



The NFHS Voice



NFHS Begins Yearlong Celebration of 50th Anniversary of Title IX

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The NFHS celebrated its 100th anniversary two years ago, and among all the events that have occurred since 1920, perhaps nothing had a more positive impact on high school sports than the passage of Title IX of the Educational Amendments in 1972.

Ironically, the landmark legislation signed by President Richard Nixon on June 23, 1972, did not specifically mention high school athletics:

“No person in the United States shall on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.”

While Title IX may not have been targeted to improving the opportunities for girls to participate in high school sports, the numbers indicate that this historic legislation had everything to do with opening the floodgates. Although sports had been a part of high schools for more than 50 years in 1972, those opportunities overwhelmingly were limited to boys.

In an article in *High School Today* magazine in 2012, Dorothy McIntyre, former assistant executive director of the Minnesota State High School League and one of the leaders of girls athletics at the state level in the early 1970s, summarized the challenges prior to the passage of Title IX:

“That attitude (that girls don’t play sports) germinated in the 1920s and 1930s when a national attitude swept the country that the lives of girls and women would be better – and more healthy – if they played for fun and not with the pressure of winning, intense coaching and excited crowds . . . Girls sat on the sidelines and watched. The Girls Athletic Association and its recreational activities were deemed to be ‘sufficient’ for girls, or perhaps they could be cheerleaders for the boys teams.”

Opportunity was the key word. After the passage of Title IX, the rapid rise in girls participation in education-based athletics was remarkable. In the last year prior to the passage of Title IX, there were fewer than 300,000 girls who participated in high school sports, or about one in every 27 girls who attended school. In two years, that figure jumped to 1,300,169, and by the 1977-78 school year, girls participation exceeded 2 million – a remarkable increase of almost 1.7 million in just six years.

The number of girls involved in high school sports has continued to increase since those historic years, and currently more than 3.4 million girls are taking advantage of the opportunity to participate in these vital, life-changing programs.

Next year, the 50th anniversary of Title IX occurs on June 23, 2022, and the NFHS has begun a year-long celebration of this historic event. The lives of millions of girls and women have been positively impacted since 1972, and we will be remembering some of those key individuals and events during the next 12 months.



“Title IX at 50 – Celebrating and Growing Opportunities” will highlight the law’s impact by celebrating the inspirational individuals and landmark moments in the history of Title IX, and continuing to grow the educational and competitive opportunities for the future.

The NFHS has created a page on its website (<https://www.nfhs.org/resources/title-ix/>) to house information throughout the coming year. The page includes a Title IX Timeline, Title IX Milestones, The History and Importance of Title IX, Title IX Fact Sheet, Title IX Frequently Asked Questions and several Title IX videos.

The most recent post highlights two females who have been hired this year to lead NFHS member state associations – Stephanie Hauser of the Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association and Colleen Maguire of the New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association.

NFHS member state associations will receive access to a toolkit containing a number of materials to involve their member schools in promoting the upcoming 50th anniversary of Title IX, including social media graphics, email signatures, website graphics, print ads, fact sheets and videos. Push-to-post social media messaging is planned throughout the year, and the NFHS will highlight Title IX trailblazers each week, along with Moments of Magnitude that have occurred throughout the past 50 years. Articles related to Title IX will appear each month during 2021-22 in *High School Today* magazine.

In addition, a Title IX course has been added to the NFHS Learning Center (www.NFHSLearn.com), and is designed to help interscholastic professionals understand the history and impact of Title IX, as well as the responsibilities held by schools and staff members to maintain an equitable balance between boys and girls programs.

In trying to describe the impact of Title IX as it relates to opportunities for girls to be involved in high school sports, **Michele Smith**, a three-sport standout at Voorhees High School in Glen Gardner, New Jersey, in the early 1980s, who went on to lead the U.S. Olympic softball team to gold medals in 1996 and 2000 and has been the lead college softball analyst at ESPN for more than 20 years, offered the following thoughts during her recent induction into the NFHS National High School Hall of Fame:

“Title IX was life-changing for many women, especially team sports. When President Nixon signed that bill into law in 1972, it truly impacted the ability, especially in high school sports, for girls to have funding to be able to play team sports. In golf and tennis and other sports that were more individualized, there was always a way for girls to be able to compete, but to be able to bring together a group of girls – a basketball team of 10, a field hockey team of 20, a softball team of 20-25 – and be able to fund it and have those opportunities for girls to play organized team sports, it was a game-changer for everybody.

“That’s one of the reasons why the ’96 Olympics was such a big deal for all the team sports that won gold medals because it’s that generation – my generation – of the youth through the ’80s and early ’90s that had the opportunity to play teams sports at the high school level and then go on and be elite athletes. Without Title IX, the world of sports for women looks completely different.”

The yearlong celebration will conclude at the 2022 NFHS Summer Meeting, which will be held June 28-July 2 next year in San Antonio, Texas.

Dr. Karissa L. Niehoff is in her third year as executive director of the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) in Indianapolis, Indiana. She is the first female to head the national leadership organization for high school athletics and performing arts activities and the sixth full-time executive director of the NFHS. She previously was executive director of the Connecticut Association of Schools-Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference for seven years.