

TITLE IX

Trauma Informed Services for Middle and High School Students

What is Title IX?

Title IX is a section of the Education Amendments of 1972 that requires equal education opportunities for girls in federally funded educational programs. The purpose of Title IX is to circumvent the perpetuation of society's gender discrimination in academic settings; ideally, it should operate as a force to rebalance the scales of justice. While Title IX is traditionally thought of as method to provide young women equal opportunities in sports, the amendment extends to 10 key areas: Access to Higher Education, Career Education, Education for Pregnant and Parenting Students, Employment, Learning Environment, Math and Science, Sexual Harassment, Standardized Testing, and Technology.

In recent years, Title IX legislation has been used to address the crisis of sexual harassment and sexual assault on college campuses. Title IX has become particularly integral in holding universities and schools accountable for sexual assaults that are overlooked or ignored by the administration and campus police. By June 15, 2016, there were 246 federal Title IX investigations against college universities alone.

Title IX & Vulnerable Girls

Title IX's promise of equal education opportunity is important for middle and high school girls who have experienced sexual trauma. Girls are sexually abused at a rate 4.4 times higher than boys and their behavioral reaction to trauma is often criminalized. According to the Sex Abuse to Prison Pipeline Report, traumatic experiences are frequently the cause for youth involvement in the criminal justice system, with 31% of girls having been victims of sexual violence, 41% being physically abused, and 84% experiencing family violence.

In schools, zero-tolerance policies prioritize discipline over educational attainment; this disproportionately affects students of color. For example, Black girls are almost six times more likely to be suspended than White girls and three times more likely to be suspended than Black boys for the same behavior. LGBTQIA+ youth are also disproportionately affected. Students suspended or expelled are in turn three times more likely to be drawn into the juvenile justice system the following year.

If a student is engaged in rule infractions or otherwise disruptive behaviors that are a result of trauma, that student is in need of the appropriate trauma-related services, not disciplinary action. The rights of girls are further violated when they are punished, pushed out, or criminalized instead of recognized as survivors of trauma and provided services such as emotional counseling and health assistance. Girls who experience sexual or physical abuse are entitled to an equal education and when their trauma, assault, and abuse is not recognized, they are deprived of that right.

All federally funded school districts are required to have a certified Title IX Coordinator who has been properly trained to handle cases of sexual violence. The Campus Save Act, as well as the Title IX Guidance, stress that training should include guidance on how to deal with cases of sexual violence as well as how to identify them.

In middle schools and high schools too many girls who are survivors of sex assault are being routinely access to an equal education. They are penalized for their trauma-induced behavior instead of receiving wraparound trauma-informed services. Schools must work with their Title IX Coordinators and other faculty to rectify this injustice.

NOW's Action Agenda

As activists you can lobby your school district to:

- Install a properly trained Title IX Coordinator, who can not only handle cases of sexual abuse but also know how to identify it.
- Provide trainings for faculty and staff so that they too can recognize signs of trauma that may be an underlying cause for “defiant” behavior in certain students, and learn how to address that trauma without further victimizing the student or depriving them of their education.
- Develop protocols and make referrals to services for sexually traumatized students to ensure equal education opportunities for survivors, allowing them to stay in school and recover from trauma.
- Replace law enforcement in schools, often in the form of Student Resource Officers (SROs), who have been known to increase youth involvement in the juvenile justice system, with guidance and mental health counselors.

Sources

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