

Principal: Soccer would strain other sports

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Since 1996, a group of parents and the Laurel School Board have kept in contact for one reason — soccer.

As members of the Laurel Soccer Club, parents want the school board to introduce the sport into the district's athletic program.

Four of Lawrence County's eight school districts have soccer programs: Shenango, Union, New Castle and Laurel do not.

With 671 students in the middle and high schools, Laurel cannot support another sport, said Michael Krol, principal of student affairs.

"To be quite honest, I think soccer would have an impact not only on our athletic programs, but

LAfter 10 years of discussion, the Laurel School Board and parents continue to disagree on the implementation of a soccer program at the school.

co-curricular programs as well," he said. "We're proud of the programs we offer. They're very competitive, and it's our intent to keep our present enrollment. We feel with our present enrollment, it would put a strain on current programs."

Vincent Belgrowicz, the president of the Laurel Soccer Club, said he asked for the board's permission for seven girls to play on Ellwood City's high school soccer team.

"The girls requesting this have

been playing from an early age," he said. "It would be unfortunate to stop them from continuing to participate in the sport."

Belgrowicz added that the girls' parents, along with the Laurel Soccer Club, would be willing to discuss sharing the expenses and would provide any transportation required.

In response, Krol said the girls couldn't join the team because of transportation, liability and budget issues that would need to be worked out with Ellwood City.

With 200 students participating in sports at Laurel, Krol said there isn't enough interest for soccer.

"Our enrollment cannot support another interscholastic team," he said. "The administration and school board realize that when you accept a program like soccer,

you are looking at more than one program, including varsity, junior varsity and junior high teams.

Belgrowicz said there is more than enough student interest.

"Last year, the Laurel Soccer Club had more soccer players registered than Neshannock, Wilmington and Mohawk — all schools with established high school soccer programs," he said.

A survey conducted by the National Federation of State High School Associations reported that for the 2004-05 school year, soccer was ranked fourth in school participation with more than 870,000 players.

Krol said the last sport added to the district's athletic program was girls softball in the late 1990s.

Last school year, slow and fast pitch softball combined ranked

seventh overall, with more than 378,000 girls and boys participating, the survey reported.

Although the school board does not want to bring soccer into the district, school board president Timothy Redfoot said the members will keep it in mind.

Belgrowicz said the school board doesn't realize what soccer could do for other athletic programs.

"Our athletic director, Donald Nogay, as well as our football coaches should be the first ones on the bandwagon wanting soccer in Laurel," he said. "It would aid in our chances of winning a title.

"We all know that many of our kickers on the Laurel football team have come from soccer and benefited from the training they received."