

The Facts About Trans Student Athletes

FACT: Including trans athletes benefits all students.

The Minnesota State High School League adopted a formal policy in 2014 permitting students to play on teams that align with their gender identity. Since then, girls' participation rates in school sports have increased, not decreased. This trend isn't unique to Minnesota; the same is true in other states, too.

The evidence is clear: There are real problems that harm girls in sports and discourage participation. We should focus our attention there, rather than on creating bigger problems for girls' sports.

People who oppose the inclusion of transgender youth athletes wrongly claim that allowing trans athletes to compete will harm cisgender girls. But this way of thinking is exactly backwards! Excluding trans girls from sports hurts all girls. It invites gender policing that could lead to invasive tests or accusations of being "too masculine" or "too good" to be a "real" girl.

FACT: Trans athletes vary in ability, like cisgender athletes.

Trans athletes vary in athletic ability just like cisgender athletes. Their skill in competition comes from training and preparation, not from any innate physical advantage.

In Connecticut, where cisgender girl runners have tried to block a transgender girl from participating in the sport she loves, the very same cisgender girls who have claimed that transgender athletes have an "unfair" advantage have consistently performed as well as or better than their transgender competitors.

The idea that girls have an advantage because they are transgender ignores the conditions of their lives. Women and girls who are transgender face discrimination and violence that make it difficult to even stay in school. According to the U.S. Trans Survey, 22% of trans girls who were perceived as trans in school were harassed so badly they had to leave school because of it. Another 10% were kicked out of school.

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FACT: Trans girls are girls.

Girls who are transgender are told repeatedly that they are not “real” girls; boys who are transgender are told they are not “real” boys; and non-binary people are told that their gender is not real. None of these statements are true. Trans people are exactly who we say we are.

There are not only two kinds of bodies. All people, including people who are transgender, cisgender, intersex, or disabled, have a range of different physical characteristics. A person’s sex is made up of multiple biological characteristics and they may not all align as typically male or female. Many people who are not transgender can have hormones levels outside of the range considered “typical” for a cisgender person of their assigned sex.

Excluding transgender athletes is harmful and disruptive to their mental and physical well-being, and it also harms cisgender athletes when gender norms are rigidly policed and enforced.

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FACT: Trans youth belong on the same teams as other students.

Transgender youth have the same right to play sports as anybody else. In fact, the Minnesota State High School League has had a trans-inclusive policy in place since 2014, with no disruption to competition.

There are too few transgender student athletes in any given district to constitute a separate league, but even if there were, it would still be wrong. This proposal evokes a long, painful history of segregation that includes so-called “separate but equal” leagues for Black athletes, created by white people who argued that Black athletes had inherent athletic advantages. It was wrong back then, and it’s wrong now.

Further, the logic of segregation harms transgender students outside of sports, especially when schools deny transgender students access to restrooms and other facilities that align with their gender identities. Segregating transgender students in these ways is illegal under the Minnesota Human Rights Act and unconstitutional under the Minnesota Constitution.