

# LGBTQ Inclusivity

Despite growing numbers of youth openly disclosing that they identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning (LGBTQ)\* during their school-age years, LGBTQ youth remain a vulnerable population across the nation. Schools can be hostile environments and staff may lack the skills and capacity to identify and design supportive environments for LGBTQ students. The need for this is great, particularly since the 2013 National School Climate Survey found that 59.5% of LGBTQ students said they felt unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation,<sup>1</sup> with other studies citing high instances of anti-gay bullying, physical harassment and physical assault.

Less discussed is the reality that discrimination and prejudice against youth who identify as LGBTQ compromises student achievement, emotional and behavioral health. It is crucial that educational systems and schools support all students, regardless of their gender expression, identity or sexuality, not from the perspective of victimization, but rather, acknowledging the entire personhood of each and every student an educator encounters.

## The Challenges

- Lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) high school students are 4 times more likely to attempt suicide as their heterosexual peers, and questioning youth are 3 times more likely to attempt suicide as their heterosexual peers.<sup>2</sup>
- 1 in 4 students have heard school staff make homophobic remarks, sexist remarks (30%), or negative remarks about someone's gender expression (35%) sometimes, often, or frequently in rural or small towns.<sup>3</sup>
- According to a large national study, high school students who have been hit, slapped, or physically hurt on purpose by their partner earned grades of C or D twice as often as earning grades of A or B.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Kosciw, J. G., Greytak, E. A., Palmer, N. A., & Boesen, M. J. (2014). The 2013 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth in our nation's schools. New York: GLSEN. Retrieved from <http://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2013%20National%20School%20Climate%20Survey%20Full%20Report.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Centers for Disease Control. (2011). *Sexual Identity, Sex of Sexual Contacts, and Health-Risk Behaviors Among Students in Grades 9-12: Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance*. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

<sup>3</sup> Palmer, N. A., Kosciw, J. G., & Bartkiewicz, M. J. (2012). *Strengths and Silences: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students in rural and small town schools*. New York, NY: Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network. Retrieved from <http://www.glsen.org/ruralreport>.

<sup>4</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2010). *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance — United States, 2009*. Surveillance Summaries, MMWR 2010;59(No. SS-5).

\*As a measure of inclusivity, the authors use the acronym LGBTQ to include all sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions. We understand that identities are not limited to the terms represented by the letters in this acronym and aim to be representative of the entirety of identities across the queer spectrum. Select studies utilize the acronyms LGBT or LGB to denote the specific populations represented in those studies and are marked as such throughout this tip sheet.

## Value Identit(ies)

- Create a culture of respect where everyone is valued for the person who they are. Show that you honor someone's identity by respecting their self-determination. Always use the name and [gender pronouns](#) used by students, even when they are not around.<sup>5</sup> If you are unsure which pronoun a student uses, ask, and urge colleagues and students to do the same.
- Be mindful of ethical obligations like privacy, data protection, confidentiality, and informed consent;<sup>6</sup> do not discuss a student's sexuality or gender identity with others unless it is absolutely necessary.

## Increase Visibility

- Creating inclusive cultures involves a myriad of measures including physical space considerations, staff development, attitudinal changes, and promoting respect for each individual in the community. A tangible first step to increasing the visibility of LGBTQ young people and establishing a welcome campus could involve displaying [posters](#), Safe Space stickers, brochures and other visuals that promote LGBTQ inclusivity and visibility.<sup>7</sup> Providing LGBTQ information, education and resources helps signify potential safe(r) spaces for LGBTQ youth to connect with positive, on-campus support.
- Expand visibility and inclusion beyond the classroom door. Integrate LGBTQ sexual and reproductive health into student health education paying specific attention to how sexual and gender stereotypes affect health-seeking behavior among LGBTQ young people, for example.
- Acknowledge there is more to a young LGBTQ student's identity than their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression. Assess and update curricula with depictions of LGBTQ persons of various backgrounds.<sup>8</sup> Literature and images of LGBTQ leaders or high profile figures should not be limited to depictions of oppression.<sup>9</sup> Start off with (s)heroes Bayard Rustin or Sylvia Rivera.

## Reduce Barriers

- Encourage all students to take initiative and be involved in the development of policies, decision-making and activities that concern them.<sup>10</sup> Youth leadership structures and mentoring are examples of ways to achieve this, and gain vital insight into the needs of LGBTQ students to better serve them in the future.
- Increase feelings of safety and provide non-gendered restroom access. More than 1 in 3 LGBTQ students expressed in a national survey that they find restrooms and locker rooms unsafe due to their sexual orientation.<sup>11</sup> [Know the laws in your area](#) and advocate for them to be respected.

<sup>5</sup> *The Safe Space Kit: Guide to Being an Ally to LGBT Students*, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Best Practices: Creating an LGBT-inclusive School Climate. (n.d.). Retrieved September 17, 2015, from <http://www.tolerance.org/lgbt-best-practices>.

<sup>7</sup> The Rhode Island Task Force on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Questioning Youth. (2009). *Toward Comprehensive Inclusion: Addressing the needs of Rhode Island's LGBTQ Youth*. Retrieved from <http://www.youthprideri.org/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/toward%20comprehensive%20inclusion.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> McGarry, R. (2013). Build a Curriculum That Includes Everyone: Ensuring That Schools Are More Accepting of LGBT Students and Issues Requires More Than Passing Mentions of Diversity in Sex Education Classes. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 94(5), 27.

<sup>10</sup> The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Youth and Student Organisation. (2007). *Guidelines for an LGBTQ-Inclusive Education*. IGLYO: Brussels, Belgium. Retrieved from [http://www.iglyo.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/IGLYO\\_Guidelines.pdf](http://www.iglyo.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/IGLYO_Guidelines.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> Kosciw, Greytak., Palmer, & Boesen, 2014.



## Put It In Writing

- Educate all staff and students on federal, state and local policies and laws such as the [Safe Schools Improvement Act](#) and the [Student Non-Discrimination Act](#), which provide protection for all young people. Empowering LGBTQ students and their parents with this information enables them to know how, when and where to get support.<sup>12</sup>
- Increase campus support by developing non-discrimination and inclusive protections in all policies and procedures.<sup>13</sup> If you already have these in place, ensure that they include protections for sexual orientation, gender identity and expression.<sup>14</sup> Inclusive policies create supportive educational environments and promote individual student perceptions of safety and well-being.

## Educate Staff and Students

- Integrate human rights into the educational approach. For instance, interactive methods like group-work enables students to value each other as equals. Recognizing that all people deserve the same rights, even if they are different from each other, is helpful when discussing rights for LGBTQ people, as well as other marginalized students.<sup>15</sup>
- Ensure staff are trained on LGBTQ-inclusive practices including the “coming out” process,<sup>16</sup> enabling them to empower LGBTQ youth on the dynamics of self-expression. This can also challenge staff to be critical of their personal attitudes, biases and assumptions.
- Develop the knowledge base of educators through [professional development](#) and trainings that address gender stereotypes, bullying, harassment and human rights<sup>17</sup> without positioning members of these communities as victims. This helps [create safer and happier environments](#) for all students, LGBTQ or not.

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<sup>12</sup> Hansen, A. L. (2007). School-based support for GLBT students: A review of three levels of research. *Psychology in the Schools*, 44(8), 839-848.

<sup>13</sup> The Rhode Island Task Force on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Questioning Youth, 2009.

<sup>14</sup> Best Practices: Creating an LGBT-inclusive School Climate, n.d.

<sup>15</sup> The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Youth and Student Organisation, 2007.

<sup>16</sup> The Rhode Island Task Force on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Questioning Youth, 2009.

<sup>17</sup> Greytak, E. A., & Kosciw, J. G. (2010). *Year one evaluation of the New York City Department of Education Respect for All Training Program*. New York: GLSEN.



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