

Request to Add High School Baseball Will Be Considered in June by APS Board of Education

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Steve Nelson and Troy Wynn asked the Auburn Public Schools Board of Education Monday, May 14, to consider adding high school baseball as an opportunity for Auburn Public Schools students. The board will consider the request in June.

"It's a great opportunity for our student athletes to participate. There are tremendous learning opportunities. Many schools the size of Auburn offer baseball," Nelson said.

Nelson and Wynn were willing to answer any questions anyone may have on the issue.

Nelson said that some Auburn High School students do not participate in track and field or golf. He said that he did not believe that the addition of baseball would hurt other sports. Cooperative sponsorship needed to be considered. There has not been any formal discussion of cooperative sponsorship. Many smaller schools who offer baseball do so as a cooperative sponsorship with other districts.

Kevin Walker, assistant principal/activities director, answered several questions concerning the addition of baseball.

How much will it cost?: Walker estimated last year that it was around \$30,000. Costs involved include equipment, travel, umpires and substitute pay.

He said that Plattsmouth started baseball this year and spent \$40,000. Nebraska City spent \$50,000 when they started baseball, Walker said.

How is Title IX affected?: Three tests were developed by the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights for nondiscriminatory sports participation opportunities.

1. Athletic opportunities are provided to male and female students substantially in proportion to their respective enrollments.

Walker said that in 2011-2012, 78 girls and 72 boys participated in sports at Auburn Public Schools. He said that puts the district in proportion with Title IX.

2. The district's athletic program has a history and continuing practice of program expansion that responds to the developing interest and abilities of the underrepresented sex.

No sports have been added in Auburn Public Schools in the past five years, Walker said.

3. The district can demonstrate that the interests and abilities of the underrepresented sex have been fully and effectively accommodated.

Currently, Walker said that Auburn Public Schools has six varsity sports for males and seven for females. That is not a part of Title IX, he said.

Adding a varsity sport may or may not make Auburn Public Schools compliant with Title IX. It is the total number of athletes of one gender, Walker said. If a student participates in both basketball and golf, that counts as only one athlete, he said. As of now, Auburn Public Schools are in good shape in compliance with Title IX, Walker said.

Is there sufficient interest?: The 2011-2012 activity survey showed that 26 students in grades eight through 11 said that they would play baseball next season if it were offered. Walker said that would be enough to field a team. He said some student-athletes would likely switch from golf and track and field to baseball. In contrast, the survey showed 15 boys would go out for track and field and 26 for soccer. However, Walker said that what the student-athletes said in the survey may not necessarily mean that they will go out for a sport.

In order to get a full schedule, he said that the team would have to travel, play larger schools and students will miss class. The closest high school baseball team is Nebraska City, 20 miles from Auburn.

Nebraska high school baseball teams are allowed to schedule up to 24 games, including three

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or four tournaments. Teams do not have to schedule that many games. Walker said that there will likely be an abbreviated schedule.

Asked about the biggest difference between high school baseball and American Legion baseball, American Legion baseball players may not receive notice which would lead to scholarships.

Wynn said that the addition of high school baseball would strengthen American Legion baseball. Wynn, who has been involved with the Auburn City Recreation programs, said that City Recreation baseball is offered to boys ages 8-14 and those who continue advance to American Legion baseball. City Recreation soccer ends at sixth grade, he said.

Participation in American Legion baseball has varied, Wynn said. The Junior team has had about 15-20 players the past couple of years and participation has increased. Besides Auburn, the Senior team has players from Johnson, Humboldt and Rock Port, Mo., he said.

As to where a high school baseball team would play, Walker said that arrangements would need to be made with officials of the American Legion and the city to use Tushla Field, where the Auburn American Legion teams play.