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EDITOR'S PICK

Maplewood Richmond Heights School District denounces new transgender athletes law

Jack Suntrup

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A student's Yoda high-top sneaker marks the corner baseline for volleyball during field day on Friday, May 20, 2022, at Maplewood Richmond Heights High School in Maplewood. Photo by Laurie Skrivan, Iskrivan@post-dispatch.com

Laurie Skrivan

Jack Suntrup

JEFFERSON CITY — Maplewood Richmond Heights School District administrators on Monday called a new state law restricting transgender athletes discriminatory and didn't shut the door on future legal action.

The new law, which the St. Louis County district called an attack on transgender students, requires athletes to play on sports teams corresponding with the sex on their birth certificate — **a requirement at odds with a resolution** on which the district school board had signed off two months before legislators approved the law in May.

The law took effect Monday.

The district said in a Monday message to parents that it had received rules from the Missouri State High School Activities Association “enforcing this discriminatory legislation,” which also applies to public and private colleges.

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“It is especially disappointing that so much energy and hatred was directed at an issue that involved fewer than 10 students in the entire state who were participating in sports under MSHSAA's former regulations,” the administrators said in a Monday message to parents.

District administrators said there weren't currently any transgender students in the district wishing to play sports.

“However, when and if a student does decide to participate,” the administrators said, “MRH will work with the student and their parents/guardians to consider any and all options — legal and otherwise — necessary to support that student’s desire to participate in sports and any other activities available to MRH students.”

MSHSAA’s policy prior to the new law said a transgender girl couldn’t play on a girls sports team “until one calendar year of documented medical/hormone treatment and/or suppression is completed.”

The policy said that to maintain eligibility, the athlete would have to “provide continuing medical documentation” of “appropriate hormone levels.”

The past MSHSAA policy also allowed transgender boys to participate on boys teams without the transgender boys undergoing hormone therapy.

Though supporters of the new law have focused on transgender women and girls, Missouri’s restrictions also apply to transgender boys, who will no longer be able to play on all-boys teams.

Girls and transgender boys are still allowed to play on teams designated for boys if there is no girls team, such as in football or baseball.

The administrators said they would “continue to promote an environment that affirms our students’ identities, which ultimately will contribute to their overall well-being and success.”

The Missouri law, which follows the lead of other conservative states, expires in four years, on Aug. 28, 2027.

While opponents have characterized the legislation as a discriminatory attack on a small group of transgender young people, proponents say they are protecting girls contests from athletes who have an unfair advantage because of their sex designated at birth.

A poll released last week by St. Louis University and YouGov suggested a majority of Missourians were in agreement with restrictions.

The poll of 900 likely voters found that 67% opposed allowing transgender student-athletes to play on sports teams that match their gender identity, rather than the gender they were assigned at birth.



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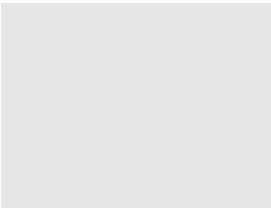


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Some 471 anti-LGBTQ bills, many of which target transgender rights, have been introduced in state legislatures across the United State since the start of the year. At least 18 states have banned transgender athletes from competing in sports that match their gender identity. Ohio could be the next name on that list, as lawmakers in the Buckeye State look to pass the Save Women's Sports Act, which would require state institutions of higher education and private colleges to designate separate single-sex teams and sports for each biological sex. For a more unique perspective on the issue of letting trans athletes compete in sports, "Morning Rush" host Lindsay Tuchman spoke with American swimmer Schuyler Bailar, who uses he/him pronouns. He is the first openly transgender Division I swimmer in NCAA history, where he competed for the Harvard men's swimming and diving team. "For me, sports absolutely saved my life," Bailar said. "They gave me life, and I think that every kid has a right to access that type of connection with their body and with their peers." Bailar says it's important for legislators to understand that these bills are affecting children who want to play recreational sports with their friends before they're even reaching the age of puberty. "I think that most of the bills that we're looking at around the country are not actually talking about the Olympics, they're not talking about professional sports some of them are talking about college sports, but most of them are talking about

children. And I think what lawmakers and legislators are missing is that central point that we should allow kids to play sports with their friends."SEE MORE: Advocates worry about the effects of state laws targeting LGBTQ youthBailar shared his own experience and said he received a lot of positivity and support from his teammates and coaches when competing in the men's swimming category in college. But, he shared the juxtaposition when it comes to trans women."The driving way that people are trying to exclude is by focusing on trans women and trans girls. Lia Thomas, for example, received only hatred and vitriol from the media, which I think was really devastating to see, even though she did have support from her coach and from some of her teammates," he said. "So there's a discrepant difference between that. Even though people are saying it's about saving women's sports, they're actually excluding women."Does biological sex determine ability to win? Some advocates for bans on transgender athletes have made the argument that the biological sex of a transgender athlete could give them advantages when competing with cis men or cis women. But Bailar disagrees and says there's data to support her stance."I understand the focus on research and science and I will also say that that's important. There is research and science that reports that trans women who've undergone testosterone suppression do not retain clear advantages over cis women," he said. "So, when people are talking about the science, the research actually does support the inclusion of trans women in the women's category."SEE MORE: World Swimming bans transgender athletes from women's eventsBailar continued to argue that people who have an issue with transgender women athletes competing with cis women athletes should be asking themselves a different question."Transgender people don't transition in order to win, or even in order to play sports. We happened to also be athletes. We transition to live," Bailar said. "Now, if you are afraid of a man pretending to be a woman in order to win women's sports, who are you afraid of? You're afraid of men toxic, cis men, who are abusing their power. You're not actually afraid of trans women. And we have to stop punishing trans people for the harm that the patriarchy, that cis men perpetuate. You're afraid of men, not trans people."Gender-affirming careWhen it comes to gender-affirming care, which some legislators are also working to ban, Bailar says it can mean a variety of things. He also pointed out that gender-affirming care has been approved by major medical, psychological and psychiatric associations as medically necessary, appropriate and lifesaving. "Gender-affirming care is exactly what it says it is. It affirms one's gender. It doesn't try to make you be somebody that you're not. It says, 'Hey, I see you for who you are. I believe you. I trust you for who you are and Im going to do things to affirm that.' And for me, gender-affirming care was lifesaving," Bailar said. "It could be something from therapy, just talking about it; it can be affirming one's name and pronouns; it can include surgery and hormones, but only at developmentally appropriate ages. So people have this belief that

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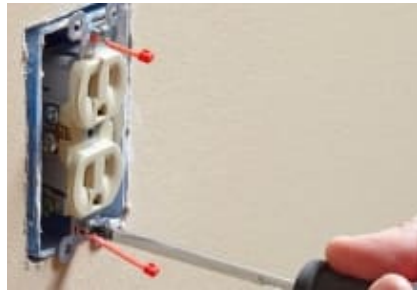
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By Jack Suntrup
Jefferson City reporter