

PTSA Academic Boosters Presentation Summary

January 7, 2016 Meeting – Guest Speaker Mr. Rob Wagner, Athletic Director

Mr. Wagner joined the Academic Boosters at the January meeting. Prior to the meeting the Academic Boosters had submitted queries and topics of interest to Mr. Wagner, so the format was structured as a question/answer session rather than as a presentation. The two main topics discussed were academic/athletic physical education class (PE) waivers and Spring Break practice policies. The discussion frequently moved between these topics. For purposes of clarity this summary is arranged by topic rather than as the discussion flowed.

Waivers

Overview:

York offers two types of PE waivers: athletic waivers and academic waivers. Mr. Wagner spoke to athletic waivers, and Dr. Covino spoke to academic waivers.

- An athletic PE waiver allows a junior or senior who is a junior varsity or varsity athlete to have a study hall instead of PE throughout the duration of an athletic season. For many students, the extra study time during the day helps balance academic and athletic demands. It applies only to juniors and seniors, not to freshmen or sophomores regardless of junior varsity or varsity status. This is what is allowed by the state of Illinois.
- An academic PE waiver allows a junior or senior to take an academic class in place of PE. A student may request an academic waiver for two reasons. 1) If a student needs an academic course to be considered for admission into a college or particular post high school program, the student may request to substitute the academic course for PE. 2) If a student is credit deficient and needs academic courses to graduate, the student may be granted a waiver. (Dr. Covino noted that this is a very rare situation, and most often there are other avenues for handling these cases.)

Athletic PE Waivers - Questions/Discussion:

- *Do students who participate in club sports get an athletic PE waiver?*
Lacrosse players do get the athletic PE waiver. They sign the code of conduct and are subject to York's athletic department rules. Their coaches are part of York's coaching staff. Hockey players do not get the athletic PE waiver because hockey is a club sport managed outside of York High School. While York recognizes the team and posts flyers and makes announcements on behalf of Club Hockey, players do not sign York's code of conduct, are not subject to academic eligibility checks, and do not qualify for PE waivers.
- *What is the process for a student to get an athletic PE waiver?*
Currently the process is as follows: The JV or varsity roster for a sport is set. The student submits an athletic PE waiver request form. The PE teacher signs the waiver. The coach signs the waiver

to verify that the student is on the roster. The student submits the waiver request form and is granted a study hall for the season.

York is looking to modify the process by having the school rather than each coach verify a student's place on the roster. This is because in some cases the waiver has evolved into a coach's decision with some coaches allowing athletic waivers and others not. The rationale is that some coaches want their athletes to get their conditioning in PE class and want practice time to concentrate on skills/strategies for the particular sport. While this can be valid, the counterpoint is that it is not up to a coach alone to decide whether or not a student needs an athletic study hall. The perspective of a student's school counselor, the student, parents or guardians, etc., should also be weighed. Changing the process should allow for greater dialogue beyond one individual's perspective.

- *Is there data that shows students benefit from a study hall during an athletic season?*
Anecdotal evidence from parents suggests that students rely on athletic study halls. Members present pointed out that many students in sports take a very rigorous academic schedule and require the in-school study hall time. Parents pointed out that it would also be helpful to streamline the study hall check-in process for juniors as it takes up a significant amount of time to verify IDs due to the volume of students in the study hall.
- *Are athletes who are ineligible (not making grades) in a structured study hall environment wherein resources are available to help these students make grades?*
Students who are academically ineligible attend a study hall in the Learning Commons where there are teachers available to help with coursework.
- *Students have heard that athletic study halls will not be offered next school year. Is this true?*
Both Mr. Wagner and Ms. Smith said that there is no truth to this rumor. Junior and senior JV and varsity athletes will continue to be offered the athletic study hall in season.
- *Do any students other than junior or senior JV or varsity athletes receive PE waivers?*
York follows the state of Illinois' guidelines for waivers. For example, York grants PE waivers to students in marching band in season as well as to some students with IEPs.

Academic PE Waivers – Discussion:

Dr. Chris Covino joined the discussion to provide insight and clarity in the area of academic waivers for PE.

- Academic PE waivers are granted for the reasons outlined at the beginning of this summary. Some common instances of students requesting academic PE waivers come from students looking to enter professional tracks in college, and working to fit programs like the Medical Careers program or Restaurant Management into their schedules (These programs take up more than one class period in the day).
- When requesting an academic PE waiver, a rising junior or senior student meets with his/her counselor to fill out a PE waiver form which includes the projected schedule both with and

without PE. The student outlines reasons for requiring the academic PE waiver and submits the application to Dr. Covino. Applications that clearly identify the relationship between post-secondary plans and the need for a PE waiver to allow the student to enroll in an added academic class are seriously and carefully considered.

- Dr. Covino wanted to make it clear to members present that in many cases when students request an academic PE waiver it is to take an additional academic class above core requirements, adding another full credit class to a student's day. In considering whether or not to apply for an Academic PE waiver, students and parents should be cognizant of homework levels that students are taking on each year.
- Ms. Smith pointed out that some parents may recall that York granted a large number of academic PE waivers several years ago when the school was under construction. Given the limitations of the facilities and PE course offerings at that time, many students were granted waivers. York believes in the value of PE, and the current athletic facilities offer excellent opportunities for students to participate in PE classes.
- Over the last few years, a combination of factors including the need to more strictly adhere to Illinois law regarding the granting of PE waivers, the number of academic PE waivers granted has been reduced from a high of over 300 per year to approximately 60 per year.
- The discussion of academic PE waivers led to a reminder from parents present about the importance of mapping out a four-year plan for each student. It was suggested that it might be helpful for sophomore students to meet with their counselors to work through a plan for junior and senior year coursework, taking into consideration such topics as prerequisites, time required for lunch labs, and college admission requirements.

Winter/Spring Break Practice Policies

Overview:

- Mr. Wagner then addressed parent questions about York's policies and procedures regarding requiring students to attend practices, including those scheduled during winter and spring breaks, as well as exceptions for required practices when non-athletic extracurricular (i.e., Math Team competitions) or excessive academic demands exist.
- Mr. Wagner stated that there is no one policy for coaches to follow, but that it is an overall expectation that students at the varsity level practice (and, when scheduled, compete) over winter and spring break. Winter sports have competitions scheduled over break. Spring sports often have competitions scheduled over break. Parents and students should consider this before trying out for a varsity sport.
- In order to give parents the opportunity to make plans, members present urged Mr. Wagner to have coaches post practice and competition schedules well ahead of season, especially any required practices and competitions over breaks. Parents offered anecdotes of practice and

competition schedules changing during season, causing scheduling conflicts with family trips, college visits, etc. Mr. Wagner agreed that to the fullest extent possible, practice schedules should be communicated to parents by the coaches at each sport's pre-season meeting. He also offered, that for spring outdoor sports, weather can be an issue for scheduling/re-scheduling of both practices and competitions (i.e., baseball, softball, and lacrosse) and let parents know that these sports can require last-minute changes.

- Mr. Wagner plans to share parent concerns offered during the meeting and work with coaches to see that team pages are updated. He also asked that parents contact him if they are not. Mr. Wagner encouraged parents to work with coaches in advance of important scheduling conflicts, like college visits. He noted that coaches are accustomed to working with their student athletes, and, with sufficient notice, can plan around practice and competition absences.
- Regarding excused and unexcused absences, at present, there is no standard practice policy across all sports. Generally, each student is allowed 2-3 absences before being released from a roster. The athletic department is working to develop standards across all sports, and Mr. Wagner is currently working with the York Athletic Boosters to create a parent handbook which would outline all of this information.

Coaches

Overview:

The discussion moved from spring break policies to center on York's coaching staff and parent/student/coach relationships as well as the pressures students face to be high achievers both in academics and athletics and the toll it takes on them.

Questions/Discussion:

- *What is the evaluation process like for the coaching staff at York? Do student athletes have the opportunity to evaluate the coaching staff?*
As York's Athletic Director, Mr. Wagner evaluates all head coaches. Head coaches evaluate assistant coaches. Mr. Wagner does not evaluate assistant coaches but makes his way around to all sports' practices and flags any issues. Mr. Wagner has regular breakfast meetings each season with student team captains and solicits feedback to share with the coaching staff. As far as student evaluations of coaches, Mr. Wagner stated that York has included student evaluation forms in the past, but found that feedback has not been helpful overall as it varies widely depending on a student's participation and performance in a given sport.
- *How come students feel comfortable advocating for themselves with their teachers but often do not feel comfortable approaching coaches? Students accept that their parents may need to step in at times and contact teachers, but students do not want their parents contacting coaches. York also seems to suggest that parents should not contact coaches for any reason. Why is there a difference?*
Mr. Wagner reviewed the protocol for the communication process. First, he made it clear, that students should be involved in each step of the communication process. If a student athlete has an issue, he or she should first contact the coach. If no resolution is reached, a parent and

student athlete should talk with a coach. If there is still an issue to resolve, the parent and student athlete should talk with the Athletic Director. Just as students learn to become successful self-advocates in a classroom setting, they need to learn to communicate effectively with their coaches. Members present suggested that it is important for assistant coaches to be approachable and receptive to the concerns of student athletes.

- *Is there a benefit for coaches, especially those who do not teach Academic classes at York, to see what it is like to have a day in the life of a junior or senior athlete?*

Both Ms. Smith and Mr. Wagner agreed this is important and stated that York is looking for all York personnel to understand the pressures on students. Following this question, the group discussed the pressures and stresses that students face from all angles. Discussion centered on the need for students to communicate with parents and coaches about the demands on their time and their ability to manage everything that is “on their plates.” Students and parents have to consider course loads, athletics, work...and be aware of what it will take for a student to meet all commitments successfully while maintaining good health and a healthy frame of mind.

At the end of the discussion members present thanked Mr. Wagner for joining the group and agreed that it was very helpful to have the opportunity to present a variety of questions and solicit his input. Some of the issues raised could not be resolved in one meeting. However, members present appreciated the chance to start a conversation.