

# Utilizing Title IX Student Survey Data to Promote Equity

By Dr. Steve Amaro, CMAA on February 08, 2022

2022

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It's the Friday before a rival basketball game and the school leadership team has just finished planning the halftime activities for the girls tripleheader (freshman, junior varsity and varsity games) when the athletic director gets a call from the rival school. The rival is calling to let the home site know that it has collapsed the freshmen team because there were not enough participants to field a team.

As a result, the game plan for the evening events is not totally scrapped, but several changes must occur, and the freshman home team has to be notified it won't be able to play. However, one question that may be unexplored focuses on a minute detail – did the rival school review data to determine if such an outcome could have been prevented?

This year marks the 50th anniversary of Title IX and schools have come a long way in creating more equitable environments for students. One area that sometimes becomes overlooked in activities and athletic programs is to regularly use student surveys to analyze data including participation trends, student surveys, and even financial distribution among clubs and teams. In order to run effective educational programs, schools should consistently collect and analyze data to understand the student experience and provide equitable opportunities for all.

## Exploring the Possibility of Student Survey Data

Survey data can sometimes appear discomfoting. Such data can reveal patterns that may not necessarily be initially recognized and can uncover areas within a program that may need improvement. In some cases, survey data can reveal underlying deficiencies that can be challenging to face.

For instance, if a school is just starting to collect and analyze student survey data and one of the survey question responses indicates that the softball team does not feel safe participating in its sport due to poor field conditions, this may indicate a systemic problem that may have been in existence for several years. Furthermore, if the same question is posed to the baseball team and the answers are divergent, it could indicate a Title IX challenge as all students should have similar athletic and activity experiences regardless of sport.

To make student survey data meaningful, surveys can be designed to include questions that help identify challenges and give direction for program improvement. Such questions directed to students could include:

- Do you feel you were able to fully participate in your sport or activity and were encouraged to maximize your potential?
- Do you feel that you had the appropriate equipment and training to fully participate in your sport?
- Do you feel the playing facilities and equipment are safe and in working order?

These are just a few questions that could be asked in a quick survey that can allow school leaders to make better decisions that not only support the growth of athletic programs but can also verify Title IX compliance and equity. Such surveys can be given in a variety of ways; however, students may prefer to answer in a digital format they can access via cell phone.

## Survey Data Can Illuminate a Path for Program Improvement

Survey data can also be used to find a path for continual improvement for a school, athletic program and even coaching personnel. Far too often, we hear how students may not be the best assessor of what goes on around them as they may not have the life experience and wisdom of the adults who run school programs; however, students who are given a survey to share their experience can reveal insightful perspective as they are the actual participants who experience the program.

Most states regularly collect student survey data to determine whether students feel safe, if they feel they have a connection to an adult employee on campus, and even whether they feel they are treated fairly. Schools can replicate the types of questions in these surveys so that they can drive program improvement.

Questions such as:

- Do you feel you can contact your coach, athletic director or school leadership to voice concerns?
- What is one thing you think your school, coach, athletic director or school leadership does that you feel they do extraordinarily well?
- What is one way you feel that your school, coach, athletic director or school leadership can improve?

Open-ended questions yield a variety of responses, but students generally want to help others improve and share their perspective when given the opportunity.

### **Collect Data to Drive Programs and Explore Expansion/Reduction**

Annual Student Survey Data can also reveal participation trends and potential unexplored growth. For example, if participation numbers drop in a sport over several years but students are asked a question on a student survey such as, "What is one sport or activity you feel should be added to the school?" this may reveal an unexplored way a school can serve its students. For example, there may be enough female students to justify the exploration of a flag football team or another national or international sport that is gaining in popularity that students can identify if given an opportunity.

### **Collect Data to Determine Equitable Financing**

Although finances may not at first appear to have anything to do with student surveys, some student data may reveal troubling trends in finances and such trends need to be examined especially in keeping in compliance with Title IX. For instance, if school financial data reveals that the girls basketball team has significant differences in physical equipment, facilities, scheduling and practice times, such reports need to be taken seriously and examined.

Confirming such data can be done by analyzing finances to determine whether school programs 1) meet the needs of the participants, 2) are equitably distributed and 3) are analyzed through a lens that will reveal inequities in spending between boys and girls programs to ensure that one team does not experience significantly more or less benefits than another program. If such inequities are found, schools can then take corrective action to make a better program for all students.

### **Final Thoughts**

Analyzing school program data plan can seem laborious, but once a system is established, regular data collection and analysis can be a beacon of pride for a community as it gives students voice, uncovers ways schools can improve and verifies appropriate finances are balanced so that all students can experience positive athletics and activities programs.