

Reauthorization of the Women's Educational Equity Act (WEEA) of 2001¹

Background:

Since 1974, WEEA has been the only federal education program specifically focused on gender equity. The federal government has a responsibility to actively implement Title IX and other federal civil rights laws using preventive as well as enforcement strategies. WEEA was known for funding model gender equity programs and for using its Resource Center to share information on these programs and assist states with gender equity initiatives.

However, WEEA has never been adequately funded and the Bush Administration ended the WEEA Equity Resource Center in 2003. At its height, WEEA received \$10 million in 1980, although it had been authorized for \$80 million. Since 1987 the annual appropriations for WEEA have been less than \$4 million and in the proposed FY '11 Department of Education budget WEEA is to receive only \$2.278 million -- less than many congressional earmarks!

This amount is not even sufficient to support annual competitions for gender equity programs that were held in past years. This is not to say that there has been no funding of gender equity programs –the Perkins Vocational Education Acts had provided \$100 million annually for sex equity in non-traditional careers and to assist displaced homemakers until 1998 and the National Science Foundation has funded gender equity STEM (science, technology, engineering & mathematics) activities for many years – but the funding has been narrow and not focused on the broad goal of educational equity for girls and boys, women and men.

Federal support of gender equity education has been minimal, uncoordinated, and inadequately focused on preventing sex discrimination. A new coordinated approach is needed to take advantage of the common underlying challenges in fully implementing gender equity in a wide variety of areas (such as STEM, vocational education, and under-representation of women in education administration).² The Department of Education (ED) is in an ideal position to provide leadership in accomplishing many gender equality goals.

Justification for Improved Federal Legislation to Support Gender Equity in Education:

While Title IX has promoted positive results on important indicators such as increased participation of females in athletics and higher education, there are still many subtle inequities³ and unlawful school activities (such as sexual harassment in schools, and sex-segregated classes that violate Title IX) and reinforce continued inequities for both girls and boys. Many of these gender inequities are particularly detrimental to less advantaged groups in our society, who often suffer from multiple forms of discrimination based on sex, race, national origin, limited English proficiency, disability, sexual orientation and gender identity, age, or poverty.

In counteracting sex stereotypes, education can play a critical role in changing the social norms that have limited educational opportunities for women and men, girls and boys. Changing such norms is associated with improvements in quality of life indicators for individuals and families.

In addition to having insufficient resources to continue to advance gender equality in US education, the previous reauthorizations of WEEA have failed to adequately support the Title IX

¹ WEEA of 2001 was included in the ESEA of 2002. See <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg86.html>

² For example, the recent NSF supported report from AAUW on "Why so Few?" on women in the STEM fields addresses problems with sex stereotyping as well as the internalization of sex bias and stereotypes in limiting career options. These principles apply to gender equity across the board, not just STEM.

³ In the early years of Title IX there was often government leadership in identifying and helping educators end overt sex discriminatory practices such as allowing only boys to take shop and only girls to take home-economics. Additionally, the ED supported research on more subtle types of sex discrimination such as sex differences in classroom interactions with teachers.

coordinators who are critical to fully implementing Title IX educational equity at the state, local school district, and school levels. Since the beginning of the Bush Administration, ED has also neglected its responsibility to coordinate and provide leadership in gender equity by failing to appoint a Special Assistant for Gender Equity (SAGE) to provide oversight of equity programs across the ED.⁴ The R&D strategy to fund model programs also needs to be updated to build on the more comprehensive gender equity expertise and grass roots resources of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in the various topic areas.

Key Features of the Reauthorized WEEA:

- 1. Create an Office for Gender Equity in the US Dept. of Education to be managed by an Assistant Secretary for Gender Equity.** This Office would build on the advisory, coordination, and other requirements for the SAGE. It would work closely with ED's Office for Civil Rights, the Civil Rights Act Title IV programs⁵, and the Institute for Education Sciences. In addition to providing assistance to the White House Council for Women and Girls, the Office for Gender Equity would collaborate on educational equity issues with the women's offices in other agencies, such as the Department of Labor Women's Bureau and the HHS Women's Health Offices.
- 2. Provide leadership in the development of effective and sustainable Title IX Action Networks at the national, state, and local levels.**
 - Develop national accreditation standards and training for Title IX coordinators and include incentives for teachers, administrators, and other gender equity advocates to obtain gender equity training.
 - Provide grants to states to establish these networks of Title IX coordinators and gender equity partners or advisors.
 - Provide pilot grants to Local Education Agencies and their gender equity partners to establish replicable local Title IX Action Network models that are effective in helping proactive Title IX Coordinators in all their schools work with other educators, parents, and students in advancing gender equality.
- 3. Support National Gender Equity Collaboratives to develop and share programs that work to:**
 - Fully implement Title IX and other gender equity laws and policies.
 - Counteract sex bias and sex stereotypes, especially as they intersect with other kinds of bias and stereotypes, and to change societal norms which limit equality.
 - Create supportive and safe educational climates free from sexual harassment, discrimination, and gender-related inequities.
 - Increase participation of both girls and boys in fields non-traditional for their gender, especially in STEM, vocational/technical, and leadership in politics and business.
 - Insure gender equity in athletics, sports, and physical and mental health.
 - Support education and research on women's studies, women's history, and gender equality.

⁴ This SAGE position is currently authorized in the 1994 Department of Education Organizational Act.

⁵ While the Civil Rights Act Title IV programs have been administered by the ED Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, they have a permanent authorization and are not usually specified in the ESEA. However, one of their specific responsibilities is to provide technical assistance to end sex, as well as race and national origin discrimination and to advance the use of effective strategies and activities to do so.