

# Youth Inclusion in School Sports

Michigan [SB 218](#) would exclude students from participating in sports when their gender is not the same as the gender they were assigned at birth. This bill was introduced March 10, 2021. The Senate Committee on Education held the first hearing on this bill May 25, 2021.

## Context

The same bill language that is in SB218 was used in several state legislative proposals. These youth exclusion bills have often been introduced along with other bills that target transgender and gender diverse youth and their families. These bills include criminalizing gender affirmative care, healthcare refusal bills, and bills prohibiting transgender and gender diverse youth from participating in sports according to their gender.

## What is gender diversity?

Gender diversity, including being transgender or gender nonbinary, is part of normal and healthy human variation (American Psychological Association, 2021). Transgender and gender diverse youth are often part of the LGBTQI+ youth community, or youth who describe themselves as diverse in their sexual orientations or genders including describing themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, or intersex.

Affirming gender diversity, including using a student's self-identified pronouns and chosen name, leads to better well-being and mental health. Affirming youths' gender identities is important for healthy development (Olson, Durwood, DeMueles, & McLaughlin, 2016; Russell, Pollitt, Li, & Grossman, 2019).

## **There is no scientific reason to focus on gender assigned-at-birth to determine a youth's qualifications for athletics or their athletic capabilities.**

There are a number of misunderstandings about gender and athletic ability. It is important that we acknowledge a number of facts recognized by psychological and sport science, including:

- Individuals of any gender differ from each other in significant ways; for example, some youth assigned boys at birth have low levels of testosterone and some youth assigned girls at birth grow taller at earlier ages than other youth assigned girls at birth.
- On average, "before puberty, boys and girls do not differ in height, muscle and bone mass" (Gooren & Bunck, 2004, p. 425). During and after puberty, youth, including transgender and gender diverse youth, vary in their physical development. An increase in testosterone typically begins around age 11-12 and plateaus between age 16-19 (Handelsman, 2017; Senefeld, Coleman, & Johnson, 2020).
- There are many factors that contribute to the variability in strength and athletic performance in children and adolescents. Just like other children, transgender and

gender diverse youth vary in their musculoskeletal development, levels of various hormones, height, size, and athletic ability.

- Although there can be average differences between groups, youth who were assigned boys at birth are not uniformly stronger, faster, or better.

Transgender and gender diverse students have been harmoniously participating in sports in accordance with their gender identity; for example,

- the International Olympics Committee has included transgender athletes in accordance with their gender identity since 2004
- the NCAA has included transgender athletes in accordance with their gender identity since [2011](#)
- the Michigan High School Athletic Association support including transgender youth in sports and [oppose SB 218](#)

Fifteen states and Washington, D.C. ([transathlete.com/k-12](http://transathlete.com/k-12)), along with national governing bodies (e.g. United States Soccer Federation, USA Swimming) have adopted inclusive policies for transgender and gender diverse youth to participate in athletics based upon the youth's gender identity or "consistent gender identification" (Buzuvis, 2016) rather than requirements of medical or legal transition.

## **Policies that exclude transgender and gender diverse youth from participating in their schools' athletics reinforce harmful stereotypes.**

Excluding students from activities because of their transgender or gender diverse identities or experiences is a form of harmful discrimination and an expression of stigma (e.g., Hendricks & Testa, 2012; Jones, Arcelus, Bouman, & Haycraft, 2017; Nadal, Skolnik, & Wong, 2012).

Transgender and gender diverse students are already exposed to greater amounts of bullying, harassment, exclusion, and other victimization compared to cisgender youth (GLSEN, 2021); and Black, Latinx, Indigenous, Asian, and other transgender and gender diverse youth of color often face even more stigma and discrimination (Truong, Zongrone, & Kosciw, 2020a; Truong, Zongrone, & Kosciw, 2020b; Zongrone, Truong, & Kosciw, 2020a; Zongrone, Truong, & Kosciw, 2020b).

Rejecting, excluding, and victimizing transgender and gender diverse youth leads to significant mental health problems (American Psychological Association, 2020; Hendricks & Testa, 2012; Toomey, Ryan, Diaz, Card & Russell, 2010).

Stereotyping and stigmatizing gender diversity makes everyone less safe (Poteat, O'Dwyer, & Mereish, 2012; Russell, Talmage, Laub, & Manke, 2009; White Hughto, Reisner, & Pachankis, 2015).

## **Inclusive school policies improve the school environment and support well-being.**

Students in schools with inclusive policies tend to feel safer, miss fewer days of school, have lower depressive symptoms, and are less likely to think about dropping out of school (Kosciw, Clark, Truong, & Zongrone, 2020). For example, 30% of LGBTQI+ students who considered dropping out of school had experienced a hostile school climate associated with gendered school policies.

Participating in sports has long been associated with positive outcomes for youth including greater homework completion, better grades, and having higher educational and occupational aspirations (Darling et al., 2005; Fredericks & Eccles, 2006; Marsh & Kleitman, 2003; Nelson, & Gordon-Larsen, 2006; Ortega et al., 2008; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2008). Although they appear to have lower rates of participation than cisgender students, research on transgender and gender diverse youth show similar benefits for their participation in school sports (Trevor Project, 2020).

### **Definitions**

The following definitions were taken from APA's (2020) Gender and sexual orientation diversity in children and adolescents in schools:

**Cisgender** replaces the terms "nontransgender" or "bio man/bio woman" to refer to individuals who have a match between the gender they were assigned at birth, their bodies and their gender identity (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009).

**Gender diversity** refers to the extent to which a person's gender identity, role or expression differs from the cultural norms prescribed for people of a particular sex. This term is becoming more popular as a way to describe people without reference to a particular cultural norm, in a manner that is more affirming and potentially less stigmatizing than gender nonconformity (Gender Spectrum, n. d.).

**Gender identity** refers to one's sense of oneself as male, female or something else (APA, 2011). When one's gender identity and biological sex are not congruent, the individual may identify along the transgender spectrum (APA, 2012; Gainor, 2000). Gender identity refers to one's sense of oneself as male, female or something else (APA, 2011). When one's gender identity and biological sex are not congruent, the individual may identify along the transgender spectrum (APA, 2012; Gainor, 2000).

**Transgender** is an umbrella term that incorporates differences in gender identity wherein one's assigned biological sex doesn't match their felt identity. This umbrella term includes persons who do not feel they fit into a dichotomous sex structure through which they are identified as male or female. Individuals in this category may feel as if they are in the wrong gender, but this

perception may or may not correlate with a desire for surgical or hormonal reassignment (Meier & Labuski, 2013).

## Information Resources

Follow the bill at <http://legislature.mi.gov/doc.aspx?2021-SB-0218>

Educate yourself and your mental health colleagues about gender diversity:

- [Family Acceptance Project](#)
- [Fenway Institute](#)
- [The Gender ASSET](#)
- [WPATH](#)

Learn facts about gender diversity in youth sports:

- [Transgender Exclusion in Sports](#) (American Psychological Association)
- [Fair Play](#) The Importance of Sports Participation for Transgender Youth (Center for American Progress)
- [NCWGE Supports Transgender and Nonbinary Students' Full and Equal Participation in All Education Programs and Activities](#) (National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education)
- [Four Myths About Trans Athletes, Debunked](#) (ACLU)
- [Gender Affirming and Inclusive Athletics Participation](#) (GLSEN)
- [The Experiences of LGBT Students in School Athletics](#) (GLSEN)

## Support Resources

[Affirmations](#)

[PFLAG](#)

[Stand With Trans](#)

[Transgender Michigan](#)

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