

# School board asked to reinstate tennis program

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The ball is in the Vermillion School Board's court, after hearing public support at its meeting Monday night to reinstate the district's tennis program.

The meeting began with a full house, with nearly every student athlete involved in tennis and their parents sitting in the audience.

The school board, in a budget-trimming move, decided two years ago to no longer fund the sport. It

has survived during the last two seasons thanks mainly to private donations and funding.

"Almost two years ago, when the board made the decision to cut the funding for the girls and boys tennis program at the high school, it was more than a

50-year tradition that was threatened. We as parents and players didn't want that to go down easily, so we came to the board and asked if we raised the funds to put back into the budget if you would allow the tennis program to continue, and for the last two seasons, that's what we've done – we've raised the funds," Steve Ford said. "We are coming tonight to begin the process of formally requesting that you add tennis back into the budget."

Ford noted that the Vermillion High School tennis program enjoys widespread local support.

"When we first were made aware of the cut, we began the process of getting the word out. We formed a parents' organization and we decided to put together a local tennis tournament. When we did, we got way more support than we really expected," he said. "Schools across the state that we compete against came to our rescue – some of them raised money at their schools and brought it with them to the tournament. Locally, we got a lot of support – we've received phone calls from alumni of the tennis program and some who are just concerned citizens."

"That just encouraged us that the tennis program is something significant here at Vermillion High School," he said.

This year, members of the informal parents' organization held a petition drive, gathering signatures of eligible voters in the school district. The petitions ask that the

school board reinstate the tennis program.

"We tried to find out how much support there is the community, and tonight we have 526 signatures that we would like to give you," Ford said.

He said that number is comparable to the total number of people who voted in the last school board election.

"I think it's a pretty good display of public support for the program," Ford said.

"There are a lot of kids on the tennis team that are out for tennis, and that's their only sport," Curt Robinson said. "So, when you cut their sport, you really cut their opportunity. They are not runners – they aren't built like a runner; it would be hard for them to win the 100-yard dash."

"Our goal, I think, in high school athletics is to help participation within our school district," he said, adding that when the school board cuts a sport, it is "choosing which kids don't get to play, which kids don't get the opportunity."

Robinson suggested that the board consider cutting a small bit of funding from other existing sports and using that money to reinstate the tennis program.

"It certainly makes sense to me to cut a little bit from the athletic budget, and keep all of our kids happy," he said, "because they are part of our family, they are part of our school district, and we've found very wide support. A lot of people wonder why in the world it

(tennis) was cut. I think it really comes down to how we support our kids, and there are a lot of kids who would like to continue with the program. I would encourage you to find solutions to keep this in the budget for the school district. I think it's very important."

Vermillion sophomore Jacob Ford spoke on behalf of his tennis teammates.

"I am home-schooled, and four years ago, I didn't really know that many people. I began playing tennis three years ago, and during that time, through tennis, I have gotten to know so many people in such a great way that it's just really blessed me," he said.

Jacob Ford noted that he and his teammates play four to five days a week during the summer, and two to three days a week during the fall.

"I just value those relationships with people with that mutual love of tennis that we all share," he said, "and if that was taken away, I don't know what I'd do. It is just a very important part of my life, and I want to keep that going for the rest of my high school career."

"We basically are just asking that in the upcoming budget for the 2013-2014 school year that you consider putting tennis back into the budget, funded again by the school district," Steve Ford said. "We all understand that you all have a very difficult job ... and that you all care deeply. We understand that you have some hard decisions to make."

The board took no formal action following the presentation.

"Thank you all for showing your support of tennis," School Board President Chris Girard said. "We will certainly take your comments into consideration when we look at the budget for next year."

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