School Climate for LGBTQ Students

Surveys by GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network) report the following conditions for LGBTQ students in U.S. public schools:

▪ 86.2% of LGBT students reported being verbally harassed, 44.1% reported being physically harassed and 22.1% reported being physically assaulted at school in the past year because of their sexual orientation.³

▪ 90% of transgender students heard derogatory remarks, such as “dyke” or “faggot,” sometimes, often or frequently in school in the past year.¹

▪ Almost all transgender students had been verbally harassed (e.g., called names or threatened) in the past year at school because of their sexual orientation (89%) and gender expression (87%).¹

▪ More than half of all transgender students had been physically harassed (e.g., pushed or shoved) in school in the past year because of their sexual orientation (55%) and gender expression (53%).¹

▪ More than a quarter of transgender students had been physically assaulted (e.g., punched, kicked or injured with a weapon) in school in the past year because of their sexual orientation (28%) and gender expression (26%).¹

▪ More than half (60.8%) of students reported that they felt unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation, and more than a third (38.4%) felt unsafe because of their gender expression.³ Two-thirds of transgender students felt unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation (69%) and how they expressed their gender (65%).¹

▪ LGBT students of color who were minorities in their school were much more likely to feel unsafe and experience harassment because of their race or ethnicity than those who were in the racial/ethnic majority.²

▪ Almost half of all transgender students reported skipping a class at least once in the past month (47%) and missing at least one day of school in the past month (46%) because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable.¹

▪ The reported grade point average of students who were more frequently harassed because of their sexual orientation or gender expression was almost half a grade lower than for students who were less often harassed (2.8 versus 2.4).³

▪ Less than a fifth of transgender students said that school staff intervened most of the time or always when hearing anti-LGBTQ remarks (16%) or negative remarks about someone’s gender expression (11%).¹

▪ School staff also contributed to harassment. A third of transgender students heard school staff make anti-LGBTQ remarks (32%), sexist remarks (39%) and negative comments about someone’s gender expression (39%) sometimes, often or frequently in the past year.¹

▪ Most transgender students (54%) who were victimized in school didn’t report the events to school authorities. Among those reporting incidents to school personnel, few (33%) believed that staff addressed the situation effectively.¹

▪ Only half (54%) of transgender students reported that their school had an anti-harassment policy, and only 24% said that the school policy included specific protections based on sexual orientation, gender identity/expression.¹
Teachers and Staff Can Positively Affect the Experiences of LGBTQ Students

- The presence of supportive staff contributed to fewer reports of missing school, greater academic achievement, higher educational aspirations, and a greater sense of belonging to their school community.³

- Students from a school with a safe school policy that included protections based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity/expression heard fewer anti-LGBTQ remarks, experienced lower levels of victimization related to their sexual orientation, and were more likely to report that staff intervened when hearing anti-LGBTQ remarks.³

- Students in schools with a Gay-Straight Alliance reported hearing fewer anti-LGBTQ remarks, experienced less harassment and assault because of their sexual orientation and gender expression, were more likely to report incidents of harassment and assault to school staff, were less likely to feel unsafe because of their sexual orientation or gender expression, were less likely to miss school because of safety concerns and reported a greater sense of belonging to their school community.³

Resources for Educators:

GLSEN, the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, is the leading national education organization focused on ensuring safe schools for all students. GLSEN offers free curricula and lesson plans that engage issues of safe schools, name-calling, bullying, anti-LGBTQ language, and LGBTQ history. GLSEN also offers books and other publications for use in the K-12 classroom and for teacher education. [www.GLSEN.org](http://www.glSEN.org)


How to Be an Ally to LGBT Students:

- Interrupt anti-LGBTQ jokes or comments. Explain why you find what someone has said to be offensive or hateful. Let the person making the remark know that sexual and gender prejudice are not acceptable.

- Identify allies: find teachers, counselors, staff, and parents who are supportive of LGBTQ students, and get the word out to the student body.

- Invite speakers to your school from organizations like PFLAG and the UMass Speakers Bureau to share their stories of their diverse experiences as LGBTQ folks and as allies.

- Make sure your school’s anti-discrimination policy includes sexual orientation and gender identity.

- Ask your librarian to make books that deal with issues related to LGBTQ youth available in the library.

- Let people know that you, personally, support the LGBTQ community.

- Get involved in or start your school’s Gay-Straight Alliance.