

# Should homeschooled youth play public school sports?

## Understanding the research base related to Mississippi HB 1617

A research overview prepared by Lisa Chinn PhD and Elizabeth Day PhD

## What is House Bill 1617?

The Tim Tebow Act (HB 1617) allows homeschooled students to play public school sports. The House advanced this bill on February 11, 2025. Many states have already passed similar legislation.<sup>1,2</sup>

1	Homeschooled students would be required to meet the same academic standards as public-school students to play public school sports, verified through testing.
2	Homeschooled students would not have to pay more than public school students to participate in public school sports.
3	Homeschooled athletes would still have to meet many of the same requirements as public school athletes, including immunization, age, and physical exam requirements.

## What are key issues surrounding the debate?

Both supporters and opponents of “Tim Tebow” laws point to issues of fairness.<sup>2</sup>



Supporters note that homeschooling families pay taxes that contribute to public schools, so they deserve to play public school sports.



Opponents note that unless a student is enrolled, they don't contribute to its headcount, so the school doesn't actually receive funding for that student.



Other concerns are an increased administrative burden on schools and fears that students may drop out if they can still play sports while homeschooled.

# What does the research say?

There isn't much published research on effects of these specific laws, but evidence suggests that school sports benefit students, with a couple caveats.

## Findings from Systematic Reviews

We found no systematic reviews specifically addressing the benefits or drawbacks of the policy changes specific to HB 1617.

A 2024 meta-analysis on school sports showed physical benefits of sports. Compared to those who didn't play, students who played had:

- more adequate amounts of sleep
- less sedentary behavior
- less tobacco use
- less illicit drug use

This analysis found one drawback, which was higher alcohol consumption in boys.<sup>3</sup>

<b>39%</b> LOWER	Odds of <b>sedentary behavior</b> (range: 9-39% lower)
<b>65%</b> LOWER	Odds of <b>tobacco use</b> (range: 27-65% lower)
<b>60%</b> LOWER	Odds of <b>illicit drug use</b> (range: 9-60% lower)

In a different 2024 systematic review, findings showed students engaging in physical activity, physical education, or sports reported mixed results for mental health benefits such as self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and life satisfaction.<sup>4</sup>

## Findings from Select Individual Studies

Individual studies have explored other outcomes for students.

- A 2025 study of 782 students ages 6-16 years found better health indices in student athletes, such as resting heart rate, flexibility, calories burned per day, and muscular strength.<sup>5</sup>
- The same 2025 study found that students who played after-school sports also had fewer ADHD symptoms, better cognitive skills, better social awareness, and better language comprehension.<sup>5</sup>
- A 2010 analysis of data from when Title IX increased girls' athletic participation in the 1970s found that as girls participated in sports more, they also became 1% more likely to go to college and 1-2% more likely to participate in the labor force.<sup>6</sup>

## References

1. Pender, G. (2025). House passes ‘Tim Tebow Act’ to allow homeschoolers to play sports. <https://mississippitoday.org/2025/02/11/house-passes-tim-tebow-act-to-allow-homeschoolers-to-play-sports/>
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3. Campos, J. G., Silva, M., Vieira, R., Bacil, E. D. A., Pacífico, A. B., Bastos, M., & Campos, W. (2024). Association of sports practice aspects with health risk behaviors in adolescents: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Revista Paulista de Pediatria*, 43. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1984-0462/2025/43/2024094>
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6. Stevenson, B. (2010). Beyond the Classroom: Using Title IX to Measure the Return to High School Sports. *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, 92(2), 284–301.

For full legislative text:

<https://billstatus.ls.state.ms.us/documents/2025/html/HB/1400-1499/HB1435IN.htm>

## Methods

Findings presented in this brief come from a literature review of academic peer-reviewed studies, as well as a review of research and findings from non-partisan think tanks, foundations, and organizations. Given the rapid nature of this search, other relevant studies may exist. In addition, please note that we did not use formal methods for summarizing results, assessing study quality, and exploring reasons for differences in findings across studies.

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