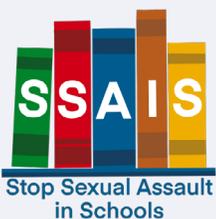


Toolkit

Parents: You Can Become the Agent of Change for Title IX Policies in Your Schools



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Parents: You Can Become the Agent of Change for Title IX Policies in Your Schools

by Susan Moen, Executive Director, Jackson County (OR) SART

Most parents are not aware of deficiencies in their schools' response protocols for sexual harassment and assault – until their own child (or a friend's) experiences the life-altering harm that can result. Parents may be forced to become activists when their own family is impacted, or they are driven to action by heartbreaking stories or public pleas from survivors: "Please don't let this happen to another student." Spurring a community to action too often means having to share details of an incident of harassment or violence after it has occurred.

While personal stories are powerful tools for bringing change, wouldn't it be wonderful for our parent communities to be able to bring the needed change to their schools before that next story unfolds, before the next student is harmed? We encourage parents to proactively learn what their schools are doing about Title IX protections so that if improvements are needed, they happen *before* the next harmful incident occurs. Here are some places parents can start.

Every school must have a sexual harassment policy that defines what constitutes harassment and sexual assault and how to report it. Finding your school's policy is the place to start. These policies are usually the responsibility of the School Board and based on state policies. *They should be easy to find on a school's website.*

While personal stories are powerful tools for bringing change, wouldn't it be wonderful for our parent communities to be able to bring the needed change to their schools before that next story unfolds, before the next student is harmed?

- A school's Title IX plan should provide clear descriptions of student rights and the school's responsibilities to ensure that all students have access to an education free from fear of, or actual, violence and harassment. Title IX addresses both individual incidents and "hostile environments" that impact a student's ability to learn, regardless where the incident occurred.
- The plan should clearly explain how and when Title IX reports are made, how they are investigated, how violations are addressed, and what rights and resources are available to all involved parties during a Title IX investigation. You may want to consult [Investigating What Happens When a Student Reports Sexual Harassment](#).

Title IX Plan:

- Students' rights
- School's responsibilities
- Reporting
- Investigations
- Resources

Title IX response. After identifying the school's policies and Title IX plan (or lack thereof), parents can educate themselves on what should be in a Title IX response, to determine if their school policy adequately addresses everything required by the law and recommended by Title IX experts.

- Sites such as [Know Your IX](#), [Stop Sexual Assault in Schools](#), and the [National Women's Law Center](#) offer helpful information. You can also access the Title IX guidance documents directly on the U.S Department of Education [website](#); these explain in detail a school's responsibility to respond to reports of sexual harassment and assault.
- Find a local expert on Title IX who can help with your research. For example, if you have a college nearby, their Title IX office may have staff willing to help you; a local rape crisis center may also have advocates or administrators who are versed in Title IX matters and will assist your efforts. Local attorneys who take civil rights cases or a state victim rights organization can also be good resources.

Create a plan! If your school does not have a clear Title IX plan, parents can (and should!) get involved in creating one. Request a meeting with the District Title IX Coordinator or the Title IX Coordinator for a school (they should be identified on the school website; if not, start with the district Superintendent). Let them know you are interested in knowing more about their policies. Consult the guide [How to Gather Information about a School District's Title IX Policies](#).

This meeting will give you an idea of whether the schools have adequately addressed this issue. Bring someone who has a working knowledge of Title IX (see above) to the meeting and make it clear your interest is to learn more. If needed, help the school create a “gold standard” Title IX plan and response **before** it is needed.

Learning from your meeting. Some things you can learn from your meeting: When and by whom are the Title IX coordinators trained? Who is responsible for conducting Title IX investigations and how are they trained? Are students and staff all aware of their Title IX rights? How does the school ensure this? Does the school have a partnership with confidential advocates to help victim/survivors and their families navigate the process of a report?

- If your school does not have the answers to these questions, you can contact your [state Department of Education](#) to find out how training can be provided to the schools, and if it can recommend best practices. Local colleges may also be a source for Title IX training.

Spirit of collaboration. Depending on the school's response, your next steps will hopefully be taken in collaboration with the school. If you have approached them in the spirit of “we'd like to help” rather than “we think you are doing a terrible job,” they may be relieved to have the help learning

how to create a great response system (“We want to help you become the gold standard that other districts can adopt” is a great way to approach them).

- Either way, a next step is to involve other parents. Find the best way to connect with other parents (social media?) and set a meeting to discuss what you have learned and how to move forward. Provide your group with the resources to educate themselves on Title IX, and then create a “to do” list of goals for improvement, based on what you see is lacking.
- Let the School Board know what you are doing. Explain the need you have identified, your willingness to lead the work, and ask for their support.
- List of improvements in hand, continue to meet with the school district and ask that the changes be made. A task force/work group of school administrators, parents and students can be convened to create the best possible policies and Title IX plan.

Involve students. In most high schools and even some middle schools, students are already talking to each other about gender-based harassment and feelings of lack of support or response from their school’s administration. Your school may have a social justice group or peer support group already in place.

- If not, seek out students who would like to start one. Stop Sexual Assault in Schools has created **SASH Club** (Students Against Sexual Harassment) with ready-to-use resources and structure to encourage the formation of peer groups that address the problem of sexual harassment and assault in their communities. Learn how to **bring one to your school**. Student input about what STUDENTS need from their school’s policy, and how the policy can be made “user-friendly,” is important.



Parents have infinite power to help their children improve the society and culture of their schools, and Title IX compliance may be only the beginning of what you can achieve.

Model policies. Find a few models for the plan you would like to see (no need to start from scratch). **Here is one plan** that was created through a “task force” process that demonstrates the scope of a good Title IX plan – use it is an example, but do not let it limit you: What you create could be better and will reflect your own community’s needs.

Continuity. Creating the Title IX plan is not the end of the work. How will you ensure that the school is faithful to it, in every case? A great policy is only great if it is followed consistently. Creating a system of accountability is important. Work with the school to discuss how this can be done – not because you don’t trust them, but because you want to make sure that everyone benefits from their new gold-standard protocols.

- Find a way to keep your parent group engaged and active once the Title IX plan is in place. A Facebook group where resources, articles and observations can be shared can keep the momentum going, along with quarterly (monthly?) social gatherings.



Related issues. There are so many related issues: comprehensive sex ed in the schools (teaching healthy relationships is the true core of sexual abuse prevention), access to confidential advocacy for youth, student activism at school around changing existing rape-supportive culture, education to sports teams about creating a safe environment, etc.

Parents have infinite power to help their children improve the society and culture of their schools, and Title IX compliance may be only the beginning of what you can achieve.

Links referenced

[How to Gather Information about a School District's Title IX Policies](#). Find out if your school has a Title IX policy, what it says, and if it meets federal guidelines (SSAIS)

[Investigating What Happens When a Student Reports Sexual Harassment](#). Find out what happens when you report sexual harassment in your school (SSAIS)

[Video: Sexual Harassment and Title IX: Why we should care](#) (NWLC)

[Know Your Rights](#) (SSAIS)

[Title IX Coordinators](#) (SSAIS)

[100 School Districts](#) (NWLC)



Susan Moen

Susan Moen has worked in the field of sexual assault response and prevention since 1994 as an advocate with the L.A. Commission on Assaults Against Women, founder of the nonprofit Jackson County, OR SART, and Founding Board Member of the You Have Options Program. As JC SART's Executive Director she oversaw a SANE program, a survivor resource specialist program, sexual assault support groups, a violence prevention education program in local schools and communities, and continues to provide direct advocacy with survivors. Susan was awarded the state SART award, the Jan Hindman Memorial Award for Outstanding Contributions to Victim Services, and the 2024 NCVLI's Gail Burns-Smith Excellence in Victim Services Award.

Stop Sexual Assault in Schools

- [Stop Sexual Assault in Schools Website](#)
- [SSAIS YouTube](#)
- [Instagram](#)
- Email info@stopsexualassaultinschools.org

