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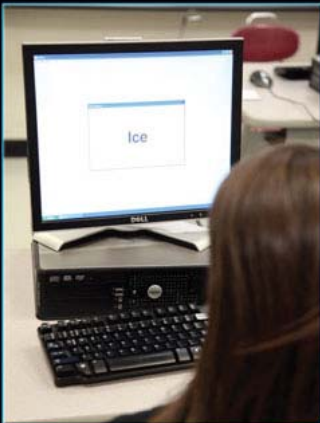
## Ridgewood High School Making an Impact

Written by Amanda Balionis

### New Jersey - Articles



# Ridgewood High School



Story By: **Amanda Balionis**  
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When it comes to concussion testing, Ridgewood High School is well ahead of the curve. They have been testing student-athletes for concussions that are involved in contact sports for the last four years, and, starting this spring have started to test middle school athletes. Nick Nicolaides, Ridgewood's head athletic trainer, says it may be even more important to test middle school athletes than the high school athletes.

"First of all, the younger athletes' brains are not nearly as developed as the kids on in high school, so concussions are even more dangerous for them," says Nicolaides. "And second, trainers aren't on the sidelines of every game in middle school like we are in high school, so we don't always see what happens."

The computer program that is used by Ridgewood, as well as over 200 other schools in New Jersey, is called the ImPACT Test, a program that was developed in 2005. The test creates a baseline for a student before they suffer a head injury by measuring their attention, memory, processing speed and reaction time. If the athlete suffers a head injury, trainers will test the athlete again, and the computer will determine if their measurements are comparable to their pre-injury testing. If the results are not within the acceptable range, trainers will continue to test the athlete until they are cleared by the program.

So far, over 100 middle school students have taken advantage of the testing, as well as over 700 high school students. These are the athletes only involved in spring sports. Within the next couple of weeks, Nicolaides and his training staff hope to open up testing to the fall and winter sport athletes as well.

In the last year, the topic of concussions and athletes has turned into a hot-button issue, starting with the National Football League, and trickling down to the early stages of competition. The NFL revealed a study from 2009 showing that players will do anything to get back into the game. 150 players were asked about their return to football after a concussion, and one-fifth of those players admitted to lying about remaining symptoms to get back on the field earlier. As shocking as these numbers are, the omissions don't just

# Making An **ImPACT**

happen at the most elite level of athletics.

"ImPACT is so important to us now," explains Nicholaides. "Before, we had to take the athlete's word that they weren't experiencing any symptoms, and some of them would lie, but now we have an objective way to determine if they can return to their sport."

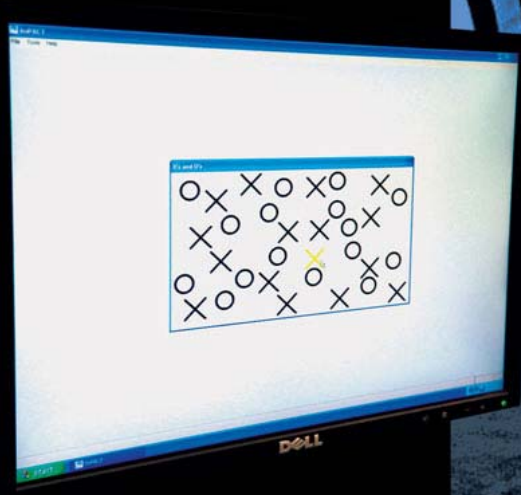
Ridgewood High School decided to start using ImPACT four years ago, when the state of New Jersey offered grant money to the first 100 schools that implemented the ImPACT program. "We really jumped on that," says Nicholaides, "we received grant money for the first three years from the government, and when that ran out our school decided to fund the program for the next three years. They understand how important it is for our students."

The middle school testing however took a little more time to develop. Parents were constantly coming up to Nicholaides asking for their middle school athletes to be tested, but the high school just didn't have the means to accommodate the students. Then, one of the parents suggested that the middle school testing be turned into a fundraiser, and all the proceeds would go to the training room.

"I thought that the fundraiser was a great idea," said Nicholaides. "And I told the parents I would do them one better by also adding educational sessions to the parents and students about head injuries and how to deal with concussions."

While the students get tested, Nicholaides gives the parents a short seminar on concussions and also gives them informational packets. The students are also shown videos so they understand how important it is to take care of a head injury. So far, the middle school program has raised over \$2,000 for the Ridgewood High School training room. This money will buy new rehabbing materials and equipment.

"Basically, the money that is raised is going right back to the students who received the testing," said Nicholaides. With over 2,000 Ridgewood students participating in athletics between high school and middle school, Nick Nicholaides and his training staff are ensuring safety and peace of mind to an entire Ridgewood community. **LA**





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