

MICHIGAN TASK FORCE ON WOMEN IN SPORTS: RESEARCH REPORT



Compiled by the Michigan Task Force on Women in Sports

December 3, 2020

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INTRODUCTION

In June 2019, Governor Gretchen Whitmer signed [Executive Order 2019-16](#), which established the Michigan Task Force on Women in Sports. The Task Force, chaired by Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson, is comprised of 15 voting members and 16 advisory members from across the state and country. The first of its kind at a state government level, the Task Force brings together local and national leaders to develop strategies that support and promote opportunities in Michigan for girls and women in sports.

The work of the Task Force will take place over the course of three years, culminating in the release of its recommendations to the Governor in 2022.

This report represents the culmination of the first major phase of work – research to understand the status of women and girls in sports in Michigan – and a transition to the next phase. Throughout 2021, the Task Force will explore potential solutions to the issues raised in this report with the goal of issuing recommendations to the Governor on how to increase opportunities and representation for women and girls in sports across the state in the summer of 2022, to coincide with the 50th anniversary of Title IX.

This report begins with a landscape overview of the current state of Michigan girls and women in sports at a K-12, college and professional level, and then proceeds to discuss Michigan female participation in athletics and the experience of athletes and sports leadership professionals. The final section of this report puts forth possible solutions to increase women and girls' sports equity as the Task Force considers crafting possible recommendations.

This report is possible thanks to the committed work of the members of the Task Force, their allies, and supporters in Michigan and nationwide, and the Michigan residents, athletes, and leaders who participated in this research to date.

Special thanks to the Women's Sports Foundation; the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation; Dr. Ketra Armstrong, professor of Sport Management and director of Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion for the University of Michigan School of Kinesiology; Dr. Dan Gould, director of the Michigan State University Institute for the Study of Youth Sports; Jill Kochanek, graduate student at the MSU Institute for the Study of Youth Sports; Edward Elliot, University of Michigan Ford School graduate research student; and Michigan Department of State interns Davina Ngyuyen and Olivia Reckley for their contributions to the research cited in this report.

To read detailed reports of the research conducted by the Task Force and allies referenced throughout this report, please follow the links below:

- [Women in Sport Leadership: Perils, Possibilities, and Pathways](#). Report Prepared by: Ketra L. Armstrong, PhD, Member of Michigan Task Force on Women in Sports, Professor, University of Michigan (July 2020)

- [**The Status of High School Girls' Sport Participation: A Report Compiled for the State of Michigan Women in Sports Task Force.**](#) Submitted by: Jill Kochanek, MS & Daniel Gould, PhD, Institute for the Study of Youth Sports; Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan, March 4, 2020
- [**The Status of High School Girls' Sport Participation Phase 2: A Report Compiled for the State of Michigan Women in Sports Task Force.**](#) Submitted by: Jill Kochanek, MS & Daniel Gould, PhD, Institute for the Study of Youth Sports, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan, April 5, 2020
- [**Perspectives from Colleges and Universities in Michigan on Women in Sports.**](#) Edward Elliott, April 2020
- [**Review of Strategies and Policies Across the World to Promote Women in Sports,**](#) Edward Elliott, April 2020
- [**Chasing Equity: The Triumphs, Challenges, and Opportunities in Sports for Girls and Women.**](#) The Women's Sports Foundation, January 2020
- [**State of Play Southeast Michigan.**](#) The Aspen Institute Project Play, the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation, Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan, 2020

1. KEY FINDINGS

Michigan is poised to be a leader in improving access and participation for girls and women in sports because, as this report illustrates, overall Michigan roughly mirrors national trends in athletics. Nationally and in Michigan, while women and girls have made great strides both in sports participation and leadership, there is still much work to be done for women and girls to reach their fullest potential as athletes and leaders on and off the field.

This report reveals several major takeaways on the status of women and girls in sports in the state of Michigan:

1. At the K-12 level, girls in Michigan participate in athletics at lower rates than boys, and those rates are further exacerbated by other factors like socioeconomic status and geography.
2. At the collegiate level, there are fewer female student-athletes than male student-athletes, on average. Female student-athletes often receive less institutional investment in terms of funding, visibility, and institutional support when they do participate.
3. There are relatively few professional women's sports teams and athletes in Michigan compared to men's teams, despite the value of female role models for younger girls, women and athletes.
4. Women are underrepresented in sports leadership at the collegiate and university level in Michigan compared to their male peers, with only approximately 25% of NAIA head coaches and 26% of NCAA head coaches identifying as female. While these statistics are slightly better than the national average, it is still far below gender parity.
5. Michigan women navigating careers in sports and athletics report facing gender discrimination, "glass ceilings," and an "old boys club" culture in their workplaces.
6. Men and women alike recognize the need for increased male allyship as well as increased institutional support for women leaders across all levels of sport.

Like the country as a whole, in Michigan, gender disparity in sports participation and opportunity starts at an early age and continues through adulthood. As they progress in sports, women athletes and leaders suffer from gender biases and underinvestment. As the Task Force turns to solutions, there are ample areas for improvement to increase the number of women and girls who participate and grow as athletes and leaders, in athletics and across sectors.

2. THE MICHIGAN LANDSCAPE

What is the status of women and girls in sport in the state of Michigan? This section provides an overview that sets the stage for the research discussed throughout this report. Overall, women and girls in Michigan are in a similar position to women and girls nationwide as it pertains to sports involvement and representation. While there is incremental progress and representation from K-12 to professional levels, there is not yet equal opportunity for access to sports or athletics leadership for women and girls in Michigan – discrepancies that are further exacerbated along socioeconomic, geographic region, community type, and racial demographic characteristics.

K-12 and Youth Sports in Michigan

Based on available data, girls in Michigan participate in sports at lower rates than their male counterparts at the K-12 level. Furthermore, younger girls and female athletes lack exposure to role models in sports.

Key takeaways on girls' K-12 and youth sports participation in Michigan include:

- Young girls in Michigan participate in athletics at a lower rate than boys, mirroring national trends.
- Socioeconomic status and geographic region have the largest impact on the likelihood of girls' participation in K-12 sport. Schools with students from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds experience lower rates of participation and retention.
- More research and data collection is needed on participation in non-school sports to create a more complete picture of youth sports participation.

For example, each member school of the Michigan High School Athletic Association (MHSAA) in 2017 saw fewer female participants than male participants on sports teams – 169 female athletes versus 216 male athletes. Still, the average number of sports offered for both male and female athletes were consistent: approximately nine sports offered per gender, per school.¹

An important note in these data, however, is that Michigan has a thriving community of competitive girls' club teams and these non-school leagues should be considered when characterizing the landscape of youth sports. Youth club sports are non-school sanctioned competitive athletic leagues and teams that are typically organized and hosted at the community or local government level, or by a private league. Because these leagues are run separately and often privately, data are not currently recorded or publicly shared to provide a statewide participation measure in the K-12 demographic, creating visibility gaps for youth sports participation.

College and University Sports in Michigan

In Michigan, a total of 8,670 women are student-athletes at universities and colleges, compared to 11,091 male student-athletes. At NCAA schools in Michigan, 44% of student-athletes are women with NAIA schools in Michigan at 45%.²

In researching college and university athletics in Michigan, the Task Force found glaring differences in the experience of female student-athletes, coaches, staff, and administrators when compared to their male counterparts and colleagues. While interview and survey respondents repeatedly pointed out what was working – noting recent and gradual improvements in support and culture – most acknowledged that sex-based discrimination continues to be pervasive in college athletics.

Key takeaways on women's college athletics in Michigan include:

- Female student-athletes encounter stigmatization and a culture of prioritizing male athletics over female athletics, exhibited in peer/coach interactions and in the uneven distribution of and access to resources such as facilities, sports equipment, academic support, or financial aid.
- Both women and men working in sports leadership positions perceive gender-bias in hiring practices and sports/athletics organizations' workplace culture.
- Female representation in executive-level leadership roles is lacking at most institutions across Michigan in coaching and administration. Having women in these roles is important for increasing exposure and support for female working professionals and athletes.

Professional and Semi-Professional Sports in Michigan

One professional women's team currently exists in Michigan: The Flint Monarchs women's basketball team, which plays in the Global Women's Basketball Association. The team is currently ranked #1 in the league and has garnered an impressive three back-to-back national championships (on their way to defend the title for a fourth time prior to the suspension of its 2020 season due to the COVID-19 pandemic).³



Michigan is also home to several amateur and developmental women's teams in sports such as soccer, football and basketball. The Women's Basketball Development Association (formerly the Women's Blue Chip Basketball League) has two Michigan based teams: Grand Rapids Galaxy and Detroit Dodgers. Out of 37 basketball teams from across the country, the Detroit Dodgers placed 3rd overall in the league in 2018.⁴

Opportunities for women's sports and athletes in the semi-professional space in Michigan continue to grow. Michigan currently hosts six women's semi-professional soccer teams, playing in the United Women's Soccer league (a second-tier league in the United States and Canada) adding its newest women's team, Detroit Football Club, in 2020.⁵

The scope of the Task Force's research on professional athletics includes the history and experience of professional or semi-professional athletes in women's sports. It also explores the

representation and experience of professional women in sports leadership roles in all sectors, including but not limited to coaches, staff, and administrators.

Key takeaways on women's professional sports and women's sports leadership representation in Michigan include:

- The professional women's sports landscape in Michigan is limited, with only one current professional team.
- Women working in a professional capacity in various domains of sports leadership regularly experience gender inequity in hiring, promotional and payment practices.
- Women working in the sports leadership profession at all levels of sport commonly encounter a deeply ingrained, male-dominated culture. They must simultaneously work against and within that culture in order to succeed professionally.
- The importance of male allyship, institutional support, and outside resources are keys to upending this male-dominated culture to promote increased inclusion and gender equity.



CASE STUDY: The Detroit Shock – Detroit's WNBA Team⁶

Michigan has a history of being home to competitively successful women's pro teams. Detroit's former WNBA team, The Detroit Shock, won 3 championships while in Michigan - in '03, '06 and '08 (more than the Detroit Pistons since the year 2000).

The franchise set a national attendance record at the 2003 WNBA Finals, drawing the largest-ever crowd to attend a women's professional basketball game. Ultimately, the team's inability to gain traction in an over-saturated Detroit sports market, a poor economy in Michigan resulting from the financial crisis, and the promise of an enticing television contract in Tulsa lured the team's owners to Oklahoma in 2009.

3. ATHLETE PARTICIPATION & EXPERIENCE

In this section of the report, we discuss the participation and experiences of female athletes, in K-12 and youth sports, at colleges and universities, and in a professional capacity.

K-12 Sports Participation

It is widely acknowledged that girls' sports participation drops off around age 14. While factors like stigma and changing social dynamics may contribute to this decline, there are several more measurable variables that also play a role.⁷

Issues surrounding gender equity in sports and exposure to women's athletics begin at an early age. Since the formation of the Michigan Task Force on Women in Sports, members and advisors have facilitated discussions with Michigan's sports leadership in the K-12 space. Many individuals interviewed felt girls' sports teams are not seen as "important" and receive less administrative support when compared to boys' teams – a feeling exacerbated by the difficulty experienced in obtaining funding for basic athletic equipment like uniforms and in accessing gym space for practices. Priority is often given to boys' teams.⁸

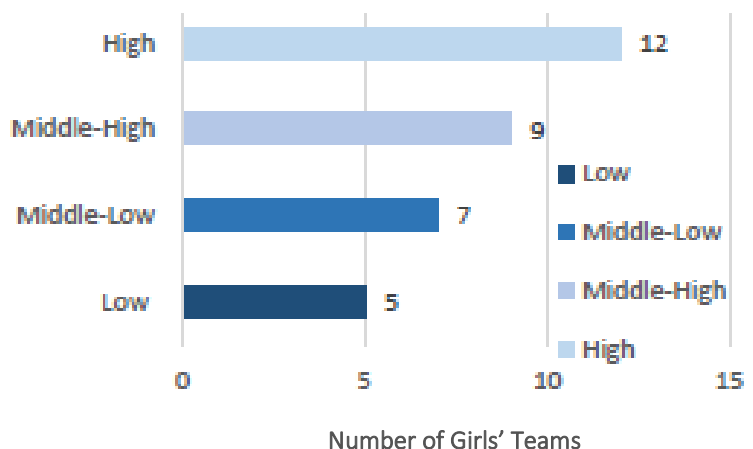
An overall lack of female coaches and leadership role models for girls was also reported by K-12 leadership, a critical factor in recruitment, retention, and overall morale. Parental support was another frequently mentioned barrier – the high financial cost of participation keeps many students out of athletics and contributes to dropout.⁹

Ultimately, K-12 leadership emphasized the importance of beginning girls' exposure to sports and athletics at a younger age – creating a broader pipeline of female athletes. The data cited below bolster these claims (see Figures 2.1, 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4 on the following page). Gaps in youth sports participation between girls and boys creates a snowball effect, compounding and normalizing the disparities and inequity seen at the college and professional level.¹⁰

Key Factors Affecting Participation

To examine the state of girls' sports participation at the K-12 level, the Michigan Task Force on Women in Sports analyzed participation data from 523 total senior public high schools, in partnership with the Michigan State University's Institute for the Study of Youth Sports (ISYS). Schools represented in this data set are from every region of the state. These schools also exhibit a wide range of sizes and are from varied socio-economic levels within each community.¹¹

Figure 2.1: Average Number of Girls' Teams by Socioeconomic Status¹³



Of the 523 Michigan senior high schools examined, girls' rates of sports participation were most strongly predicted by their high school's geographic region and socioeconomic status.¹²

Socioeconomic Status

Key findings suggest that girls who attend schools with a lower socioeconomic status were *far less likely* to participate in sports (see Figures 2.1 and 2.2). Conversely, girls from more affluent areas are *far more likely* to participate. Findings show that higher socioeconomic schools generally have a wider variety of sports available to girls, with 12 girls' teams per school and an average of 24 girls per team. Schools with a lower socioeconomic status have only an average of five girls' teams and five team members.

The participation rate, a measure of how many girls are participating in interscholastic sports at each high school, is 36% for girls attending school in the lowest socioeconomic status segment, compared to the next highest segment at 51%. This disparity in participation suggests financial security and socioeconomic status is a significant factor contributing to girls' sports participation, as well as funding and resources within the school district and community.¹⁴

Geography and Community Type

Geographic region within Michigan also significantly impacts the rate of girls' sport participation (see Figure 2.3). In the Detroit Metro region, girls' sports participation is 34%, followed by the Upper Peninsula at 43%. Other regions within the state show a rate of girls' high school sports participation of around 53%.

Participation rates among girls also vary by community type (e.g. city/urban, suburban, town or rural). Data suggests that communities with increased access to resources (i.e. higher levels of funding, practice

Figure 2.2: Average Percentage of Girl Participants by Socioeconomic Status¹⁵

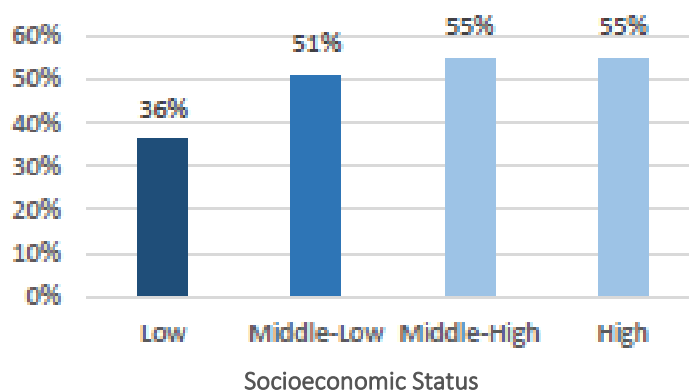
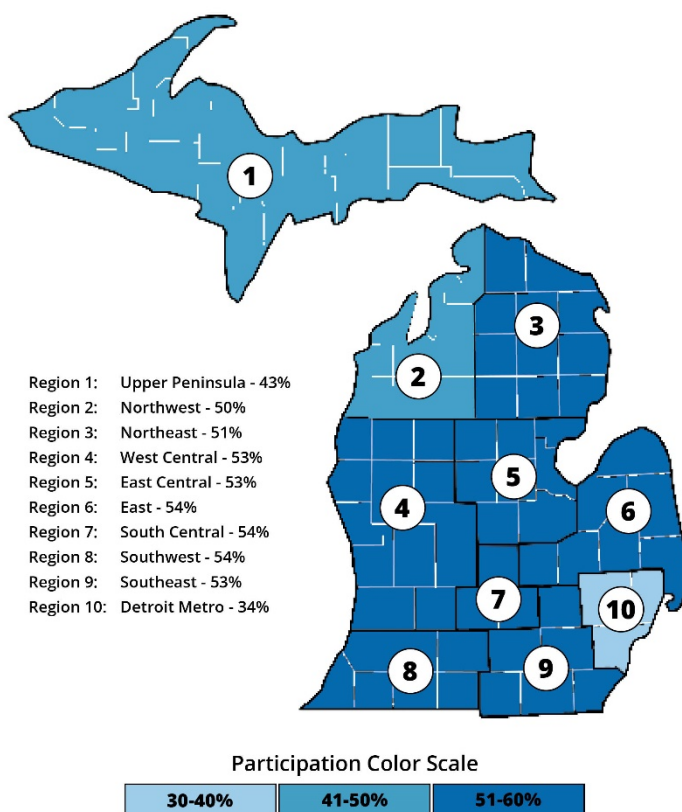


Figure 2.3: Map of Average Girl Sport Participants by Geographic Region¹⁷



spaces, facilities) also have higher rates of girls' sports participation.

Suburban schools were found to have the largest number of girls participating on average, with city and rural locations having the lowest participation rates and average number of teams.¹⁶

School and Class Size

Research indicates that as school size increases, the average number of girls on high school sports teams also rises, as well as the number of sports offered.

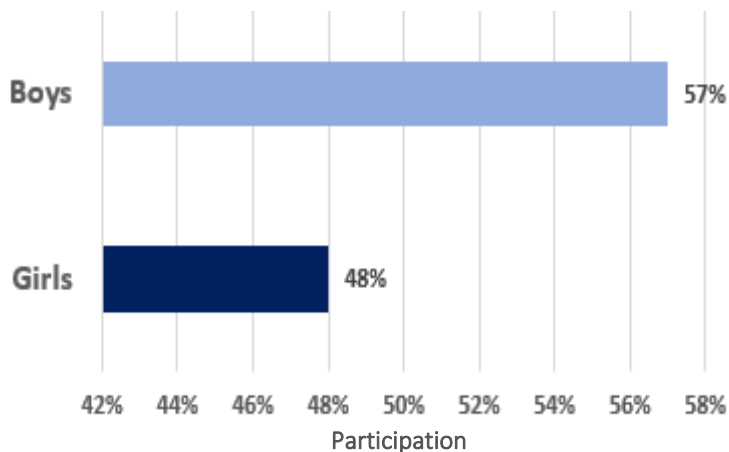
It is important to note that the data used by ISYS (generously provided by the Michigan High School Athletics Association) counts each K-12 participant in every sport, meaning that those who participate in multiple sports are counted twice. Because of this, it is possible the associated links between class size and sports offerings may be attributed, in part, to these duplicate athlete counts. Despite this data complexity, there is no doubt that larger schools generally benefit from an increased array of female sport offerings, which in turn accommodates more female athletic participants.¹⁷

Comparison of Girls' and Boys' Sports Participation

Factors such as community type and geographic region, socioeconomic status and school size, impact both girls' and boys' sports participation. However, boys' sport participation rates overall are much higher than girls. The boys' participation rate in Michigan is 57% versus 48% for girls (see Figure 2.4).¹⁸

High schools located in Michigan towns enjoy the highest rate of girls' sport participation at 56%. However, in these same communities, the boys' participation rate is 65%. Girls attending wealthier, higher socioeconomic status schools had a participation rate 12% lower than boys (58% girls vs 70% boys).¹⁹

Figure 2.4: Average Percentage of High School Sports Participants²⁰



College and University Athletics Participation and Experience

Throughout 2019, members, advisors and associates of the Michigan Task Force on Women in Sports visited numerous colleges and universities across the state to tour campus athletic facilities and to meet with and interview staff, faculty, administrators, and student-athletes. In conducting the interviews, key themes emerged around the policies, initiatives, and actions that are working well for women in sports, as well as the challenges that persist. Site visits and interviews revealed how a positive environment for female student-athletes emanates from the top down, starting with women having a seat at the table in university sports leadership.²¹

Student-Athlete Participation

Female students in Michigan participate in sports less than their male counterparts, on average. Across all colleges and universities in Michigan, for every 100 male athletes, there are only 79 female athletes. This discrepancy between women and men in the overall number of athletes begins at a youth sports level and becomes more pronounced over time. Nationwide, college and university athletics saw 62,236 fewer women participate than men in NCAA sports during the 2017/2018 academic year. Only 9% of NCAA Division I institutions (30 of 348) offered athletic opportunities to female athletes proportional to their enrollment. In Michigan, participation rates for female student-athletes average 13% of the female student enrollment (ranging per school from a low of 1% to a high of 60%). This is compared to a participation rate for male student-athletes that averages 20% male student enrollment.²²

Student-Athlete Financial Aid and Funding

Differences in funding and student aid between genders also exist in Michigan. Statewide, male athletes receive 19% more funding earmarked for college and university athletic financial aid. This illustrates the ongoing challenges nationally, and in Michigan, in fulfilling the full promise and vision of equity in Title IX.²³

Team Culture

While most athletes reported overwhelmingly positive experiences, interviews laid bare the most frequent obstacle experienced by female student-athletes: athletic department culture and the stigma that women's sport is viewed as "inferior" to male athletics.²⁵ Perpetuators of this damaging "boys club" culture can include administrators and coaches, but the most frequently cited

Figure 2.5: Title IX Rules and Realities²⁴



culprits were male student-athletes. While many male counterparts were described as supportive and encouraging, female interviewees across Michigan's campuses consistently referred to pockets of male student-athlete instigators who perpetuate a toxic, at times misogynistic team culture, as well as an environment in which this type of behavior and attitude was allowed to persist. Other issues included non-equitable distribution of resources, access to facilities, and coaching preferences.²⁶

Female athletes also relayed an experience of feeling overlooked by coaching staff, largely due to a decentralized team structure in which head coaches contribute to a toxic team environment. Student-athletes on jointly coached men's and women's teams described some head coaches as uninterested in the female team's athletics, while taking a larger interest in the men's team competition and training. Female athletes often described head coaches as unaware of heavy demands placed on student-athletes. One female interviewee described this experience as "constantly being in the shadow" of their male peers. Female student-athletes also reported being advised against taking "tough" majors as the workload was considered too much for them.²⁷

Administrative Support

The female student-athletes interviewed were quick to identify one or various senior female coaches or administrators as personally important for them. Female student-athletes reported feeling that female coaches or administrators represented someone who understands their experience, who will listen to their concerns, who is a role model for them, and someone who can act as advocate for them. Crucially, these student-athletes pointed to the fact that these women who hold positions of power in the athletic department were able to effect beneficial change.²⁸

Visible support from the top, particularly from athletic directors, was important for the female student-athletes too, regardless of the gender of the AD. Having the athletic director physically present on game days and actively supporting them was identified as a small yet meaningful way of showing that the women's teams were not being "overlooked." Some female student-athletes said that their athletic director had not attended a single game and had "not even bothered to talk to the team and make that personal connection."²⁹

Important points raised by these female student-athletes included a plea to see more wide-ranging promotion of women in sports and athletic events at the university level, including efforts to increase fan attendance at women's games. Female student-athletes also repeatedly mentioned the importance of mental health services and resources for athletes. Some reported athletic department attempts to identify mental health as an important issue, making resources available to athletes, although most student-athletes continued to call for greater accessibility.³⁰

Mental Health

Interviewed student-athletes reported being aware of mental health resources available to them and stated that either themselves or a teammate had accessed such resources during their time on the team. Female athletes reported a higher focus placed on mental health in recent years.

Despite this increased awareness, female student-athletes explained a “stigma” still exists, and that athletes aren’t always connected with needed mental health resources. Female student-athletes who struggle to cope with the high pressures placed on them fear being stigmatized as “weak” by teammates or coaching staff for seeking help, also fearing what impact that perception may have on their competitive sport and team standing.³¹

These issues are particularly prevalent in schools and on teams in higher levels of competition, at the DI level, for example. The demands placed on student-athletes in this echelon are heavy, forcing students to find a balance between sporting competitiveness and academic success – often resulting in burnout, overtraining, a lack of sleep and high stress levels. Due to the elevated focus on competition, student-athletes often hide their struggles from their peers and coaching staff, with female interviewees referencing a “code of silence” and a culture of pretending everything is okay while silently floundering.³³ This “culture of pretending” is nothing new for high-stakes female student-athletes. A study conducted by the Women’s Sports Foundation in 2020 reported that nearly 1/3 of female student-athletes on NCAA-sponsored teams demonstrated signs of depression, compared to 18% for male student-athletes.³⁴

Michigan Professional Sports Participation

Data and research on Michigan’s professional women’s sports is lacking because of the relative lack of professional opportunities for women.

CASE STUDY: University of Michigan Women’s Ice Hockey³²

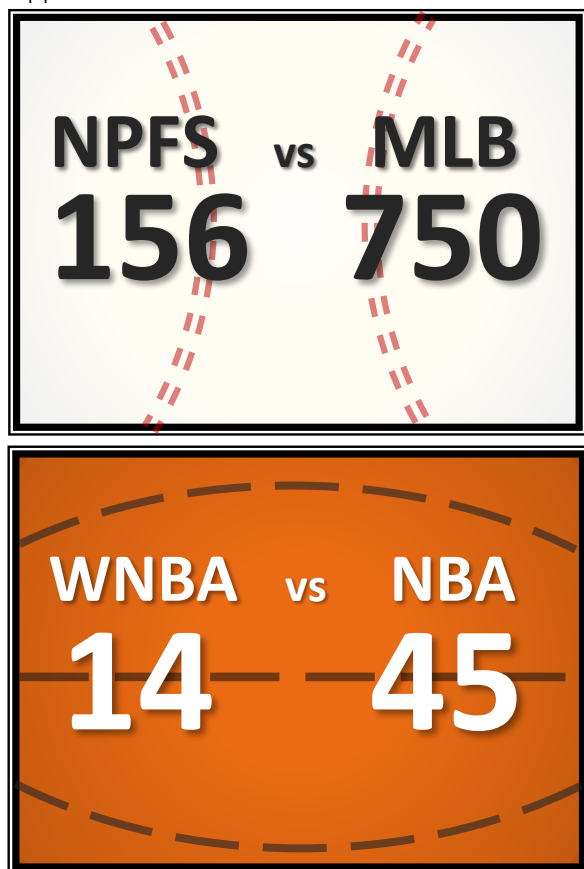
Gary Quitiquit, head coach of the Wolverine Women’s Ice Hockey Team addressed the Task Force about disparities experienced between the school’s men’s NCAA and the women’s ACHA team. The coach acknowledged university policies and the different league of play between the men’s and women’s teams that contribute to differences in experience; however, the contrast in equity between two teams playing the same sport is still striking.



A large gap in university support and resources exists between the two teams. For example, no university admissions preference, scholarships, or academic support resources are given to the women’s team, whereas all privileges are enjoyed by male ice hockey student-athletes. The women’s team must furnish their own equipment, whereas the men’s team has all equipment paid for and provided. The women’s ice hockey team must pay for the use of Yost Arena, but are rarely able to do so because of their low priority status in reserving the space. The women’s team most often play games as a general public admit at local public ice arenas. Quitiquit told the Task Force of a recent game played in a public arena against an out-of-state opponent that was forced to end early when the Zamboni ice-resurfacer entered the ice rink while the game was still in play.

The University of Michigan women’s ice hockey team experience is not unique - many women’s teams at universities across the state experience similar challenges.

Figure 2.6: Total Number of Professional Sports Opportunities³⁶



This is reflective of national trends. For example, according to the Women's Sports Foundation, for every 25 opportunities available to men seeking a professional career in basketball, there are only nine opportunities available to women. Nationwide, only 3.2% of sports media coverage is devoted to women's sports.³⁵

While female professional athletes in Michigan are in short supply, our research at other levels of sport indicate the power and value of female sports teams and role models. The value of increasing professional sports opportunities for women lies not only in opening doors for female athletes to play on a larger stage, but also in providing exposure of women's sports to young girls. The importance of local role models for youth in sports - role models that look like them and reflect their experiences - should not be underestimated.

Figure 2.7: Women in Sports and Viewership and Representation³⁷



4. FEMALE LEADERSHIP IN SPORTS

When examining gender-based issues in women's sports, the experience of female athletes is only part of the landscape. At a national level, it is no secret that women navigating careers in athletics frequently encounter gender discrimination and "glass ceilings." A national survey of sports leaders conducted by the Women's Sports Foundation indicated that just over half of women sport leaders reported men were favored over women in the workplace, and 63% of the women reported experiencing sex discrimination.³⁸

The experience of women working in sport leadership in Michigan closely mirrors national trends. A survey conducted by members of the Michigan Task Force on Women in Sports garnered over 560 responses from sports leaders across the state, both men and women. Responses came from Michiganders working in a variety of sectors, from front office employees, coaches, staff and administrators, to professional athletes and officiating crews.

Survey results provide a window into the experiences of women working in sports in Michigan. The following section provides insight into these experiences, based on research conducted by and on behalf of the Task Force.³⁹

K-12 Leadership

*"... Continued focus on creating a diverse work environment has immense benefits for all those involved including the young lives being shaped and molded throughout the athletic and educational journey. I have seen many work environments resisted to gender diversity at first but when it does occur, the positive impact is beyond measure."*⁴⁰

At the MHSAA Women in Sports Leadership Conference held on February 3, 2020, in Lansing Michigan, the Michigan Task Force on Women in Sports conducted a workshop with conference attendees to facilitate discussion on successes, challenges, and barriers facing women's and girls' sports participation in Michigan. Participants shared their experiences and struggles as professionals working in a K-12 setting.⁴¹

Recurring themes surfaced through these discussions. Attendees reported feeling a lack of support for girls' sports in comparison to boys' sports from both administrators and male colleagues. Many female attendees reported feeling passed over for leadership roles, and that male coaches hired instead often lacked knowledge or experience in girls' sports, leading to high turnover in these positions.⁴²

These reflections are consistent with findings reported in the Task Force's survey of sports leaders in Michigan. Those working in high school or youth athletics were the second largest block of survey participants.

The need for increased male allyship and support, and different perceptions of working environments between men and women in sports leadership, were common themes in the survey results, throughout all sectors of sport.⁴³

Males who responded to survey questions on sports' organizational culture consistently underestimated the challenges facing their female colleagues. For example, when asked if they agreed that women who model assertive characteristics move up in leadership, 68% of men agreed vs only 55% of women.

An even starker contrast was displayed in response to the statement that there are clearly sex and gender-role leadership expectations in the workplace; nearly half (49%) of all female respondents agreed with that statement, versus only 21% of male respondents. Female respondents were also far more likely to report perceived gender inequity in hiring practices, as displayed in Table 3.1.⁴⁴

Table 3.1: Dimensions of Gender Equity in Michigan Sport Workplaces⁴⁵

<u>Survey Question Topic</u>	<u>Survey Respondents</u>	
	Female Leaders % in Agreement	Male Leaders % in Agreement
Respondents were asked to indicate if they agree with the below statements regarding their workplace:		
Gender biases are not prevalent in hiring practices.	41%	56%
Gender biases are not prevalent in work expectations.	38%	56%
Gender biases are not prevalent in promotional spaces.	36%	60%
Men and women receive comparable career advice.	36%	63%
Gender biases are not prevalent in wages and compensation.	26%	58%

Although all survey participants work in the same field, in the same state, and most likely at some of the same institutions, the contrast between how men and women perceive their work environment sheds light on the challenges that female sports professionals face - namely in building a supportive coalition of male allies in their workplaces. It is difficult to ask for help from male colleagues who do not see or understand the challenges women experience in the workplace.⁴⁶

College and University Leadership

“During my 15 years in collegiate athletics I was repeatedly subject to the ‘old boys network’ and denied opportunities for advancement or recognition from university leadership. For 10 years there were no female head coaches.... I was told on multiple occasions that, despite my leadership positions in our conference organization, I was not qualified for advancement... After 10 years I left, due in part to lack of diversity and support... The first thing they did was hire a male replacement.”⁴⁷

Overall, there are proportionally more female head coaches in Michigan than the national average, but still far below gender parity. Among Michigan’s member schools in the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA), 25% of head coaches are female, ahead of the conference’s national average at 18%. Female head coaches at Michigan schools in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) account for 26% of all head coaches – slightly higher than the NCAA national average of 25%. Whether over or under national conference averages, Michigan colleges and universities’ prioritization of female representation in leadership roles leaves much to be desired.⁴⁸

NCAA Representation

In examining female representation in positions of leadership at NCAA schools in Michigan (Divisions I, II and III), the Task Force found that in all three levels of competition, men are far more likely than women to serve as head coaches for both men’s and women’s teams (as displayed in Figures 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3). While 80% of Michigan’s NCAA universities had female head coaches for women’s sports, out of all 25 schools examined, only five schools were found to have a female serving as the head coach of a men’s team. All schools examined had males serving as head coaches for women’s teams. In fact, 17 out of 25 schools had a greater number of male head coaches than female head coaches for women’s teams, with two DII schools having no female head coaches on their women’s sports rosters.⁴⁹

Figure 3.1: Division I Colleges and Universities Head Coaches⁵⁰

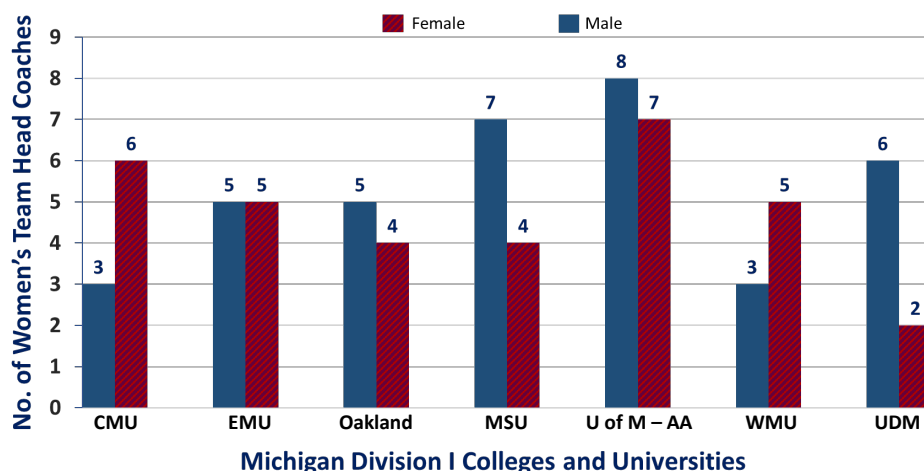


Figure 3.2: Division II Colleges and Universities Head Coaches⁵¹

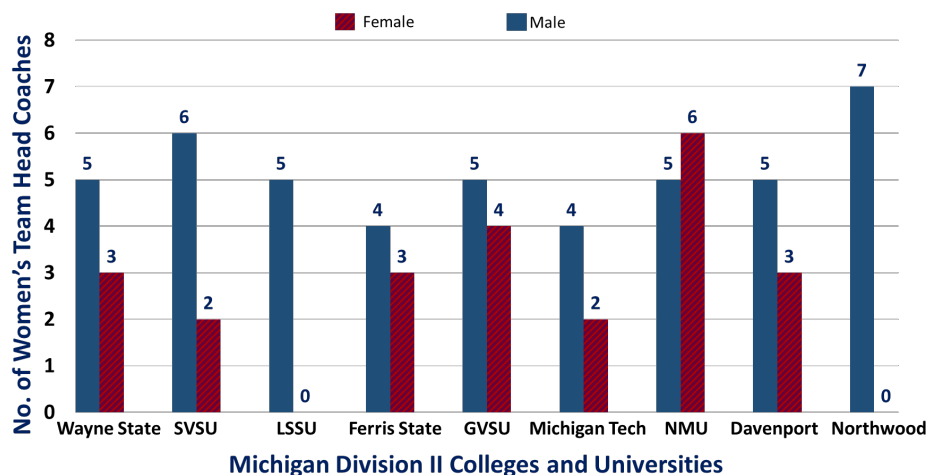
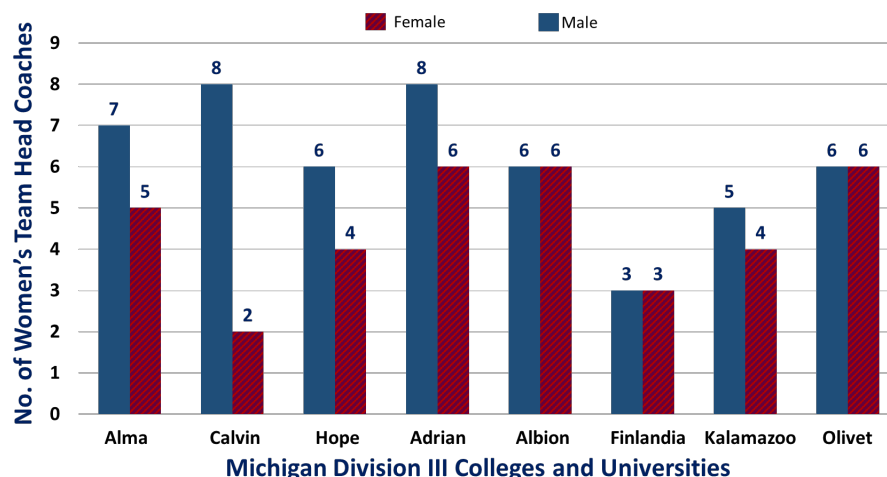


Figure 3.3: Division III Colleges and Universities Head Coaches⁵²



Interviews among Michigan sports leadership revealed the personal experiences of female coaches behind the numbers, with one female coach stating, “People don’t like it.” regarding how female coaches are perceived in a leadership role.⁵³

Another interviewee said that she had witnessed many instances where males could transition from coaching a women’s team to a men’s team seamlessly; whereas, it would be seen as a “big step up” for an equally qualified female coach to do the same.⁵⁴

Glass Ceiling in Sports Leadership

While both men and women surveyed by the Task Force acknowledge the existence of a “glass ceiling” in Michigan sports, women perceive the barriers much more acutely.⁵⁵

When asked if women with many skills and qualifications are recognized for promotions in sports, 38% of men agreed with the statement versus only 17% of women working in the same field.⁵⁶ Nearly 90% of women surveyed agreed that gender biases in sports (e.g., recruitment, hiring, salaries, promotions, and career advancement) were a barrier for women in sports leadership, whereas less than half of male respondents agreed (44%).⁵⁷

While a majority of both men and women expressed confidence in women’s ability to serve as effective leaders when given the opportunity, a full 17% of male respondents did not agree.⁵⁸

In interviews conducted by the Task Force with sports leaders at the college level, work cultures across the state were frequently referred to as an “old boys club” – an atmosphere depicted by both female and younger male coaches interviewed – stating that older male colleagues “often pretend to support change but do not do so themselves.”⁵⁹

Michigan Sports Professionals: Recurring Themes

“I feel the next generation of female athletes has the potential to gain a greater piece of ground in sport leadership.”⁶⁰

Intersectionality

When considering the fair treatment of women in sports organizations, it is essential that women are not viewed as a monolith. Not all women have the same experiences, and the intersections of identity - including sex, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, and other characteristics— must be considered when assessing experiences and solutions. Survey questions distributed by Task Force members touched on perceptions of treatment towards women with intersecting identities, and from these results it is clear that misconceptions about the fair treatment of women of Color in the workplace, or women of varied sexual orientation, for example, still persist (see Figure 3.4).

Figure 3.4: The Fair Treatment of Women Regardless of the Following⁶¹

Survey Question Topic	Survey Respondents	
	Female Leaders % in Agreement	Male Leaders % in Agreement
Respondents were asked if they agree that the treatment of women in their workplace is fair regardless of:		
Their religion or spiritual practice.	73%	78%
Their marital status.	71%	79%
Their racial or ethnic identity.	70%	85%
Their political affiliation.	67%	73%
Their sexual orientation.	65%	80%
Their status as a current or former athlete.	63%	72%
Whether or not they have children.	62%	71%
Their gender or gender identity.	61%	77%
Their attractiveness or physical appearance.	61%	73%
Their age.	60%	80%
Whether or not they have a disability.	60%	74%

Female sports leaders surveyed were consistently less in agreement than male sports leaders when asked if they perceived the treatment of women in their workplaces to be fair regardless of their identities, affiliations, and status characteristics. The most discrepant perceptions of fair treatment were due to women's age, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and whether they have a disability.⁶²

Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance is a challenge while working in sports leadership, and women, particularly female coaches, often feel the brunt of these challenges more acutely. Interviews conducted by Task Force members found that many sports professionals knew at least one female colleague who had dropped out of the profession because of work-life balance stresses. Most female interviewees confessed to having similar thoughts of leaving when faced with work-life balance stresses, especially when becoming mothers.

One female respondent pointed out that the stress and anxiety of balancing family and work “can be difficult when the boss's relationship with family is a different one (to theirs).” Again, this response points to the importance of having representational female leadership in positions of powers across the sectors of sports. While female interviewees cited examples of how male colleagues were supportive, there was significant agreement that in their experience, women in leadership roles had proved to be more supportive, because they “understand what it takes to do what we do.”⁶³

Institutional Support

Ultimately, most interviewees, respondents and workshop participants agreed that any change in work environment and experience must start at the top – there is a need for institutions and high-level leadership to place a deliberate emphasis on inclusion and gender equality in sports and athletics. The overwhelming majority of survey responses, both male and female, saw a benefit in enhancing visibility of women sports leaders in Michigan and in creating women in sports leadership professional development programs. Participants also saw the state playing a key role in circulating consistent and research-based messaging to drive schools across Michigan towards taking action.⁶⁴

5. LOOKING FORWARD

Further Research

Further research can be conducted to further assess the landscape of women and girls in sports in Michigan. Key areas for further research include:

- **Widespread collection of youth sport participation data.** No reliable surveillance system exists to track overall youth sport participation at the community level. The Task Force suggests the development of a standardized, statewide survey containing questions to measure youth sport participation.
- **Analyzing the connection between mental health and sports for female athletes.** The barriers to an athlete's access to resources, as well as the stigma surrounding mental health, should be examined, particularly at the highest levels of college and high school competitive sports.

The Next Phase: Solutions and Recommendations

As this report demonstrates, Michigan can be a leader in expanding and improving access to sports and athletics for women precisely because Michigan roughly mirrors national trends in athletics. The work of the Task Force moving forward will be to utilize the research highlighted in this report to develop solutions and recommendations to address current discrepancies and inequities in athletics.

Key areas for solutions include increased resources at every level of sport, programs to encourage young girls to play sports, and career advancement opportunities.⁶⁶ Such recommendations may include diverse hiring practices and equal pay procedures for athletic and educational institutions, incentivizing the inclusion of qualified candidates from diverse backgrounds, and improved childcare policies.

CASE STUDY: This Girl Can – International Media Campaigns⁶⁵



Internationally, one of the most popular ways to increase exposure and promote women in sports is through the creation of major state promotional campaigns encouraging physical activity in sport and debunking negative stereotypes.

One successful example out of England is the “This Girl Can” campaign led by Sport England, which ran a number of advertisements promoting girls’ sports engagement. It racked up over 95 million views. A reported 70% of women who viewed this campaign experienced increased motivations toward engaging in sports activities and 1.6 million women started or restarted exercise as a result.

The Australian Department of Health also runs the “Girls Make Your Move Campaign,” inspired by “This Girl Can.” These campaigns not only promote women in sports, but also serve as hubs for more information about how to get involved in sports, directing girls and women towards existing organizations and resources. These campaigns are a very effective way of tying promotional work directly to a call to action to get involved in sport.

APPENDIX

Exemplary Programs in Michigan

Exemplary programs in Michigan should be considered when making future recommendations. In the K-12 space, several schools were noted to have higher rates of girls' sports participation compared to similar schools in geographic, demographic and socioeconomic conditions; one city school ranked among those with the highest participation rates in the state. Examining what programs and institutions are doing well is key to implementing statewide policy to address girls' sports participation. Whether in a K-12 setting or acting as a nonprofit, exemplary programs exist across Michigan and this section serves to highlight those doing outstanding work.

Great Sport Great Kids in Grand Rapids

In Grand Rapids, Great Sport Great Kids, a nonprofit working in the Grand Rapids School District, privately funds K-8th grade athletics for public schools, offering a variety of sports at the elementary and middle school levels. A subsection of the program called Great Girls consists of a group of 20 female corporate leaders with a background in athletics who advocate for the importance of girls in sports and removing barriers.⁶⁷

Port Huron Parks and Recreation

Working to reduce barriers of access for young people, the Port Huron Parks and Recreation Department turned to free play as a strategy to increase park usage on a limited budget. The city placed bins at four city parks and filled them with balls. Recreation director Nancy Winzer reported an increase in the number of children coming to the parks as a result. "If the balls aren't returned, that's a great sign," she commented. "We'll just get more balls."⁶⁸

Michigan YMCAs

Another exemplary program in Michigan is the YMCA. With over 460,000 participants across the state, this creates 73 physical locations for use. The YMCA also reaches many rural and underserved communities in the state, insuring that 80% of American households live within 10 miles of a Y. Specifically in Michigan, over 24,000 youth participate on swim teams.⁶⁹

Girls on the Run

Girls on the Run, an organization promoting positive emotional and physical development for young girls through physical activity, has over 15 active councils in Michigan, serving 11,441 girls across 37 Michigan counties. Girls on the Run places an emphasis on providing female role models for girls, with 95% female coaches.⁷⁰

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