Competitive Cheer Coach Recommendation

To: Board of Education, Lisle Community Unit School District 202

From: Tom Marcum, Athletic Director

Date: October 26, 2026

Subject: Emily Fiedler and the plan for coaching support and student safety

Recommendation and basis for selection

We recommend that the Board of Education approve Emily Fiedler as Lisle High School's Head Competitive Cheer Coach for the 2026–2027 season. Two candidates applied for the position, and the administration determined that Emily was the most qualified. The Board hired her as Head Sideline Cheer Coach in August 2026. This recommendation builds on her work with our students and a plan that combines progressive skill instruction, experienced technical support, and administrative oversight. A thorough analysis of the program was conducted. The details can be found below, but here are the highlights:

- Practices already implemented this fall
- Support and safety plan for the competitive season
- Administrative oversight and family communication

Emily coached Lisle Junior High varsity cheer during the 2025–2026 school year, volunteered as a Lisle High School JV cheer choreographer in 2017 and 2019, and served as a high school cheer tryout judge in 2015 and 2016. Her strengths lie in her leadership, judgment, communication, preparation, and willingness to seek assistance.

She holds a master's degree in education leadership from the University of Iowa, has completed all of the necessary IESA, IHSA, and District 202 requirements to hold the position. Lastly, we are proud to say that she participated in Lisle's junior high and high school cheer programs as a student here.

Response to concerns about experience

In August, parents raised concerns about Emily's limited experience leading a high school competitive cheer program and the technical demands of the sport. We took those concerns seriously. The previously mentioned review addressed stunt and tumbling progressions, spotting, matting, supervision, conditioning, injury prevention, emergency procedures, and IHSA/NFHS expectations. Our recommendation recognizes that Emily is still developing her high school competitive coaching experience and pairs her leadership with access to specialized instruction and continued professional growth.

Requested Board action

Approve Emily Fiedler as Head Competitive Cheer Coach at Lisle High School for the 2026–2027 season. We believe her demonstrated leadership and preparation, together with the documented safeguards and planned technical support, provide a sound basis for this recommendation.

Analysis of the Lisle Cheer Program

Program practices and plans for student development and safety

This analysis reviews practices implemented during fall 2026, the support and safety plan for the competitive season, and planned changes across the cheer program. The detailed review compares practices before August 2026, current practices beginning in August 2026, and plans for November 2026 and beyond.

Practices implemented this fall

The October 16 program analysis documents three stunt clinics at Lisle High School to teach technique and develop skills safely. Coaches reduced the difficulty of the homecoming routine when planned skills exceeded the team's readiness. Emily also established coach-directed stunt rotations, tracked attendance, consistently applied a revised team contract, and reviewed weekly performance and stunt completion with athletes. These practices support instruction matched to demonstrated ability and clear expectations.

Support and safety for the competitive season

Progressive instruction and appropriate routines. Athletes must demonstrate foundational skills safely before advancing. Intentional practice plans and routines based on demonstrated abilities will guide development. The October plan calls for building advanced skills progressively through specialized training.

Specialized stunt and tumbling instruction. Recurring Xperience Cheer (XC) training at Lisle High School is planned, with one hour of stunting and one hour of tumbling per session, including tumbling spotted by an XC trainer. This extends the fall clinics and provides technical expertise. Scheduling and participation costs will be communicated to families in advance.

Mentoring and coach development. Emily has sought mentorship from experienced area high school cheer coaches and identified professional development through the Illinois High School Cheer Coaches Organization. Experienced clinicians and qualified resources will support instruction requiring additional technical expertise, including advanced stunting and tumbling.

Athletic trainer coordination. Emily's plan includes collaboration with the athletic trainer on conditioning and injury prevention. The administrative review called for examining recent program injuries with the trainer to identify any additional precautions, training, or supervision needed. Spotting, matting, supervision, and emergency-response expectations remain central to the safety review.

Student development and accountability. The winter plan includes a JV program, attendance monitoring, and individual meetings on goals, roles, and contributions. Team values and clear expectations support a constructive environment and consistent participation.

Administrative oversight and family communication

Consistent with the September communication to families, the athletic director and coach will share safety and support measures with athletes and parents after the appointment. This communication should clarify training arrangements, participation expectations, and how families can raise questions or concerns.

Leadership and team culture

Focus area	Past practice Before August 2026	Current practice Beginning August 2026	Planned practice November 2026 and beyond
Captains	Captains were used previously, but not in recent seasons.	Captains were not used in fall 2026.	Provide opportunities to teach athletes how to lead and what effective leadership means. Highlight positive leadership during game recaps and define the roles and responsibilities of captains if the role is used.
Seniority and leadership opportunities	Seniors were expected to lead the team, and seniority guided most decisions.	Seniors taught sideline material. Items were distributed according to the team's size needs rather than seniority. Coach-directed stunt rotations supported equitable opportunities for growth.	The coach will teach sideline material. A JV/varsity model will create leadership opportunities before senior year. Continue distributing items according to size needs and using coach-directed stunt rotations to support equitable growth.
Program management	The program used a previous team contract.	The contract was rewritten, consistently enforced, and referenced when situations required it.	Continue revising the contract as experience identifies needed changes, with notes maintained in a general planning document.
Team culture	The program used a Big/Little Sister tradition but did not define or use team values.	Big/Little Sisters exchanged locker signs. The team selected values and completed a midseason review, assigning percentages to how effectively the team lived those values. Results were compared with grading scales and end-of-season goals.	Begin winter with a values week to establish season goals and team values. Give each JV and varsity cheerleader a plain bow. After each practice, event, or performance, coaches and teammates will recognize athletes who demonstrated team values by adding a rhinestone to their bows; each color will represent a different value. Additional rhinestones may be earned for seven days of attendance or attaining a new skill. Use #choosegreatness to reinforce athletes' choices to give full effort in practices, competitions, and game performances.

Skill development and athlete accountability

Focus area	Past practice Before August 2026	Current practice Beginning August 2026	Planned practice November 2026 and beyond
Cheerleading as a sport	Tumbling has been an opportunity within the program. Under Coach McGrath, athletes were encouraged to participate beginning in junior high. Team tumbling classes were part of high school training through Elite Gymnastics. Previous practice also included using the tumbling skills athletes brought to the program when possible.	Three stunt clinics were hosted at Lisle High School during the fall in place of a summer camp, focusing on technique and safe skill development.	Each team will participate in biweekly XC training at Lisle High School, with one hour of stunting and one hour of tumbling. Cheerleaders will be responsible for funding their participation to support growth in all aspects of the sport.
Team attendance	Attendance was an issue.	As of October 3, no fall 2026 practice had included all team members. Attendance was tracked regularly, and a 24-hour excused-absence requirement was in place.	Share attendance data, including excused and unexcused absences and tardies, at the parent meeting. Alternates for the 2026–2027 competition season will not be named until needed or until January for IHSA rostering. JV-season attendance and skill will both inform those decisions.
Individual athlete coaching	Each athlete established a season goal, which was revisited periodically.	The fall season was used to learn athletes' strengths and opportunities for growth.	Use individual Cheerleader Impact Meetings: an initial summer meeting, a midpoint meeting at the end of fall, and a summative meeting at the end of winter. Discuss individual goals, roles, contributions, and data such as attendance.

Summer preparation and fall team structure

Focus area	Past practice Before August 2026	Current practice Beginning August 2026	Planned practice November 2026 and beyond
Summer practices	Practices were limited, with low attendance.	Practices began August 10 and met three days per week.	Practice two days per week in June and July and three days per week in August. Use videos to help absent athletes learn material. Communicate the expectation that athletes who are in Lisle should attend practice. Track attendance and excuses consistently with regular-season practices.
Summer camp	Camp was held in-house, without full team attendance.	No summer camp was held in 2026.	Attend Xperience Cheer Commuter Camp.
Fall roster	The team included 20 athletes from freshman through senior year.	The coach inherited a team of 20 athletes across those grade levels.	Move to a skill-based JV/varsity model with approximately 10 athletes per team. Both teams will continue cheering on the sidelines at varsity football games. Smaller groups are intended to support more focused management and coaching attention.
Homecoming routine	Seniors created the competition-style routine entirely.	Seniors created the routine. Coaches reduced planned difficulty because some skills were beyond the team's readiness. Material was taught on a rushed timeline, and deadlines were difficult to meet. The process led to inequity and disappointment about stunt placements and formations.	The head coach will create a routine based on the team's skills and plan stunt progressions within practices so the routine is achievable within the available time. JV will open with a music section, JV and varsity will cheer together, and varsity will close with a music section.

Season expectations and winter competition

Focus area	Past practice Before August 2026	Current practice Beginning August 2026	Planned practice November 2026 and beyond
Purpose of the fall season	In recent seasons, fall was treated as a lower-stress, recreational season, peaking with homecoming before practices decreased. Coach McGrath required participation in both fall and winter; that two-season commitment ended after COVID.	Football games provide repetitions in stunting and tumbling to support competition preparation. The coach supplies game plans with chants and stunt rotations, and seniors call chants. Weekly recaps review successful and total stunt attempts, the number of chants, and chants needing practice. Weekly stunt and chant goals support continued improvement.	Treat fall as an athletic development season and require varsity cheerleaders to commit to both fall and winter. The longer-term goal is a two-season commitment across the entire program.
Winter spirit squad and JV development	A spirit squad served in place of a winter JV team, contributing to feelings of inequity and limited practice opportunities for growth.	—	Create a winter JV program that develops stunt and tumbling skills through biweekly Xperience Cheer training. During 2026–2027, JV cheerleaders will cheer for JV basketball and participate in team training and game-day practices.
Competition routine	An outside choreographer with limited knowledge of the team and its skills provided the routine. Routines frequently required modification or reduced difficulty to match attainable skills.	—	Use biweekly Xperience Cheer training to develop skills proactively throughout the season and safely introduce more advanced elements into the routine. Provide tumbling instruction at Lisle High School with spotting by an XC trainer.