

OHSAA continues to grapple with an 'alarming shortage' of high school officials

By: [Mike Dyer](#)

COLUMBUS, Ohio — The Ohio High School Athletic Association is down almost 800 officials for its junior high through high school varsity sanctioned sports compared to the 2017-18 school year.

The OHSAA has 14,060 officials as of Feb. 4 compared to 14,842 overall (as of May 31, 2018) during the 2017-18 school year.

Data is available going back to the 2010-11 school year when there were 16,629 officials – the most in the past nine school years. There are 1,679 member schools in Ohio including high schools and junior high schools.

The “alarming shortage” of high school officials is an ever-growing reality as [adult behavior at games and events continues to be the primary reason for the overall shortage](#), according to the OHSAA.

On Tuesday, the Kentucky High School Athletic Association Board of Control reported a [9.7 percent drop or 405 fewer officials licensed in Kentucky](#) than in the 2016-17 school year. Data from the Indiana High School Athletic Association (IHSAA) wasn't immediately available.

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Like Ohio, Kentucky could see some additions to baseball and softball officials before those seasons start in March. Those officials can also be added during the mid-season.

In Michigan, registered officials are down almost 3,000 since the 2008-09 school year, according to the [Lansing State Journal](#).

The cumulative impact of the shortage of officials prompted the OHSAA to send a statewide media release in January saying adult behavior needs to improve.

"Yelling, screaming and berating the officials humiliates your child, annoys those sitting around, embarrasses your child's school and is the primary reason Ohio has an alarming shortage of high school officials," said a letter from the OHSAA and the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS).

The National Association of Sports Officials (NASO) conducted a [2017 survey](#) in which over 75 percent of officials said their primary reason for leaving was due to poor sportsmanship or the treatment they received from those surveyed.

A distant second was retirement due to age or physical limitations. Other factors included the time investment, money and displeasure over assignments received.

Nearly every OHSAA sport saw a drop in the number of officials since the 2017-18 school year. Football saw 151 fewer officials in 2018 (3,158) than 2017 (3,309). The sport has seen a reduction in nearly

every season since 2010 (3,723 officials that season).

In basketball, there are 586 fewer officials than during the 2010-11 school year.

The most significant reduction from the 2017-18 school year has been in baseball (477 fewer officials) and softball (288 fewer), as of Feb. 4.

Baseball has a reduction of 1,230 officials since 2011, while softball has seen 1,054 fewer officials.

Swimming, gymnastics, field hockey and ice hockey were the only sports to see slight increases in the number of officials compared to the 2017-18 school year.

The OHSAA keeps data on officials in baseball, softball, girls' volleyball, soccer, basketball, wrestling, track and field, swimming and diving, gymnastics, field hockey, ice hockey and lacrosse.

The OHSAA and NFHS say there is a ripple effect with more officials over age 60 than under 30.

"If there are no officials, there are no games," the letter said. "The shortage of licensed high school officials is severe enough in some areas that athletic events are being postponed or canceled—especially at the freshman and junior varsity levels."

Ben Ferree, the OHSAA Assistant Director of Officiating and Sport Management, told WCPO the OHSAA typically gains 500 to 600 officials through the spring in classes for new officials. So an estimate is the state will be down between 200 to 300 officials by the time the final count is calculated May 31.

Total number of OHSAA officials since 2010-11 (junior high and high school)

2010-11: 16,629

2011-12: 16,305

2012-13: 15,509

2013-14: 15,602

2014-15: 14,857

2015-16: 14,586

2016-17: 15,225

2017-18: 14,842

2018-19: 14,060 (as of Feb. 4)