

Key Points of Information LGBTQ+ YOUTH IN SCHOOLS



Public School Defenders Hub 2023

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- We can and must ensure safe schools for LGBTQ+ youth.
- All children have the right to live as their authentic selves, in every space, especially at school.
- LGBTQ+ youth have the same rights to a safe and supportive learning environment as heterosexual, cisgender youth.
- Schools need to be a source of support and safety for all students.

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- Data from recent surveys indicate the vast majority of LGBTQ+ students are experiencing high levels of harassment, physical violence, and discrimination. . . . A hostile school environment prevents learning. It hurts academic performance, damages mental health, and limits post- secondary education plans, putting LGBTQ+ students at higher risk for poorer life outcomes.
- Efforts to ban LGTBQ+ books and to disallow students to use facilities matching their gender identities have hurt the mental health of LGBTQ+ students because they fears for their safety at school.
- LGBTQ youth aren't inherently prone to suicide risk because of their sexual orientation or gender, but face higher risk because of the stigma and mistreatment they experience.
- Not all parents are equipped or willing to support an LGBTQ+ youth. Some homes put LGBTQ+ youth at risk for abuse, mental health issues, and unhealthy coping behaviors.

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- In 2019, at least 1 in 6 teens surveyed by the Centers for Disease Control identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or unsure of their sexual orientation.
- UCLA studies from 2017 estimate 1.4% of teens aged 13-17 identify as transgender.
- A 2021 national survey found 82% of 22,000 LGBTQ+ youth reported feeling unsafe in school due to their actual or perceived personal characteristics.
- More than 80% avoid school functions and extracurricular activities because they feel uncomfortable or even unsafe.
- Over 90% heard homophobic and negative remarks about gender expression at school--with more than half hearing these from teachers or staff. - One-third of students missed at least one day of school because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable.
- 80% experienced harassment or physical assault; when reporting this treatment to school officials, more than 60% saw no response or were told to ignore the event.

What is at stake?

- LGBTQ+ students who reported higher levels of victimization are 3 times more likely to drop out and have lower GPAs, are twice as likely to be disciplined, feel less connected at school, are less likely to have post-secondary education plans, have lower self-esteem and higher levels of depression than students experiencing less victimization.
- LGBTQ+ students are also more likely to experience housing instability and higher rates of substance abuse, engage in riskier sexual behaviors, and consider and/or attempt suicide at higher rates than their non-LGBTQ+ peers.

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- Education is a public good because it helps everyone, including people who don't have children in school, to live in an educated society.
- A school is a place where childhood happens, where children of different places & races & backgrounds & genders learn from the past, make sense of the present and prepare for the future.
- Education is critically important for children themselves but also for our country. Education enables its citizens to develop their full potential and enables our democracy to flourish.

What should be done to support LGBTQ+ youth?

- All of the following recommendations from the Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network (GLSEN) have been shown to increase feelings of safety at school, lower dropout and absentee rates, improve academic performance and the likelihood of plans for post-secondary education, reduce experiences of harassment and violence, and improve mental well-being with decreased rates of depression and suicide:
- Increase student access to appropriate and accurate information regarding LGBTQ+ people, history, and events through inclusive curricula and library and internet resources;
- Support student clubs, such as GSAs (Gay-Straight or Gender/Sexual Alliances), that provide support for 6 LGBTQ+ students and address LGBTQ+ issues in education
- Provide professional development for school staff to improve rates of intervention and increase the number of supportive teachers and other staff available to students;
- Ensure that school policies and practices, such as those related to dress codes and school dances, do not discriminate against LGBTQ+ students;
- Enact school policies that provide transgender and gender nonconforming students equal access to school facilities and activities and specify appropriate educational practices to support these students;
- Adopt and implement comprehensive bullying/harassment policies that specifically enumerate sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression in individual schools and districts, with clear and effective systems for reporting and addressing these incidents.

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Resources

- The Human Rights Campaign Foundation partnered with 25 youth-serving organizations to develop a [checklist of actions](#) schools and communities can take to support LGBTQ+ youth better.
- HRC also offers professional development through a campaign called [Welcoming Schools](#).
- Equality California publishes a [Safe and Supportive Schools Scorecard](#) that summarizes school district responses to a bi-annual survey on LGBTQ-inclusive programs and policies.