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## Board discusses need for middle school athletic trainers

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Student athlete safety in contact sports has been a concern raised by parents, especially since Lancaster County School District only supplies athletic trainers for high school sports.

At the Feb. 21 school board meeting, Andrew Jackson High School Principal Alex Dabney gave some insight into the athletic training program.

District 7 board member Melvin Stroble said parents have raised concerns when there are multiple games or events at the same time in different sports, and asked where trainer responsibilities lie in that case.

“If you have multiple events on site, the trainer is shared between the groups (different sports), and then they have ways of getting in contact (with one another),” Dabney said.

He said this has always been the case, and reaffirmed that the trainers have knowledge of current problems or injuries at the school, even if they are not physically at every game location. “On serious injuries, time is a factor,” Stroble said. “In the event of a serious incident, the trainer takes control (in high school sports). Every high school has a trainer.”

Dabney said this is because the trainers are not paid employees of the district.

“They are MUSC employees,” he said. “The benefit of that is if I get hurt on the football field at night, at most football games we have had a trainer on the sideline and we’ve had a doctor. A lot of times it’s been an orthopedic doctor.”

Dabney provided the example of this year’s football jamboree at Indian Land High School, where the Lancaster High coach got hit on the sidelines during the game.

“Within seconds, not only was the trainer at Indian Land High School standing beside him, but an orthopedist was standing beside him,” Dabney said. “Because the orthopedist was there, he braced his knee, the coach didn’t have to go to the ER, and he automatically had an appointment first thing Monday morning at 8 a.m. in that orthopedics’ office

here in Lancaster.”

Board Chair Brad Small applauded the MUSC athletic training system, saying his son got hurt at a football game during the season, and the athletic trainers were able to treat him on site, call the ER, and once his son got to the ER, they were ready to see and treat him.

However, this training model is only at county high schools. Middle school sports are not a part of the MUSC athletic training network at this time, according to Dabney.

“There’s nowhere in that model that they supply trainers to the middle school, so what that means for our district is if we choose to have trainers at the middle school, we would have to pay a trainer to stay at that middle school all day long,” Dabney said. “I will say it’ll cost you a teacher’s salary, easily.”

Stroble said the need for athletic training at the middle school level is important, and that the board needs to look at pricing and options to make it possible.

“Even if other districts are not doing it, we can certainly be the first,” he said.

“It’s something we may need to look into at the middle school level, because they do play the same contact sports (as the high school),” Small said.

Dabney also discussed the next phase of the athletic training plan through MUSC called the “black and blue clinic,” which will include the orthopedist’s office being open on a Saturday morning, especially during football season.

“Because of our partnership with MUSC, all of that is expedited super fast and, as a matter of fact, when orthopedists diagnose (the athlete) with whatever it is, the doctors will communicate back to the trainers, ‘I need you to do XYZ to get (the player) back on the field as soon as possible,’ ” Dabney said.

Bryan Vaughn, the district’s director of communications, safety and transportation, said this is a huge challenge, because the district has already been supplying and paying for nurses and EMTs, but there are not enough paramedics to fill the district’s needs. The EMT/nurse position for those games costs \$35 an hour.

“It’s more about nurses needing to be there for the fans,” Vaughn said. “Not so much for players; the players are covered at those athletic events. We have some Friday nights where we’ve got 2,000 to 3,000 people, and it’s hot at a football game. And you’ve got someone that’s 60 years old, and they’ve got heat stroke or falls down the steps. We’ve had multiple cases.”

Vaughn said this will be something that is very difficult to implement, due to staffing and budget.

He said spring sports are the district’s biggest nightmare, due to the volume of teams competing and the radius of fields in operation, but it is something the district can continue to research.

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