

Esteemed Members of the School Board,

I hope this letter finds each of you well. My name is James Libresco and I am an 11th grader at ACHS. I am the junior class president, a Theogony editor, and a basketball and rowing athlete. I am also one of four ACHS Ambassadors to Morgan's Message. Morgan's Message is an international organization dedicated to student-athlete mental health, and last year, I had the honor of co-founding our chapter here at ACHS. Since last August, we have been working hard to collect feedback from the myriad of student-athletes at our school. From those conversations, we have developed a proposal that addresses their most important concerns, and we ask that you allocate funding for three parts of the proposal.

As we navigate the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the well-being of student-athletes has emerged as a paramount concern. Since 2020, the NCAA has found that the rate of student-athlete mental health concerns has risen between 1.5 and 2 times the normal level. This is extremely alarming and calls for swift action. The challenges faced by student-athletes in today's world demand a nuanced and robust support system, and ACHS must look to provide one.

The first thing that would help nurture this system is the hiring of a full-time sports psychologist. Sports psychology is becoming increasingly popular in high school and collegiate athletics, and continuing this trend at ACHS would bring tremendous benefits.

A sports psychologist would not just be an added resource; they would be a beacon of support and a guiding presence that would help student-athletes navigate the complex landscape of their emotions, stressors, and aspirations. Unlike traditional mental health professionals, a sports psychologist specializes in the unique challenges faced by athletes. They possess the expertise to address performance anxiety, stress management, goal setting, and resilience-building—key components for successful athletes at any level.

This investment would not just be in the mental health of individual athletes, but in the cohesiveness of ACHS athletics as a whole. The benefits will extend beyond the playing field, as a sports psychologist would improve academic performance, personal relationships, long-term mental well-being, and so much more. The path to a more supportive athletics program, a path that you should aim to nurture, begins with recognizing the indispensable role of a sports psychologist.

Additionally, I urge you to consider ACHS's critical need for an additional full-time medical trainer. Our current trainers are wonderful, but they are severely overworked. Often assisting over 50 student-athletes daily, their commitment is commendable but unsustainable. The consequences of an overburdened medical team extend beyond fatigue; they compromise the quality of care and pose a tangible risk to student-athlete safety.

We are in need of another trainer to help alleviate these concerns. In funding a new medical trainer, you would signal a commitment to ensuring that each student-athlete receives the personalized attention and care they deserve.

The final funding we are requesting would go towards mental health trainings for coaches.

Student-athletes often spend hours with their coaches each day, so it is essential for them to cultivate a top-notch relationship. A positive coaching environment not only helps to improve these relationships and overall well-being, but has also been shown to boost team performance.

Imagine a coaching staff equipped not only with strategic expertise but also with the tools to navigate the complex landscape of mental health challenges. Such an investment transcends individual coaching relationships, and it shapes the very culture of our athletic community.

Thank you all for your invaluable time, consideration, and dedication. I hope to see you reflect the mental-health needs of student-athletes in the budget.

Sincerely,

James Libresco