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KEN-TON SCHOOLS

Ken-Ton plans to offer girls varsity ice hockey next year

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NEWS STAFF REPORTER

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The Ken-Ton School District is prepared to offer varsity ice hockey for girls next year, provided there is enough competition to form a league.

At Tuesday night's School Board work session, the district's athletic director said he would include the program as long as five other districts commit, as well.

"If all goes as planned, my intention, at this point, is to include girls hockey in my [budget] proposal," said Brett Banker. The estimated cost is \$24,500 per district, although Banker said he thinks that figure is on the high side.

Earlier this year, Banker was among a committee of athletic directors from several school districts that recommended a regional girls varsity ice hockey league be launched in the 2010-11 school year. The committee also recommended that interested school districts prepare by fielding intradistrict games, scrimmages and clinics this school year.

Already, the Williamsville School District and the Monsignor Martin Athletic Association, which comprises local Catholic and private schools, have agreed to field teams. "In addition to us, there are three or four other districts that seem to be moving in that direction," Banker said.

Three open skates will be held — the first is Oct. 26 — for interested girls in grades six through 11. Banker said he will organize those sessions with William Pavone, a Ken-Ton parent and member of Girls 4 Varsity Ice Hockey, a parents group representing several school districts.

Girls in seventh and eighth grades can be considered for the teams, the committee recommended, because it is not a contact sport and girls mature faster than boys.

Jim Simmons, another Ken-Ton parent, previously appeared before the board to lobby for the program. Tuesday, his daughter, Grace, stepped up to the microphone.

“I’m very excited that it’s . . . closer and closer to happening. I’m getting ready to try out,” she said. “Thank you for your support.”

Thomas J. Noonan, the board’s vice president, spoke enthusiastically about the prospect of the team hitting the ice next year.

“I think it’s a great opportunity for students in our district to have this chance to play ice hockey at the high school level. I would love to be able to fund this for our students,” Noonan said.

While the \$24,500 price tag includes uniforms and helmets, it’s generally assumed that players would provide their own equipment otherwise — based on their years of participation in youth and other leagues. But accommodations would be made for those without gear.

“We don’t, in any sport, turn away any student athlete on [ability] to buy equipment,” Banker said. “We would find a way to help.”

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