



MARYLAND OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR EDUCATION

INVESTIGATIVE SUMMARY | 2021 – 0002 - 1

Findings Regarding the Misuse of Funds Involving the Baltimore County Public Schools System and the Construction of the Westowne Elementary School in Catonsville, Maryland.

The Office of the Inspector General for Education (OIGE) received a complaint from the Baltimore County Office of the Inspector General (BCOIG) regarding an allegation of school construction fraud in the construction of Westowne Elementary School.

The allegation focused on the absence of playing fields following the new construction project associated with Westowne Elementary School. The allegation further referred a comparison of a neighboring school facility – Relay Elementary which had new playing fields as part of its construction project.

A preliminary review of this complaint and statements made as a result of our investigation indicated that during the design and early stages of this construction project, it was determined BCPS would be required to relocate the new school on existing BCPS property. The property designated for this project included the open space which was used as playing fields at Westowne Elementary. (This area included fields which formerly provided a baseball or softball field.) The decision to use the adjoining area afforded BCPS the opportunity to continue the use of the former Westowne Elementary while construction occurred. Additionally, the new design of the school encompassed a larger physical footprint than the previously existing school building.

We found as a result of the increase in size of the new building, the requirements governing the designation / curriculum of fields associated with an elementary school, and the available open space as a result of the new construction, BCPS determined they could only construct a multi-purpose field for use by school staff and the neighboring community.

OIGE did examine the schematic design (SD) for Westowne Elementary dated April 14, 2014. In this design, there was a reference to “playing fields” but did not include the

design or reference to a baseball field. Additionally, during the preliminary presentation to the board of education dated June 10, 2014, there is a reference to “ball field”, but not baseball field.

The OIGE did review the SD associated with Relay Elementary. In the SD, there is specific verbiage and design drawings indicating the installation of baseball fields. The Westowne Elementary project did not show or reference a baseball field in its SD.

The OIGE did review the BCPS open field construction protocols associated with elementary, middle, and high schools and the designated county agency responsible for open field maintenance. As it pertains to curriculum and open space requirements associated with an elementary school, BCPS requires a multipurpose field at all elementary schools. Although the vast majority of elementary schools have additional space available which services the needs for baseball or softball, in this case BCPS determined there was not enough available space to accommodate additional fields.

Additionally, as part of the required curriculum and design associated with a middle or high school, BCPS requires the installation of a multipurpose field and field(s) used for baseball and/or softball.

After a review of all statements and designs, the OIGE investigation could not substantiate the complaint. The OIGE determined that BCPS reference to the word “ball field” was used interchangeably with their reference to a multipurpose field. The OIGE did not find clear and convincing evidence that the BCPS intentionally misrepresented the Westowne Elementary design to the Board of Education or the surrounding community. The OIGE provided its report of investigation to the BCPS Law Office and the Baltimore County Office of the Inspector General.

Unless otherwise noted, the OIGE applies the preponderance of the evidence standard in determining whether local school system personnel have committed misconduct.