

The End of 9th Grade Sports in CR

Due to budget cuts, the 9th grade sports program at both CR North and CR South was eliminated effective September 2011. To get a fuller understanding of the background, decision, and implications of this cut, Citizens For Education recently met with Superintendent Mark Klein for a conversation about this issue.

The end of 9th grade sports affected teams in the following sports: field hockey, men's soccer, football, men's & women's basketball, wrestling, baseball, and softball. The cost savings to the district is approximately \$110,000, if all sports had been run at both schools.

This year, there were 193 freshman participants in fall sports, as compared to 252 in 2010. (It should be noted that there are also 115 less 9th graders in total enrollment this year than in 2010, 65 less at North and 50 less at South.) According to their respective school profiles, in 2010-11 CR North had 27 Varsity, 19 JV and 7 freshman teams, and CR South had 30 Varsity, 16 JV and 8 freshman teams. Part of the differences in the number of teams are in how each school defines a team (i.e. at North, bowling is a single co-ed sport, but at South it is considered a separate sport for men and women), and when a sport doesn't run because of lack of participants (i.e. 9th grade wrestling at North didn't run in 2010-11).

The decision to eliminate the 9th grade sports program is not unique to Council Rock. The Bux-Mont league, which administered the 9th grade sports program, no longer exists as of this school year. Both Neshaminy and Pennsbury school districts have adopted modified programs this year. At these schools, the athletic directors put together a limited schedule for games with other schools that have 9th grade teams. The Central Bucks School District has implemented an internal program among its schools and the teams only play against each other.

In the sports that were eliminated, 9th graders tried out for positions on the JV/Varsity teams. The "In the Numbers" chart on page_____ gives the participation levels for the fall season, compared to 2010 when there were 9th grade sports. This year there were 5 less 9th graders in Field Hockey (7 at North and an increase of 2 at South), 15 less in Boys Soccer (10 at North and 5 at South), and 32 less in Football (11 at North and 21 at South).

The CR Administration is working hard to establish alternatives to freshman sports teams. One such program is an intramural basketball program for students who do not make the JV or Varsity teams. These students would receive clinic instruction from the high school coaches and play in weekly competitions. According to the administration, students will not have to try out for the Varsity/JV teams in order to participate in the intramural program. Other considerations, such as allowing 10th grade participation, and how students will be informed of this opportunity, have yet to be determined as of this writing. Depending on the numbers at each school, the intent is to have a tournament between CR North and CR South. Due to PIAA regulations these intramural teams

would not be able to play schools outside the CR district.

There are several “no-cut” sports: football, track, cross country, swimming and wrestling (though there is a 98 pound weight minimum). Any student who tries out for another team and does not secure a position has the opportunity to jump to one of those “no-cut” sports. Whereas the other fall sports teams are chosen by mid to late August, students can join one of the "no-cut" fall sports until the first day of school.

With respect to football, the district recognizes the need to prevent injuries and give smaller and still physically developing players an opportunity to play. Discussions to pursue some type of program with a maximum weight limit are in its infancy. If other districts' have teams in the same weight limit then CR would explore the possibility of getting approval for a limited weight team that would play a few games within the JV designation.

The district has budgeted \$10,000 for an intramural program at North and South. Part of the allocation will go towards a stipend of approximately \$3,500 for an intramural coordinator at each school, with the balance of \$3,000 going to defray the cost of equipment, supplies, and other expenses. The coordinators are John Englehart at North and Tim Keddie at South. The Administration is also working on sports funding alternatives with members of the community, the school board, and coaches. This may lead to the creation of a community-based foundation to help fund the 9th grade sports program. This alternative is in the very early planning stages and will need time to develop. However, it could impact the spring baseball and softball sports teams, if funding becomes available.

The goal of the CR Administration is to give students the opportunity to be part of a team. The sense of belonging is especially important for freshmen. According to Mr. Klein, wearing the school colors is an excellent way to achieve this goal. In addition to the athletic teams, he states, there are also many other areas where students can become involved, including music, art, theater, and various clubs.

There is no easy fix to this situation. But by working together with the community, the administration feels viable solutions can be implemented to create opportunities for students who otherwise would have been interested in participating on a 9th grade sports team.