

KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

STAFF NOTE

Action/Discussion Item:

Requiring Kentucky middle schools to comply with Kentucky High School Athletic Association (KHSAA) health and safety requirements including but not limited to coach training, specific safety programs and potential limitations on competition.

Applicable Statute or Regulation:

KRS 156.070 (2), 702 KAR 7:065, KRS 160.445

Action Question:

Should the Kentucky Board of Education:

- 1) Ask the KHSAA to convene a representative stakeholder group to study the question of whether all Kentucky middle schools should be required to comply with KHSAA health and safety requirements including but not limited to coach training, specific safety programs and potential limitations on competition, and
- 2) Ask the group to report to the board prior to the December meeting regarding their findings and make recommendations regarding implementation.

History/Background:

Existing Policy. The Kentucky Board of Education has in the past refrained from regulating middle school sports in the interest of assuring that during these critical years in a student's education, the primary focus would remain where it should be – on classroom instruction. It was felt that putting rules in place, and in particular calling attention to special events and programs, would draw attention away from academics and instead create an unintended focus on athletic programs.

However, there has been a recent explosion of interest in organized athletics at the middle school level. Non-school related organizations are beginning to organize tournaments and championships in some sports, and limitations on practices and dead times historically applicable to high school sports are not being followed, sometimes resulting in longer practices for middle school athletes than for their high school counterparts. This has been possible because of the absence of consistent guidelines to assure the safety and health of these young athletes.

Rather than merely recommending a blanket application of the high school health and safety guidelines to middle school sports programs, we feel a better approach is to ask the experts at KHSAA to gather a group of interested stakeholders, look specifically at the needs of this younger population of students, gather applicable research, inquire as to best practices occurring in other states, and report recommendations back to the board for future action. We feel that this

may result in a set of requirements that would better serve the needs of these students. The Kentucky Medical Association, which has long advised the KHSAA on student athlete health and safety issues, has indicated a willingness to work with KDE and KHSAA on addressing these issues.

Impact on Getting to Proficiency:

Participation in extracurricular activities such as athletics provides the primary incentive for many students to stay in school and complete their diplomas. Students begin preparing for high school sports through participation on teams at the middle school level. As students at this level are less developmentally advanced than high school students, they need health and safety requirements at least as stringent as those provided to high school athletes; and contest/practice limitations preferably specifically tailored to meet their unique needs. Ensuring their health and safety will enable them to remain in school, safely continue their sport, and persist to graduation.

Staff Recommendation and Rationale:

Staff recommends the board direct the KHSAA to convene a group of representative stakeholders to advise the board on the application of KHSAA health and safety requirements to Kentucky middle schools.

Groups Consulted and Brief Summary of Responses:

The Kentucky Medical Association has been in contact with the KDE and KHSAA about these issues and is supportive of beginning this important conversation. The Local Superintendents Advisory council (LSAC) and others will be contacted regarding suggestions for membership on the group.

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Commissioner of Education

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