

INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENTS FOR TRANSGENDER ATHLETES

**FOSTERING INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENTS FOR
MIDDLE SCHOOL TRANSGENDER STUDENT ATHLETES**

by

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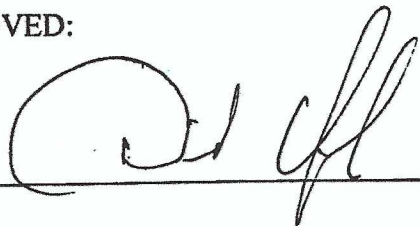
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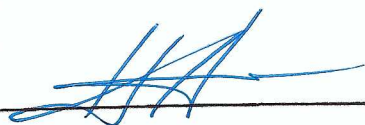
**Fostering Inclusive Environments for
Middle School Transgender Student Athletes**

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Abstract

This capstone paper considers the barriers that middle school transgender student athletes face in their desire to compete in scholastic athletic programs. Many transgender students are barred from playing on teams that they feel reflect their gender identity. Instead, they must play on teams that reflect their biological sex at birth or remove themselves from participation altogether. This capstone draws on current research to identify the barriers to inclusive participation for transgender student athletes, which fall into three categories: physical, administrative, and cultural. Each category considers how current practices often discourage or obstruct safe and fulfilling athletic participation for transgender students. Finally, this capstone paper offers recommendations to assist school stakeholders in working toward more inclusive practices that may encourage transgender student athletes to participate in school-based athletic programs.

Keywords: transgender, 2SLGBTQ+, gender, identity, sports

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Fostering Inclusive Environments for Middle School Transgender Student Athletes

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Athletic programs benefit student athletes in many ways. Pegoraro et al. (2022) stated: “Sport is a powerful means of promoting health, but an even more powerful means of building social capital, providing young people with positive adult role models and mentors and opportunities for positive development” (p. 52). Not only does playing sports as an individual or as a member of a team have physical benefits, but it contributes to our social growth as well. Instilling an understanding of the health benefits and social benefits of sports and recreation in young people is part of a well-rounded education. It is in fact a right under the UN General Assembly’s *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, Article 31, Section 2: “States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity” (1989, p. 9).

However, issues and concerns regarding the topic of gender identity “pose a significant challenge to the gendered organisation and culture prevalent in the sporting world” (Hargie et al., 2017, p. 225). Many sports at varying levels of competition, including the school level, still apply the traditional gender binary category of male and female, or boys and girls: “The sport system is based on the sex binary and assumes that athletes can be unambiguously separated into the rigid categories of biological sex assigned at birth” (Braumüller et al., 2020, p. 3). This

creates conflict for transgender athletes whose gender identity does not align with the biological gender they were assigned at birth. Clark et al. (2021) asserted: “Transgender students... may be denied access to the team that [aligns] with their gender, and then must choose whether to play on the team not consistent with their gender identity or not play sports at all” (p. 1).

Background

The ongoing debate about the rights of transgender people to play and compete as their preferred gender identity is a contentious topic. Kosciw et al. (2022) explained: “These battles in state legislatures and in school boards have sparked local, state-wide, and national conversations about the rights of students, educators, and marginalized populations in schools, including LGBTQ+ youth” (p. 3). The primary focus of this debate is that of gender identity rather than sexuality, which puts a greater emphasis on the needs of transgender students:

The vast majority of research exploring sports participation among LGBTQ youth only examines sexual orientation differences, and very little research specifically examine the experiences of transgender and nonbinary youth. Because of the highly gendered nature of sports environments, it is likely that sports environments are more hostile for these youth than for their cisgender LGBQ peers. (Clark & Kosciw, 2022, p. 97)

Such hostility is evident when considering some of the legal actions that have been taken to limit the participation of transgender people in sports. According to the Movement Advancement Project (2023), there are currently 23 American states where “[state] law bans transgender students from participating in sports consistent with their gender identity”. Quinlan (2023) noted “[at] least 70 anti-LGBTQ laws were enacted [in 2023], with 15 of those laws targeting gender-affirming care for transgender youth and seven allowing or requiring the misgendering of trans

kids at school”. Such laws limit transgender people’s ability to participate freely in organized sports, which exacerbates ongoing mental health concerns. Rizzone (2022) observed: “Limiting access to the very activities that may be beneficial to the mental health and well-being of a transgender adolescent... may be deeply harmful, particularly in the context of added stressors experienced by a transgender adolescent” (p. 125). Despite this potential for harm, many athletic-based organizations continue to use the social construct of gender identity to monitor and police participants.

Sports participation has positive effects on youth development, improving physical health, social skills, and psychological well-being (Bailey, 2006). Regardless of inherent athleticism, “both students with healthy and unhealthy physical fitness profiles improved their physical fitness levels” through participation in a physical education program (Guijarro-Romero et al., 2020, p. 1556). However, Greytak et al. (2016) found, “[heterosexual], cisgender students were more than twice as likely as LGBTQ students to participate in athletic-related activities such as intramural sports (35.8% vs. 15.9%) and interscholastic sports (40.2% vs. 19.2%).” (p. 33). Making school athletic programs more inclusive for transgender students could increase participation in and enjoyment of those programs.

Statement of the Issue

In the 2021 National School Climate Survey, “16.0% [of LGBTQ+ students surveyed] had been prevented from playing on the sports team that is consistent with their gender” (Kosciw et al., 2022, p. 32). Rather than acquiescing to these restrictions, many transgender people remove themselves from these situations altogether, leading to feelings of marginalization. Such feelings are only exacerbated in school environments. Hargie et al. (2017) said: “Given the

powerful socialising role of school, failure to be accepted in school sports cultures has the capacity to engrain wider perceptions of rejection, inadequacy, and even... guilt” (p. 231). Such acceptance requires stakeholders who are comfortable applying strategies that support transgender youth and environments that allow such students to participate and compete in a safe and inclusive manner. Clark et al. (2021) stated: “Enhancing the climate of sports in schools is necessary to allow LGBTQ students full access to school life and to improve the well-being of LGBTQ students who choose to participate in sports” (p. 1). The issue of how to improve the school sports climate as it relates to inclusion and support of transgender student athletes is the focus of this paper.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this capstone is to advocate the inclusion and support of transgender students in school-based athletic programs. Toward this end, the capstone will review and elaborate on several barriers to such inclusion. Knowing and understanding these barriers will lead to recommendations for school athletic programs to accommodate, include, and support transgender students to fully participate in these programs.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this capstone are:

1. What are the current barriers to transgender athlete inclusion in school sports?
2. What strategies and educational interventions can be implemented to foster a more inclusive environment for transgender student athletes in sports?
3. What is the school leader’s role in fostering and maintaining such an inclusive environment for transgender student athletes?

Significance of the Study

Much of the research in this area tends to group transgender individuals with other members of the LGBTQ community. However, Cunningham and Pickett (2018) noted that transgender people may face greater discrimination:

There is reason to believe that trans individuals will face greater prejudice than will their lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) counterparts... [T]rans individuals evoke stronger reactions because they challenge people's assumptions of succinct gender binaries—dissonance LGB individuals do not necessarily evoke. (p. 221)

While individuals from these divergent marginalized communities do share similarities, transgender people are unique in that their gender identity is in opposition to their biological sex. This creates an additional barrier to participation in athletic pursuits that has less, if any, impact on LGBTQ members whose gender identity aligns with their biological sex:

Among LGBTQ students, [it was] found that cisgender LGBTQ students were more likely to participate in school sports than their transgender and nonbinary peers, and nonbinary students were more likely to participate than transgender students... Given that school sports teams are most often segregated by a gender binary, it may be that nonbinary students are more likely to participate in sports than their transgender peers because they are not being denied access to the team that aligns with their gender as there is none, and they may be more comfortable playing on the sports team of their sex assigned at birth. (Clark et al., 2021, p. 1)

While this capstone includes data related to various members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, the overarching focus will be on transgender athletes as “[general]

acknowledgement of barriers to transgender participation is yet to be enriched with deeper understanding of how transgender people experience sport and physical activity” (Hargie et al., 2017, p. 224).

Scope of the Study

This capstone study will consider and review published research and information regarding the inclusivity of school-based athletic programs for transgender students. Publications from a variety of countries and pertaining to numerous age levels will be considered. However, the focus of the review and recommendations will be middle school athletic programs and participants.

Moreover, several studies referring to teachers’ opinions and practices regarding transgender inclusivity will be reviewed. Many middle school athletic programs are overseen by teachers volunteering as coaches. Unless otherwise noted in the paper, the data and information relating to teachers or coaches should be considered as a collective grouping.

Summary

Many transgender youths want to participate in school-based athletic programs. Despite this desire, there are numerous obstacles that make safe and inclusive participation in school-based athletic programs difficult for transgender students. Identifying, understanding, and overcoming these obstacles will be the focus of the remainder of this paper.

Outline of the Remainder of the Paper

Chapter Two will review the current literature regarding transgender youth participation in sports. To address the research questions, the chapter will explore three areas: physical

barriers, administrative barriers, and cultural barriers (Egale Canada, n.d., p. 3). Physical barriers relate to the accessibility and inclusivity of traditionally gender-segregated facilities, specifically changing rooms and washrooms. The section on administrative barriers will review restrictive school policies related to athletics— e.g., registration processes and team assignments. The exploration of cultural barriers will assess social attitudes toward transgender youth in sports with consideration of teachers/coaches, parents, and school leaders.

Chapter Three will first consider the implications of ongoing disregard for inclusive policies for school athletic programs, as well as recommend strategies to support the inclusion and participation of transgender students in athletic programs. The intent of the closing chapter is to offer school stakeholders a relevant and applicable resource to support transgender students in participating in school sports.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Buzuvis (2021) observed: “While sport opportunities are frequently separated by sex, there are a number of reasons for sport organizations to question whether this automatically warrants the exclusion or restriction of participation by transgender athletes, especially in the case of youth and recreational opportunities” (p. 449). This literature review will explore several obstacles to the inclusion of transgender middle school students in school athletics. The discussion of physical barriers will consider safety and privacy concerns in washroom and changing room facilities. Administrative barriers will consider registration processes and team categories. Finally, transgender inclusion will be explored in terms of the culture of school athletics, including support from coaches and teachers, parental concerns, and administrative leadership. The implications of these barriers as well as recommendations for supporting transgender middle school athletes will be discussed in Chapter Three.

Definitions of Terms

To facilitate the understanding of this capstone, relevant terms are defined herein.

- 2SLGBTQ: “An acronym for Two Spirit (2S), Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans (LGBT), Queer, and Questioning... The acronym also encompasses anyone who identifies as a sexual orientation, gender identity/expression, sex characteristics (SOGIESC) minority” (Peter et al., 2021, p. 27).
- Cisgender: "A term used to describe a person whose gender identity aligns with conventional social expectations for the sex assigned to them at birth (e.g., a

- cisgender man is someone who identifies as a man and who was assigned male sex at birth)” (Peter et al., 2021, p. 28).
- HBTP: “Homophobic, biphobic, and/or transphobic” (Taylor et al., 2015, p. 8). This term is used to describe harassment of 2SLGBTQ people.
 - Non-binary: A term that “refers to when a person’s gender identity does not align with binary gender, male/female. Non-binary people may identify as gender fluid, trans masculine, trans feminine, agender, bigender, gender queer and a multitude of other such terms” (Storr et al., 2020, p. 6). People who identify as non-binary may or may not identify as transgender.
 - Transgender or Trans: “A person who does not identify either fully or in part with the gender conventionally associated with the sex assigned to them at birth. Transgender (or trans) is often used as an umbrella term to represent a wide range of gender identities and expressions (e.g., a person assigned male at birth who expresses femininity and identifies as a woman, a person who identifies as genderqueer or gender fluid)” (Taylor et al., 2015, p. 6). While some transgender people are nonbinary, most transgender people have a gender identity that is either male or female and should be treated like any other man/boy or woman/girl. (National Center for Transgender Equality, 2023).

Sources for Literature Review

Sources for this literature review were collected and reviewed during the completion of this leadership program from September 2021 to September 2023. Documents were collected from the City University of Seattle’s online library and various affiliates. Furthermore, Google

Scholar was employed to collect supplementary documents not available through City University. Some keywords that were used in the search for sources include: *athlete, athletic, bathroom, changing room, inclusion, LGBTQ, middle school, transgender*. In some cases, authors were contacted directly to receive access to their scholarly work.

Review of Research Literature

Physical Barriers

School washrooms and particularly changing rooms are vulnerable spaces. For many transgender students, using a changing room can be a stressful time, depending on which facility they are permitted to access (Storr et al., 2020, p. 17). For example, a transgender female may be uncomfortable using a men's/boy's washroom or changing room because that gender designation does not align with their gender identity. However, that same student may not physically present as feminine enough to be accepted by cisgender females in a women's/girl's washroom or changing room. Research in this area revealed that poor access to inclusive washrooms and changing room facilities was the most significant obstacle to sports participation among transgender athletes (Dubon et al., 2018; Hargie et al., 2015). In another study, a transgender interviewee in a qualitative study about bathroom usage described their experience in relation to appearance and acceptance:

I wouldn't feel comfortable around guys, especially with how they would see me. I don't appear that masculine all the time, even though I don't identify as female. I feel like I don't need to appear as the gender norm. So, I might use the women's bathroom because it feels easier. But, I notice myself acting more feminine when I go in there just so I don't

get looked at weird, especially if I am looking more masculine that day. (Weinhardt et al., 2017, p. 148)

Even if transgender students are willing to use washrooms and changing rooms in the course of their participation, “[trans] people are often targeted and harassed in gender-segregated washrooms, and they may be publicly humiliated or physically assaulted for using the washroom or change room. They may also be denied entry entirely” (Hixson-Vulpe, 2015, p. 29). This section will examine issues of accessibility, safety, and inclusivity in gender-segregated spaces for transgender middle school athletes.

Accessibility

“The CHRA, 1977, states that all Canadians have the right to equality, equal opportunity, fair treatment, and an environment free of discrimination on the basis of sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression (added in 2017), marital status and family status, in employment and the provision of goods, services, facilities or accommodation within federal jurisdiction” (Women and Gender Equality Canada, 2021). Students in Canada have the right to choose and use the preferred washroom or changing room facility of their gender identity. However, this right does not guarantee the support or approval of other users. Opponents to inclusive space policies often try to “position cisgender individuals... as potential predators who will capitalize on transgender protections to legally gain entrance to single-sex facilities and abuse others” (Corbat, 2017). However, this argument “fails to consider that there is nothing stopping predatory men from exhibiting this behaviour anyways. The laws that penalize assault still exist even with trans people being able to use the washroom they choose to” (Egale Canada, n.d., p. 6). Additionally, “transgender people have been positioned as the predators who must be kept

away from cisgender individuals, a view that is undeniably rooted in bigotry and intolerance” (Corbat, 2017). Research on this topic, however, does not support either of these assertions:

To assess the degree to which sexual predators may take advantage of transgender friendly restroom laws, we conducted a systematic search of PubMed, Nexis Uni, and Google to find cases of such behaviors. Although the searches of PubMed and Nexis Uni returned no pertinent results, the Google search returned websites for conservative organizations such as the Family Research Council, American Family Association, the Liberty Counsel, and Breitbart, which have compiled lists of alleged cases... A thorough review revealed that only a small number of cases actually involved perpetrators who were transgender, perpetrators who falsely claimed to be transgender, or perpetrators who attempted to disguise themselves as a member of the opposite sex to gain restroom access. (Barnett et al., 2018, p. 235)

In fact, transgender people are more likely to be victims of bullying behaviours, including sexual harassment or sexual assault, than cisgender people. A survey of Canadian students indicates that “2SLGBTQ participants were more likely than [cisgender heterosexual] students to see washrooms (56% versus 34%), Physical Education change rooms (53% versus 27%), hallways (43% versus 34%), and physical education or gym class (40% versus 16%) as unsafe places for 2SLGBTQ students” (Peter et al., 2021, p. 73). Additionally, trans students were more likely than any other 2SLGBTQ demographic to report school spaces as unsafe with a slight exception for cisgender LGBTQ girls regarding change rooms: 59% for cisgender LGBTQ girls vs. 52% for transgender students (Peter et al., 2021, p. 74). Thus, “transgender-related bathroom policies limiting use to sex assigned at birth or requiring use of only single-stall bathrooms will likely

have a negative impact on health outcomes among [transgender] youth. Policies that create more restrictive bathroom options for transgender students will likely create environments in which [transgender] youth feel less safe in bathrooms and in school” (Weinhardt et al., 2017, p. 149). Ensuring that all students feel safe when using school facilities through more inclusive policies regarding their use will encourage participation and promote acceptance.

Safety

According to Erickson-Schroth and Jacobs (2017), “A Human Rights Watch (HRW) report focusing on trans youth and sex-segregated school facilities reveals that preventing youth from using bathrooms and locker rooms consistent with their gender identity leads to numerous health and safety issues” (p. 86). Transgender youth face distinct safety issues in school athletics, stemming from societal prejudices and misconceptions about gender identity. “School spaces associated with sports, such as locker rooms, P.E./gym classes, and athletic fields/facilities, are some of the spaces most commonly avoided by LGBTQ students because of feeling unsafe” (Clark et al., 2021, p. 2). Peter et al. (2021) elaborated: “[Some] areas in school are less safe depending on such factors as exposure, opportunity, the presence of potential witnesses or authority figures, and the type of activity associated with the place, such as change rooms or physical activity” (p. 73).

Students must deal with exposure in change rooms as most school facilities are communal. “[Discomfort] with communal changing rooms/showers was by far the greatest barrier to respondents taking part in sport” (Hargie et al., 2017, p. 229). For one thing, transgender students often do not understand how to navigate the experience:

There was a strong sense of anxiety about using the changing rooms of the “other” gender. Given that changing areas are spaces strongly associated with distinct gendered behaviour, participants had no experience or expertise in what was acceptable behaviour therein. There was a sense of “mystery” and fear of the unknown surrounding them and a lack of sub-cultural expertise of the unspoken locker room etiquette. (Hargie et al., 2017, p. 229).

These expectations of gender-based behaviours apply to both cisgender males and females, though it is often perceived to occur more frequently among males. As Jones (2022) noted, “boys and men tend to face harsher criticism for behavior and attributes that are counterstereotypical than do girls and women. For example, a boy who plays with a doll and wears a princess dress is more likely to be met with a negative reaction than a girl who wears overalls and plays with trucks.” However, cisgender girls are just as capable of exhibiting bullying behaviours towards transgender students. A transgender male recounted his experience of being made to change in a female change room: “I was beat up when I tried to change with the other girls. They were like calling me ‘fag’ or ‘dyke’ and they just beat me up. It was horrible.” (Storr et al., 2020, p. 17). While the victim’s female gender assignment dictated which changing space should be used, their gender identity led to victimization. This reinforces the incorrect notion that gender is a binary system that categorizes people on one side or the other with no exceptions.

Safety concerns also pertain to sexual violation or assault. According to Erickson-Schroth and Jacobs (2017), the main concern is that trans females (or cisgender males claiming to be trans females who gain access to female bathrooms and changing rooms) could potentially violate cisgender females. This is of particular concern in school settings, where young cisgender

females are less likely to be able to defend themselves effectively from physical attacks. However, the school environment is typically monitored by staff members on the lookout for violations of school rules, including access to unsupervised or unauthorized spaces. “Given the intense social policing of bathrooms, dressing up as a woman to stealthily enter a women’s bathroom is one of the most difficult ways to find victims” (Erickson-Schroth & Jacobs, 2017, p. 86). Along the same lines, it is unlikely that a transgender student would have the opportunity to use gender identity to gain access to a gendered bathroom or changing room for criminal purposes.

Supervision of students or a lack thereof presents another concern regarding student safety. Teachers and coaches typically do not supervise students in changing rooms or bathrooms due to privacy issues. While teachers or coaches may briefly enter these spaces to ensure student safety, bathrooms and changing rooms are not under constant supervision. Taylor et al. (2015) pointed out, “When asked what school safety required, almost three-quarters of educators selected ‘inclusion (e.g., through curriculum, school clubs and events, and policy)’ rather than regulation of behaviour” (p. 20). From the perspective of teachers, it is more effective to have clear policies in place to ensure the safety of all students rather than having to police and correct student behaviour on a case-by-case basis.

Inclusivity

One strategy for accommodating transgender athletes without altering school infrastructure or policies is providing students with a separate washroom/changing room to maintain privacy. This may be a dedicated handicapped bathroom space or a dedicated staff washroom. This is not an inclusive practice. “Although creating separate spaces may sometimes

be necessary, emphasis should be on creating safe and inclusive spaces... [Strategies] should be in place to ensure all areas of the school are safe for all students, all of the time” (Alberta Education, 2016, p. 9). Moreover, some previous studies (Murchison et al., 2019; Weinhardt et al., 2017) have indicated that such accommodations do not necessarily resolve issues related to student safety:

Access to single-user bathrooms in school was important to participants; but according to the experiences they shared, it could be a double-edged sword; offering privacy on the one hand, but singling them out on the other. One difficulty they encountered was being restricted from multiple-user bathrooms altogether. Another difficulty was that single-user bathrooms were locked or located in faculty/staff-only areas, potentially exposing students to unwanted attention from peers and adults and being seen as different from their peers. (Weinhardt et al., 2017, p. 147)

Providing transgender athletes with a separate washroom or change room implies a difference from other student athletes that requires such accommodation. True inclusion “provides an environment where everyone feels safe and secure enough to participate in the same opportunities as others” (Egale Canada, n.d., p. 5). Separate spaces only exacerbate the potential for exclusionary and bullying behaviour.

Moreover, transgender people often *feel* like a member of their preferred gender identity even before they have made any physical transition to resemble cisgender members of that gender identity. Even though a transgender male may still present as a female to the outside world, internally they identify as a male. This dichotomy presents its own barriers to transgender

acceptance. In one study, a trans male who had not yet begun a physical transition (he still looked like a biological female) expressed his discomfort:

‘I got to the stage I wouldn’t, couldn’t go to the gym anymore because I felt I was violating everybody else in the changing room ’cause I’m a guy and like everybody else is a woman.’ His internal conditioning of ‘maleness’ was such that he found being around women in the intimacy of the changing room, despite then visibly being a woman, to be an insurmountable barrier, eliciting unwanted feelings of guilt and transgression. (Hargie et al., 2015, p. 229)

This discrepancy can result in feelings of deceitfulness in gendered spaces. This reinforces the separation between transgender athletes and their teammates or other participants, even though every participant has the right to be there.

Washrooms and changing rooms are physical spaces that place users in positions of vulnerability. Improvements to the safety, privacy, and accessibility to students’ preferred spaces will benefit the safety, dignity, and validity of all students.

Administrative Barriers

Looking beyond gendered physical spaces, many school policies and practices reinforce the notion of gender as a binary construct. Cunningham and Pickett (2018) explained, “From an early age, boys compete against boys, and girls against girls—a pattern that continues and is strengthened as athletes mature. There is, therefore, little space in sport for individuals who do not neatly fit into the rigid gender-norms system” (p. 221). This inhibits the participation of transgender students who do not identify as part of the traditional gender binary. “The binary gender order... reproduced in sports organizations and the rigid sex-segregated competitive

structures constitute barriers for transgender participation in organized sports” (Braumüller et al., 2020, p. 3). Supporting the participation of transgender students in school athletics requires a reassessment of current administrative policies and practices to those that are more inclusive of gender diversity, as “research has shown that restrictive policies (a) serve to segregate, isolate, and stigmatize; (b) negatively affect athletes’ health and well-being; and (c) create a climate of exclusion” (Cunningham et al., 2018, p. 370). This section will consider inclusive administrative practices for schools that will support educators and educational leaders “to listen to children, to affirm their self-knowledge of who they are, and to support them in living in their self-identified gender” (Skelton, 2022, p. 251).

Registration

School athletics begins with the registration process. However, the question of if or how transgender people can join and compete in a sport is a significant barrier to their participation (Egale Canada, n.d.). Many athletic organizations group participants together according to a system of eligibility: males are grouped with other males to compete against other groups of males; 6- to 8-year-old boys and girls are grouped together to play with/against other 6- to 8-year-old boys and girls.

Instead of focusing only on eligibility criteria, which can sometimes have a tone of *keeping people out of sport*, inclusive policies and enlightened best practices have the potential to affirm and encourage individuals to *participate* in sport rather than feeling marginalized or unwelcome. (Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport (CCES), 2016, p. 13)

These feelings of marginalization contribute directly to many potential athletes turning away from sports.

Being excluded from activities that many young people associate with fun and enjoyment resulted in young people developing negative attitudes towards sport early in their lives and switching off from sport and exercise because they were excluded or told they were not welcome to participate. (Storr et al., 2020, p. 20)

Most sports participants in Canada play in what the CCES (2016) refers to as sports that focus on recreation or athletic development; participants are simply playing for fun or to build upon their current level of athleticism. As such, “[individuals] participating in developmental and recreational sport... should be able to participate in the gender with which they identify and not be subject to requirements for disclosure of personal information beyond those required of cisgender athletes” (CCES, 2016, p. 16). When a cisgender boy tries out for a school team, most school officials do not demand proof of the student’s gender before allowing him to participate. If a transgender boy tries out for a school team, why should he be treated any differently? The registration process emphasizes the inclusiveness (or lack thereof) of the organization, as demonstrated by this parent’s experience:

[It] was clear that registration forms were one common way that a heterosexist culture was reproduced within the youth sport organisation. As one mother explained: “It would be great to have none *[sic]* gender-based forms... Assuming that all families are the same is not the way of this world” (Mother, participant #65, Australia). (Trussel et al., 2017, p. 57)

As such, an effective way to support the inclusion of transgender participants is to allow them to choose their gender identity as part of the process (Egale Canada, n.d.; CCES, 2016).

Team Categories

Many students across the gender identity spectrum look forward to pursuing athletics as part of their education. Storr et al. (2020) elaborated, “Similar to the reasons all people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity engage in sports and other physical activities, young people... saw these activities as opportunities to initiate and build meaningful connections and relationships, to get support, and a means to having fun” (p. 22). To maximize the level of participation, many athletic programs in schools focus on team sports (volleyball, basketball, flag football) rather than on individual sports such as tennis. This can be problematic for transgender students:

Because most sports provide separate participation and competition opportunities for male and female athletes, and because this binary structure is believed to account for sex-based differences in performance and outcomes between male and female athletes, many sport organizations draw the conclusion that transgender people should be restricted to the category that corresponds to their birth-assigned sex, regardless of the gender with which the individual identifies. (Buzuvis, 2021, p. 440)

Transgender students must therefore decide if they are willing to play on a gendered team that does not align with their personal gender identity. In many cases, transgender students opt to disengage from team sports altogether (Caudwell, 2012; Hargie et al., 2017; Storr et al., 2020). Such disengagement is counterproductive to school athletic programs and iterates the importance of allowing all students to choose their preferred team in school sports. Athletic programs at this level should promote participation rather than competition. As noted by the CCES (2016): “The human right of non-discrimination and the True Sport Principles of *Include Everyone, Stay*

Healthy, Keep It Fun and *Respect Others* mean that everyone should be welcome to participate in sport as they are and in the gender with which they identify” (p. 16).

Cultural Barriers

McCavanagh and Cadaret (2022) stated: “The adverse influence of dominant, cisgender, and heteronormative culture is embedded within the social and institutional systems of athletics” (p. 142). Examples of such adverse influences include:

regular reminders to children how important it is that they be a boy or a girl, and nothing in between (greeting students as “boys and girls,” registration systems, report cards populated with “he” and “she,” separate teams for boys and girls, pink- and blue-coded wall charts); different expectations for student behavior, student achievement, and athletic prowess; sex-specific activity prompts and requirements that students line up, sit, or engage in other activities in boy-girl-boy-girl fashion; sex-specific dress codes; and many other ways. (Skelton, 2022, pp. 249-250)

This heteronormative culture challenges the gender identity of transgender student athletes, particularly regarding how they are perceived and treated in situations related to school athletics. As Hargie et al. (2017) explained, “The normative gender expectations of stereotypical male and female behaviour, as enforced by teachers and expected by peers, evoked a mixture of emotions linked to sport, including fear, alienation, loathing and exclusion” (p. 233). By maintaining a culture of inclusivity in school athletics, stakeholders can help mitigate these negative emotions for all student athletes, gender diverse and otherwise. This section will consider some of those cultural challenges through the lens of key stakeholders—that is, teachers/coaches, parents, and school administrators. To clarify, “parents” refers to any parent who is opposed to the inclusive

participation of transgender student athletes in school sports. This opposition typically relates (but is not limited) to concerns for that parent's own cisgender child and their participation in school athletics.

Support From Coaches and Teachers

School-based sports teams are often coached or overseen by teachers from that school. Therefore, teachers need to feel comfortable and confident in their ability to address transgender-related issues and incidents with their students and/or players. In one survey, 79% of transgender students wanted their teachers to become more informed about trans people's experiences (Peter et al., 2021, p. 126-127). However, while many teachers agree, they often lack the comfort and confidence in the topic to do so. In a survey of Canadian teachers, "[almost] all (99%) participants agreed that "it is important for students to have someone to talk to," but only 73% indicated they would be comfortable discussing LGBTQ topics with students" (Taylor et al., 2015, p. 20). The reasons offered by survey participants for their lack of comfort in addressing such topics "included lack of training and/or resources (33%), student-based reasons such as believing their students were too young (31%), fear-based reasons external to the school such as parental opposition (23%), and fear-based reasons internal to the school such as opposition from school administration (14%)" (Taylor et al., 2015, p. 21).

The lack of acknowledgement by coaches of the possible presence of transgender participants is one of the first barriers to inclusion. Storr et al. (2020) explained: "Common among PE teachers and community sports clubs is that because they are not aware of any 'out' [transgender] young people in their classes or clubs, they have the misconception that [transgender] people are not present" (p. 18). Taylor et al. (2015) found that 48% of teachers

surveyed did not know whether any transgender students had participated in school sports. This highlights the need for further training regarding the presence and participation of transgender student athletes among coaches and teachers. “In order for sport organizations to create safe, inclusive environments for trans participants, it is essential that everyone involved in sport be aware of trans issues, and how they can contribute to making sport a more positive experience for everyone” (CCES, 2016, p. 34).

Some coaches believe that avoiding the topic of transgender athletes is the preferable course of action. One justification is that “LGBT athletes do not want to live with discrimination or injustice” (Viel & Demers, 2013, p. 2). Rather than fighting for inclusivity, many transgender athletes choose to avoid advocating for themselves. However, as reported by Taylor et al. (2015), such negative experiences contribute to increased emotional distress, social marginalization, and decreased feelings of safety for those athletes.

A loss of social status enjoyed by student athletes is another consideration of some coaches. According to Viel and Demers (2013), “athletes are often considered as role models and would therefore feel the need to conform to what is expected of them” (p. 3). Thus, some coaches believe that many transgender student athletes would prefer to remain closeted to avoid sacrificing that role. While this may be true for some student athletes, the decision to live openly in their preferred gender identity or not should be left to each student. Moreover, the fact that some athletes would prefer to keep their identity hidden only reinforces the notion that these athletes would benefit from more visible role models. Coaches themselves pointed out that one of the key elements in helping them support their athletes was “the presence or access to an LGBT role model or spokesperson” (Viel & Demers, 2013, p. 3). As transgender male athlete

Chris Mosier (2019) wrote: “Visibility is important. Had I seen a trans man competing with men, I would have had a much easier time seeing myself in that role.” School athletic programs can positively contribute to transgender participation by maintaining inclusive practices that support such visibility.

Parental Concerns

Parental opposition to the participation of transgender athletes is another concern. Many schools require student athletes to receive parental permission to participate in school sports because of safety concerns regarding interschool travel as well as the potential for related injuries. If a parent opposes a student’s participation, the student cannot participate. In terms of transgender inclusivity, such opposition often relates to the safety of cisgender female athletes, or, as explained by Hargie et al. (2017) to “the dubious assumption that all women require protection from unfair disadvantage through segregation from men in sport” (p. 225). Proponents of this argument claim that the physiological advantages of biological male athletes (and therefore the physiological advantages of transgender female athletes) put cisgender female athletes at greater risk of injury. Such potential risks can only be mitigated by separate gender categories in certain sports, which has been enforced by male athletic associations. Fischer and McClearen (2020) agreed: “Sex segregation or ‘separate but equal’ has become the foundation upon which competitive fairness is judged” (p. 150). However, for student athletes at this age and skill level, “the inclusion of all athletes, based on the fundamental human right of gender self-determination overrides any consideration of potential competitive advantage” (CCES, 2016, p. 16).

At the middle school level, it is more important for athletes to feel included in their preferred gender category rather than being barred from competition altogether. It is also interesting to note that gender is held up by opponents to transgender inclusion as a unique biological advantage, which is inaccurate:

[Other] forms of “natural” potential competitive advantage- such as height, weight, muscularity, or training environment- are rarely questioned or proffered as the basis for exclusion from women’s sports. Women come in many shapes and sizes. If we wouldn’t exclude a woman from sport because she was born with a tall body, or a strong body, or other attributes that might provide an asset on the field, then it is not necessary either to exclude a woman because she was born with a male body. (Buzuvis, 2012, p. 28-29)

It is unfair to single out male physiology as an advantage for transgender female athletes when numerous biological advantages are already not considered advantageous for certain athletes.

Another concern shared by oppositional parents is the potential loss of opportunities that stem from participation in athletics:

The emphasis on what playing sports can do for cis girls’ confidence and opportunity is resounding in these debates as is the emphasis on being parents of girl children. Many conservative state politicians frame their trans exclusionary positions by first discussing their own daughters, those daughters’ dreams for the future, and the necessity of protecting the opportunities and health of girls... Mississippi governor Tate Reeves says, “the reason I am passionate about [excluding trans girls and women] is because I have a 16-year-old daughter, a 14-year-old daughter, and a 9-year-old daughter... biological

males should not be allowed to compete with them for athletic scholarships... [or] opportunities.” (McClearen, 2022, p. 9)

This argument once again focuses on the participation of transgender female athletes who wish to compete with/against cisgender female athletes. Transgender males, having been born as biological females and thus lacking the alleged physical advantages of biological males, are typically removed from this discourse. Such deference is justified by the explanation that transgender males present less of a threat to cisgender male athletic achievement or excellence. Coaches must be well-versed in organizational policy regarding transgender inclusion to feel confident in discussing the inclusion and participation of transgender students in school sports (CCES, 2016, p. 37).

Administrative Leadership

School principals are the mediators who unite the administrative workings of school districts with the daily workings of school sites. Ernandes (2020) elaborated: “With districts being the governing entity over schools, they are of substantial importance in establishing a mission, vision, and purpose. Moreover, districts are responsible for establishing the protocol for disseminating information and strategies for implementation at their sites” (p. 63). As such, administrators at the school level must be confident in their knowledge and understanding of all district policies and how to enact them appropriately. This is particularly significant in terms of supporting transgender students:

The principals with less district structures reported feeling less secure about the protections the district would provide if presented with pushback from parents or other school stakeholders. Overall, the principals who felt unsupported were less likely to

confidently create change. When acting on behalf of trans* students this can be problematic. (Ernandes, 2020, p. 67)

On the other hand, every school presents diverse needs and challenges for stakeholders. Administrators must therefore find a balance between following policies instituted at the district level while also ensuring that those policies are most effectively applied at the individual school level. Moreover, it is the administrator's responsibility to ensure that stakeholders at the school level are adhering to those policies. As one student noted in an interview: "Teachers... seem to be very unwilling to integrate LGBTQ voices into their resources and curriculum, and a lack of leadership on this makes them feel justified in keeping those voices silenced" (Taylor et al., 2015, p. 132). Confident leadership grounded in firm understanding of district policy will ensure that teachers understand the expectations of inclusivity that they in turn must implement and encourage in their interactions with students.

Confident leadership is proactive rather than reactive. Administrators should be looking for strategies to support transgender inclusion in their schools while adhering to current district policy. In this way, supportive practices can highlight the need for policy changes and motivate such changes.

[I]t is incumbent on the principals to create site-specific training so that changes develop into practice, rather than a remote policy from the district office. Eventually, enough changes in practice can influence changes in policy. Once policies morph into change, districts can then support principals to lead their site since principals will be acting out of compliance, instead of on their own accord. (Ernandes, 2020, p. 69)

School sites can act as proving grounds for strategies that support transgender inclusivity and allow administrators to offer feedback to their districts regarding the efficacy of these strategies.

Summary

Sports are an important part of many cultures and contribute to the development of mental and physical health. Regardless of the categories society uses to identify and categorize people, everyone should have the opportunity to play and participate (Egale Canada, n.d., p. 15). However, many barriers to inclusion are embedded in the policies and practices of school sports organizations. These include but are not limited to physical barriers such as a lack of inclusive bathroom and changing room spaces, and administrative barriers such as strict gender categories on official documents and a lack of training in inclusive practices for coaches. This literature review moves the discourse of transgender student athlete participation forward. Cunningham et al. (2018) observed: “Such discourse is important because of the ramifications for people’s health and well-being—transgender and cisgender people alike—legal implications, and access to sport and physical activity” (p. 371). Numerous studies have found that being barred from participating in school sports resulted in negative attitudes towards sports and a lack of participation (McClearn, 2022; Pegoraro et al., 2022; Storr et al., 2020). Such negativity is in direct opposition to the nature of sports participation:

Sport, at its best, balances a series of principles to create a fair, safe, inclusive and open environment. Depending on the level of sport, these principles need to exist in different degrees and proportions. Creating good sport policy is about finding a balance between these principles while keeping all of them present in a way that makes sport a positive experience for everyone. (CCES, 2016, p. 7)

It is in recognizing the need for more inclusivity in school athletics and in acknowledging the barriers to such inclusion that effective strategies and changes to policy and practice may be considered.

Chapter 3: Summary, Recommendations and Conclusion

Summary of Findings

The previous chapter demonstrated that many transgender student athletes are unable to participate in school athletic activities in a manner that aligns with their gender identity. This includes not being allowed to freely access gendered school spaces that best suit their gender identity, as well as school policies that discriminate against their gender identity. This chapter will consider how this lack of inclusion may affect various stakeholders in the education system. Furthermore, it will consider and recommend strategies for fostering more inclusive policies and practices as the education system continues to evolve and grow. The role of the administrator as liaison between school-level stakeholders and the district is of particular significance. As such, recommendations for administrative plans and action will be offered.

Implications

Students

The visibility and subsequent desire for inclusivity of transgender students and athletes in the school system continues to grow. Román (2021) stated that “transgender athletes and their allies are not trying to destroy... sports teams as we know it. Rather, they are asking for inclusion and camaraderie amongst their fellow athletes” (p. 244). However, research has demonstrated that many transgender students do not feel safe living as their authentic selves in school. In many cases, school authorities have policies that bar transgender students from doing so (Martino et al., 2022; Murchison et al., 2019; Román, 2021). This lack of inclusion is reinforced by gendered physical spaces that many students are made to use or are restricted from using. This lack of

inclusivity impacts the school experience of transgender students in many ways, including emotional distress, compromised sense of safety, poorer school attendance, and lack of social connectedness to their school (Kosciw et al., 2022; Peter et al, 2021).

Emotional distress occurs when a person's sense of emotional well-being is compromised. For many transgender student athletes, the school environment is a place with more negative elements that detract from their emotional well-being than positive elements (Storr et al., 2020). This highlights the significance of inclusive policies in middle school athletic programs. By focusing on positive experiences and emotions through inclusion, the emotional well-being of all student athletes, including trans student athletes, can be safeguarded from unnecessary distress.

For students, a sense of safety in school depends not only on protection from elements outside of the school but also elements within the school itself. Many students deal with incidents of bullying and harassment in school environments (Campbell & Taylor, 2021; Kosciw et al., 2022). However, due in part to their observations of ineffective supervisory support, transgender students are less likely than cisgender students to report such incidents. This demonstrates the need for clear and consistent anti-harassment policies in schools, as well as teacher training on when and how to intervene in incidents of harassment. As noted by Martino et al. (2020), "normalisation needs to be conceived as part of a broader commitment to integrating trans affirmative and gender expansive education that attends to crucial questions of cisnormativity and cisgenderism irrespective of the embodied presence of a trans student in the classroom" (p. 764). While it is difficult to eliminate verbal harassment from the school

environment, interventions by teachers and staff members are an important part of promoting a sense of safety in the school.

When a student's sense of safety is sufficiently compromised, it may result in unexcused absences from school (Kosciw et al., 2022; Peter et al., 2021). Absent students cannot participate in school athletics, and absences can also affect a team's potential to compete effectively. Promoting safe policies and practices in the school environment encourages participation for all students, particularly those with diverse gender identities.

“Social connectedness is the converse of social isolation, a feeling of belonging to a community and sharing a bond with others in that community” (Peter et al., 2021). For many transgender student athletes, the culture of sports in schools can exacerbate these negative experiences. Inclusive practices are an opportunity to reinforce social connectedness between the school and all students. This reiterates the importance of inclusive practices that celebrate every stakeholder's connection to the school community.

When discussing student athletes, it is notable that the word *student* comes first. Regardless of whether they choose to participate in school sports, all students are primarily members of the school community. Whether and how effectively student athletes are supported by that community influences their experiences in that community as well as their feelings towards it. Therefore, a positive experience for the athlete starts with ensuring a positive experience for the student.

Teachers and Coaches

In the field of education, teachers and coaches recognize that transgender students deal with issues of harassment and exclusion, as do many cisgender students. Taylor et al. (2015)

pointed out that, “50% of educators reported that they were aware of students being verbally harassed for being perceived as LGB, and 23% of their being physically harassed. Further, 35% reported that they were aware of heterosexual students who had experienced homophobic harassment” (p. 39). They consider the lack of inclusivity in schools and school athletics to be a problem for transgender students. Teachers and coaches also agree that inclusive education is appropriate and important (Greytak et al., 2016; Taylor et al., 2015). However, integrating inclusive strategies into their current practice poses a greater challenge, though this is often a self-imposed challenge rather than an actual issue with district policy. An interviewee in Taylor et al. (2015) said, “the biggest barriers for teachers addressing LGBTQ issues are not any formal barriers, but rather their own perceptions and attitudes, which spread from one teacher to another—fears of getting ‘in trouble’, or having parents complain seem to be a major barrier” (p. 124).

Teachers and coaches are not always aware of the presence of transgender students on school teams. As Viel and Demers (2013) explained, “Some coaches said they do not know any LGBT athletes, particularly males, who have come out. Given the non-inclusive environment in sport, it is understandable, according to the coaches, that athletes choose not to come out” (p. 2). As such, they may forgo more inclusive practices without taking time to gauge the level of comfort and support each athlete has with such strategies. They may even implicitly encourage trans student athletes to keep their gender identity hidden for fear of being seen and treated differently by their teammates or coaches. Instituting and mandating inclusive practices for teachers and coaches to follow and apply may reassure transgender students that they are an integral part of the team (CCES, 2016; Storr et al., 2020). Moreover, this ensures that teachers

and coaches will model inclusive behaviours for cisgender student athletes and encourage them to act inclusively as well.

Teachers and coaches may also be unfamiliar with the school and/or district policies they are expected to follow. A lack of professional development related to inclusivity may result in teachers not fully understanding what actions they should take when presented with a transgender student athlete. According to Taylor et al. (2015), 74% of Canadian educators were unclear on whether to include instruction about 2SLGBTQ+ issues in their schools (p. 138). Teachers and coaches who are unaware of their student support options may contribute to those students' feelings of exclusion from teams and school programs. This may reinforce the notion that transgender students need to keep their true gender identity a secret, which may in turn reinforce the perception that there are no transgender student athletes in need of support, contributing to a cycle of exclusion.

School Leaders

School leaders are responsible for all stakeholders in their school community. Teachers and coaches interact more directly with students and athletes, but it is the administrator's responsibility to ensure that these interactions are appropriate and reflect district policies and mandates.

School leaders are bound by the policies of their respective districts, and their practices in their individual schools must align with those policies. One effective means of support an administrator can provide to other stakeholders is ensuring that they understand what courses of action they may pursue while respecting district regulations (Ernandes, 2020). If an administrator fails to do so, they may be held responsible when anyone calls their decisions or actions into

question. For example, many school districts mandate that transgender students must use the bathroom that matches their biological sex at birth or a separate, private bathroom. If a teacher or coach permits a transgender student to use their preferred bathroom facility, this may violate district policy. The teacher or coach may be held responsible, but the administrator who oversees that teacher or coach will also likely face consequences for the employee's choice.

Many athletic pursuits in schools involve interscholastic competition. While all schools within a given school district follow the same policies, some schools may have expectations for stakeholders that fall outside of those policies. Furthermore, certain stakeholders such as visiting parents, guest teachers, and invited guests may not be fully aware of school and district policies when entering schools. This increases opportunities for exclusionary incidents and their consequences, which may undermine the safety and/or inclusivity of the school and its stakeholders. As recommended by Taylor et al. (2015), school leaders can support an inclusive school environment by ensuring that anyone entering their school is made aware of the expectations for that school in terms of district or site-specific policy (p. 157).

Recommendations

Students

There are two recommendations for students that relate to this topic whether they are transgender or cisgender: be true to yourself, and be respectful of others. Guided discovery of oneself and how one fits into the world is a fundamental aspect of education. This is reflected in the Alberta Teaching Quality Standard, where teachers are charged with “using appropriate universal and targeted strategies and supports to address students’ strengths, learning challenges and areas for growth” (Alberta Education, 2020, p. 6). Students should be encouraged to try

different pursuits, to immerse themselves in different areas of knowledge, and to use their expanding knowledge of themselves and the world around them to benefit themselves and others. However, students cannot accomplish these goals if they are barred from exploring or living certain aspects of their identity. Moreover, it is more difficult for other stakeholders to support these students as they are not able to understand who these students truly are. This emphasizes the need for effective administrators to “[create] an inclusive learning environment in which diversity is embraced, a sense of belonging is emphasized, and all students and staff are welcomed, cared for, respected and safe” (Alberta Education, 2023, p. 4). In a respectful and safe school environment, students may allow these other stakeholders to support their educational goals effectively. This is not to say that any pursuit of knowledge in the name of education is appropriate or permissible. Teachers, coaches, parents, and other leaders are responsible for ensuring that student learning is appropriate, respectful of others, and safe for all stakeholders. A student’s gender identity has little bearing on the pursuits of other students. Similarly, a student athlete’s gender identity has little bearing on the pursuits of other student athletes (McClearen, 2022). By being respectful of other stakeholders, students may contribute to an educational environment that is inclusive for all. There may be uncomfortable moments. There may be obstacles to overcome. Nevertheless, respecting the rights of everyone to live and learn as the person they want to be will contribute to an inclusive environment where every student has the same opportunities to learn and participate.

Teachers and Coaches

An effective strategy for teachers and coaches is to ensure their practice is inclusive and respectful to all students and athletes while adhering to the regulations and policies of their

schools and districts. Allowing students to use a preferred name among classmates and teammates will demonstrate inclusivity and respect for every student's identity (CCES, 2016). Many athletes use nicknames to communicate effectively, and this practice is an opportunity to support inclusion. Ensuring access to private bathrooms or changing room facilities at athletic events also contributes to a more inclusive environment. If the school or district permits it, allowing each athlete to choose which facilities they prefer is even more inclusive. Teachers and coaches can also model inclusive behaviour by minimizing the use of gendered language in their practice. This may help eliminate some of the exclusionary pain transgender students may feel if they are forced to participate on a team that does not match their gender identity. Teachers and coaches generally do not choose the students they work with nor the players they coach. It is incumbent upon them to ensure their methods and practices support all their charges in the pursuit of personal fulfillment and success. School leaders can support staff members in this endeavour by "facilitating access to resources, agencies and experts within and outside the school community to enhance student learning and development" (Alberta Education, 2023, p. 4).

School Leaders

The administrator must bridge the gap between the district and the school stakeholders. They must continue to enact district policy in the daily operations of their schools. Moreover, they must communicate the needs of their school communities to the district authorities to ensure that the district continues to grow and evolve with the needs of its stakeholders. Inclusivity does not occur spontaneously. When a community recognizes its own lack of inclusivity, it creates an opportunity for growth. When stakeholders understand that change is not only helpful but

necessary it creates an opportunity to evolve. School leaders are the bridge between recognition and growth (Alberta Education, 2023; Taylor et al., 2015).

Transgender stakeholders face many challenges as they continue to advocate for more inclusive practices and policies. However, administrators are not responsible for creating or amending policies. Rather, they are charged with upholding the policies of their districts. They must ensure that the stakeholders at their respective schools honour those policies as well. Inclusive leadership can only occur in school districts that institute inclusivity. Administrators must tread a fine line between allowing and encouraging advocates for transgender inclusion in their schools to continue their journey towards transgender equality while also ensuring that they respect and follow the regulations of those schools and districts. Administrators may not be able to manifest change, but they should do what they can to support and protect those who can.

Conclusion

Transgender athletes exist. They are not vying for attention, they are not looking for a competitive edge, and they are not the result of an alleged agenda. Transgender student athletes are in our schools. They work with cisgender classmates, and they compete with cisgender athletes. Middle school student athletes are not participating for the sake of scholarships or endorsements. These athletes want to be a part of a team—they want to play. Fostering inclusive environments for all student athletes should be paramount in any scholastic athletic program at this level. Teachers, coaches, and administrators can shape and maintain such programs. They have the power to make every athlete feel like they are part of a team, part of a community, and part of the pursuit of excellence sought by athletes of all ages and abilities. Together, inclusive

practices may not only help school communities overcome obstacles to inclusion for everyone; together, they may eliminate them forever.

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