



COUNTY SCHOOLS

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Participating in athletics is an important part of the overall school experience for many students in Wilson County Schools. Beginning at the middle-school level and culminating with the final game of their senior year, our students have an opportunity to participate in a wide variety of sports. Our student-athletes create lifelong memories and learn valuable lessons that prepare them for the challenges and successes that will come their way in life.

Intense competition and rivalries are a healthy part of athletics, and coaches understand how passionate our student-athletes are about winning. They train the students to discipline their emotions, work as a team and show sportsmanship at all times - even in the face of adversity. Coaches, students and parents also sign a code of conduct which states that they will demonstrate the utmost character while representing their schools. Student-athletes serve as role models for younger students and must be held to a higher standard for their actions.

The expectation of Wilson County Schools and the Wilson County Board of Education is that teams will play their hardest and exhibit excellent sportsmanship at all times, which means they play fair, respect the opponent and exhibit graciousness in winning or losing. Unfortunately, an opportunity to model sportsmanship to our community was missed on November 1 after the Fike High School and Hunt High School football game. While shaking hands at the conclusion of the game, a fight broke out between a few of the players on both teams. When coaches, administrators and law enforcement could not subdue the players, deputies with the Wilson County Sheriff's Office used pepper spray to end the altercation.

After investigating the incident, we - the district officials who have signed this letter - have made a unified decision to end the football season for both teams even though each have one more game to play in the regular season and are in contention for the playoffs. The students involved in the fight will also face disciplinary action.

Participation in athletics is a privilege and not a right. Rivalries and traditions are important, but lack of sportsmanship from our athletes will not be tolerated. While we did notify the North Carolina High School Athletic Association (NCHSAA) about the incident, we felt strongly enough about the expectation of sportsmanship that we did not submit information about the incident to the NCHSAA for review. We made our own decision following protocol set forth by NCHSAA to end the regular season and self impose the ban on the playoffs. Both teams will also be fined up to \$1,000.

The poor decision by several students ended the football season not just for themselves but for their entire team. We hope that they learned a valuable lesson. We commend the players who did not take part in the fight

and demonstrated the level of sportsmanship we expect from our players. We regret that their season had to end even though they did not do anything wrong, but the expectation of both Wilson County Schools and NCHSAA is that teams demonstrate sportsmanship as a unit. Given the magnitude of both the altercation and the measure law enforcement had to take to control the situation, there was no other option.

We know how passionate our student-athletes are. They want to win and are frustrated when that does not happen. But no matter the outcome at the end of the game, our athletes are expected to demonstrate sportsmanship. Whether they win or lose, they will show respect - especially to fellow members of their Wilson County Schools Family.

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Superintendent

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