



TITLE IX COORDINATORS

ESSENTIAL CHAMPIONS OF EDUCATIONAL EQUITY

TITLE IX COORDINATORS ARE INTERNAL staff members who are accountable for ensuring that public schools, higher education institutions, and other education providers address the full scope of Title IX, which prohibits sex discrimination in federally funded education programs and activities. As such, Title IX coordinators play a vital role in protecting all students, both male and female, by preventing and addressing unlawful sex discrimination in school.

In overseeing compliance, Title IX coordinators serve as catalysts for equal opportunity in all areas covered in this report—athletics, sexual harassment and assault, single-sex education, pregnant and parenting students, career and technical education, and science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM)—as well as in employment and other aspects of education. They are the primary resource in identifying sex discrimination, resolving grievances, and providing equity information and training. Their work also ensures that education institutions take proactive steps to remain in compliance with Title IX.

Having a Title IX coordinator in place is not only required law, it is also essential for helping schools fulfill their mission of providing students with the best possible education. Yet gaps in compliance persist, with many schools failing to give coordinators adequate training or authority, or even to designate a Title IX coordinator. With new sources of information to help find where Title IX coordinators serve,

education stakeholders are in a strong position to hold schools and districts accountable for safeguarding students by filling and supporting these positions.

40+ Years of Protecting Students' Rights

The role of the Title IX coordinator originated with the 1975 regulations developed to implement the Title IX legislation of 1972. Title IX coordinators may be men or women. Multiple designations are used, but whether they are called Title IX coordinators, compliance officers, or equity coordinators, the concept and overall purpose of those in this position is consistent: to provide leadership and support in ensuring equal opportunity in education for all students, regardless of sex.

By protecting students, Title IX coordinators also protect their organization from complaints that can lead to negative publicity and expensive lawsuits. Institutional leaders thus have a vested interest in ensuring that a Title IX coordinator is in place and receives institutional support, including preventing retaliation against IX coordinators and others who report discrimination—something that is specifically prohibited by law.¹

AN INCREASINGLY COMPLEX ROLE

While the overarching responsibility of the Title IX coordinator has remained the same since 1975, the challenges of ending sex discrimination have become more complicated as institutional policies and other driving forces have evolved. Many forms of overt sex discrimination have been curbed—for example, women no longer face official quotas for acceptance into graduate programs—but gender stereotyping and other subtle forms of discrimination persist at all levels of education.

Common forms of sex discrimination include different treatment of boys and girls in class,

KEY FINDINGS

- 1. By law, every institution that receives federal funds for education programs or activities must designate at least one employee as a Title IX coordinator.** Coordinators oversee all aspects of Title IX at their schools, including fielding complaints and identifying and addressing any problems or patterns of sex discrimination.
- 2. Title IX coordinators are critical advocates for addressing gender equity concerns** throughout the school community, in areas ranging from academics to athletics to sexual harassment and assault. They can also work with their peers and other stakeholders across schools, districts, and states to implement Title IX fully and consistently.
- 3. Despite clear federal guidelines, many education institutions do not have a Title IX coordinator in place.** Even where Title IX coordinators are appointed, they often lack the training, autonomy, or authority to do their jobs effectively. These lapses can lead to Title IX violations that harm students and open the door for investigations and legal action.
- 4. Recent Department of Education resources offer both guidelines for supporting the work of Title IX coordinators** and tools for identifying and contacting coordinators working in specific locations. These tools can help Title IX coordinators work more effectively while providing students with the access they need to these advocates.
- 5. Efforts to distribute these resources nationally have improved the flow of information** and started much-needed conversations about how to bolster compliance. Students, parents, and other stakeholders can also use these resources to help advance gender equity in their schools, districts, and colleges.

counseling that directs students away from certain fields, biases in allocating funding for STEM research or athletics, and failure to address sexual harassment, among others. By limiting opportunity in many aspects of education, these forms of discrimination can have long-term effects that extend beyond school and into the workforce. Yet they can be difficult to combat, even where they clearly violate the law.

In addition, the role of the Title IX coordinator has become more complex as new issues such as cyberbullying arise, as existing issues gain broader recognition, and as the need to address the intersection of sex discrimination and discrimination based on factors such as race or disability becomes more apparent. In some cases, state and federal Title IX guidance has provided strong reinforcement of mandated responsibilities; for example, guidance documents from the U.S. Department of Education have made clear that schools must protect all students by working to prevent and address sexual harassment and assault. Lack of strong federal guidance in other areas leaves students vulnerable and schools uncertain about how best to comply with Title IX.

As the issues surrounding equity in education continue to evolve in ways that affect both male and female students, the need for designated staff to oversee Title IX compliance is higher than ever. By continuing to address sex discrimination, Title IX coordinators can help safeguard education opportunities for all students at a time when education is becoming increasingly important for achieving economic and social stability.

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DECLINING FUNDING FOR GENDER EQUITY WORK

While gender equity work has become more complex, federal and state support for these endeavors continues to diminish. The years following the passage of Title IX saw important federal funding that indirectly supported Title IX coordinators and other equity advocates through measures such as Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the 1974 Women's Educational Equity Act (WEEA), the Perkins Vocational Education Act, and other federal education programs.²

Funding for gender equity has generally been in decline since the 1990s, however. The WEEA annual appropriation peaked at \$10 million in 1980 and remained under \$4 million a year from 1987 until the last WEEA funding in 2010.³ The 1984 Perkins Vocational Education Act provided the most generous federal funding for gender equity, but the bulk of the funding ended in 1998. Other federal programs, such as efforts by the National Science Foundation to increase the participation of women and people of color in STEM, have addressed gender equity to a greater or lesser degree. In recent years, however, funding responsibility for Title IX coordinators has largely rested with school districts or education institutions, which rarely make it an explicit budget item.

Passage of new federal legislation with funding to support the Title IX infrastructure would enhance opportunity in all aspects of education, thus better preparing students for success in school and beyond. One proposed piece of legislation is the Patsy Mink Gender Equity in Education Act, which would fund training for Title IX coordinators, among other activities.⁴ In the absence of such legislation, schools can



use federal funds to help implement Title IX even if these funds are not specifically designated for that role.

CHALLENGES IN COMPLIANCE

Every education entity that receives federal financial assistance must designate at least one employee as the Title IX coordinator. This includes public schools, school districts, state education departments, colleges and universities, and other education providers that receive federal support (e.g., libraries, museums, and health and justice facilities).

Title IX coordinators oversee all aspects of Title IX compliance at their institutions, including

fielding complaints and identifying and addressing systemic problems or patterns of sex discrimination. To do this work effectively, Title IX coordinators need continuity, independence, authority, and training in federal and state regulations and school/district policy.

In practice, many education entities fail to meet the most basic requirement of having a Title IX coordinator in place. In its investigations of alleged Title IX violations at more than 100 schools, the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) found that many had not designated a Title IX coordinator.⁵ Not surprisingly, OCR has noted that some of the most "egregious and harmful" Title IX violations occur when schools fail to have a Title IX coordinator in place, or when a Title IX coordinator does not have the training or authority to oversee compliance.⁶

Lack of proper training, authority, and systemic support are persistent issues for Title IX coordinators. Many Title IX coordinators are unaware of the full scope of their work and focus exclusively on gender equity in athletics, the most well-known aspect of Title IX, or on one or two other aspects. In its research, the Feminist Majority Foundation (FMF) has found multiple other issues in the implementation of Title IX at the state and local levels:⁷

- At the state, district, and campus levels, many Title IX coordinators fail to cover all aspects of Title IX, including academics, employment, and school climate. In addition, districts often do not provide training and

TITLE IX COORDINATORS AS LEADERS AND COLLABORATORS

Title IX coordinators work to protect the rights of students and others at education institutions to ensure an equitable learning environment. They can also help their institutions avoid sanctions and lawsuits by creating a strong Title IX infrastructure. To do so, they must:

Be proactive gender equity leaders in their institutions.

They should work within their communities to identify discrimination and to educate students, staff, and others about their rights and responsibilities with regard to Title IX.

Have the expertise, authority, and time built into their work schedule to ensure compliance with all aspects of Title IX.

This includes working to end sex discrimination and stereotyping in academics and athletics, to ensure equitable treatment of pregnant and parenting students, to end sexual harassment and assault, and to prevent discrimination in employment. It also includes examining grievance and disciplinary practices.

Work with key stakeholders to build a national Title IX infrastructure to prevent sex discrimination in education. This includes using vertical networks to share information and training from state education agencies as well as horizontal networks of Title IX coordinators that include other civil rights coordinators and gender equity advocates.

SOURCE: Adapted from S. Klein et al., *Reinvigorating the Role of the Title IX Coordinator*. Feminist Majority Foundation, 2016.

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assistance to Title IX coordinators in all of the district's schools.

- Most state education agency websites have limited information on Title IX–related issues or on Title IX coordinators. School district websites are typically even worse.
- Many Title IX coordinators do not operate independently, and few work on Title IX full time.
- Title IX coordinators often do not receive sufficient support in their work to ensure high-quality, systematic, sustainable, and proactive guidance. Their roles are often seen as reactive—that is, primarily as responding to complaints and protecting their employer from sex discrimination lawsuits.
- There is little systematic oversight of the gender equity aspects of educational programs. This has resulted in school-sanctioned sex discrimination, especially with regard to single-sex programs, as well as



inadequate protection of students from sexual harassment and assault.

One solution to some of these issues is to create teams of Title IX coordinators with expertise in different areas serving under a lead coordinator. Reducing turnover by providing incentives to retain experienced Title IX coordinators would also improve their ability to fulfill their role, with benefits accruing to the entire education community.

Resources for Enhancing Effectiveness

To address compliance issues, in 2004 OCR sent letters to all school district superintendents and college presidents about the requirement to appoint Title IX coordinators. OCR and the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division have also included information on the role of Title IX coordinators in policy guidance documents relating to issues such as single-sex education, sexual harassment and assault, and athletics, among others.

With Title IX compliance still in need of shoring up, the Department of Education and other organizations have developed a host of more recent materials to guide schools in putting in place systems to ensure that all students have equitable access to education opportunities. These resources can help educa-

tion institutions, their communities, and Title IX coordinators themselves understand the roles and responsibilities of this vital position.

FEDERAL GUIDANCE ON THE ROLE OF THE TITLE IX COORDINATOR

In 2015, OCR released a guidance package to help educators understand the role of Title IX coordinators.⁸ The package includes the *Title IX Resource Guide* and a “Dear Colleague” letter on Title IX coordinators, which went out to schools and higher education institutions throughout the country. The letter outlines both obligations and recommendations for schools to maximize compliance. It also emphasizes the importance of making Title IX coordinators accessible to the school community. Key points include:⁹

Designation. Every education institution that receives federal financial assistance must designate at least one employee to coordinate its efforts to comply with and carry out its responsibilities under Title IX. This position may not be left vacant; a recipient must have at least one person designated and actually serving as the Title IX coordinator at all times.

Independence. The Title IX coordinator's role should be independent to avoid any potential conflicts of interest. The Title IX coordinator should report directly to senior leadership, such as the district superintendent or the college or university president.

Time. Designating a full-time Title IX coordinator minimizes the risk of a conflict of interest and helps ensure that sufficient time is available to perform all of the role's responsibilities. Although not required by Title IX, it may be good practice for larger school districts, colleges, and universities to designate multiple Title IX coordinators.

Authority. The Title IX coordinator must have the authority necessary to fulfill the responsibility of coordinating compliance with Title IX, including grievance procedures for resolving Title IX complaints.

Visibility. Institutions should make the role of the Title IX coordinator visible by widely distributing the coordinator's contact information, including making it easily found on the school's website and in various publications.

Training. Schools should ensure that Title IX coordinators are aware of the full scope of issues covered by Title IX, as well as other relevant federal

and state laws. Title IX coordinators should also know the requirements for grievance procedures and their role in ensuring that community members know how to file a Title IX complaint.

ONLINE TOOLS FOR FINDING TITLE IX COORDINATORS

Several online tools now exist for identifying and contacting the Title IX coordinators who serve in specific locations. These tools were developed using information from OCR and the Department of Education's Office of Postsecondary Education (OPE). These agencies recently collected and published contact information on more than 23,000 Title IX coordinators across the country. Information came from the required Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) and Clery Act reporting processes, which gather information from K-12 schools and postsecondary institutions, respectively.

Online tools to help students and other stakeholders locate Title IX coordinators include a database of K-12 Title IX coordinators from OCR;¹⁰ the Campus Safety and Security Database, which includes information on the Title IX coordinators at some 7,000 colleges and universities;¹¹ *Find Your Title IX Coordinator*, an interactive tool that includes Title IX coordinators across K-12 and higher education;¹² and a list of Title IX coordinators at state education departments.¹³ The Resources sidebar on the next page includes more information and URLs for these resources.

Given the lack of such information available through school websites and other public forums, these tools are a major step forward in providing students with access to the school staff members who are tasked with protecting their rights. Ensuring that this information remains up to date is an important priority, particularly since turnover for this position can be high.



RESOURCES FOR ACCESSING AND SUPPORTING TITLE IX COORDINATORS

LOCATING TITLE IX COORDINATORS

Find Your Title IX Coordinator. An interactive tool from the American Association of University Women (AAUW) with information on Title IX coordinators in K–12 and higher education, by state. See <http://www.aauw.org/resource/find-your-title-ix-coordinator/>.

Civil Rights Coordinators Database. OCR has compiled names, titles, and contact information for Title IX and other civil rights coordinators at virtually every public school district in the country. See <https://www.ed.gov/civ-rts-coordinators>.

Campus Safety and Security Database. OPE's database includes contact information for the security officer, the fire safety officer, and the lead Title IX coordinator at every college and university. See <https://ope.ed.gov/campussafety/>.

Title IX Coordinators in State Education Agencies. Developed by FMF, this list of Title IX coordinators serving at the state level is designed not only to inform state and school communities but also to help Title IX coordinators exchange information. See http://www.feminist.org/education/NetworkCoordinators_state.asp.

UNDERSTANDING THE WORK OF TITLE IX COORDINATORS

Title IX Resource Guide. U.S. Department of Education, OCR, April 2015. Information on the scope of Title IX, the role and authority of Title IX coordinators, and more. See <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/dcl-title-ix-coordinators-guide-201504.pdf>.

Dear Colleague Letter on Title IX Coordinators. U.S. Department of Education, OCR, April 2015. A reminder of the responsibilities of school districts, colleges, and universities in designating and supporting Title IX coordinators. See <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201504-title-ix-coordinators.pdf>.

Reinvigorating the Role of the Title IX Coordinator: A Requirement and Resource. FMF, 2016. Research findings and recommendations for maximizing the effectiveness of Title IX coordinators. See <http://www.feminist.org/education/pdfs/Title-IX-Coordinators-Full-9-13-16.pdf>.

Title IX Coordinators Web Page. A special section of the FMF Education Equity website, which includes *Essential Resources for Title IX Coordinators*, the state Title IX coordinator finder, research reports, a handout on campus Title IX coordinators, and other resources. See <http://www.feminist.org/education/TitleIXcoordinatorsNetwork.asp>.

Making Title IX History at the Office for Civil Rights. AAUW, December 2016. A summary of the impact of OCR's recent Title IX work, including data collection on Title IX coordinators. See <http://www.aauw.org/article/making-title-ix-history-at-the-ocr/>.

Video (part 1): Sexual Harassment: Not in Our School! A training video from Stop Sexual Assault in Schools that includes a parent interview with a Title IX coordinator. See <http://www.ssais.org/video>.