

FactSheet July 2017

Competition Cheer as Sport: AB 949

by Mary Briggs

Bill Summary

In 2015, California passed Assembly Bill 949, which required that the California Interscholastic Federation (CIF) take steps to classify Competition Cheer as an interscholastic sport. The new law tasked the CIF with creating guidelines, procedures, and safety standards for Competitive Cheerleading.

Unlike traditional Sideline Cheer, in which cheerleaders support sports teams from the sidelines at athletic events, Competition Cheer teams compete directly against one another using an objective scoring system. Beginning in the 2017-18 school year, any cheerleading team that enters a competition is subject to CIF Bylaws. Among those regulations, all competitive cheer coaches—paid or unpaid—must complete the safety education program required of all CIF coaches, plus an additional training outlined in the CIF Bylaws (updated April 2017). Participants must meet the same eligibility requirements as all other interscholastic athletes.

Purpose

Without CIF recognition, districts' standards for coaching competence, safety resources, and regulations have been inconsistent. The growing popularity of cheerleading and cheerleading competitions, along with increasing skill and athletic demands, have led to more reported cheer-related injuries such as fractures, concussions, spinal damage, and paralysis. Cheerleading injuries account for 65 percent of all major injuries in girls' high school athletics. Moreover, the Consumer Product Safety Commission reported almost 37,000 emergency room visits for cheer-related injuries in 2012.

By making Competitive Cheer a sport, the state Legislature seeks to ensure that cheerleaders and coaches

Questions for Boards to Consider

The CIF now recognizes Competitive Cheer as an interscholastic sport and, has developed a set of guidelines, procedures, and safety standards for this new designation. Districts that currently offer any form of cheerleading should review their programs, because many Sideline Cheer teams will also be affected by the new regulations.

School boards should ask the following questions:

- » Who in the district oversees athletic programs?
- » Do our existing cheer teams currently participate in any competitions?
 - » If so, do the teams currently have coaches who meet the safety guidelines and certification requirements mandated by the new law? How will the district ensure that they are certified prior to competition?
- » Is there interest in offering Competitive Cheer in the future?
 - » If so, how will the district facilitate funding to comply with Title IX requirement (see p. 2) for parity in terms of the quality of resources, opportunities, and scholarships available to male and female athletes?

receive the same resources and are held to the same safety standards as other interscholastic sports. Under the new law, Competitive Cheerleading coaches are required to complete the same training as other interscholastic coaches.

In places that have instituted additional safety requirements, catastrophic injuries have declined. As an added benefit, Competitive Cheer participants are eligible for the same exemption from physical education courses that other interscholastic athletes receive. A few colleges and cheer organizations offer cheer scholarships, though cheerleading is not currently recognized as a sport by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA).

What does this mean?

Effective July 1, two forms of Competitive Cheer have been designated as interscholastic sports by the CIF: Traditional Competitive Cheer (TCC) and Competitive Sport Cheer (CSC). There are several distinctions between the two sports, outlined within CIF Bylaws, Article 170 (see CIF Competitive Cheer link in the Resources section).

According to Roger Blake, CIF Executive Director, about one third of Sideline Cheer teams have entered competitions in the past. Unless they meet CIF standards, however, this is no longer allowed. The moment a Sideline Cheer team enters a competition, it becomes subject to CIF regulations.

Title IX Compliance

AB 949 tasked the CIF with obtaining a Title IX compliance designation for Competition Cheer, meaning that the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights (OCR) would rule that competition cheer meets its definition as a sport.

While the OCR has yet to recognize any form of Competition Cheer as a sport, the agency does not approve individual sports at the time a program is initiated. Instead, the OCR only determines compliance on a case-by-case basis during investigations of complaints about potential Title IX violations. Furthermore, the OCR reviews programs as a whole—not by individual sport—considering factors such as the program structure and administration; team preparation; and

opportunities for practice and competition. About 30 states are currently moving to adopt Competition Cheer as an interscholastic sport.

Importantly, for a district or school to be compliant with Title IX, the district must provide male and female students with the same quality of resources, opportunities, and scholarships. If the school funds certain sports, such as football, through the budget but requires that predominantly female teams operate solely through fundraising, the school will likely be found out of compliance with Title IX.

What about Sideline Cheer?

While Sideline Cheer is not recognized by CIF as a sport (and thus, it cannot fulfill Title IX requirements), the organization recommends that Sideline Cheer coaches also receive safety certification to reduce the risks to student athletes.

Where can coaches receive training?

LEAs can operate their own safety certification program, provided it meets the requirements outlined within CIF Bylaws (Article 170). Districts may also support online certification through the American Association of Cheerleading Coaches and Administrators (AACCA), which makes district-to-district transfers easier and features a searchable database of all certified coaches.

Resources:

CIF Competitive Cheer Information
http://cifstate.org/sports/competitive_cheer/index

AACCA Spirit Safety Certification
<https://nfhslearn.com/courses/10000/aacca-spirit-safety-certification>

Title IX Regulations Related to Athletics
<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/rights/reg/ocr/edlite-34cfr106.html#S41>

U.S. Department of Education – Office of Civil Rights
Dear Colleague Letter, September 17, 2008
<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-20080917.pdf>

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