evokes a stereotyped American Indian caricature. For those with young children it might evoke images of a red-haired Scottish princess from a Disney movie. Regardless, stereotyping does not align with Olentangy’s Board’s stated commitment to “[challenge] and [reject] all forms of discrimination in schools and [meet] the demands of present and future society.” Changing the image of the Olentangy Brave only takes us half way to rejecting stereotypes of the past. After decades of controversy, the Atlanta Braves opted to change only the offensive logo, but not the name, as our BoE has done. Ryan Helsley (Cherokee nation) recently said of this, “It’s about the misconception of...Native Americans, and it devalues us and how we’re perceived...That stuff like this still goes on [is] just disrespectful.” Philip Yenyo of the American Indian Movement (AIM) said of the Atlanta Braves image-only change, “[W]hat they fail to realize is...they're still using a living culture as a theme for their...team. There is nothing brave about [that].” While Olentangy could be seen as redefining the term “Braves,” the truth is, it is not for a district predominantly composed of non-American Indians to redefine. We must honor not what the White majority of this district wants, but what American Indians have been saying for decades. Kevin Gover (Pawnee Tribe), director of the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of the American Indian, obliges us to consider: “It doesn’t feel like an honor when you do not confront the truth of the people you claim to be honoring...[You] are honoring [your White] notion of ‘heritage’ - history with all the bad parts taken out.” Keeping the name Braves is the path of least resistance and expense. Many have convinced themselves that “brave” is a positive term worthy of aspiration, and that referring to an entire school or team as “braves” somehow escapes appropriation. If Braves is no longer a reference to American Indians then choose from an array of other laudable qualities so there is no confusion. If it is still a nod to our regional heritage (e.g., “Olentangy”) then find a more appropriate word that leaves no room for interpretation. This is not about giving in to the current trend of “cancel culture” or being “politically correct.” It is about maintaining the integrity of the district--making our actions match our stated values. We have a unique opportunity at this pivotal moment to courageously own the past name choice and be culturally responsive IF we make this name change. The Board has asked the public to stop writing about this subject and allow the school committee to do their work, but the committee was limited to keeping the name Braves. No doubt they have done their work well given that parameter. There is no harm in providing the committee the necessary tools to make a culturally informed decision. I ask Board members to

give the committee three things: The capacity to consider other names Anti-bias training and relevant history for all committee members to enable them to look at name options more objectively At least 1-2 American Indian tribe members to consult the committee. The OLSD BoE agreed to “promote acceptance, understanding, cooperation, and appreciation of diverse groups of people.” The name Braves violates this premise. The bravery of this Board is needed to follow through on those agreements to make a positive impact for our students and families, and for the community we envision in the future. I appreciate all that you do for our OLSD community.

3/14/21 15:35:44

Ashley Wise

4842 Normandy Drive, Galena

Please click on google doc link to view my public participation comments.

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1sHsm8ML\\_-xHgtvtvb2IUMK8jv5-eU2Q5hzoAlQ3njWw/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1sHsm8ML_-xHgtvtvb2IUMK8jv5-eU2Q5hzoAlQ3njWw/edit?usp=sharing)

Dear Board Members,

Thank you for your time and energy that you give tirelessly as you serve the students and families of this district. My family and I are appreciative of the role you play. From my understanding of the last board meeting, parents and community members were asked to let the project committee process take place. I completely respect that as we were a part of the project committee process for our own school’s rebranding, however I honestly feel, under the current limiting parameters the board put in place of changing only the imagery and not the name, it puts the committee in a very difficult place. Changing the mascot name for Olentangy High School from “Braves” to an acronym spelling BRAVE is a noble but unsuccessful attempt to have your cake and eat it too. The fact is a mascot name with any variation of the word “Brave” or “Brave” will be associated with Native American people. Chief Glenna Wallace of the Eastern Shawnee Tribe says in a statement written the Olentangy school board :

“The word Braves will always be associated with Native Americans. Firemen are brave, police are brave, essential workers are brave, medical personnel are brave, but the word Braves, like it or not, will always be associated with Native Americans.”

The attempt to change the mascot name to an acronym suggests an awareness that the term “Braves” is problematic, but after decades of being known as the “Braves”, are we to believe dropping the “s” and making it an acronym is true change or progress?

At football games, will fans cheer “let’s go Balanced, Resilient, Attitude, Value, Empathy” or will they cheer “let’s go Braves”? Will a community who has cheered on the “Braves” for decades see a collection of character traits or will they see the same Braves they’ve known for years?

But what about the members of the Native American community who have respectfully asked you to change the name from the Braves or any variation of the word? Will they see our Olentangy respecting their wishes to remove a degrading, demeaning, and disrespectful mascot

name, or will they see this school board regifting them the same slap in the face in a shiny new box?

Besides, making an offensive mascot name an acronym of positive character traits does not change the offensiveness of the word it spells. Would the district consider a mascot name with this acronym?

Nice, Intelligent, Gracious, Generous, Energetic, Resilient

According to the logic of the school board and plans for Olentangy High School, that would be an acceptable mascot name describing desirable characteristics of an ideal student. But the acronym it spells out is offensive to many people in the African American community and hopefully would never be considered as a team name.

Members of the Native American community told you in no uncertain terms they want mascots with any variation of the word Braves to be removed from the district because it challenges their human dignity. Making an offensive mascot name an acronym does not satisfy their request. It shows the district is aware of the offensiveness of the name, but unwilling to change it.

I understand the bind you're in. There are many in the community who would like to see the name stay the same because Olentangy High School has a long and proud tradition with the name Braves. However, the term Braves for the use of a mascot name has been offensive, demeaning, and derogatory to many Native people for far longer. Does our tradition as a school district supersede the current stated will and desire of the Native American community whose long and proud tradition predates our school district by hundreds of years?

It's time for us to honor the wishes of Native people by changing the name from any variation of the word Brave. The school board members have the power to do it, but instead are choosing to place their priorities over the requests of the Native American community offended by the continued use of a demeaning and derogatory mascot name. We are better than this. Let's come together as a community, and create a new tradition that exemplifies the One Community that Olentangy strives to be. Respectfully Submitted, Ashley Wise

3/14/21 15:45:03

Ceylon Wise "Salon" Wise

4842 Normandy Drive, Galena

Please see google docs link for my public participation comments.

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1eDvb69Dhi-OvkMYWYMOw8OjPbMGpvj4dTRrVdidb51g/edit?usp=sharing>

Hello Board Members,

The Native American community has spoken and the school board is choosing not to listen. The board received a statement from Chief Glenna Wallace of the Eastern Shawnee Tribe who were forcibly removed from Ohio in 1830. She wrote the following:

“The word Braves will always be associated with Native Americans. Firemen are brave, police are brave, essential workers are brave, medical personnel are brave, but the word Braves, like it or not, will always be associated with Native Americans. Eliminating the imagery is the most expensive thing. If your school, your community has already made that commitment, then my advice is to eliminate the word Braves. I thank you for your sensitivity, your desire to do the right thing. And I realize that what I say might not be to your liking, but I must be honest with you and again ask for you to think long term.”

The board received a statement from the Delaware Tribe which says the following:

“To get rid of the Olentangy Braves logo without getting rid of the names “Braves” falls short of doing the right thing. You can nuance the name Braves and try to justify it with a dictionary or thesaurus logic, but Braves is still clearly associated with a Native American male, oftentimes a warrior. The issue is not just “politically correct” but it is a human dignity issue.”

Here we have the Chief of one tribe explaining that a mascot name using any variation of “Brave” should be eliminated. The Delaware tribe, our county’s namesake, says changing the name is an issue of human dignity.

This issue is about respecting and honoring the voice of Native people, but it’s also about all of us who have spoken up only to be shut down. This is about every business woman who stood up to their male counterparts only to be shut down and put back in their supposed place. This is about every parent who advocates for their child with learning differences only to be shut down and told they just need to try harder.

This is about a district who spent the summer reading posts on DearOLSD where students expressed the pain, disrespect, and indignities they experienced in Olentangy regarding race, identity, disability, and more. These students courageously spoke up pleading for the district to truly become One Community only for them to be shut down by a very prominent district administrator telling the students behind DearOLSD to stop posting because it was not necessary anymore.

After a summer of supposed awakening over issues of race, after several town halls, and staff professional development sessions about racial sensitivity, the Chief and the cultural director of Native American communities from this area spoke up to say maintaining any variation of the word Brave in a mascot name is an affront to their human dignity. They spoke up and at the moment, the board’s position is to shut them down by replacing the name braves with an acronym that spells BRAVE.

If this board does not protect the dignity of the people in the tribe our very county is named after, how can we trust it to protect the dignity of Asian Olentangy students who are currently being bullied and called “coronavirus” by classmates? How can we trust these board members to protect the dignity of Black students who walk through middle and high school hallways hearing the n-word daily?

How can we trust this board to protect the dignity of religious students who are hesitant to be seen saying grace over their food before lunch. How can we trust our district to protect the dignity of gay students being taunted with the f-word? How can we trust these board members to protect the dignity of students with disabilities? How can we trust this board to protect the dignity of students with dyslexia, autism, and other learning differences?

Those questions are sincere and will only linger and amplify if the district is willing to sacrifice the dignity of an entire race of people just to appease local nostalgia and tradition? The Native American community and their allies have spoken up. Will you respect their request for dignity or shut them down? Thank you.

3/14/21 16:10:29

Kariena Turner        car-ee-na  
265 Tara Glen Dr. Delaware

Hello Board Members, The Native American community has reached out to the school board expressing their desire for the district to refrain using any variation of the word Braves as a mascot name. This is a letter submitted to the Olentangy school board members from Chief Glenna Wallace of the Eastern Shawnee Tribe. Chief Wallace spoke up on behalf of her tribe, but the board shut them down by choosing to maintain a variation of the “Braves” name. Here is the statement from Chief Wallace. Thank you for being interested in this topic, for taking the time to reach out to individuals, for seeking different opinions. As you know, this is a sensitive subject and one that is particularly of national interest now, but also one that is not going to go away. For that reason I hope you are thinking about long term solutions. I realize this is a complex issue with numerous viewpoints. So let me just focus on mine. As you probably know, I have been the Chief of the Eastern Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma for the last 15 years. We lived in 26 different states before being the first tribe forced to remove from Ohio after the 1830 Removal Act was passed. Our ancestors walked the almost 800 miles from Lewistown Reservation to Indian Territory in 1832, the land that later became the state of Oklahoma in 1907. I have been active with Ohio Historical Connection for almost 15 years advocating for federally recognized tribes. I advocate primarily for the burial of our human remains there in Ohio, I advocate for the establishment of a cemetery there in Ohio where those unburied ancestors could be buried, I am an advocate for Ohio updating its burial laws. If you do your research, you will find Ohio is one of the top locations in the U.S. for having Native Remains in their museums, basements, etc. Shameful! That includes Ohio Historical Connection which is in the top 5 locations in the U.S. Ohio burial laws give little protection to buried remains 150 years and older. That means looters can dig up even Civil War bodies, take medals, buttons

from coats, etc. and sell them at hefty prices with little more than a slight slap on the wrist. And that is occurring wholesale there in Ohio. I also advocate for preserving mounds, mounds that were built by Native Americans and have historical cultural significance. I am on the Steering Committee and my tribe was the original tribe to be supportive of the World Heritage nomination for inclusion of mound sites there in Ohio. I love Ohio. It is my homeland. But so many changes need to occur there I say this to say that the word Braves will always be associated with Native Americans. Firemen are brave, police are brave, essential workers are brave, medical personnel are brave, but the word Braves, like it or not, will always be associated with Native Americans. I love the Kansas City Chiefs. They are my favorite football team. I also know that they have been so active in removing native imagery, trying to do the right thing, trying to prevent/eliminate the negatives such as fans wearing headdresses, fans painting their faces, elimination of the tomahawk chop. They have spent millions in their efforts. Yet what did I see on my local TV station the week of the Superbowl—a video of a second grade class with all of the children doing the tomahawk chop. Some classroom teacher, a well meaning classroom teacher I have no doubt, had to have taught them that. That teacher did not realize how disrespectful, how racial that is. And those children are innocent, yet perpetuating an act that is hurtful to us, insensitive. And I believe that incident has parallelism to your situation. Eliminating the imagery is the most expensive thing. If your school, your community has already made that commitment, then my advice is to eliminate the word Braves. Choose another logo, one that will not continue to suggest Native Americans even though that is what you intend. Don't just go half way. I thank you f

3/15/21 12:58:24

Erin Francoeur Air-in Fran-core

5008 Normandy Dr, Galena, OH 43081

It is important that Olentangy Schools listens to the voices of all those that they represent, but even moreso to those of minority groups, who are underrepresented in positions of power. The feedback that the district received from the Native American community stated that any use of the term "Braves" as a mascot would be associated with Native Americans. Yet the school district still wants to move forward with the name "Braves"? Why not choose something non-offensive? Nothing is lost in changing a mascot, but this effort to "spin" the name braves is offensive. Our school district has an obligation to teach its students respectfulness and inclusivity. Continuing the use of the term Braves as a mascot, is counter to that responsibility, no matter what meaning the district claims is their meaning behind the term.

3/15/21 18:55:54

Laurie Reynolds

(No Address Given)

Respectfully submitted to the Olentangy School Board: (Laurie Reynolds currently resides in San Diego, California, and is a student at San Diego State University. She holds a degree in American Indian Studies and is currently pursuing a degree in Anthropology. She is a member of the

Puyallup tribal nation, located in the vicinity of Tacoma, Washington. While the US government does not allow natives to be enrolled in more than one tribe, and only recognizes native heritage from the tribe in which they are enrolled, Ms Reynolds also has ancestors from other Pacific Northwest tribes, namely the Yakama tribe and Nez Perce). Regarding the issue of using Indigenous mascots to represent sports teams and names/terms related to Native American culture, Laurie Reynolds shares these thoughts: I look at it like this, the name "Brave(s)" has connotations to Native American males who are fighting or "savage" ...even if you take the mascot away because the name "Braves" is not associated with any other group. The name "Braves" is still connected to and will have Native American connotations and mental imagery. It is not fair to perpetuate this racist imagery without consent and agreement with the Natives of this land. I would also submit for your consideration, the historical Supreme Court case of Brown v. Board of Education and Dr. Kenneth Clark's "Doll Test," which as you know, led to school integration. The significance of the doll test, at least in part, presented us with the disturbing reality of how racially influenced our children have become via the promotion of stereotypical imagery and racially biased education, and how this takes place at a very early age. As educators, I believe that you have both the opportunity and responsibility to help ensure the healthy development of young minds which will influence the communities of tomorrow, as we move forward as a nation of diversity. To earn a degree in my current discipline at my University, there is a set criteria to complete a rigorous course of study inclusive of the following courses, Anthropology, Biological/physical, Socio-Cultural Anthropology, Archaeology, and Anthropological Linguistics. It is also interesting to note that, in my Linguistic ANTH class, we were just discussing how words are important. Words actually shape the way we think and perceive things. Even if truth is lacking in their association, words can frame the way in which we view and perceive other people. There are many examples of various people, some I may add are or have been in leadership roles intentionally degrading others placing them in a category of being less than. Relating those scenarios back to the word "Braves," this word also has connotations which we cannot easily detach from a psychological influence. Howbeit, it may be at a very subliminal level. Do we really want to perpetuate this notion of Natives? A "Brave" is a male Native. This then negates the inclusion of females, whom I would imagine also participate in your school's sports teams. If the school maintains its stance on retaining the name "Braves," that connotation, along with the name will remain in existence along with any behavior displayed at school events using the name "Braves." Therein, the shaping of the perception of those from whom it originates. This also promotes stereotypical images for your audience and community to digest. Natives are more than fighters, we are weavers, craftsmen, doctors, and are partakers in all sorts of other roles in society, not just fighting and warring. Would it be offensive to you to have sports teams named "the colonizers" or "the land stealers"? The name "Braves," in its proper context and place of honor, within a tribal group, is not a bad thing. The problem arises when it is appropriated and used by non-Natives, which then shapes the perceptions of others and defines who we are as native people. This, as opposed to allowing us to define ourselves and having us tell you who and

3/20/21 12:36:05

Trent Turner

265 Tara Glen Dr. Delaware

I am submitting this letter from the National Congress of American Indians to be read publicly. We want to ensure Native voices are heard in our conversation regarding the braves name.

Regards, Trent Turner Dear Principal Griffiths, Superintendent Raiff, and the Olentangy Board of Education: On behalf of the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), I am writing in response to a request for assistance that we received from a member of the Olentangy High School community. This individual informed us that the Olentangy High School community is currently engaged in a conversation about whether to retire its "Braves" name and mascot, and asked if NCAI would provide the school and school board with some general information about the facts concerning the harms caused by the continued use of Native "themed" mascots in sports and popular culture. That is the purpose of this email. NCAI is the oldest, largest, and most representative national organization representing tribal nations and peoples. It has been leading Indian Country's consensus-driven movement to eradicate offensive Native "themed" mascots from sports and popular culture for the past fifty years. As a resolution passed by NCAI's membership in 2005 explains, "the use of 'Native American' sports mascots, logos, or symbols perpetuates stereotypes of American Indians that are very harmful. The 'warrior savage' myth has plagued this country's relationships with the Indian people, as it reinforces the racist view that Indians are uncivilized and uneducated and it has been used to justify policies of forced assimilation and destruction of Indian culture." Below are linked resources that provide additional details about NCAI and tribal nations' broad and longstanding opposition to the use of these mascots, as well as the harms that they cause: (We will leave out the links shared in the letter for public participation purposes. Each board member received this email that included the links) Please let me know if you have any questions or require additional information as you deliberate this critical issue. I look forward to hearing from you. Sincerely, Ian Record, Ph.D. Vice President, Tribal Governance and Special Projects National Congress of American Indians 1516 P St. NW Washington, DC 20005

3/21/21 17:56:34

Afton Turner, Jane Spelman, Lainey Wright and Dr. Jessica Spelman

265 Tara Glen Dr. Delaware

Hello! We are submitting this letter from Curtis Zunigha from the Delaware Tribe to be read aloud for the Olentangy community to hear. It has been sent previously to the school board, superintendent Raiff, Olentangy High School principal, Mr. Griffiths, the diversity and inclusion team, and the communications team. We want the community to understand that the Native Americans who have responded to our inquiry about keeping the Braves name have all said, "make a complete change". We intend to support their voice. Sincerely, Olentangy students, Afton Turner, Jane Spelman, Lainey Wright and Olentangy parent, Dr. Jessica Spelman M.D. "Thank you for inquiring to the Delaware Tribe on this issue. Please note the Delaware Tribe nor our cousins the Delaware Nation in Anadarko, Oklahoma have no contemporary presence in



Ohio. We have both been in Oklahoma since it was Indian Territory in 1870. However given the name of your town I can understand why you contacted us. In my opinion I recommend a full and complete change. Getting rid of Native American mascot imagery is an action of removing race-based mascot images. The time is ripe for such change throughout America. I think the move to something like The Knights is good. But to get rid of the Olentangy Braves logo (I looked it up) without getting rid of the names "Braves" falls short of doing the right thing. You can nuance the name Braves and try to justify it with a dictionary or thesaurus logic, but Braves is still clearly associated with a Native American male, oftentimes a warrior. Not a knight, not an army soldier, not an athlete. So being real about this is the best way to confront resistance to change. I realize there will be a cost to the school district to rebrand the name, but that's the price to pay for doing the right thing. But it shouldn't stop there. There needs to be an information campaign as to why the change is appropriate. A lot of that will come from taking an honest look at the history of Ohio and its historic racism against the Delawares and other tribes like Shawnee, Wyandotte, Ottawa, and Pottowatomi. Such history should be incorporated into school curricula. A good resource is the Ohio History Connection ([www.ohiohistory.org](http://www.ohiohistory.org)). I would ask specifically for input from the Connection's Native American resources. I appreciate you taking the lead on this issue. It will be the dominant white population desiring sincere change that will make it happen. Not a small group of Native Americans seemingly acting in protest. The issue is not just "politically correct" but it is a human dignity issue. You can inspire your community to make a paradigm shift in social consciousness and overcome the racism of the past. Good luck." Curtis Zunigha Director, Cultural Resources Dept. Delaware Tribe of Indians

3/21/21 17:59:41

Gwendolyn Laber

not submitted for privacy-author is a minor

Hello Olentangy School Board! I hope all of you are doing well. I am a student from the Olentangy School District. Some of the main themes I have been taught throughout my years of being a student in this district are inclusion and to be respectful of others. Mrs. Turner shared with me letters and meaningful conversations she had with Native Americans originally in our area. After hearing what she had learned, I realized that though it was not intentional, the Olentangy Braves name is not respectful of Native Americans. While changing the mascot is an extremely meaningful step, it seems that the job is not quite done. I truly believe that changing the name "Braves" is an important way to uphold the lesson of respect we as students are taught. Thank you so much for taking the time to listen to my thoughts and concerns. Best regards, Gwendolyn Laber

3/24/21 8:55:50

Dawn Mahan

587 Meadows Drive Delaware Ohio 43015

We moved into the school district 13 years ago, in the hopes of a fantastic investment and choice to live in the Olentangy school district. The hard work that the teachers and my child has put into what she has become and is graduating in May, has outgrown are expectations of what she has accomplished. She got into every college she applied for, and her degree will be architecture engineering! That's the wonderful part, the bad part is that Olentangy school district has decided to not celebrate her accomplishments. Has decided to not invest and in her anymore. And is not giving her the graduation she deserves. My tax dollars that I have paid and worked to the bone for. Has let me down, it is so sad and I was almost speechless if this news.... Please, reconsider a way, for her to have a traditional graduation ceremony.

3/24/21 10:32:52

Tracey Green

2200 Killdeer Place, Galena

Hello, as I am sure you know why I am writing you today. I am questioning the decision to hold graduation the same way as last year. A lot has changed this year and we know more regarding covid. Our kids have thankfully been able to participate in sports and have parents supporting them for almost all the school year. We are now back to school 5 days a week and the kids especially the seniors are doing better mentally. This is their senior year, did anyone ask them what they wanted? In speaking to many and seeing many social media posts, the seniors would like to find a way to have in person graduation with their parents attending. This could be done by separating the kids into their hybrid groups and could take place in the gym to help with costs. Has Olentangy Berlin explored all options to make this work for everyone including the seniors? Being a bear is historic. This is making history by one of the only schools not allowing in person graduation with parents. Please reconsider this idea and do what is best for our seniors and give them their graduation. Their accomplishment of 13 years of school. Thank you,

3/24/21 10:31:22

Vedad Rogers

6790 Falling Meadows Dr

I am very disappointed in the decision to not hold 2021 graduation in person. There are many safe options such as school stadium. For the reason of cost and cleaning not being to host at schottenstein seems as an easy way out and not truly exploring a options. We could have a fund raiser if it's truly cost. They are back in school and senior year has been stolen from these kids. No prom, homecoming , seeing their friends, pep ralley, homecoming... do we really have to end this way. Please reconsider options.

3/24/21 10:51:38

David Miller

5664 Harrow Glen Court, Galena - 43021

We have supported the school system for 15 years. In person graduation for seniors and families is possible and should be the intent. This administration is not living up to the

responsibilities owed to the Seniors and parents that have supported the school system for years. This appears to be nothing more than a cop out. Use the stadiums and have aim dates, worse case. Students on the field separated and parents in stands/both end zones. Erect additional bleachers as necessary. Do the right thing here or you will loose support from thousands. Forget additional funding. I'll make it my personal mission to campaign against all future levi's if you can't or won't do the right thing for our seniors

3/24/21 10:54:00

Joanne Ford

337 Chasely Circle Powell Ohio 43065

The school system has done a good job with remote learning and more importantly getting the students back to full-time in person learning. I am extremely disappointed to learn that the class of 2021 will do a drive up graduation. All four high schools have very large football stadiums that would could handle a brief outside ceremony. You have chosen the easy route and kids are robbed again of their high school experience.

3/24/21 11:08:23

Denise Steele

7515 Overland Trail, Delaware

As a representative of the parents of OHS Class of 2021 Seniors, we are requesting more communication from the School Board on why a traditional commencement has not been planned for this graduating class. School districts surrounding us have made arrangements to utilize their High School stadiums, scheduled multiple days at the Schottenstein to hold successive graduation dates for their high schools, etc. For example, Hilliard has booked the Schottenstein Center for May 26th, 27th and 28th for each of their 3 high schools. Would a plan like this be available to Olentangy? Marysville and Worthington, to our understanding, are using their HS football stadiums. If Liberty and Orange stadiums are restrictive due to student population size, could additional seating be brought in to accommodate a commencement? Or is there a different issue that we are not aware of for these solutions? Our primary concerns are 1) That all students in the class can be together to celebrate their accomplishments at commencement; and 2) That families can participate in seeing their student recognized in front of their peers, teachers and principal's as well as seeing/congratulating their student's friends and classmates. The 3 part weekend separates families from the community aspect of the celebration and diminishes the accomplishment and recognition that our students deserve and have looked forward to. We liken graduation commencement ceremonies in importance to that of a wedding. A significant event is transpiring, that is worthy of community recognition. It takes a community to get a couple to the altar and to support them after they have tied the knot. Likewise, it has taken a community to get our students to graduation. Everyone involved in that process should have the opportunity to celebrate together (even if distanced). While last year, brides and grooms held virtual weddings via Zoom and graduation was held "virtually" as well. Drive-thru graduation was a welcomed solution last year when the alternative was no

graduation at all. We have made significant progress in vaccinations and have seen pandemic infection rates coming down. Now, weddings are happening in-person because couples and venues have worked together to implement the distancing guidelines in a responsible manner. Isn't there a way for us to do the same for our community of families with graduating seniors? We inquired back in February for a contingency plan to hold an outdoor graduation commencement for our seniors. As a spokesperson for the 2021 OHS Senior Parents', I am asking again that our students be recognized at an in-person, family-friendly commencement ceremony, not a drive-through graduation. Please let us know how we can work together to explore alternative solutions to the unacceptable one proposed on March 23rd, 2021.

3/24/21 11:27:13

Lisa Balek

5223 Somerset Ave, Westerville 43082

Not ok with new graduation

3/24/21 11:25:06

Bobbi Burchinal

Bur chin al (just like it sounds)

Delaware, Ohio

I am struggling to explain to my senior how the district could allow wrestlers to have a season, children to return to school safely full time, but not allow a graduation ceremony. It would seem if it is safe for my children to be in school full time with all students, it would be safe for the seniors to have a graduation. Can we consider having it in the football stadium and live-streamed like Ohio State? They are already missing prom, is there any way we can think outside the box and find a solution for them?

3/24/21 11:36:24

Margo Seyboldt

6922 Saint Ninian's Street; Lewis Center; OH 43035

I can't express how disappointed we are in Mark Raiff's recent decision to hold our son's graduation in the format outlined in the email we received yesterday. This seems like a total disregard to parents, an important district source of support. Students were given no chance to express their desires and parents were given no chance to offer suggestions. Why was this decision made behind closed doors without any communication to the stakeholders? All Olentangy High School Seniors deserve as close to a normal graduation that you can give them. And what you have decided on and described is NOT it. Unlike last year's class who had over half of a school year of normal activities, this class has been robbed of Friday Night football pep events, homecoming and other normal Senior activities. Many students didn't see their classmates for a year. The high school is back to full-time. Cases are going down and people are vaccinated. So why can't we have a graduation in the football stadium on the 22nd at 2:00pm with our son? Sports have been in full swing, so why can't you successfully hold a graduation for these kids and allow them to bring members of their immediate family in the same

household to the stadium? It makes no sense. You should also consider that DACC has graduation too, which could interfere with the events you have planned. The Governor has said that Proms and Graduations can be held. Other schools in Ohio are planning to have dedicated graduation ceremonies. Schools locally are holding in-person graduations such as Marysville, Hilliard, Southwestern City Schools, Big Walnut, DeSales, the list goes on. There is no reason that you can't hold a drive-thru graduation for those that don't want to congregate still due to COVID-19, but there needs to be an option for those of us that want a bit of normalcy and an outdoor Graduation WITH parents. We have been very loyal to this high school and community. We pay an INCREDIBLE amount of taxes for this school district. We demand and deserve that you reverse this ridiculous decision and have a REAL graduation ceremony for our Classes of 2021. Our son and many other students work hard and love their schools, but this has been a devastating decision for parents and students alike. We just want to enjoy a normal graduation with family and classmates. I have requested a meeting in person with Mark Raiff and Robert Griffiths to discuss what can be done to accommodate EVERYONE. Our solutions may not be the answer, but some input from stakeholders could be the answer. Regards,  
Margo and Eric Seyboldt

3/24/21 11:41:59

Doug Scott

7058 Saint Ninians St Lewis Center, OH 43035

We need to find away to have traditional graduation for students/family attend. Having multiple ceremonies if needed. Each school can come up with their own game plan but try to keep things as even as you can.

3/24/21 12:29:44

Chris (No Last Name Given)

(No Street Address Given) Delaware

I don't understand why we are putting all of this thought into all the things we can do instead of having a live graduation as usual for students and live stream for family waiting outside. The kids can be around the high school staff all day, and around each other all day, but they can't walk across a stage at the same school.

3/24/21 12:28:38

Melissa Dykstra

Mel -is- suh Dike-struh

225 Kitdare Dr. Delaware, Ohio

I would like to voice my disappointment with the graduation solution communicated on March 23. A quick search shows other large districts locally and nationwide finding ways to bring a sense of normalcy to graduation ceremonies. It's difficult to believe that the leaders of a district that frequently asks voters to dig deeper to support them financially holds this up as an examples of creative thinking and hard work. If the district truly believes in fulfilling the needs of the whole child, they will go back to the drawing board on a solution for the class of 2021. It's

time to think outside the box. Instead of stating - we must do the same thing for all schools, let's explore how to do what works for each school and each class. Sports have been handled differently by each school this year, the senior classes have been treated differently by each school this year. I urge the leadership to forego rules that have driven you in the past. Think about what the students care about -- graduating with their peers with their immediate family with them -- they're not concerned with who from administration can attend each ceremony and they're certainly not concerned with all four schools graduating on the same weekend in the same exact way. This class has been nothing if not flexible throughout the past twelve months. They've learned how to practice sports in masks, worn them all day to class, figured out the less than ideal online learning options on their non class days (again, compared to other districts). It's time for the leaders of the district to show that same flexibility and give the class of 2021 the graduation they deserve and they have earned in so many ways.

3/24/21 12:42:32

Michael Stedman

7833 Royal Park Dr, Lewis Center

I would like to express my disappointment with District leadership for their failure to make a logical decision about graduation. Mind you, I do not have a senior and am still appalled by this lack of "creativity" in finding a solution to graduation ceremony. All that was changed from last year to this year is a Senior only ceremony the night before, from what I remember. All we hear about is how creative and collaborative the staff and leadership of Olentangy are and this is the best you can do? Look across central Ohio and see what other districts are doing, did you reach out at all to discuss this with any of them? All across the country schools both big and small, preparatory and colligate have held in-person graduation ceremonies with parent/loved ones. Did you reach out to any of those institutions? All of the Service Academies held graduation ceremonies where graduates were able to safely space out and loved ones could attend. Did anyone bother to reach out? The seniors have already been kicked in the shin multiple times this year and have missed out on so much of the end of their high school experience and this is adding insult to injury. Each high school has a stadium large enough to host a ceremony with a limited number of guest who can all safely attend graduation. This is not how students "flourish," this is how they are overlooked again from this administration. Each and everyone of the board and the superintendent should be ashamed to think the Olentangy families are so dense they will think a "drive thru" McGraduation is a well thought out and good solution. Really, do you think this little of us that you can send out a message to make it sound like you thought about this for more than 30 seconds. But I guess this is easier on you and your schedules and that is more than likely the reason you so creatively thought through graduation and came of with the brilliant idea of just repeating last year. If this is your best then you should resign. So many students are struggling emotionally are trying to think of that one thing to hold on to, to go after and for the seniors, it was a graduation ceremony, as close to normal as possible. But no, just take that away from them too. It trickles down as well, other high school students see there is not much to look forward to because it is just going to

be the same thing, just a different year because the leadership can't think of anything new. Let's just cancel everything for next school year while we are at it. This was the school board and superintendent's chance to shine, but no, you had to stick with the status quo. If you think your actions, or lack there of over the past year will not be remembered, oh they will, on some Tuesday in the future. We are way smarter than you think and we are way more talented than you give us and we remember and this is etched into our brains and will not quickly be forgotten. I would appreciate it if you could step back recognize your error in judgement and correct this ignorant decision and if you cannot think of how to solve this issue I am more than willing to help out. I am not looing to be a problem, I am looking help be the solution. Have a great day. V/R Mike

3/24/21 12:29:30

Diane Storer

2561 Aikin Circle S. Lewis Center, OH 43035

With a year to plan for a COVID friendly commencement, why is the plan the same as it was a year ago when the picture looked completely different?... restrictions were much tighter, vaccines weren't available, and there was little time to prepare? We have four very large football stadiums that our tax dollars have paid for that could have been used in a creative way to give the seniors an alternative to a drive through commencement.

3/24/21 15:45:52

Ellie Nicoloulis

7681 Shepherd dr. Powell OH, 43065

Hello my name is Ellie and I am a senior at Olentangy High School. I know recent news has said that we are holding a drive-through graduation at our school. While I am grateful that the district has brought up a plan to hold our graduation in the midst of a pandemic this is not the best solution for our graduation ceremony. I was made aware that the the Schottenstein center was not available for events to happen however this is clearly not the case since other school districts such as Hilliard are holding their ceremonies there as well. Even if the Schottenstein center is no longer an option, we could host our graduation ceremony in each school's football stadium allowing a limited number of guests per person. The class of 2021 has been robbed of their senior year. We didn't get to cheer on our classmates in their last games, didn't get to attend our last homecoming, and had so many other memorable events taken away from us. While this is no ones fault, graduation was the one thing most of us were excited to finally have. I have worked extremely hard for the past 13 years of school and it greatly disappoints me that the district is not working harder to find a better solution to honor the class of 2021. The Olentangy School district is known for the opportunities it gives its students but that is clearly not shown in this case. I understand the district is trying its best during the Covid pandemic but if other schools in central ohio have come up with a plan to host a real authentic graduation, so can we. If I can walk the hallways everyday with 1,000 plus students during a pandemic than I deserve to get my well earned graduation ceremony.

3/24/21 17:50:00

Cole Apke

Kole App-key

3925 Mariners Way, Lewis Center

I am currently a senior at Olentangy Berlin High School and DACC. I have recently read the comments given by Superintendent Raiff on our graduation this year. I am deeply disappointed in the way that this is going to be held and conducted this year. I as a student at DACC have my graduation and completion ceremony on the same night as the night of the sunset salute and at the same time. This leads to an impossible decision that I should not have to make. Secondly, having read the explanation from Olentangy sent out the evening of the 24th, I have noticed that staff is a large concern here for why there will not be graduation all together. This should not be a reason as the staff of the Olentangy School District has been vaccinated from the virus that has shutdown our lives for over a year. The CDC also recommends 3 feet social distancing with masks inside which can be less outside. Additional seating can also be accommodated around the tracks of the four High Schools, seating even more people. The ability for this event to be streamed live for grandparents and extended family to see has proven to not be an obstacle for any of the Olentangy Schools this year based upon previous streams of football and other sports. If the school stadiums are not considered to be big enough, other colleges like Ohio Wesleyan and Otterbein have Football stadiums and Basketball arenas that can hold options for graduations. Mapfre stadium can also be considered as an option for graduation ceremonies as well. Weather was a concern as well. Given our present circumstances, a rainy day would be considered to be more of a memory and a story for our future. I personally believe along with so many other seniors across the district that we should have a traditional, full graduation as a capstone to our senior year at our respective high schools. Please reconsider your options on graduation to truly respect and honor the class of 2021. Thank you!

3/24/21 18:15:47

Bryn Tokarz

Brin Tow-cars

2256 Park Circle, Lewis Center

Hello, my name is Bryn Tokarz and I am currently a senior at Olentangy High School. As you know, the senior class has faced one heartbreak after another (no football games, no homecoming, no Der Dutchman trip, no sports banquets, no cedar point trip, no senior breakfast, no prom, Etc...). The icing on the cake is graduation. I understand that you are trying to do the best you can this year with the given circumstances. I also understand why you chose to have a drive thru graduation over the other options. However, the most disappointing thing is that the teachers and "special handshake staff" won't actually be able to shake our hands when we receive our diplomas. I understand why this was done last year because we were on full lockdown and staying 6 feet apart, but with school being back full time with less stringent rules there should be a way to accommodate this. While this might seem like something small and unimportant I can assure you it is NOT to your senior class. This would be a special thing any other year but it means a lot more this year. Our teachers have gone above and beyond to make school better for us in a time of uncertainty. They have taught us and kept us safe both



physically and mentally. Personally I chose to have my orchestra teacher shake my hand. I have had her for all four years and have taken seven classes with her in my time at Olentangy. She is not only a teacher, but she is also a mentor and like a second mom to me. I was extremely disappointed when I read that all of the staff would be on the route into the school and not available to be there after us graduates receive our diplomas. I understand that you are trying to make graduation safe, but I would also like it to be special. Having the people there who helped get me to graduation would be super meaningful. I will gladly donate some hand sanitizer if we can make this happen. Thanks, Bryn Tokarz

3/24/21 13:01:02

Nicole Toombs

Ni cole Too m(silent b)s (like tombstone, without the tone)

9268 Polaris Green Drive

Writing an email to you isn't something I've ever done in my long history with this school district. Both of my boys have attended OLSD schools from preschool (younger son) to present. They are currently a senior and a sophomore. This past year has proven to be one disappointment after another, and the announcement yesterday regarding how graduation will be handled was the icing on the cake, and thus the reason I'm writing to you. I'm curious why, with school now open five days a week, our seniors could not have had a real ceremony in the football stadium (with each OLSD HS holding their own)? Why have parents and students continuously been disregarded and not asked what we/they want? Other districts have managed to figure out how to hold graduation ceremonies for their seniors. Why can't OLSD? For a district that has been touted as one of the best in the state, you have an extreme amount of parents (and students) who are left feeling disappointed, disgruntled, and thoroughly frustrated with how the past 13 months have transpired. We all expected/deserve better. The kids DESERVE better. And, many of us have lost hope and faith in our administration to do what's best for our children. We've all watched the "light" go out of our kids over the past year. By mid-May most people will be vaccinated. The ceremony could have been held outside, on school grounds, not in a car with no grandparents, or additional family members allowed to attend. Did you know you have seniors wanting to plan their own graduation? Did you know you have seniors planning their own prom? Did you know you have students saying, "Thirteen years in this school system, and I'm going to get my diploma handed to me like a cheeseburger in a drive thru." Shame on our administration. With the amount of money we all pay in school taxes, it's disgusting to have witnessed the incredible amount of poor decisions that have been made since March 2020 for our children. We parents, and students, ask you to reconsider your plans for the Class of 2021 graduation. Please start rethinking the steps you're taking to "protect" our children. If you haven't noticed, it's causing more harm than good. Nicole Toombs

3/24/21 18:38:20

Jordan Stroup

356 n 3 bs and k rd

It's been a full year since COVID started.... we've had these restrictions since then and we have made no progress whatsoever.... each student in the class of 2021 has been thinking of graduation since they were in elementary school... and this choice after we were told we would have a regular graduation feels like we've been robbed...

3/24/21 18:55:46

Jennifer Feucht

Jennifer Foyt

2231 Tucker Trail Lewis Center, Ohio

Our family and graduating senior feel completely let down by this Board and The Olentangy School District with regards to the 2021 Graduation plan. The plan for a drive thru ceremony to distribute diplomas falls short of what we had hoped for. This was the plan we lived through last year. At the time we were very early into the pandemic and venues were closed so it was understandable considering the circumstances. OLSD has had an entire year to figure this out and take into consideration our size, our budget and our students' expectations. Our graduating seniors lost their entire senior year and every single mile stone that is typically shared by students, classmates, teammates and family. No awards banquets were held and parents were left scrambling to host their own student banquets so the district could avoid liability. Seniors were devastated not being allowed in as spectators to cheer on their teammates one last time. Now this district is robbing them of a traditional graduation. How do we reconcile this as a family knowing that the Schottenstein Center will host Hilliard's graduation and students all across the country will enjoy a traditional ceremony? The following districts will provide their students with a traditional graduation - Westerville City Schools, Columbus Academy, St. Charles, Marysville Schools, Pickerington North, Pickerington Central, DeSales, Upper Arlington, Grove City, Southwestern City Schools and Gahanna Lincoln. So many schools across Central Ohio will host proms where students are actually permitted to dance, awards banquets where students are honored for their hard work & achievements, and traditional graduations yet our district could not figure it out. We have asked these students to be resilient for over a year and they have risen to the occasion time and time again. The very least this district could do at this point is be honest and transparent and let us know exactly what the challenges were, why parents were not informed of budget limitations due to cleaning fees and why after an entire year to plan for a traditional graduation a solution was not found. By May 23rd every single Ohioan who desires a vaccine will have had the opportunity to receive a vaccine. The Class of 2021 deserves better from this Board and this district.

3/24/21 19:29:40

Taylor Lansdale

Taylor Lansdale

7434 Falls View Circle Delaware, Ohio

I would like to have a real graduation it's wanna of those things all seniors look forward to stepping on the stage and that recognition feels awesome. I would really like to not have the drive by graduation it won't feel like the actual graduation. Please let us have a normal graduation!

3/24/21 19:29:04

Michelle Bajorek

Bajor ek

2970 Sandhurst Dr Lewis Center

We do not agree with the drive through and virtual graduation ceremonies. We would like the board to better partner with parents and students to come up with a better solution. It feels like we have not moved forward - rather it feels like we are regressing back to when covid first started when the situation was more restricted. We have all students back in school - the board was creative with making this happen. Let's work together to be creative with our 2021 graduation ceremonies.

3/24/21 19:55:33

K. Nussdorfer

K. Noos door fur

2887 Bryn Mawr Drive Lewis Center

I respectfully ask that we as a community reconsider the current plan for a virtual graduation. Our students deserve better than what was released on 3/23/21. The governor has cleared schools to plan for proms and graduation ceremonies. If we come together we can come up with a plan that honors the class of 2021. Let's have a meeting between parents/school administrators so that we can plan a real and meaningful graduation that does not include cars, or drive throughs. Our tax dollars have supported this district for many years and should allow us a voice in how our son's time with Olentangy comes to a close.

3/24/21 21:11:32

Alexander Sliwa

Alexander Slee-wa

1074 Balmoral Drive, Delaware Ohio

I believe that our seniors this year should have a full in-person graduation. If they are forced to go back into a building daily with many more people than that of which would attend a graduation, it's only fair that it be the one normal thing they have all year.

3/24/21 21:05:54

Carrie McCanna

7219 Redwood Valley Court Lewis Center

Our son says that now that we have returned back to school, why can't we have as close to a normal graduation as possible and why weren't the kids asked what they wanted? This lack of reaching out to the kids and families really upset him because it didn't give them a voice especially since it is for them. He's been looking forward to a normal graduation for years and he wants to be among his classmates and family. He said would be great for him to watch his friends graduate that he's known since kindergarten. He also says that other schools are making it work so why can't we? He is suggesting that each HS celebrate it outside at their own football stadiums and have 2 dates (1 as a backup in case it rains...Friday/Sat or Sat/Sun, etc) and the drive thru option as a last resort. Also, we would sacrifice a jumbotron at the outdoor

ceremony so long as there was a recorded livestream viewing and a photographer. Thank you for taking the time to read this!

3/24/21 21:52:14

Jessica Burchinal                      Jeh-see-kuh brr-chin-null

183 Cheshire Crossing Drive, Delaware, Ohio

I am a senior at Berlin and when I heard about the drive thru graduation I was almost brought to tears. The super intendant said weather was one of the biggest issues but I believe with a rain-date that would almost guarantee we get a graduation. Another concern was limited capacity at the stadium however as the child of spilt parents it is going to be extremely difficult to fit just my close family into one car for the drive thru graduation. I think a stadium graduation would be the best form of graduation to best fit the every students interest. I don't feel like the students each principal spoke with was a good representation of the entire senior class from each high school and in my opinion the "goals" you stated that are being met, aren't. After all this day should be centered around the students so would you consider allowing all students to give their opinion?

3/25/21 6:11:42

Brenda Brown

8093 Glenmore Drive

I have a senior and although he is rolling with all the decisions, he has learned that his voice doesn't matter... this class wasRobbed of last year snd this year activities ...Look at the stats, the mild illness the majority of teens experience w covid, 1.5 mill habe now been vaccinated,1 million have had covid therefore have antibodies, and all the surrounding schools are hosting a normal traditional graduation. Parents are willing to pay -lf costFor Olentangy is the issue .. this seems hard to believe since we should have it budgeted. Olentangy is getting a bad name when the community is posting on social media- we are becoming the laughing stock of our region! The school is not even followingGovernor dewines decision-Can the school rally a parade in our communityLike others have done? And prom... these kids didn't get junior or senior prom! PLEASE ALLOW THOSE FEW WHO HAVE A BF/GF INVITE THEM!!! Another school is doing a dance for their seniors plus one. Why spend that money to just go snd sit and Have dinner snd leave ... these kids should be allowed to bring a date! Please do the right thing for the majority not for odds of .001 percent may lose their taste and smell! Kids are not dying from covid as much as they are from mental health issues! They need excitement and to know their school cares about them!

3/25/21 7:23:44

Zachary White

7071 Lewis Center road galena Ohio 43021

Want a full normal graduation

3/25/21 7:24:47

Patrick Thomson

4469 Marilyn drive

Full graduation, it's been a full year. It's time

3/25/21 17:21:06

Jim Krupar

Gym Crew-par

1522 Peachblow Rd. Lewis Center

I would really like to see this years Seniors walk for graduation. My daughter couldn't last year and it was tough. The stadium appears to be a good option.