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## **Park High joins North Suburban Conference**

by Dr. Debra Bowers

Students at St. Louis Park High School have the opportunity to be more competitive this year in athletics and other extracurricular activities thanks to the fact that we joined the North Suburban Conference (NSC).

Park was formerly part of the Classic Lake Conference, which includes schools that are typically twice our size such as Wayzata, Minnetonka, Hopkins and Edina.

Schools in the NSC are similar to Park in size and philosophy. "We value participation in multiple sports and activities; not forcing our athletes to specialize in one sport," explains Athletic Director Andy Ewald.

Other NSC members are: Benilde-St. Margaret's, Chisago Lakes, Fridley, Irondale, North Branch, Robbinsdale Cooper, Spring Lake Park, St. Francis and Totino-Grace.

After studying data, including win/loss records as well as travel details, and gathering input from coaches, athletes and community members, Ewald and Principal Bob Laney began exploring options to change conferences.

Ewald hosted focus groups that included students and parents. He talked with many other schools and considered starting a new conference or joining others. Park had the opportunity to join a conference that wasn't competitive enough, but declined because, as Ewald put it: "Kids don't grow if the competition is too easy."

In the end, the NSC seemed like the best fit because its schools are similar in size to Park, have comparable programs and share the same values.

"It's not about winning or losing," said Ewald. "It's about doing what's best for kids. Kids need to be able to come from behind and win. They need to be able to win or lose a close game."

Last spring, the School Board voted unanimously in favor of going forward with the change.

Throughout the change from the Classic Lake to the North Suburban Conference, we've received virtually no negative feedback. Some schools in the NSC are farther away than those in the Classic Lake, and the athletic department has been creative with scheduling to mitigate the travel impact.

Busing costs will remain about the same because of scheduling and also because we traditionally bus students a variety of distances for non-conference play, and will continue to do so. We may even be going back to our old rivals' schools as coaches have

maintained relationships with teams in the Classic Lake Conference. The general feeling is that if driving a little further gives us a chance to be more effective, it's well worth it.

Our students now have a chance to make new relationships and new rivalries. They're excited about new opportunities and are working harder than ever before. This summer, a record number of athletes (over 200) are enrolled in our high school's strength and conditioning program.

The benefits to our students have driven our decision-making process. We recognize that athletic performance is tied to community spirit, and competitive programs help the overall atmosphere of the school. Thanks to Andy Ewald and all the people who participated in bringing us into the North Suburban Conference.

We're looking forward to a great year both academically and athletically. For news, information and schedules, visit our new athletics Web site at [www.gopark.org](http://www.gopark.org).

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