



Alaska education board votes to ban transgender girls from participating in girls' sports



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Education

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By Iris Samuels

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The athletic field at Begich Middle School on Saturday, Sept. 15, 2018. (Loren Holmes / ADN)

A board appointed by Gov. Mike Dunleavy decided Thursday in favor of a new regulation that would ban transgender girls from participation in high school girls' sports.

The decision by the state board of education came less than six months after the board [passed a resolution](#) first indicating its members were interested in such a policy. All seven Dunleavy-appointed board members voted in favor of the new policy, which states that only girls whose sex assigned at birth is female will be able to participate in girls' sports.

The only individual to vote against the new policy during a 90-minute meeting was the board's student representative, Felix Myers, a junior from Sitka, who said the policy could expose transgender students to bullying and criticized the board for spending time on the policy rather than other issues facing the state's education system.

Earlier this summer, the board received hundreds of written comments from parents, students and advocates on the topic. The input was mixed: Many, particularly from conservative parts of the state, expressed support for the policy. But parents of transgender children, civil rights advocates and teachers all said the policy would be harmful to an already marginalized and small group of children.

An effort by conservative lawmakers to limit transgender children's participation in school sports through legislation has failed to pass in the last three consecutive legislative sessions.

Nearly half of U.S. states have passed laws to limit the participation of transgender girls in girls' sports, part of a broader effort by Republican elected officials to limit the rights of transgender people across the country. In numerous Republican-controlled states, legislators have adopted laws to restrict gender affirming care for minors, limit transgender people's use of school bathrooms and limit what public schools can teach about gender and sexuality.

In Alaska, no such laws have been adopted. LGBTQ+ rights advocates say that the state constitution's privacy clause — the same part of the constitution that protects abortion access — could also be the basis for a legal challenge to laws and regulations pertaining to transgender children, including the new sports regulations.

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It is now up to the Alaska School Activities Association to implement the new regulations. The association oversees all high school activities in the state. Its director, Billy Strickland, said Thursday that the regulation would likely lead the association to create two divisions in high school sports: one for girls whose sex assigned at birth is female, and one for all other students —including transgender students, boys, and girls who prefer to compete alongside boys.

The Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District is the only one in the state that has already [adopted regulations](#) limiting the rights of transgender kids to participation in school sports according to the gender with which they identify.

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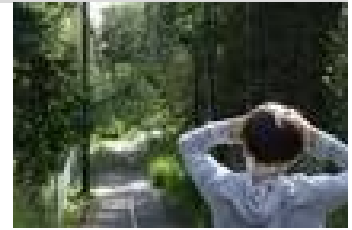
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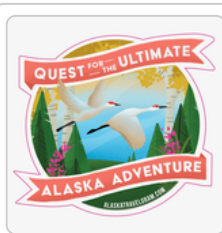
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