

LICKING HEIGHTS LOCAL SCHOOLS

6539 Summit Rd. SW, Pataskala, OH 43062

p. (740) 927-6926 | f. (740) 927-9043

February 2, 2018

Dear Families:

This week our school district has come under intense scrutiny on numerous social media channels. In response, I encourage all to take a deeper look and not be led into a false narrative about students as well as the entire school district. Furthermore, recent events have reminded me of the adage “a picture is worth a thousand words;” yet, we have a responsibility to look into the facts of a matter and not accept things (even pictures) at face value.

In response to the inaccuracies and the attention generated by some social media accounts, I have been responding to numerous reporters. In the midst of this process, I applaud 10TV News for being responsible journalists and taking time to research the matter, which resulted in the following story that aired Thursday at 11 p.m. In addition to the nearly four minutes of coverage dedicated to LH, please ensure that you look at the written summary as there is additional information not contained within the video: <https://www.10tv.com/article/licking-heights-officials-dispute-online-claims-over-kneeling-photo>. (If the hyperlink does not work, visit 10TV.com and search for the story: *Licking Heights Officials Dispute Online Claims Over Kneeling Photo*.)

I am appreciative of 10TV News personnel for spending the time required to research matters and debunk numerous myths and allegations regarding our students, staff and families. In fact, one of our middle school coaches, Mrs. Sonya Glover, provides a response in her own words within this story to set the record straight.

In addition to trying to correct false narratives, you will also note my references within the news story to racial epithets and slurs directed to some of our student body - specifically our athletes. In fact, the behaviors of some spectators at athletic events resulted in the filing of police reports because of the threatening nature of these actions.

One of the many things I enjoy about my job is working in a dynamic environment. For me, I find such work to be rewarding; however, there are often challenges with such rapid change. For example, our district is no longer what it once was and in some respects is searching for a new community identity. As a case in point, in the fall, the well-known company, Facebook, selected one site within Ohio to build a new data center. That site is located in a section of the City of New Albany within the boundaries of LH Schools on Beech Road. This new commercial development necessitated the closure of Beech Road and when it reopens later this year, there will be a new four lane road with turning lanes. When Facebook opens in 2019, it offers employment opportunities, minimizes additional residential development and helps to improve the residential tax base.

The preceding is just one example of recent change within our school district and there are numerous other examples often reflected within the region. More specifically, recent census data shows an expectation of another 500,000 people moving into Central Ohio, some from within the state, some from other states and a growing population of international families.

Although the LH community is not alone in such change, we are tasked with managing our environment. As such, I am asking for those interested in being action-oriented to email my administrative assistant, Mrs. Linda Aitken (laitken@lhschools.org), to explore the possibility of engaging in dialogue with school district personnel about the opportunities within our community and helping to chart the future. I would be remiss if I did not highlight a part of these discussions need to include racial and cultural differences and how we respond to such differences. In advance of your responses, we recently used a similar method to gather input for the design process of our new high school (scheduled to open by August, 2020) that resulted in numerous stakeholder meetings and data helpful to our architect.

I have covered a lot of ground in this communication and appreciate your attention. Please feel free to share this communication with others as it is important to provide accurate information about our schools.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Philip H. Wagner". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "P" and "W".

Philip H. Wagner, Ph.D.
Superintendent
Licking Heights Local Schools
6539 Summit Road, S.W.
Pataskala, Ohio 43062
www.lhschools.org