

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-18-425](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

Research has found that sports participation yields many benefits for youth. Girls' participation in sports has increased dramatically since the passage of Title IX in 1972, but is still lower than for boys. Further, investigations by OCR, which enforces and implements Title IX, have highlighted instances of disparities in the resources provided to girls' and boys' teams.

GAO was asked to review how public high schools encourage equal athletic opportunities. This report examines (1) measures public high schools and athletics administrators have taken to encourage equal athletic opportunities for boys and girls, and (2) factors that affect boys' and girls' participation levels in public high school sports programs. GAO conducted a nationally generalizable probability survey of athletics administrators at 784 public high schools. GAO interviewed nine subject matter specialists selected to provide a range of perspectives. GAO also reviewed relevant federal laws, regulations, and guidance and interviewed OCR officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending that OCR determine the extent of K-12 Title IX coordinators' knowledge and use of tools in its existing guidance and use this information in its efforts to encourage them to work with athletics administrators to help ensure equal athletic opportunities. Education partially concurred, stating it would consider GAO's recommendation in its complaint investigations, technical assistance activities, and communication practice reviews.

View [GAO-18-425](#). For more information, contact Jacqueline M. Nowicki, 617-788-0580 or nowickij@gao.gov.

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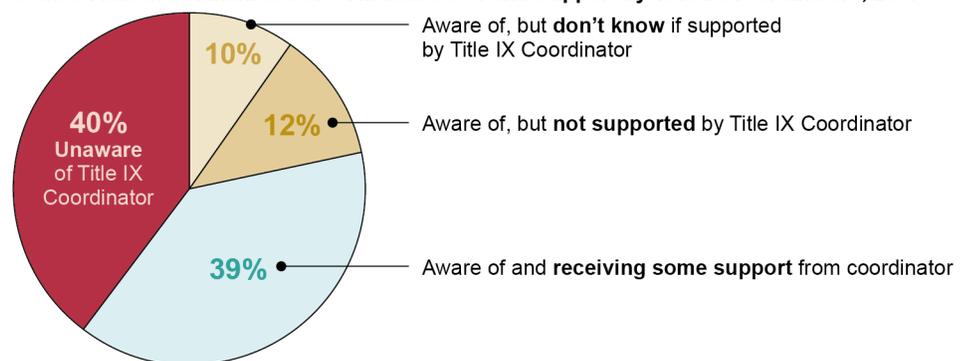
HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS

Many Schools Encouraged Equal Opportunities, but Education Could Further Help Athletics Administrators under Title IX

What GAO Found

According to GAO's nationally generalizable survey of athletics administrators, public high schools recently took various measures to encourage equal opportunities for boys and girls in sports. For example, a majority assessed resources such as equipment, travel opportunities, and facilities that they provided to girls' and boys' teams and some schools took steps to gauge student interest in specific sports as a means of encouraging equal opportunities, according to GAO's survey. Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) guidance indicates that Title IX coordinators—which school districts are required to designate and make visible per regulations for Title IX of the 1972 Education Amendments (Title IX)—should work closely with athletics administrators to determine whether action is needed to address any underrepresentation, or to otherwise encourage equal athletic opportunities. However, GAO estimates that 51 percent of athletics administrators either were unaware of or unsupported by their Title IX coordinator, according to the survey (see figure). These findings raise questions as to whether Title IX coordinators are familiar with and using Education's guidance. Officials from an association for Title IX coordinators said this lack of communication with athletics administrators may be related to some Title IX coordinators' limited understanding of Title IX and athletics. OCR officials said that they did not know the extent to which Title IX coordinators are working with their athletics administrators to encourage equal athletic opportunities because Education generally does not collect this information. Better information on Title IX coordinators could help Education support school districts' efforts to encourage equal sports opportunities for girls and boys.

School Athletics Administrators' Awareness of and Support by Title IX Coordinators, 2017



Source: GAO survey of public high school athletics administrators. | GAO-18-425

Note: All estimates in this figure have a margin of error of plus or minus 6.4 percent or less, at the 95 percent confidence level. The percentage who were either unaware of or unsupported by their Title IX coordinators (51 percent) appears higher in this graphic (52 percent) due to rounding.

The factors that most affect boys' and girls' participation in public high school sports are the number of, and interest in, participation opportunities offered, according to GAO's survey and interviews with nine subject matter specialists. Though the survey provided no clear consensus on factors that discourage students from participating in sports, athletics administrators most often perceived students' competing responsibilities as discouraging participation.