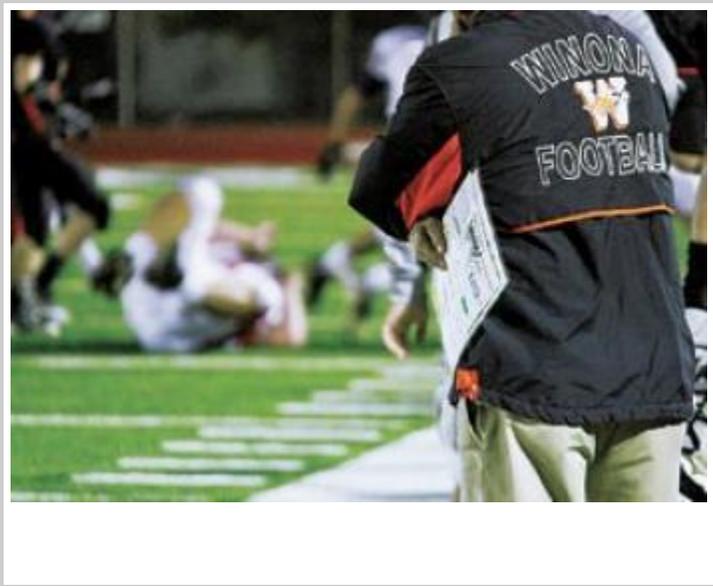


Students miss class time for sports, GPAs still up (12/07/2011)
By Sarah Squires

Winona Area Public School athletes are missing some class time in order to participate in sports, but that time away from class isn't pulling down grade point averages (GPAs), according to research conducted by teacher Brad Berzinski.

Berzinski studied how much time away from class is taken by participation in sports when students leave early to attend games. He told the School Board last week that the geography of the Big 9 Conference often required longer bus rides than found in other parts of the state, often meaning

students have to miss the last classes of the day, and he wanted to take a look at the numbers.



The numbers show that students who participate in spring sports miss the most school with an average of 15.1 periods missed, winter sports took students out of class an average of 7.3 periods, and fall sports pulled kids from class an average of 4.3 periods. Berzinski said the differences were mostly explained by the sports themselves -- in spring, for instance, sports are outdoors and during sunlight hours, like baseball, softball, golf and track.

Berzinski also said he did a GPA analysis that took student athletes' GPAs in earlier classes and compared them to the fifth period grades -- the class period most often missed for games. He said that the highest GPAs were often found in that fifth period, which was likely a reflection of the classes scheduled at the end of the day.

Winona High School Principal Kelly Halvorsen said that along with band class for fifth hour, most high school schedules attempt to place elective classes at the end of the day, an attempt to have less core classes during a time most often missed for student activities. While not every student has an elective class at the end of the day, school officials try to avoid classes like math and science at the end of the day.

School Board member Mohamed Elhindi said it was great to see student athletes performing well academically despite the missed class time. He said he watched his own son struggle to balance school activities with homework, sometimes seeing him up late at night studying.

Part of the reason to look at missed class time for sports is because of some upcoming School Board decisions, such as a new bus contract and the potential to switch schedules so high

school classes start earlier than elementary ones, as well as a recent talk about potentially extending the school day another 15 or 30 minutes.

Board Chair Greg Fellman asked how the numbers might change if the bus schedule is shifted so that buses drop off high school students first, classes start earlier, and the end of the school day were shifted from 3:30 to 2:15.

Berzinski said that shift would cut the hours missed by student athletes by about 45 percent, although if the School Board opted to also extend the school day, the numbers would have to be recalculated.

School Board member Steve Schild said he thought the decision to have the older students start after the elementary students was because research suggests that teens have a harder time getting going in the morning, and asked that the board make sure to look at all of the factors before making any major changes.

Board member Michelle Langowski added that she thought parents also preferred to have older students home when elementary aged kids left for the bus, because it was easier to find childcare after school than before. Halvorsen added that there was some evidence that when older students have a later start time, and parents aren't home to get them on the bus, they are more likely to skip school.

Fellman said that there had been talk of modifying the Big 9 in the past, although Berzinski said that it likely wouldn't change the district's drive time to game significantly. He added that District 861 student athletes are probably missing more class time than other schools in the Big 9, with no other schools in the conference having a school day that goes any later than 3:03 p.m.

The School Board is expected to take a look at new bus contract bids at the next regular meeting.

Other data: student

activities, sports,

provide benefits

A Minnesota State High School League survey of 300 Minnesota High Schools showed the average GPA for student athletes was 2.84, compared with 2.68 for the average student. The study also showed that student athletes miss an average of 7.4 days of school each year, compared to the average student, who misses 8.8 days a year.

A 2002 study conducted by the United States Department of Education showed that those students who spend time in extracurricular activities are less likely to use drugs or become

teen parents. Students who don't participate were found to be 49 percent more likely to use drugs and 37 percent more likely to become teen parents.

Research conducted in 2005 and 2006 by Dr. Feng S. Din, Professor of Education at the University of Virginia's College of Wise showed similar results. His study looked at high school athletes in rural communities, concluding that for the vast majority of students, participation in sports didn't have any impact on their academic achievements. He compared students' grades while participating in sports with grades before and after, showing that most didn't have any significant difference. "For those who did obtain lower grades at the end of the sport season, the difference between the pre- and post-season grades was small: approximately two to three points," reads Din's conclusion. "Based on the evidence of the study, it is tentatively concluded that for the participating rural high school students, their preseason grades were not found to be significantly different from their post-season grades.

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