

MEMORANDUM

Zion- Benton Township District 126

DATE: March 18, 2025
TO: Board of Education
FROM: Dr. Jesse J. Rodriguez, Superintendent of Schools,
Mr. Jack Niemi, Executive Director of Athletics,
Ms. Cynthia Moreno, Chief Human Resources,
Dr. Chris Pawelczyk, Executive Director of Strategic Planning and
Community Outreach
RE: **Recommended Criteria for Athletic Recognition**
SUBJECT: **Establishing Criteria for Athletic Recognition**

In early May 2024, the ZBTHS D126 administration met with a community group to discuss the potential retirement of a former Zee-Bee alumnus's jersey. After several discussions, both the administration and community leaders developed a plan to honor this distinguished athlete.

Recognizing the need for a consistent framework, in December 2024, the district formed a committee to establish criteria for recognizing and permanently displaying the highest athletic achievements within our facilities. This initiative represents the most prestigious form of recognition for our alumni athletes, celebrating their outstanding contributions both during and beyond high school.

To ensure a balanced and comprehensive approach, the administration assembled a diverse committee of individuals with strong ties to District 126's athletic history. After three productive meetings and other forms of communication, the committee has identified three levels of recognition, two of which align with current district practices and one new initiative that has received unanimous support.

This structured approach will ensure fairness, consistency, and a lasting legacy of excellence within District 126 athletics. Further details on implementation will be shared as we finalize the framework.

Implementation:

The work that the committee and administration has accomplished thus far is something to be proud of. It is important that District 126 develop an athletic alumni program that celebrates our athletes who have excelled beyond high school. Below is a summary of the committee's recommendation:

Based on the findings, the administration recommends the following updates for FY26.:

Three Tiers of Athletic Alumni Program Recognition:

1. Jersey Retirement/Wall Mural (*Existing*)

District 126 is one of the few schools in Northern Illinois that recognizes individual alumni through jersey retirement or facility murals. This honor is reserved for alumni who achieve the highest level of success in their sport and pursue a professional career in athletics.

Proposed Criteria

- Nominees should have demonstrated academic excellence, character, sportsmanship and have contributed service to the community or school. (Example: Billy McKinney's professional career spanned seven years, during which he played 476 games, averaged 8 points and 3.5 assists per game, and later became an NBA executive).
- Placement of recognition will be sport-specific (e.g., a professional softball player's mural would be near the softball field, while an Olympic swimmer's recognition would be in the natatorium).
- Approval process: Requires Superintendent and BOE approval following a recommendation from the committee.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

- Gym banners for alumni athletes who found exemplary success
- Suggested a recognition display in the hallway honoring both Billy McKinney and Brian Colbert.
- The Superintendent and/or Athletic Director can make a Special nomination/recommendation for an athlete who did not play professionally but did attain high level status above and beyond in their sport athletically, academically and public accomplishments that impacted the community in a positive manner.

2. Alumni Athletic Excellence Award (*New Initiative*)

Currently, there is no formal process for celebrating alumni athletic success beyond high school. This new initiative will formally honor alumni who continue to achieve excellence in their sport post-graduation. (College, Professional (both domestic and international), Olympics)

Proposed Criteria

- Academic excellence
- Character and Sportsmanship
- Community and/or School Contributions

Must meet at least one of the criteria below:

- Win or place in a National Championship (Team or Individual)
- Set a school, national, or international record
- Achieve a national ranking, All-Conference, All-American, or similar accolades at the collegiate or professional level
- Earn Team MVP or similar accolade
- Induction into a college or team Hall of Fame
- Olympian
- Played professionally or was drafted

Recognition Placement:

- The Alumni Athletic Excellence Award would be located in the hallway near the Athletic Office, featuring a photo of the athlete and a brief description of their post-high school accomplishments.
- Approval process: The committee and Athletic Director will oversee nominations and approvals. No BOE action required.
- Recognition Ceremony to be held at an athletic event.

3. Zee-Bee Athletics Wall of Achievement (*Existing*)

- The committee acknowledges that District 126 already recognizes high school athletic accomplishments at a level exceeding that of surrounding districts.
- To enhance this recognition, two key recommendations were made:
 - **Reinstall past athlete photos** in the South Commons as they were prior to construction.
 - **Invest in an updated, user-friendly electronic kiosk** to digitally display the Wall of Achievement.

Recommendation: The Board of Education of Zion-Benton Township High School District 126 accepts the Superintendent's recommendation to approve the Criteria for Alumni Athletic Recognition.