Do Ohio high schools track all athletic concussions in games and practices? Kent State student journalists wanted to find out, but discovered that’s not an easy question to answer.

At Washington High School in Massillon it’s all about football. The school has won 22 state championships, and its fans are extremely passionate about its sports teams. Kent State student journalists wanted to know if Washington High School takes its concussions as serious as its winning streak. When asked if it tracks concussions in games and practices, Richard Goodright who is the superintendent at Washington High School responded to the question with, “No comment.”

After making more telephone calls to Ohio high schools, Kent State journalists found out that seven said they do not track concussions, 14 said they do track concussions, and three did not know.

Not only did the students ask if each school tracks concussion, but they also sent public record requests asking each school to send, “Every record for the last academic year and the current academic year (with the student’s name redacted) documenting a concussion or suspected concussion of an athlete.”

Youngstown City District School didn’t send any records involving student athlete concussions because it may be the safest high school athletic department in Ohio. The Athletic Director, Ed Matey, said, “We have not had a concussion injury for nine years in this school district, and I don’t know how many have been reported before those nine years.”

Even though 14 high schools said over the phone they track concussions in games and practices, only three actually sent their tracking records.

Chillicothe High School tracks all of its injuries through a system called SportsWare, which shows the date, name, sport, complete description of the injury, and action taken. There have been 14 concussions listed since August 2011, and one of the concussions happened on August 22, 2011:
“A football athlete was hit in the left ear hole at approx 4:50. He came out immediately complains of dizziness and headaches. Rates pain 5/10. No past medical history of concussion. Respirations/HR/blood pressure all within normal limits, PEARL, CN 1-12 intact. Orientation 5/5. Concentration 5/5, memory 5/5. Rhomburgs finger to nose, balance and heel to toe all easy. Spoke to mother and referred to emergency for scan. Gave her head injury sheet when she picked him up. After ten minutes headache is getting worse, forgetting minor details and drowsy. On August 29, 2011 the athlete quit football.”

Steve Pritchard, Athletic Trainer at Strongsville High School said the athletic trainers use the Sports Management Injury System to track all concussions. Strongsville has tracked 51 concussions combined in 2011-2012. These concussions happened in various sports such as soccer, football, basketball, wrestling, and snowboarding.

Coventry High School has its trainers document any concussions through forms, and all of its trainers are contracted through Akron General Health and Wellness West. Coventry has documented 4 concussions within the past year. One out of the 4 concussions happened at a JV Girls basketball game on January 19, 2012. Its documentation of the concussion follows:

“Sara Simon, Athletic Trainer from Field called to report an incident at an away JV girls basketball game, Coventry vs. Field. She stated that Player #3 took an elbow to the head during the 3rd quarter. She did an initial assessment, and then had her sit out 5 minutes. She then did another assessment. #3 passed exam and a functional test. She entered back in the game in 4th quarter. After the game was over, Sara was informed that #3 was dizzy once returned to play. She did not play in the Varsity game. Sara stated she did speak to her parents, and informed them of the new concussion guidelines.”

Although schools do follow all OHSAA concussion guidelines during games, 17 high schools claimed it has additional protocol concussion policies during games and practices, 7 superintendents out of 26 schools said they did not have additional concussion policies, and one athletic director and one superintendent were not sure if they had additional polices.

One of the student journalists could not get a hold of the superintendent at the Parma City School District, and was then later on directed to David Allenick, the Supervisor of Athletics for Parma City School District. When the student asked Mr. Allenick why she was directed to speak to him instead of the superintendent, he said, “You know what he’s a Superintendent of a large school district and I’m sure he has other things to do. I can guarantee he knows nothing about our concussion policies.”

Another student was referred to speak with someone other than the superintendent. She was directed the Athletic Trainer Paul Miller at Gahanna Lincoln High School. When she asked about his high school’s concussion policy, he
responded, “My big question is why [do you want to know about our policy] because I feel like I am on 60 minutes?”

Out of the 17 high schools that did say they had additional policies, only 6 out of 17 complied with the public record request and sent those additional policies.

Chillicothe High School lists symptoms of concussions such as loss of consciousness, headache, dizziness, confusion or balance problems, but it does also state that a concussion can occur without loss of consciousness. Chillicothe does not allow its athletes to return to play until the athlete has written consent from a health care professional. Napoleon High School also has loss of consciousness as one of the first signs for a concussion.

Chillicothe requires its coaches to fill out a report form when a concussion occurs. The directions of the form said, “Coaches, Please fill out at the time of head injury and attach medical release from healthcare professional upon athletes return to play. Turn completed form in to the athletic office.”

The report form is sent to the parent after its filled out. Once a healthcare professional releases the athlete to start playing again, the coach and parents must sign the form that is allowing that athlete to continue his or her sports season.

Strongsville High School’s concussion policy requires its athletes to take the imPACT baseline-computerized test “prior to the start of contact activity in their sport.” Strongsville’s policy states that athletes will take the imPACT test once every two years. The athlete will have to repeat the imPACT test if the following occurs:

- A concussion injury has occurred Within the previous two years
- There is a history of two or more concussions,
- There is any history of moderate to severe brain injury, or
- There is a history of seizures, cranial surgery, or other neurological disorder.

If a concussion happens to an athlete, then a Concussion Home Care Sheet will be sent home with the athlete.

Although coaches cannot medically diagnose a concussion to his or her athlete, the coach can be taught concussions symptoms to look for if an athlete gets hit in the head during a game or practice. There are classes available for coaches to take on concussion education and training. Kent State student journalists discovered that 20 of the schools said they required coaches to attend concussion training while 5 out of the schools said they did not require any training. But only 2 high schools actually sent its records of its education policies.

With concussion related lawsuits happening more now, especially in the NFL, Kent State journalists wanted to know if each school has received litigation advisory or
sought to assess the potential increased risk of litigation from an athletic-concussion related lawsuit?

Six of the schools said they have not received any litigation advisory from their district attorney about concussion-related lawsuits, and 2 of the schools said they were not sure.

When asked if Terry Martin, Superintendent at Zanesville High School has received any litigation advisory he said, “We haven't had any specific advisory on concussions, but I think that's simply because we take it very seriously already. We have three certified athletic trainers on staff at all times, with at least one present at all athletic events, as well as a team physician.”

Eleven schools said they have received litigation advisory. One of the schools who said yes to this question was Superintendent, Christina Dinklocker at Mogadore High School. When asked if she could send a copy of the admonition, Dinlocker responded with, “We have been advised on concussions but I don’t have any meeting minutes or advisory material for you. Like anything else, we just read it, learn it, and throw it away.”