

Hello, my name is Melissa Mahoney. I'm a doctor of Occupational Therapy, a graduate of MVRHS and have over 30 years of healthcare experience. I am also the parent of a high school sophomore who plays field hockey, indoor track and lacrosse; and of a 4th grader who would like to play high school sports someday and is currently using the fields for Youth Sports.

I have been following this since 2017 because of my own kids but also because of the students with cognitive and physical impairments that I work with in the schools. Some proposals were all grass or all turf, and here we are with one turf field, 5 grass fields, and a desperately-needed track.

Somewhere over the years this debate has become acrimonious and personal. There will always be science or research that can be found to support either side at the margins. However when expectations are being put out there that are unlikely to occur, like the turf breaking down at 185 degrees with a pH of 12, we have lost sight of what is reasonable and even possible. Somehow we have moved away from the peer-reviewed science of what the turf is made of, and even what the soil is made of, and forgotten that the turf products have already been tested and proven safe. Leading to over 12,000 turf fields in the US alone.

When I think of the students at the high school now, and those that are coming up, I feel for them. Everyone wants safe and accessible fields, but somehow this debate has moved away from the peer-reviewed science and into personal stories.

Part of the job of a community is to come together and care for the young and those that can't care for themselves and right now, we are failing them. For some students playing high school sports is their one opportunity for the type of interactions that are a gateway to learn and feel acceptance. To gain and learn confidence, perseverance, compromise, teamwork, self-control, and numerous other life lessons only experienced through a team sport. As well as memories that will reinforce the fabric of our community.

For those students who are cognitively and physically impaired, they have no safe place for outdoor leisure activities or Unified Sports. Right now, they can safely engage in the halls of the high school or in the gymnasium. Even Sanderson Avenue is not a great space for them. They deserve equal access. They deserve more.

In the next few years there will be more students at the HS who are cognitively impaired, use wheelchairs, walkers, crutches and have compromised balance and gait. They too will need a place to engage in outdoor activities. They, like all of our students, deserve access to decent, level, clean and safe fields.

We need to remember that life is full of compromises. The turf committee is willing to have just one turf field. Yet there seems to be an unwillingness of the grass proponents to compromise at all going from six fields to five fields.

We need to do better. We need to get on with believing in the peer-reviewed science, not in people's opinions, but the actual peer-reviewed science. Because right now, the real tragedy isn't grass vs turf. It's that our children are being denied safe, accessible and reliable fields. My biggest fear is that these fields won't get done even in the next 5 years and we will continue to have deplorable fields. Fields that will continue to cause micro and macro injuries. Fields that will continue to alienate and deny access to all members of our community. We owe them more. If movement on the fields doesn't happen soon, it will only increase the alienation of our youth, who need our support and action more, now than ever.

Thank you.