

Dallas ISD should let neighbors use school running tracks

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Access to high school tracks is the latest casualty in the school safety debate.



By [Dallas Morning News Editorial](#)

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A sign put up near W.T. White High School's track, along Welch Road, when it was being renovated after the 2020 Dallas ISD bond. (Courtesy of Patsy Shropshire)

For neighbors in northwest Dallas, the running track at W.T. White High School had been a place to exercise and build friendships for decades. But some residents say they've been locked out of the track for the last two years.

This isn't just a problem at W.T. White High School. Residents near Hillcrest High School have also spoken out. More than 600 people have signed a petition asking Dallas ISD to unlock the tracks.

Dallas ISD officials say they restrict access to campus fields to outsiders because of safety concerns and vandalism. While these concerns are understandable, the school district should work with neighbors to find a middle ground that imposes some measures to minimize danger and damage while allowing residents to continue using the running tracks day to day.

District officials explained that residents must register online every time they want to use school facilities. It can take up to 14 business days for a rental to get approved. Orlando Alameda of Real Property Management, who handles real estate for Dallas ISD, said this policy has been around for at least 19 years but acknowledged that it was not widely enforced.

It's impractical to ask neighbors to wait a week or more to get permission to squeeze in a morning run before work or a jog before dinner. A more practical solution would be to require neighbors who use the track regularly to register with Dallas ISD every few months or once a year.

There's also confusion about when exactly nearby residents are allowed to use the track without registering. David Bates, the district's chief of operations, told us that residents can use Dallas ISD tracks for a few hours before school starts and after students go home and that the tracks are only locked before it gets dark outside.

He said residents can't expect the school district to pay custodians overtime to unlock the tracks outside of these hours. That makes sense. However, when we visited the track at W.T. White at 6:30 p.m. on a recent Wednesday, it was locked.

Patsy Shropshire, a resident who lives near W.T. White, said she and her neighbors are prepared to invest in security cameras and designate a neighborhood "lifeguard" on the track to allay DISD's fears about vandalism and violence on its property. There's a keypad on the gate to the track, but residents say the passcode has never been shared with them.

As neighbors and as taxpayers, many Dallas residents share the district's goals of protecting students and district property. Dallas ISD should work with them to find a compromise that allows residents to use the running tracks during reasonable hours and keeps them engaged with their local high school.

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