



# U.S. Department of Education

## Office for Civil Rights

February 2023

### Supporting Equal Opportunity in School Athletic Programs

*A Resource for Students and Families*

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (“Title IX”) prohibits discrimination based on sex in education programs and activities, including athletic programs, that receive Federal funds. For over 50 years, Title IX has dramatically increased athletic opportunities for generations of girls and women. Despite this progress, girls and women across the country continue to face pervasive barriers in sports, from unequal funding, resources, and coaching for girls' and women's sports teams to worse facilities, sex-based harassment on and off the field, and fewer scholarship opportunities.

Public elementary and secondary schools, as well as colleges and universities that receive Federal funding (collectively “schools”), have a responsibility under Title IX to provide equal athletic opportunities to all students, regardless of sex. Title IX requires schools to effectively accommodate the athletic interests and abilities of their students, regardless of sex, and provide equal opportunity in the benefits, opportunities, and treatment provided for their athletic teams. The law also requires that colleges and universities must not discriminate on the basis of sex in the provision of any athletic scholarships and financial assistance to students.

Examples of the kinds of situations that could, depending upon facts and circumstances, raise Title IX concerns at any education level, include:

- At a high school, the boys' baseball team plays on a turf field of excellent quality. But the girls' softball team plays on a poorly maintained grass field, which has holes and drainage problems. The girls' softball field also lacks proper fencing and lighting needed for evening practices and games.
- The men's teams at a college receive new athletic apparel and gear each year, while the women's teams must use old apparel and purchase some of their own equipment.
- A school district offers a boys' and girls' varsity ice hockey team and a boys' junior varsity (“JV”) ice hockey team but does not offer a JV ice hockey team for girls. The district also provides many more athletic opportunities overall for boys than girls. The district repeatedly denies requests to create a JV girls' ice hockey team even though many girls play ice hockey for local clubs and would like to play on a district team, and there are other JV girls' ice hockey teams in area districts that would be available for local competition.
- Across its entire athletic program, a college awards disproportionately more athletic financial assistance to men than women.
- A university provides funds for its coaches to recruit athletes for its men's football and basketball teams because it considers those teams to be “flagship sports.” It provides no funds for coaches to recruit women athletes. As a result, the school has difficulty attracting women to participate in its athletic program.



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- Women are underrepresented in a university's athletic program compared to their representation in the student body. The university would have to offer 54 additional spots for its women students on existing or new teams for women to have substantially proportionate athletic participation opportunities. Women have expressed an interest in having more teams, and there are women students participating in club sports for which there are no varsity teams. Those club sports include lacrosse, water polo, ice hockey, and bowling—all of which have intercollegiate competitions available and are sanctioned by the athletic governing body the university belongs to. Yet, the university has not added a women's team for many years.

### What can I do if I think a school is not offering equal opportunity under Title IX in its athletic program?

If you believe a school is not fulfilling its responsibility to provide equal athletic opportunities under Title IX, there are a number of actions you can take:

- ✓ **Notify the athletic director or another school official**, such as a principal or dean. You can also reach out to the Title IX Coordinator in your school for information or to file a complaint.

Anyone who believes that a school is not offering equal athletic opportunities based on sex

- ✓ **can file a complaint** with the Office for Civil Rights ("OCR"). To file a complaint, visit <https://www2.ed.gov/ocr/complaintintro.html>.

### How can I learn more about schools' responsibilities under Title IX to offer equal opportunity in their athletic programs?

Please check [Title IX and Athletic Opportunities in K-12 Schools](#) and [Title IX and Athletic Opportunities in Colleges and Universities](#). These resources from OCR are designed to assist students, parents, and school communities in evaluating whether a school is meeting its legal duty to provide equal athletic opportunity consistent with Title IX. More information is also available on OCR's [Title IX Athletics Overview webpage](#).

### Additional Resources

If you have any questions or would like technical assistance, contact OCR at 1-800-421-3481 or the regional OCR office that serves your State or territory. You can find contact information for the regional offices here: <https://ocrcas.ed.gov/contact-ocr>.

For free language access services or resources, which may include oral technical assistance or written translation of a publicly available OCR document, contact us at 1-800-421-3481 (TDD: 1-800-877-8339) or email us at [OCR@ed.gov](mailto:OCR@ed.gov). For more information about the Department's interpretation or translation services, please call 1-800-USA-LEARN (1-800-872-5327) (TTY: 1-800-437-0833) or email [Ed.Language.Assistance@ed.gov](mailto:Ed.Language.Assistance@ed.gov). To request documents in alternate formats such as Braille or large print, please contact the Department at 202-260-0852 or [om\\_eeos@ed.gov](mailto:om_eeos@ed.gov).

*Please note that this resource does not have the force and effect of law. OCR's enforcement of Title IX stems from Title IX and the Title IX regulations, which are legally binding. OCR evaluates each complaint on a case-by-case basis, considering the specific circumstances of the school and its athletic program.*