



Statement from Superintendent Dr. Stauffer Regarding WCPS & KIHS Athletics

Back on February 24th, the Parkside High School boys basketball team traveled to Kent Island High School to play in the first round of the state basketball playoff tournament. As described in the statement that WCPS distributed on February 28th, Parkside players, coaches and fans reported hearing racial slurs and race-based derogatory comments before and during the game. These comments came both from Kent Island players and fans and led directly to incidents late in the game. In addition, as was also included in the February 28th statement, this is not the first time that WCPS schools and teams have reported hearing similar racially derogatory language or seeing racially derogatory actions by Kent Island students. I have also learned that in past incidents, WCPS has been assured by Kent Island High School officials that these types of behaviors were being addressed and would not happen again. It appears from the information we have gathered that despite these assurances, the behaviors have persisted.

In light of this information, it is clear that a thorough investigation by an independent party is needed. It is also clear that this investigation will take time to complete. WCPS always believes it is in the best interest of students for our school system to model cooperation and do everything possible to find a way for competition with Kent Island High School athletics to continue. However, after much discussion within WCPS considering the information from the February 24th basketball game and descriptions of past incidents, along with the two statements from Queen Annes County Public Schools regarding this incident and preliminary discussions with Queen Annes County Public Schools administration, we strongly believe we must focus on the safety and well-being of our student athletes. This focus must occur before, during, and after the competition on the field, even at times when students may not be directly supervised or within earshot of adults. All of this raises a lot of uncertainty and concern for our coaches, student-athletes, and community. Because of this, we feel it is in the best interest of our students for Wicomico County high schools to not engage Kent Island High School in athletic competition until such time that an investigation can be completed, and appropriate steps can be put in place as a result of the findings of that investigation.

The 2023 spring sports schedule was developed and approved back in 2022. WCPS plans to immediately petition the Bayside Athletic Conference and Maryland Public Secondary School Athletic Association to allow for a waiver of these regular spring season athletic contests with Kent Island High School so that our WCPS high schools are not penalized in any way from not

playing in these specific games. We will work to schedule other games to fill any vacant slots as necessary. I'm disappointed that we have to take these steps, but the safety of our students is always our first priority. Thank you.

– Superintendent Dr. Micah Stauffer