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NJSIAA to celebrate 50th anniversary of Title IX throughout 2021-22 school year

ROBBINSVILLE, NJ (Sept. 9, 2021) — The New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association (NJSIAA) has grown exponentially since it was established in 1918. One of the most significant developments along the way took place in 1972, with the passage of Title IX of the Educational Amendments.

Signed into law by President Richard Nixon on June 23 of that year, the legislation said, in part, “No person in the United States shall on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving financial assistance.”

Although Title IX wasn’t targeted toward improving opportunities for girls to participate in high school sports, it nevertheless led to unprecedented opportunities to participate and compete through the years that followed. In New Jersey, approximately 120,000 female athletes took part in NJSIAA sports during 2018-19, the last pre-pandemic school year. And the NJSIAA is a national leader, in offering girls championship competition in a total of 16 sports.

With all this in mind, the NJSIAA is planning to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Title IX in a variety of ways during the 2021-22 school year. Through social media, its website, and at events, the NJSIAA will recognize female student-athletes from throughout the past 50 years who have not only excelled in competition, but also used the life skills gained through those experiences to embark on successful careers. The celebration will culminate with a Title IX luncheon in September 2022, for current NJSIAA female student-athletes, that will feature keynote speakers and a roundtable Q&A with former NJSIAA student-athletes.

The goal of the celebratory campaign is bringing greater awareness to the role the legislation played in terms of opportunities afforded to female student-athletes, and striving to continue their growing participation in interscholastic sports.

A true beneficiary of the opportunities afforded by Title IX is Colleen Maguire, who was an All-State athlete in both field hockey and basketball at South Hunterdon High School. After scoring more than 2,000 points in basketball, she earned a full scholarship to George Washington University, where she starred on the basketball team, graduated summa cum laude, and was eventually inducted into the university’s Athletic Hall of Fame. After working in business, she joined the NJSIAA in 2014 as its director of Finance and Administration. In 2020, she was appointed chief operating officer, becoming the first woman to lead the association. Earlier this year, she was elevated to the title of executive director.

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“I’ve benefitted greatly from Title IX, and I’m grateful to all those who forged the path I followed to my current role,” Maguire says. “I’m especially grateful to trailblazing former and current NJSIAA directors Florence Peragallo, Carol Parsons, and Kim DeGraw-Cole. Without their hard work, it’s hard to envision a female in this role today.”

Joanne Dzama, athletic director at Morristown-Beard School, says: “The impact of Title IX goes well beyond the fields of play. While the law opened doors, the girls and young women who seized the opportunity have had a profound impact on every institution from government and business and industry to our education systems and society overall.”

According to the National Federation of High Schools (NFHS), when Title IX went into effect, the number of female high school athletes nationally went from 300,000 (roughly 1 in every 27 girls attending school), to more than 2 million in a span of only six years. Today, approximately 3.4 million girls participate in interscholastic athletics each year. With all that growth in the early days and since, it makes the coming year a time to both celebrate Title IX and educate today’s student-athletes on its history.

Jen Fleury, athletic director at Villa Walsh Academy, says: “Certainly there is much to celebrate, but women’s sports still has huge opportunity for growth and acceptance and I know NJSIAA, our members schools, and our various leagues and conference are up to the challenge.”

Gianna Mangili, a senior soccer and track athlete at Mount St. Dominic in Caldwell, says: “I go to an all-girls school, and empowering young women is a big part of what we experience. They do a good job with that, and it’s afforded me a lot of opportunities that I know weren’t always there for female athletes. I think of the expression ‘Play Like A Girl’ and I know that it implied that someone wasn’t good, athletic, or strong enough. But so many athletes have come along to change that.”

Mangili is eager to learn more about the experiences of New Jersey female athletes during the past half century, via the NJSIAA Title IX 50th anniversary celebration.

“I will love to hear their stories, because I didn’t have to experience things that they did,” Mangili says. “It will be interesting to learn more about what it was like for them and to see how far we have come.”

About the NJSIAA

Established in 1918, the New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association (NJSIAA) is a voluntary, non-profit organization comprised of 436 accredited public and non-public high schools. A member of the National Federation of State High School Associations, the NJSIAA conducts tournaments and crowns champions in 33 sports. Championship competition for girls is sponsored in basketball, bowling, cross country, fencing, field hockey, golf, gymnastics, lacrosse, soccer, softball, swimming, tennis, outdoor track, winter track, volleyball, and wrestling. Boys’ championships are determined in baseball, basketball, bowling, cross country, fencing, football, golf, ice hockey, lacrosse, soccer, swimming, tennis, outdoor track, winter track, volleyball, and wrestling.

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