Headline: Concussion Policies Aren’t Universal
Tagline: Some Ohio high schools implement strict concussion policies, some don’t even have a policy

By: Mackenzie Clark

In a survey of 26 Ohio high schools, seven high school superintendents said their schools do not have an athletic concussion policy. Two stated they did not know whether or not their schools had a policy.

When Coventry High School Superintendent Russell Chaboudy was asked if his school had a concussion policy, he said, “I'm not sure ... it’s a situation where we haven't really had to do that.”

Mary Carter, Youngstown’s Assistant District Records Officer, noted, “Our athletic director reports that we have not had a concussion injury for nine years in this school district.”

Superintendent of Athens High School Carl Martin reported that concussions are “always a concern,” but said the school does not have a policy other than the mandates required by the Ohio High School Athletic Association (OHSAA).

The OHSAA’s policy, which incorporates rules from the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFSHA), requires “any athlete who exhibits signs, symptoms or behaviors consistent with a concussion [to be] immediately removed from the contest and shall not return to play until cleared with written authorization by an appropriate health care professional.”

Public record requests were sent to the 17 high schools that do have concussion polices. The requests asked for the school’s concussion policy, its concussion education policy and every record documenting athletic concussions occurring in the last two years.

Of the 17 schools that received the request, seven of them do not track concussions in practice and games and three don’t know.

Washington High School Superintendent Richard Goodright had “no comment” when asked if his school tracks concussions in practice and games. According to MaxPreps, one of CBS Sports’ websites, Washington High School is a high school football powerhouse – it’s ranked as Ohio’s 10th best high school football team. Goodright refused to answer any questions regarding the possibility of concussion litigation in the school system.

When Lincoln High School Athletic Trainer Paul Miller was sent the public records request, he said, ”I'll say the record request is a little unsettling.” Miller went on to say the policy request left him with one big question: “Why do I feel like I am on 60 Minutes?”

Of the 14 schools that do track all concussions, only one school sent all of the documents that were requested.

Chillicothe High School sent records for all student concussions since the start of the 2011 school year as well as their policy and coach training documentation. They have a head injury protocol and require coaches to fill out forms that list each of the athlete’s symptoms. The school also requires coaches to
inform the injured athlete’s parents immediately following the concussion. The document that coaches fill out says, “Coach, please provide to the parent or guardian at the time of head injury.”

Chillicothe sent detailed reports of each student injury during games and practices. One record says an athlete reported “being hit multiple times at 8:00. He only complains of some pain at occipital and dizziness. He has full orientation and memory.” Six days later, it was recorded that the athlete still had a minor headache and was not taking part in practice.

Another report said a football player had pain, dizziness and difficulty walking after being hit by an opposing player in a hitting drill. His memory was 5/5 and was taken to the emergency room. The athlete was out of football practices and games for one week.

The remaining 13 high schools either didn’t respond or sent incomplete requests.

Eight schools replied to the requests with notes and documentation that they use a test called ImPACT. Athletes’ memory, reaction time and processing speed are measured at the start of the season. Once an injury, like a concussion, occurs, the test can be performed again to test how serious it is.

Grove City High School sent the number of concussions athletes had received, but failed to send the actual records. According to Executive Director of Communications Sandy Nekoloff, there have been 34 concussions since the beginning of the 2011 season, with the majority occurring in football.

Chillicothe High School’s records show they’ve had 14 concussions since the start of last school year, and Lincoln High School Athletic Trainer Paul Miller wrote that they’ve “had 7 reported incidences of concussions thus far this year in football and tennis and volleyball.”

Earlier this year, the NFL brought concussions into the spotlight. According to the Huffington Post, “Scores of lawsuits involving thousands of former players touched by concussions and brain injuries have been consolidated into one master complaint, setting up a massive and potentially costly case for the NFL.”

Since then, the potential for concussion litigation has been on the rise.

So the high schools were also asked if their superintendents have been advised of the potential cost to the district of the risk of litigation from concussion-related injuries. Eleven said yes, six said no.

McKinley Senior High School Superintendent Chris Smith said that in the nine months he has been in office, he has not sought to assess the potential increased risk of litigation.

Tom Harrison, Ravenna Southeast High School’s superintendent, claimed he has not sought legal advice regarding litigation because the OHSAA has made its concussion regulations enough of a priority and that’s sufficient.

Twenty of 25 high schools said they require coaches to take concussion education training and seven schools do not. Some schools, like Grove City High School, require complete sports medicine training including nutrition, hydration, emergency planning and concussion care. Others, like Bay High School, solely require concussion education training.
The majority of the schools noted the OHSAA’s policy as a key element of their concussion policies.

The OHSAA’s Expectations and Regulations on Concussion Management is followed by Kent Roosevelt High School and Warren G. Harding High School. These regulations place the responsibility on the athlete rather than the coach or athletic trainers. The regulation states that if an athlete has concussion signs or symptoms, “it is [the athlete’s] responsibility to report these immediately to [the] coach and/or health care professional.”

According to the OHSAA, “An official shall not permit the athlete who has been removed under this rule to return to competition without written medical authorization presented to the head official.”

Lakewood High School Athletic Director Bob Thayer said, “Students will not be back on the field until released by our [Cleveland Clinic] doctor and the doctor is satisfied with his post-concussion ImPACT testing.”

Lakewood High School is just one of many that have a partnership with medical centers. Medina and Brunswick High Schools also work with the Cleveland Clinic while Grove City and Lincoln High Schools utilize trainers from OhioHealth. Ravenna Southeast High School contracts a trainer through Summa Health Center.

Brunswick High School Athletic Director Pietro Demonte said they take concussions very seriously and require two certified athletics trainers and a doctor on site for every game. “We go to extremes here… these are kids,” he said.