Seven of 26 schools surveyed in a selection throughout Ohio high schools do not have a concussion policy, while two schools are unsure if there’s a policy at all. When a school doesn’t have policy, the OHSAA outlines protocol. The OHSAA doesn’t require schools document suspected concussions during practice.

At Youngstown East, athletic director Ed Matey reports there have been no recorded student-athlete concussions for nine years.

“A lot of the problems that occur with a concussion are also the desire of the athlete not to recognize the problem,” said Dr. Andrew Russman, the section head of sports neurology at the Cleveland Clinic. “They want to fight on through the problem.” This mindset doesn’t fit well with the lack of consistent concussion monitoring systems.

“I may not know about a concussion for three days until a kid comes in and says something’s wrong,” said Paul Miller, the athletic trainer at Gahanna Lincoln high school.

Chillicothe’s athletic department reported five preseason concussions in 2011. During the season five concussions were recorded, only one of which occurred during game time action.

All but one of Chillicothe reported concussions would have gone undocumented, and possibly unnoticed, under OHSAA policy.

Russman said an unrecognized concussion could result in something called second-impact syndrome, which occurs when receiving a concussive impact while having a concussion.

“Second-impact syndrome is probably the biggest issue we need to educate young athletes about,” said Russman “They can suffer a process that produces a high risk of having longer symptoms and more difficult symptoms to recover from.”

The absence of concussion management is not being ignored, though. Of the 17 superintendents who responded, 11 have sought advice from legal counsel on the concussion issue.

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, 40 states have enacted legislation targeted at monitoring youth sports-related concussions. Ohio has not.

Ohio is one of nine states that have legislation pending, leaving it up to the school’s to upgrade OHSAA policy.

“It’s a situation where we haven’t really had to (form a policy) at this point,” Coventry superintendent Russell Chaboudy said. “But it’s certainly something we are looking at.”

Although there are schools lacking a concussion policy, some Ohio schools are trending towards a new system. Almost 40 percent, 207 Ohio high schools, are upgrading OHSAA policy using ImPACT.
ImPACT (Immediate Post-Concussion Assessment and Cognitive Testing) is used to implement baseline and post-injury testing by placing a point system on potential concussion-related symptoms. The athlete completes a 20-minute test prior to the season, providing a baseline for post-injury tests to determine if a concussion is present. Every MLB, NHL and MLS squad use ImPACT, along with 24 NFL organizations. Schools can minimize the risk of unrecognized concussions by using ImPACT, even if the athlete chooses to ignore the problem. Post-injury tests give the athletic trainers detailed information that can gauge the likelihood of a suffered concussion, while maintaining records in PDF format. Eight of the high schools surveyed have adopted this program, and nine of the schools have adopted additional policies. But seven schools rely solely on OHSAA policy. Not only does this lack of consistency throughout high school athletics put student-athletes at risk, the departments lacking policy may be at risk as well.