Of the more than 20 Ohio public high schools surveyed by Kent State University journalism students, 11 schools have no concussion policy other than what is mandated by the state of Ohio through the Ohio High School Athletic Association.

The students sent almost two dozen public records requests [link to PRRs] to various high schools across the state asking for the school’s concussion policy for athletes, every record for the current academic year describing concussion education training for coaches and every record for the last academic year and current academic year documenting a concussion or suspected concussion of a student athlete in order to see how concussions where handled at each school. Few schools responded to the request.

Students also contacted superintendents and athletic directors at those schools to find out if they had been advised of a possible increase in concussion litigation due to the recent NFL concussion litigation.

Two of the superintendents contacted said they did not know if high schools in their district had concussion policies, and a third, Superintendent Richard Goodright of Massillon City Schools, said “no comment” when asked if Washington High School tracks concussions in games and practice.

One school, however, did respond to the request with a thorough concussion policy.

Chillicothe High School’s concussion policy [link to Chillicothe’s document] outlined the causes and symptoms of concussions, how to handle suspected concussions, how return to play decisions should be made and how returning to school should be handled. Coaches are responsible for filing a report for concussions both in games and practice and are to inform parents of the injury as well. Chillicothe also keeps logs of all injuries of student athletes.

Of the schools surveyed, only eight schools track concussions of student athletes both in games and practices—a step beyond the OHSAA requirement [link to OHSAA document], which only requires game officials to report concussions that occur during a sanctioned contest.

As of Oct. 19, Mogadore Junior/Senior High School reported that were 11 cases of concussions in the past two school years. Gahanna Lincoln High School reported seven concussions just in the current sports season, while Chillicothe High School has had one reported concussion this season.

East High School in Youngstown, however, has no recorded cases of concussions for nine years.

Ed Matey, athletic director for East High School, said doesn’t know how many concussions may have been recorded more than nine years ago [link to PRR response document]. Diane Reha, facility manager for East High School, said the school doesn’t track concussions because there isn’t a need.
Athens City Schools Superintendent Carl Martin said concussions are “always a concern,” but Athens High School is one of the many schools that does not have a concussion policy in place or track concussions of student athletes.

According to Sherilyn Driscoll, a physiatrist with the Mayo Clinic, a student-athlete returning to play before a concussion is healed can cause more injury.

“Another blow to the head while the initial concussion is healing can occasionally result in fatal brain swelling — a condition known as second impact syndrome,” Driscoll wrote. “Also, a young athlete who sustains a concussion is at risk of developing postconcussion syndrome, which is characterized by persistent concussion symptoms such as headaches, dizziness, irritability and difficulty with thinking skills, such as memory and attention.”

According to the Dugan Law Firm in New Orleans, “While athletes in other professional sports who had suffered concussions were being effectively ‘shut down’ for a long period of time or full seasons, NFL protocol was to return players who had suffered a concussion that very game…At the end of the day, the NFL has not only failed to satisfy its duty to take the reasonable steps necessary to protect players from devastating head injuries, they have done everything in their power to hide the issue and mislead the players concerning the risks associated with concussions.”

It is possible that high schools could start facing similar litigations. Eleven of the high schools surveyed have already been advised of the increased risk of litigation from concussions.