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Transgender Issues

The current national debate about use of school bathrooms according to the gender identity of the individual as required under Title IX raises the question of whether sports managers are adequately educated about transgender issues commonly encountered in sport programs. The moral and litigation stakes of such knowledge are significant.

First, it is important to note that being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation. Therefore, transgender people may additionally identify as straight, gay, lesbian or bisexual. Second, the sport manager should be familiar with the terminology surrounding transgender issues. “Gender identity” refers to the individual's inner concept of self as male or female or both or neither which can be the same or different than the individual's assigned gender at birth and which has nothing to do with whether the individual wishes to undergo reconstructive surgery or hormone treatments. “Transgender” is an umbrella term used to describe anyone whose identity or behavior falls outside of stereotypical gender norms and commonly refers to an individual whose gender identity does not match their assigned birth gender. “Transsexual” refers to a person whose gender identity differs from the person's assigned gender at birth. In addition to transitioning socially, transsexual people may also alter their bodies surgically and/or hormonally to conform to their gender identity. “Transphobia” is fear or hatred of transgender people which can be manifested in a number of ways, including violence, harassment, and discrimination.

The policy positions regarding participation of transgender individuals in sport that are consistent with federal law and expert recommendations are as follows:

- At the high school level, regardless of whether the athlete is undergoing medical treatment, the individual should be allowed to play on the team of his or her gender identity. High school education is mandatory and a bona fide part of the high school experience is non-discriminatory access to all extracurricular activities. High school athletes are still growing physically, cognitively and emotionally and if medical protocols are being used, they most commonly involve the use of hormone blockers to delay puberty (and male physical advantage) until the individual is better able to handle the experience of acquiring different secondary characteristics.
- At the college level where banned substances include testosterone and participation needs to be consistent with such drug policies, male-to-female transgender students taking medically

prescribed hormone treatments related to gender transition should be allowed to participate on a men's team at any time but not on a women's team until completion of one year of hormone treatment. Female-to-male transgender students taking medically prescribed testosterone should not be permitted to participate on a women's team after beginning such treatment. If not undergoing hormone treatment, the student must participate on a team according to assigned gender at birth.

- Any form of sexual harassment should be strictly prohibited and enforced.

Sport managers must also be able to quell the common fear that transgender male-to-female students will have strength and other advantages if they play on women's teams. Research experts say otherwise. Any athletic advantages resulting from higher testosterone levels prior to hormone treatment dissipate after one year of estrogen therapy.

Failure to adopt sound policies regarding the participation and treatment of transgender students can have numerous adverse effects, the most important of which is hurtful discrimination which denies the transgender individual the same educational experience offered to all other students. Such discrimination can result in costly litigation which will most likely be accompanied by media criticism and institutional divisiveness. Allowing harassing or bully treatment can cause additional harm to the transgender student such as isolation, stigmatization, or depression. Worse still, failure to clearly state and enforce the rights of transgender students will reinforce harmful fears and stereotypes, putting pressure on all students to conform to strict and narrow definitions of gender roles that are simply out of touch with the diversity of human beings.

There are two short but important publications on these issues which should be read by all sport managers: [On the Team: Equal Opportunity for Transgender Student Athletes](#) and [NCAA Inclusion of Transgender Student-Athletes](#).

Topics

[Gender Race and Other Issues](#)

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