

Report Highlights

Implementation of the Pennsylvania Safety in Youth Sports Act

House Resolution 2014-1064 directed the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee to review the Commonwealth's program of providing intervention for student athletes who sustain a brain injury, as required under the Safety in Youth Sports Act, Act 2011-101.

- **Between 2001 and 2012, the number of emergency room visits in the US for sports and recreation-related traumatic brain injury increased by 144% for children between the ages of 10 to 19.** This increase (from 100,029 in 2001 to 244,332 in 2012) is attributed primarily to a greater awareness of the seriousness of concussions rather than an increase in the number of injuries.
- **Nationally, 14 deaths due to brain injury occurred in high school football between 2010 and 2014.** None of these deaths occurred in Pennsylvania. It does not appear that deaths due to brain injuries occurred in any other high school sport during this period.
- **Pennsylvania's Safety in Youth Sports Act (SYSA) contains many of the key provisions recommended as best practices when states first began enacting such legislation in 2009.** Virtually all states now have youth concussion laws. The three key provisions in state concussion laws are education (athletes, parents, and coaches); immediate removal from play when an athlete shows signs of a concussion; and written permission from a medical professional before returning to play. PA's SYSA has all three provisions.
- **Current best practices call for a graduated Return to Play protocol.** Some states include a mandate for a graduated RTP protocol in their concussion statutes. But most states, including Pennsylvania, do not have such a requirement. A Return to Learn protocol, which recognizes the importance of a gradual return to academics, is required in two states.
- **Schools appear to have achieved a high level of compliance with the PA SYSA.** In particular:
 - **Education.** The SYSA (and the PA Interscholastic Athletic Association) requires student athletes and their parents to read and sign a concussion and traumatic brain injury information sheet. Our survey of school athletic directors found that 89% of athletic directors indicated that they require students and parents to complete this sheet. Athletic directors also report virtually full compliance with the annual on-line concussion training required of coaches in the SYSA.
 - **Removal From Play.** All (100%) school athletic directors reported that their coaches know that any student suspected of a concussion must be immediately removed from play. School athletic trainers were more divided, with 59% agreeing that coaches immediately remove from play any student suspected of a concussion and 42% responding "generally yes, but not always."
 - **Return to Play.** 99% of school athletic directors reported that all of their coaches know that any student suspected of a concussion cannot return to play until evaluated and cleared to return to play by an appropriate medical professional.
- **Athletic trainers and Brain Injury Coalition members made several recommendations for possible improvements to the PA SYSA.** These suggestions, which include expanding the SYSA to cover community-based youth sports, more strenuous record-keeping and reporting requirements, and mandating Return to Learn protocols, are listed in the report.
- **Recommendation:** We recommend the PA Department of Education expand its guidelines for managing concussions in a manner similar to the guidelines issued by the New York Department of Education.