



INFORMATION

Facts on Title IX and Career & Technical Education

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 is a federal law barring sex discrimination in education programs, including career and technical education programs such as vocational training, internships, and apprenticeship programs. Title IX requires schools and colleges receiving federal funds to give women and girls an equal chance to succeed in career education and to treat female students equally when it comes to recruiting, counseling and treatment in the classroom.

Career Education, or vo-tech, as it has been called in the past is not just shop and auto mechanics class anymore. Today, school systems have revamped the vocational school model of the past to encompass learning about the latest technologies, such as computer circuitry and robotics. School districts are even offering programs such as industry-sponsored certification courses from Cisco Systems and Microsoft, and career-focused academies for students.

Despite the promise of these programs, the career education opportunities for women and girls remain limited. Young women in these programs tend to remain clustered in traditionally female classes like child development, healthcare, and cosmetology, while their male peers are moving ahead in high-paying trades and high-technology fields. Enrollment numbers look like statistics from the 70's, not the 21st century. For example, Connecticut's high school carpentry, electronics and automotive programs are 85% male, of the fashion technology and hairdressing programs are 96% female. In New York City, 13 of 18 vocational schools are more than 70% either male or female.

Unfortunately, far too many schools do little to broaden girls' career aspirations, and in fact, even limit them. Counselors and teachers often rely on gender stereotypes to steer girls toward traditional female lines of work and away from traditionally male programs like computer aided design classes. This has a huge impact on women's economic security, for women working in non-traditional fields typically earn 20 to 30 percent more than women working in traditionally female jobs.

In addition to gender-biased or limited counseling and recruiting, sex discrimination takes the form of sexual harassment, and mistreatment in the classroom – all of which steer female students away from non-traditional areas. Stories of sex discrimination come from all over: a counselor in Maine discouraged girls from non-traditional programs because “young ladies don't like to do the dirty or heavy work;” a teacher in Michigan would only allow female students to operate equipment if they had a male student supervising them; and a male student in a computer class in Hawaii created computer-generated, pornographic pictures of a female classmate and circulated them in class.

These old patterns of sex segregation threaten to leave girls behind in the new economy. Nationwide, girls are less than 17% of those who take introductory-level AP computer science exams, and less than 11% of those who take advanced computer science exams. Even in one of the richest counties in America, Fairfax County, Virginia, girls are only 5% of the students in design and technology courses and 13% of those in computer tech/electronic courses.

As technology plays a greater role in our economy, schools and communities must take this gender gap seriously. Until we ensure that young women are made aware of non-traditional alternatives and, once in non-traditional classrooms, receive equal treatment from their teachers and a harassment-free learning environment, we can expect female students to continue opting out and dropping out of these programs.