Some Ohio high school administrators unsure of how their schools handle concussions.

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By Student Journalist
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Ask any high school superintendent how important safety is for their student athletes and they’ll collectively answer the same way, saying it is of the utmost importance for the school district.

Massillon Superintendent Richard Goodright was asked if his schools, perennial football powerhouses, tracks all concussions during games and practices. His response? “No Comment.”

Thousands of high school students in the United States strap on cleats, pads and helmets on Friday nights and clash against rival teams of adolescents. With increased media attention on the seriousness of concussion safety, what are high school football programs in Ohio doing to make sure these young gladiators will be able to use their brains for future activities off the field, such as college and a career? So we wondered: what schools track ALL concussions during games and practices?

This was the question a group of journalists at Kent State University was determined to find out in a statewide report asking school administrators some simple questions:

Does your school have a specific concussion policy in addition to the state-mandated Ohio High School Athletic Association (OHSAA) policy?
All Ohio high schools follow state guidelines outlined by the Ohio High School Athletic Association (OHSAA) regarding concussions, which mandate all concussions obtained during a sanctioned game be recorded by officials.

The KSU report was interested in finding out how many schools track ALL concussions, during practice and during games. This would require the school to create its own specific guidelines on top of what the state requires. If the school districts were so concerned about the safety of their students, this information should be easily obtained and readily available.

We submitted extremely simple and easy public records requests to every school’s superintendent asking for electronic copies of their school’s concussion policy. After three weeks, only five schools responded to our requests, sending us copies of their specific school policies explaining how they track all concussions.

Over that time span, the group of 15 reporters called high schools around the state and found it very difficult to get straight answers to the basic questions outlined above. Some high school superintendents had no information at all regarding such an important topic and referred us to their athletic directors. Most of these athletic directors had the information we requested, but needed
days (and in some cases weeks) to unearth it. In either case, reporters encountered a wide range of responses.

Mogadore High School in Summit County reported eleven concussions over the last two years; while Athletic Director Ed Matey of East High School in Youngstown said, “we have not had a concussion injury for nine years in this school district.” Here is their official response (LINK TO PDF MARY RECEIVED).

Lakewood High School Athletic Director Bob Thayer told a reporter his school uses preseason testing with a computer software program called ImPact (also used by seven other schools) to measure brain activity before the season and after a potential concussion-causing injury. Lakewood High works with Cleveland Clinic doctors and requires clearance from the hospital staff before a student can return to the field.

Chillicothe was another great program that supplied us with extremely detailed record keeping of every incident of possible concussions and documented concussions, not just during sporting events but practices as well. They sent a student reporter numerous pages, as requested in his records request, of their concussion policy as well as examples of how their records are kept. These records detail the exact nature of each injury and require the coaches **to notify the parents immediately following the incident.** (LINK TO SAMPLE CHILlicoTHE FORM WHICH TELLS COACHES TO NOTIFY PARENTS)

Unfortunately, not all schools took this much precaution with the well-being of their student’s developing brains.

For example, Struthers High School Superintendent Robert Rostan openly admitted to a student reporter he “just doesn’t pay as much attention” to the whole situation.

The final verdict for this group of reporters? Whether or not high schools in Ohio are taking the risks of concussion seriously depends on which high school is in question. We encountered some schools that had wonderful programs and others that seemed indifferent, if not oblivious, about concussion safety.
High school administrators must remember that in order to be a student athlete, the safety of the student and his/her developing brain has to come first. For parents concerned about the safety of their student athletes, contact your school athletic director or district superintendent. We hope you have a better response than we did.

**WHAT THE ADMINISTRATORS HAD TO SAY:**

“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.”

Mogadore Superintendent Christina Dinklocker

“My big question is why [do you want to know about our policy] because I feel like I am on 60 minutes!”

Gahanna Lincoln Athletic Director Paul Miller

“I believe we do [track all concussions], I just don’t pay as much attention.”

Struthers Superintendent Robert Rostan