

TITLE IX

FACT SHEET

The Battle For Gender Equity In Athletics In Elementary And Secondary Schools

Athletic Opportunities for Girls Remain Unequal.

Despite the fact that Title IX has opened many doors for young women in athletics, schools across the country are still not providing equal opportunities for girls to participate in sports and are not treating girls' teams equally in terms of benefits and resources. Girls, particularly girls of color, receive far fewer opportunities to play sports than do boys, as well as inferior treatment in areas such as equipment, facilities, coaching, and publicity. Although data on gender equity in athletics are not as readily available at the elementary/secondary level as they are at the college level (because there is no federal law requiring elementary and secondary schools to annually disclose such data), the available information indicates that discrimination against this population is widespread.

- Schools are providing 1.3 million fewer chances for girls to play sports in high school as compared to boys.¹ In 1972, only 295,000 girls competed in high school sports, a mere 7.4% of all high school athletes, compared to 3.67 million boys.² By the 2010-2011 school year, the number of girls had swelled to 3.2 million, while the number of boys was 4.5 million.³
- Girls of color in particular play sports at far lower rates than Caucasian girls and are far more likely than their male counterparts to be non-athletes.⁴
- Three quarters of boys from immigrant families are involved in athletics, while less than half of girls from immigrant families are.⁵
- More than a quarter of LGBT students reported being harassed or assaulted while playing on a school sports

Girls Face Inequities Nationwide

Complaints of discrimination at the middle and high school levels involve schools providing fewer participation opportunities and inferior treatment of girls' teams.

- **Arizona:** In 2010, the National Women's Law Center filed an administrative complaint challenging girls' lack of opportunities to play sports in Deer Valley Unified School District in Arizona.⁶ During the investigation of the case, the district decided to add girls' badminton, and the result demonstrated that, "if you build it, they will come." All five schools in the district easily fielded teams, with four teams having over 20 girls show up for tryouts. At the end of the first season, many coaches noted the enthusiasm of the girls and expressed optimism about the continued growth of the sport next season.⁷
- **Florida:** In 2009, in an effort to save money, the Florida High School Athletics Association implemented cuts in the numbers of games scheduled for teams statewide. The association specifically spared football from any cuts, however, ensuring that girls would shoulder a greater burden of the reductions. After parents sued, the FHSAA responded by claiming that the cuts were not discriminatory because football is

Examples of Unequal Opportunities - continued -

technically a co-ed sport, even though only eight of the state's 40,400 football players are girls.⁸ While the FHSAA reversed its scheduled cuts as a result of the successful Title IX complaint, individual districts have stated publicly that they will nonetheless limit their games in the same manner, thereby disproportionately disadvantaging female students.⁹

- **North Carolina:** In 2009, parents at a high school in Richmond complained that the boys' baseball team had exclusive access to the only baseball field with lights, while the girls were forced to cut games short after playing on an unlit field. There were also complaints that boys' teams received greater publicity through local radio advertisements. In response to a Title IX complaint, the District agreed to begin building a comparable field for the girls' softball team.¹⁰

- **Maryland:** In 2006, in response to complaints about the treatment of girls' softball teams, Prince George's County Public Schools entered into a comprehensive, county-wide agreement with the National Women's Law Center. PGCPSS agreed to ensure Title IX compliance by each county middle and high school, including making improvements to the girls' softball fields, such as adding protective fencing, backstops, dugouts, storage sheds, and batting cages; treating girls' teams equally in terms of scheduling of games and practice times, equipment, uniforms, publicity, and locker rooms; and providing annual reports showing the progress it has made toward these goals, including participation rates, funding received, and plans for expenditures of funds.¹¹

team because of their sexual orientation (27.8%) or gender expression (29.4%).¹²

The Importance of Equal Sports Opportunities for Girls

Ensuring that girls have equal opportunities to play sports is critical. Studies show that sports participation has a positive influence on girls' academic and employment paths, as well as their physical and psychological health.¹³

Greater Academic Success

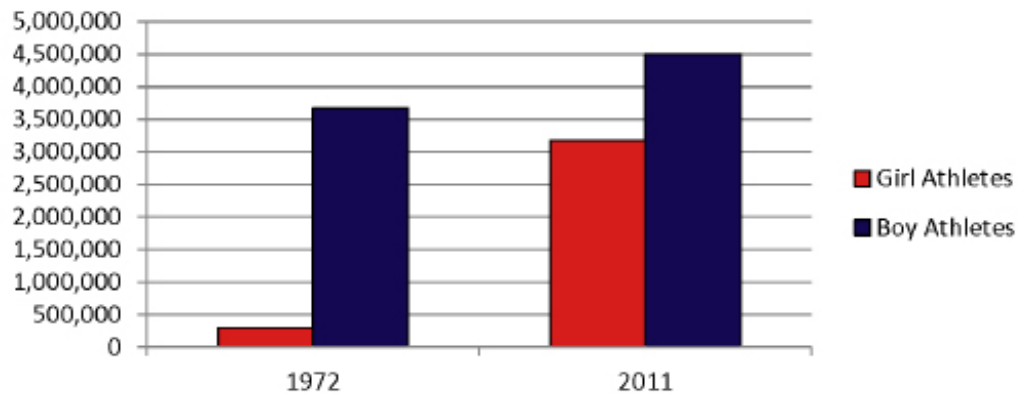
- By a 3-1 ratio, female athletes "do better in school, do not drop out, and have a better chance to get through college."¹⁴
- Young women who play sports are more likely to graduate from high school, have higher grades, and score higher on standardized tests than non-athletes.¹⁵ This pattern of greater academic achievement is consistent across community income levels.¹⁶
- Female athletes are more likely to do well in science classes than their classmates who do not play sports.¹⁷
- Female athletes of color consistently benefit from

increased academic success. Female Hispanic athletes are more likely than non-athletes to improve their academic standing, graduate from high school, and attend college.¹⁸

Increased Career Opportunities

- One study showed that being a high school athlete was associated with 14 percent higher wages for women, even when controlling for other factors.¹⁹
- Another study using state-level data concluded that an increase in female sports participation leads to an increase in women's labor force participation down the road and greater female participation in previously male-dominated occupations, particularly high-skill, high-wage ones.²⁰
- A number of successful women played organized sports as girls and credit their athletic participation with helping prepare them well for the business world: "Of 401 executive businesswomen surveyed, 82 percent reported playing organized sports while growing up, including school teams, intramurals, and recreational leagues."²¹
- In a survey of senior managers and executives worldwide, 90% of the women sampled had played

High School Athletic Participation Before and After title IX



Source: National Federation of State High School Associations High School Athletics Participation Surveys 1972 – 2011.

sports at some point in their education.²²

Responsible Social Behaviors

- High school athletes are less likely to smoke cigarettes²³ or use drugs²⁴ than their peers who don't play sports. One study found that female athletes are 29% less likely to smoke than non-athletes.²⁵
- Adolescent female athletes have lower rates of both sexual activity and pregnancy. In fact, female athletes are less than half as likely to become pregnant as their peers who are not athletes.²⁶ This is true for white, African-American, and Latina female athletes.²⁷

Health Benefits

- Obesity is an emerging children's health epidemic and a particular concern for girls of color. African-American girls are more likely to be overweight than white girls. Of girls aged 6 to 11, 24.8% of African-American girls, compared to almost 16% of white girls, are overweight. Of girls aged 12 to 19, 23.8% of African-American girls and 14.6% of white girls are overweight.²⁸
- Regular physical activity can reduce the risk of obesity for adolescent girls.²⁹ It can also have positive health effects later in life. The *New York Times* recently highlighted research showing that women who played sports while young had a 7 percent lower risk of obesity 20 to 25 years later, when women were in their late 30s and early 40s.³⁰ The study notes that

while a 7 percent decline in obesity is modest, "no other public health program can claim similar success."

- Minority girls are more likely to participate in sports through their schools than through private organizations,³¹ making it even more critical that they have equal access to school-sponsored sports to enable them to be physically active.
- Sports participation decreases a young woman's chance of developing heart disease, osteoporosis, and other health related problems.³²
- Women who participate in sports significantly reduce their risk of developing breast cancer.³³

Improved Mental Health and Increased Personal Skills

- Girls who play sports report better health, body image, popularity, and an overall higher quality of life, compared to girls who don't play sports.³⁴
- One study showed that the difference in self-reported life satisfaction for girls who play sports versus girls who do not is greater than the difference for boys.³⁵

Are you concerned about sports inequities at your school? Call NWLC @ 1.855.HERGAME

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- 4 Don Sabo & Phil Veliz, Women's Sports Foundation, *Go Out and Play: Youth Sports in America*, 14-15, 161 (2008), available at <http://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/sitecore/content/home/research/articles-and-reports/mental-and-physical-health/go-out-and-play.aspx> [hereinafter *Go Out and Play*].
- 5 *Id.*
- 6 National Women's Law Center, *Rally for Girls' Sports: She'll Win More Than a Game* (November 10, 2010).
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- 9 See Eduardo Encina, *Hillsborough County to Retain Number of Sponsored Contests*, *Tampa Bay Times Blog* (Jul. 29, 2009), available at: <http://www.tampabay.com/hometeam/blog/5992-hillsborough-county-to-retain-number-of-sponsored-contests/977/> (quoting officials saying they will follow FHSAA's proposed cuts); Buddy Collings, *FHSAA Votes to Rescind Cuts in High School Game Schedules*, *Orlando Sentinel*, July 15, 2009 (citing four counties that independently decided to lower schedule limits without touching football).
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- 12 Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network, *The 2011 National School Climate Survey: The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth in Our Nation's Schools* (2012), available at <http://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2011%20National%20School%20Climate%20Survey%20Full%20Report.pdf>
- 13 Alex Poinsett, Carnegie Corporation of New York, *The Role of Sports in Youth Development* (March 1996), available at: <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED407376.pdf>.
- 14 *The Case for High School Activities* (National Federation of State High school Associations, Indianapolis, I.N.), 2008, at 7, available at <http://www.nfhs.org/Work-Area/linkit.aspx?LinkIdentifier=id&ItemID=3263>.
- 15 *Id.* (A state-wide, three year study by the North Carolina High School Athletic Association found that athletes had higher grade point averages (by almost a full grade point), lower dropout rates, and higher high school graduation rates, than their nonathletic peers.)
- 16 *Go Out and Play*, *supra* note 4, at 14-15, 161.
- 17 D. Sabo, K.E. Miller, M.J. Melnick, & L. Heywood, *Her Life Depends On It: Sport, Physical Activity, and the Health and Well-Being of American Girls* 52 (Women's Sports Foundation, East Meadow, N.Y.), 2004.
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