

Delegation Submission from Tony Whelan for the 2024-04-30 Student Achievement (SAWB) Meeting

Dear trustees and staff of Toronto Catholic district school board.

I would like to present to you a handout with five articles from various sources about chronic traumatic encephalopathy, or CTE. One article from the University of Rochester measured students' brains before and after a season of play and found that "more than two thirds of them showed changes to the integrity of the white matter of their midbrains." Scientists suggest that it does not require a concussion to acquire CTE. This disease causes anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation. When this was in the news (PBS did a documentary, and the movie *Concussion*) the Star had a headline that read, "Football kills, but nobody really cares" (Oct 14, 2013) The Globe read "OK, we get it: football kills. Now what time is the game on?"

School football is particularly problematic. There was an article by two doctors in the American Journal of Bioethics specifically about this, entitled Medical Ethics and *School* Football. In schools there is peer pressure and appeals to "school spirit". I have found in my research that there are far more deaths and serious injuries in school football.

The fact that this is discussed in a journal of bioethics is itself proof that this is a legitimate ethical issue. The question now is, where would we fall as Catholic Educators in this debate.

Our church put out a document on sports in 2018 – *Giving the Best of Yourself*. It has much praise for sport and its place in education and I agree with all of it. It also has a section entitled *The Debasement of the Body*, where it mentions football. It references this book, *Out of Their League*. It is a powerful read. This game is incredibly bad for your body. It doesn't even include the new science we now have about CTE. This document says that we should put the dignity and well-being of the person first.

Why don't we start doing that? I love the fact that your motto calls you to witness, faith, innovation and action. This innovative action would require courage. Nothing ever changes without courage and passion. We must have more than a duty to protect our youth – we must have a passion to protect – like the passion of a bear for her cubs. There is so much fear about what might happen – we are called to be motivated by love, not fear.

And if you believe we need violent sports – then please show up for debate. Let's not fear the truth. Let's not fear change. Some people are true witnesses to faith, innovation and action. Ted Schmidt wrote of this very issue in 1979.