

Title IX: New Regulations for 2020 Sexual Harassment At School

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## Learning Objectives

- Answer “Why are we here?”
- Recognize Title IX as a sexual harassment issue-

Media refers to Title IX regarding sports and colleges, but it equally applies to K-12 campuses

☑ Gain understanding of new Title IX regulations that take effect August 14, 2020

- Understand that Title IX regulations are 100 pages long with 1,900+ pages of discussion and supporting documentation

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Student with Backpack

Agency Guidance “Dear Colleague” letters, informal guidance.

Not a basis for enforcement action

“Why are we here?”

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Formal Rulemaking

Proposed Regulations adopted through formal rulemaking process including public comment/scrutiny.

Has the force and effect of law.

## Title IX on K-12 Campuses

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- Nearly 50% of grade 7-12 students reported experiencing sexual harassment in 2010-2011
- 2013-14 OCR: "67% of school districts had zero allegations of sexual harassment"
- Incomplete data specific to ESE students. However, we know cognitive and physical disabilities increase vulnerability.
- One small study from 2004 surveyed ESE teachers
- 92% reported observing peer to peer harassment

## Title IX

“No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefit of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.”

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Increase in DOE Open Title IX investigations from  
2011 to 2020

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<https://projects.chronicle.com/titleix/#overview>

line graph

## Definitions from new regulations

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Complainant: an individual who is alleged to be the victim of conduct that could constitute sexual harassment

- Parents and guardians who have a legal right to act on behalf of parties may do so, including by filing formal complaints

Respondent: an individual who has been reported to be the perpetrator of conduct that could constitute sexual harassment



## Clearing up the Definitions of Sexual Harassment

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Under the regulations, any of the following conduct on the basis of sex constitutes sexual harassment:

- Sexual conduct by a school employee towards a student
- Unwelcome conduct determined by a reasonable person to be severe, pervasive, and objectively offensive that it effectively denies a person equal access to the school's education program or activity

When must a school respond?

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A school must respond when:

1. the school has actual knowledge of sexual harassment;
2. which occurred within the school's education program or activity (situations over which the school exercised substantial control);
3. against a person in the United States.

The Final Rule expands "actual knowledge" to include notice to any elementary or secondary school employee.

## Title IX Basic Compliance

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How many of you know who your Title IX Coordinator is for your district?

Does your Title IX Coordinator directly report to Superintendent?

Other requirements under Title IX:

- Annual reporting
- Visibility on website for Office of Title IX Coordinator
- “Regular training” provided to Title IX Coordinator

## New Investigative Requirements

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- Both parties must now receive written notice of the allegations with sufficient detail for a respondent to respond (i.e. who, when, where, etc.)

- The parties have the right to select an advisor of their choice to be present at all stages of the investigative process

- May be an attorney and can be in addition to their parent, in the case of a student respondent, and in addition to a union representative in the case of an employee respondent

- The parties have the right to submit and review evidence throughout the investigation

- There is a presumption of innocence during the process

- The standard of proof must be stated. Usually “preponderance of evidence” which simply means “more likely than not”.

## Expanded Requirements to Publicize Title

### IX Coordinator

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The School must notify students, parents or legal guardians of elementary and secondary school students, applicants for employment, employees, and all unions, of the

- name or title
- office address
- electronic mail address
- telephone number of the employee or employees designated as the Title IX Coordinator.

## 5 Elements of a Title IX Lawsuit

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- School Board is a funding recipient
- The “appropriate person” has actual knowledge of the alleged harassment
- The alleged harassment must be “severe, pervasive, and objectively offensive”
- Plaintiff must show that the School Board acted with “deliberate indifference” to known acts of harassment
- Plaintiff must demonstrate that the harassment effectively barred the student’s access to an educational opportunity or benefit

Clarifying the Definition  
of Harassment

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The harassment is “severe, pervasive, and objectively offensive” to a reasonable person

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The behavior must be serious enough to have a systemic effect of denying equal access to an education.

Generally, a single instance of inappropriate touching would not be found to be severe or pervasive. Hill v. Cundiff, 797 F.3d 948 (11th Cir. 2015).



The harassment is “severe, pervasive, and objectively offensive”

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Facts: Three 2nd grade students alleged that they were sexually harassed by another second grade student over several months.

The students found it unwelcomed and intimidating and faked being sick several times and stayed home from school.

Held: Not severe enough to have a systemic effect.

Hawkins v. Sarasota Cnty. Sch. Bd., 322 F.3d 1279 (11th Cir. 2003).

“Deliberate Indifference” examples

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The School Board acted with “deliberate indifference” to known acts of harassment

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“Clearly unreasonable in light of known circumstances.”

- “Clearly unreasonable” means th

at the school’s response causes the student to undergo harassment or makes the student more vulnerable to it. *Hill v. Cundiff*, 797 F.3d 948 (11th Cir. 2015).

“[N]o effort whatsoever either to investigate or to put an end to the harassment; fail[ure] to respond; a lack of instruction to school personnel on how to respond to peer sexual harassment and a lack of a policy on the issue.”

*Rodriguez v. Alpha Inst. of S. Florida, Inc.*, No. 10-80714-CIV, 2011 WL 5103950, at \*6 (S.D. Fla. Oct. 27, 2011).

The School Board acted with “deliberate indifference” to known acts of harassment

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Facts: There were two prior unrelated sex incidents, then sexual assault occurred on campus.

Law enforcement conducted the investigation.

Policies changed (for the better) after.

Held: The deliberate indifference was not met.

Doe v. Bibb Cnty., 688 Fed Appdx. 791, 11th Cir. (Ga.) 2017.

“The harassment effectively  
denied access to education”

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Plaintiff must demonstrate that the harassment effectively barred the students access to an educational opportunity or benefit

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“Hav[ing] a concrete, negative effect on the victim's education or access to school-related resources, which could include dropping grades, being diagnosed with behavioral or anxiety disorders, becoming homebound/hospitalized due to harassment, physical violence, or sexual assault.”

Roe ex rel. Callahan v. Gustine Unified School Dist.,678 F.Supp.2d 1008 (E.D.Cal.2009).

Seeing any of these outcomes should be red flags. Remediation/student supports are needed.

Plaintiff must demonstrate that the harassment effectively barred the students access to an educational opportunity or benefit

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Facts: A male student made sexually explicit and vulgar remarks to 3 second grade students.

He also offensively touched the girls.

The girls faked being sick several times but suffered no decline in grades, teachers observed no behavior changes, and the girls didn't tell their parents for months.

Hawkins v. Sarasota CntySch. Bd., 11th Cir. 2003.

Held: Access to education not denied.

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Title IX Checklist Providing your Administrators with the tools to investigate, document,  
and remediate



## Title IX Checklist

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Contact the District's Title IX Coordinator.

Investigate regardless of whether law enforcement is investigating.

Evaluate the relative age and ESE status of students involved.

Respond to the incident based on a "preponderance of the evidence" standard.

-Note: a response is required whether or not the victim files a complaint.

-Provide the complainant notice, identifying Title IX Coordinator, how to contact Title IX Coordinator, and procedures for making a complaint.

Limit harm: Address the immediate individualized needs of the complainant.

-E.g. class schedule, transportation, lunch, class transition

-Convene IEP?

## Title IX Checklist

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Evaluate the severity or pervasiveness of the alleged misconduct.

-E.g., prior discipline history

Complete discipline process as far as possible.

Remediate harm: Evaluate the continuing effects on the student.

-E.g., schedule guidance follow-up, check on grades, enrollment status

Remediate harm: Evaluate whether an ongoing adjustment needs to be made to the class schedule, transportation, contact outside of class, lunch schedule, afterschool or club activities of the students involved.

Dear Colleague Letter, 111 LRP 23852 (OCR 4/4/11);

Questions and Answers on Title IX and Sexual Violence, 8 GASLD 40 (OCR 2014)

## Expectations for School Districts

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Title IX does not require school districts to be perfect or to prevent every incident of sexual harassment.

But, schools must show that they respond and thoroughly investigate incidents. Take action where warranted, with the overall goal of preventing a pervasive atmosphere of harassment.

Districts must also have in place a properly trained Title IX Coordinator who is visible and accessible to students. Updated policies and ongoing training of campus level administrators also now required.

What does Due Process look like?

Tips for Conducting Investigations

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- It is critical that you listen, are present, avoid judgment, and do not blame the complainant for what happened
- Avoid statements that indicate that you do not believe the person you are interviewing during the investigation
- Avoid statements and comments about possible outcomes. Discipline is not the job of the investigator.

## Important Provisions for Investigations

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- No “single investigator” models. Decision-maker can not be investigator.
- It is very important to note that no disciplinary action can be taken against a respondent in a Title IX sexual harassment case before this entire process (through appeal) is completed
- The parties are given the opportunity to submit written questions for the other parties and witnesses to answer with limited follow up questions.
- The decision-maker(s) must explain to the party proposing the questions any decision to exclude questions as not relevant.
- Both parties receive a written determination re: outcome explaining how and why decision-maker reached conclusions
- Both parties have an equal opportunity to appeal
- Records of all sexual harassment reports and investigations be maintained for 7 years
- Protect all participants including witnesses from retaliation
- There is no time limit or statute of limitations on a complainant’s decision to file a formal complaint.

Recommendation action for school site  
administrators

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- Principals will need to designate a Title IX Liaison at their school (AP recommended) responsible for the facilitation of information to and from district level administrator conducting investigation
- All principals, APs, and Title IX Liaisons will need to undergo Title IX training on how to properly handle these cases
- Principals need to understand they will still be responsible for other types of student on student investigations pursuant to School Board policy
- Again, it is very important to note that no disciplinary action can be taken against a respondent before this process is completed!

## Title IX Takeaways

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- New regulations are here. Our understanding is evolving.
- Title IX training materials must be published on website
- Process must avoid conflicts of interest or bias
- Emphasis on due process for respondents
- Supportive measures (individualized help to preserve access to education) must be offered to every alleged victim/complainant even if they do not wish to initiate or participate in the formal complaint process
- Help your administrators learn to recognize Title IX issues
- Need to implement proper procedures and training

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Questions?

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