
Human Rights Campaign Foundation

California LGBTQ Youth Report



In Partnership with



TIME TO THRIVE

PROMOTING SAFETY, INCLUSION AND WELL-BEING FOR **LGBTQ YOUTH**...EVERYWHERE!

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THE HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN FOUNDATION AND OUR CO-PRESENTING CONFERENCE PARTNERS ARE EXCITED TO PRESENT **TIME TO THRIVE, THE 7TH ANNUAL NATIONAL CONFERENCE** PROMOTING SAFETY, INCLUSION AND WELL-BEING FOR LGBTQ YOUTH ... EVERYWHERE!

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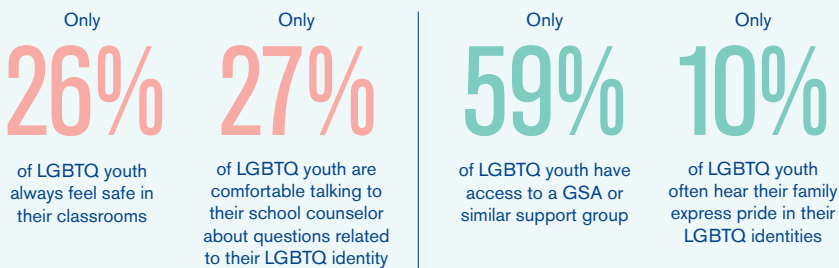
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FACTS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT LGBTQ YOUTH

HRC Foundation and University of Connecticut's 2017 landmark research shows us some of the most pressing issues facing our youth today.



We are making progress on the road to legal equality, yet young LGBTQ people in America still face dramatically heightened rates of discrimination in school, at home and within their community. The impact of family rejection, bullying and the messages they hear about being LGBTQ weigh heavily on our youth. By engaging a broad audience of youth-serving professionals, including K-12 educators, parents and families, mental health providers, pediatricians, religious leaders, recreational athletic coaches and youth development staff (Boys and Girls Club, YMCAs, scout leaders, etc.), we can create spaces in which LGBTQ youth are affirmed, supported and have the ability to thrive.

Time to THRIVE provides a comprehensive professional development opportunity for youth-serving professionals to build awareness and cultural competency, learn current and emerging best practices and gather resources from leading experts and national organizations in the field. The conference is strongly committed to an intersectional approach in all conversations, workshops and keynotes.

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From the Organizational Leaders

We are grateful that you are taking the time to read and absorb this report. As K-12 educators, parents, other youth-serving professionals and advocates, you have the opportunity and the power to ensure that LGBTQ youth are safe, supported and can thrive in all areas of their lives. This report brings to light the unfortunate reality that many of our institutions – right here in California – are not in lockstep with the laws, policies and best practices meant to protect LGBTQ students. Together, we can and must do better to close the gap and ensure the equal treatment and inclusion of LGBTQ students in this great state.

This report is based on survey responses from 1,700 California-based LGBTQ youth who participated in a national survey administered by the Human Rights Campaign Foundation and the University of Connecticut in 2017. These are our children, our students, our neighbors, our clients, our friends – and all of us have a role to play in taking the steps outlined in this report to improve the safety, inclusion and well-being of our LGBTQ youth. We stand with you and are eager to engage each and every one of you in changing the landscape for these remarkable young people – from administrators ensuring compliance with state law, to school counselors creating safe spaces, to parents and peers learning effective ally behavior. The need is great and the time is now.

Thank you,

Chad Griffin

President,
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Introduction

In recent years, LGBTQ Americans have seen tremendous strides toward equality and inclusion in the workplace, in health care, in public opinion and under the law. Marriage equality is now the law of the land, transgender candidates are being elected to public office and mainstream television and movies routinely feature LGBTQ characters portrayed in a positive light. These significant cultural changes, milestones and achievements provide hope to many LGBTQ youth.

And yet, the results of HRC Foundation's 2017 LGBTQ Teen Survey reveal persistent, serious challenges for LGBTQ students in California. More than 1,700 LGBTQ youth ages 13-17 living in the state participated in HRC's 2017 survey. The cards remain stacked against these youth in terms of safety, acceptance and support, both from their families and school staff. For LGBTQ youth of color, these challenges are compounded by racism and race-related stressors. Transgender and gender-expansive youth also face unique challenges.

In recent years, California has passed several laws designed to explicitly protect LGBTQ students and to provide guidance on compliance. However, a closer look at data suggests that some districts may be unaware of current legal requirements or could still be in the process of updating policies and procedures concerning LGBTQ inclusion. These oversights or district decisions to avoid the topic, have likely contributed to the challenges shared by LGBTQ youth in the survey.

Despite the difficulties that LGBTQ students face, stories of empowerment, resilience and activism have emerged from survey respondents. Across the state, many LGBTQ students are taking a stand and advocating for inclusivity and equality in schools. Parents, school board members, school administrators, teachers, school counselors, school psychologists and other school staff can support LGBTQ youth by following their lead and implementing the actionable guidelines in this report to create safe, affirming and welcoming schools.

About the Study

In 2017, HRC Foundation partnered with researchers at the University of Connecticut to deploy a comprehensive survey capturing the experiences of LGBTQ youth in their family settings, schools, social circles and communities. More than 12,000 youth ages 13-17 participated in the survey, with representation from all 50 states and the District of Columbia. This sub-report includes responses from more than 1,700 youth living in California. More information about the survey process, materials and respondent profiles can be found in the methodology section of HRC Foundation's 2018 LGBTQ Youth Report at <https://hrc.im/YouthReport>.

Terminology

Many parents and educators refrain from talking about or advocating for LGBTQ inclusion because it feels taboo or because they're afraid of saying the wrong thing. Having a better understanding of terms and meanings can help make conversations easier and more comfortable. Additionally, LGBTQ youth often assess whether a parent or educator is affirming by their ability to use LGBTQ-inclusive language. If you are new to LGBTQ topics, or simply need a refresher on the most up-to-date terminology and definitions, visit <https://www.hrc.org/resources/glossary-of-terms>.

The Importance of Family Support

Parents and families play an essential role in promoting adolescent health and well-being. Studies have shown positive health outcomes for LGBTQ youth whose families are supportive and accepting, including greater self-esteem and resilience, and a lower risk of negative health outcomes such as depression, distress, hopelessness, substance use and more.¹

Most LGBTQ youth are aware of their sexual orientation or gender identity by the start of adolescence.² On average, California youth who participated in the survey first understood their sexual orientation by age 12.³ While some people come out as transgender or non-binary as young adults or even later in life, research has confirmed that children as young as three or four years old can have a consistent, insistent and persistent sense of a transgender identity.⁴

While disclosing one's sexual orientation or gender identity to family members is an important and self-affirming developmental milestone, it is often fraught with worry. Many LGBTQ youth in California report coming out, being outed or being found out by their family as extremely stressful. For some LGBTQ youth, the real and perceived fear of rejection is compounded by the negative comments they hear about the LGBTQ community from their parents or family members. These negative attitudes and beliefs may make them reluctant to come out or disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity at home.

“For me, personally, it is uncomfortable because I am not accustomed to talking about my sexual identity with adults.”

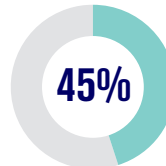
– Calif. respondent

To Be or Not To Be Out

Many LGBTQ youth begin to disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity during adolescence. This process varies widely for LGBTQ youth as they make decisions about whom they can come out to and in which contexts they feel the most safe disclosing their LGBTQ identity. Studies show that “outness” usually leads to more positive outcomes, including better academic performance, higher self-esteem and lower anxiety and depression.¹⁰ Similarly, the youth in our survey who report that being out has been a positive and affirming experience for them also report better outcomes in terms of their overall health and well-being.

36%
of LGBTQ youth in California
rate coming out as LGBTQ
to their parents as
extremely stressful⁵

**Only
21%**
are out to all
of their parents⁶



**45% say that their families
sometimes/often say bad things
about LGBTQ people in general⁷**

**About
29%**
are taunted or mocked
by their parents or
family members for
being LGBTQ⁸

**Transgender youth in
California are more than
1.75x**
more likely to be taunted
or mocked by family for
their LGBTQ identity than
cisgender LGBTQ youth⁹

¹ Ryan, C., Huebner, D., Diaz, R.M. & Sanchez, J. (2009). Family Rejection as a Predictor of Negative Health Outcomes in White and Latino Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Young Adults. *Pediatrics*, 123 (1), 346-352.

² Russell, S. and Fish, J.N., (2016). Mental Health in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Youth. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, 12, 465-487.

³ Mean age of age at which California respondents understood their sexual orientation, n=___

⁴ Brill, S., & Pepper, R. (2008). Developmental Stages and the Transgender Child. In *The Transgender Child: A Handbook for Families and Professionals* (pp. 61-72). San Francisco, CA: Cleis Press.

⁵ Percentage of California respondents who indicated that coming out as LGBTQ to their parents was extremely stressful, n=___

⁶ Percentage of California respondents who indicated that they are out to all of their parents, n=___

⁷ Percentage of California respondents who indicated that their families sometimes/often say bad things about LGBTQ people in general, n=___

⁸ Percentage of California respondents who indicated that they are taunted or mocked by their parents or family members for being LGBTQ, n=___

⁹ Percentage of transgender California respondents who indicated that they are taunted or mocked by family for their LGBTQ identity, n=___; percentage of cisgender California respondents who indicated that they are taunted or mocked by family for their LGBTQ identity, n=___

¹⁰ Russell, S. & Fish, J.N., (2016) Mental Health in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Youth. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, 12, 465-487.

Alternatively, LGBTQ students can experience greater stress and negative outcomes when they must manage their identity. We use the term “manage” to describe a scenario in which LGBTQ youth are not out to everyone in their lives and therefore must constantly evaluate in which environments and scenarios they are safe to share information about their LGBTQ identity.

Only
32% say that they can definitely be themselves at school as an LGBTQ person¹¹

Just
5% are open about their sexual orientation to all of their teachers¹²

Only
13% are out as transgender, non-binary or gender expansive to all of their teachers¹³

As parents, youth-serving professionals and allies, we all have a responsibility to create safe and affirming spaces so every LGBTQ youth can be out, proud and able to thrive.

“Generally, being out is difficult. Coming out to an adult you don’t know at all is even harder. I, personally, find it hard to come out to people until I’m comfortable around them. Also, it can be difficult to talk about LGBTQ issues with someone who isn’t LGBTQ and doesn’t understand the issues themselves.”

– Calif. respondent

The Need for Confidentiality

Privacy and confidentiality are critically important for LGBTQ youth, especially for those who do not have supportive families. Students in California have a legal right to share or withhold information about their sexual orientation or gender identity from their parents, educators, peers and others.¹⁴ For example, a student may disclose their LGBTQ identity to a school counselor and appear open about their LGBTQ identity to friends, but still wish not to disclose their LGBTQ identity to parents or family members. Given the level of rejection that LGBTQ youth experience at home, sharing a student’s sexual orientation or gender identity with parents or family members could expose them to abuse, rejection and even homelessness. Absent an explicit legal obligation or written permission from the student, school personnel should never disclose a student’s LGBTQ identity to parents, family members or other school staff. In May of 2016, the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Safe and Healthy Students recommended that school districts consider implementing safeguards to prevent disclosures.¹⁵

Question:

Do your district staff know that students have a legal right to confidentiality and that they should not disclose a student’s LGBTQ identity to parents, family members or other staff without permission from the student?

☐ Yes
☐ No

“If I were out to my family, I would feel more comfortable. Talking to anyone about my identity makes me nervous right now in case my family finds out.”

– Calif. respondent

“Sensitive topics such as sexual and/or gender identity are not something that a person would discuss with a stranger. Often times school counselors are nothing more than guides for one’s educational success.”

– Calif. respondent

¹¹ Percentage of California respondents who indicated that they can definitely be themselves at school as an LGBTQ person, n= __

¹² Percentage of California respondents who indicated that they are open about their sexual orientation to all of their teachers, n= __

¹³ Percentage of California respondents who indicated that they are out as transgender, non-binary, or gender expansive to all of their teachers, n= __

¹⁴ Ettinghoff, E., J.D. (2014). Outed At School: Student Privacy Rights and Preventing Unwanted Disclosures of Sexual Orientation. *Loyola of Los Angeles Law Review*, 47(2), 579-617. Retrieved from <https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/llr/vol47/iss2/10>

¹⁵ California Department of Education. (2018, April 25). School Success and Opportunity Act (Assembly Bill 1266) Frequently Asked Questions. Retrieved from <https://www.cde.ca.gov/re/di/eo/faqs.asp>

LGBTQ Students and Mental Health

The mental health disparities between LGBTQ youth and non-LGBTQ youth continue to be alarming. Today's LGBTQ youth face a variety of stressors including harassment, rejection from family and school staff, bullying from their peers, isolation and a lack of a sense of belonging in schools, that majorly impact their overall well-being. Studies have shown that, compared to their non-LGBTQ peers, LGBTQ students report lower self-esteem and much higher rates of depression, anxiety, alcohol and drug use and even suicide.¹⁶



More than 78% of LGBTQ students in California felt depressed or down in the past week²⁰



93% of LGBTQ students in California report they have trouble getting to sleep at night²¹



84% of LGBTQ youth in California rated their average stress level as a 5 or higher on a ten-point scale¹⁷

45%

indicated feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness, letting people down and/or not being a good person within the past week¹⁸

47%

indicated trouble concentrating or inability to focus on schoolwork in the past week¹⁹

Suicide is the second leading cause of death among youth ages 10-24,²² and studies continue to show that LGBTQ youth are up to four times more likely to attempt suicide than their non-LGBTQ peers.²³ In 2016, California passed Assembly Bill 2246, requiring the adoption of suicide prevention, intervention and follow-up plans by the state's public school districts serving students in grades seven through twelve. The law mandates that the suicide prevention policy specifically address the needs of LGBTQ students and other at-risk student populations.²⁴ Educators in California should also review the California Healthy Kids Survey to identify the percentage of students within their school or district who have seriously considered suicide in the past 12 months.

AB 2246:

To learn more about mandated suicide prevention policies, download information from the California Department of Education at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/cg/mh/suicide-prevres.asp>.

¹⁶ Birkett, M., Newcomb, M.E., & Mustanski, B. (2014). Does it Get Better? A Longitudinal Analysis of Psychological Distress and Victimization in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning Youth. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 56 (3), 280-285.

¹⁷ Percentage of California respondents who indicated that their average stress level is a 5 or higher on a scale of 1-10

¹⁸ Percentage of California respondents who indicated feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness, letting people down, and/or not being a good person when asked their "on average" or "usual" experience within the last week

¹⁹ Percentage of California respondents who indicated trouble concentrating or inability to focus on schoolwork when asked their "on average" or "usual" experience within the last week

²⁰ Percentage of California respondents who indicated that they felt depressed or down in the past week

²¹ Percentage of California respondents who indicated that they have trouble falling asleep at night

²² National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2016). [10 Leading Causes of Death, United States].

²³ CDC. (2016). *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.

²⁴ Pupil Suicide Prevention Policies, A. B. 2246. (Cal. 2016).

Schools must invest in creating climates that **openly** and **vocally** value and celebrate all forms of diversity, including LGBTQ identities. Ensuring that schools have LGBTQ-inclusive policies and procedures that are compliant with California law, and that school staff have received sufficient training on implementation, is a good starting point.

LGBTQ-Inclusive Policies and Compliance with California Law

Outdated district policies and procedures may be contributing to increased bullying among at-risk student populations. When attempting to bring schools into compliance, it is important to first review existing state law.

In 2000, California passed Assembly Bill 537, updating public school non-discrimination policies to include protections for students and staff based on sexual orientation and gender identity.²⁵ In 2011, California went a step further to pass Assembly Bill 9, requiring public schools to adopt **enumerated** anti-bullying policies that explicitly list protections based on sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression. AB 9 also requires that public schools in the state create a

process for receiving and investigating bullying complaints, including a requirement that school personnel intervene if they witness bullying. Additionally, AB 9 requires that school districts publicize the enumerated anti-bullying policy and the bullying complaint process, and that districts post online resources for students experiencing bullying on their website.²⁶

"Our district created a collaborative team to review and update our anti-bullying policies to explicitly include our LGBTQ students. We also created a policy and admin regulations on supporting our transgender and non-binary students that outline how district staff should support and affirm those youth. We are now rolling out professional development and will continue to collect and monitor data on safety and inclusion of our LGBTQ students."

– Director of Student Support Services, San Bernardino Unified School District

While writing this report, HRC reviewed the anti-bullying policies for five randomly selected school districts in the state and found only one with enumeration compliant with California's AB 9. Districts with outdated policies should expedite updates not only because of legal obligations, but because research strongly supports that enumerated policies significantly improve student safety.

AB 537:

To learn more about legal protection for LGBTQ students and staff, download information from the California Department of Education's Advisory Task Force at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ss/se/documents/ab537report.pdf>.

Question:

Does the anti-bullying and non-discrimination policy in your school district explicitly list protections based on sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression?

☐ Yes
☐ No

AB 9:

To learn more about the anti-bullying policy requirements for California's public schools, review guidance from the California Department of Education at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ss/se/sampleactionplan.asp>.



Only
32%
of LGBTQ youth
in California always
feel safe in the
classroom²⁷

²⁵ *Discrimination, A. B. 537. (Cal. 2000).*

²⁶ *Pupil Rights: Bullying, A. B. 9. (Cal. 2011).*

²⁷ *Percentage of California respondents who indicated that they always feeling safe in the classroom*

Training and Professional Development for All Staff

Written policies are an essential building block for improving school climate; however, policies alone will not translate into the needed changes for LGBTQ students. School and district leaders should consider that many educator preparation programs provide little to no cultural competency instruction on sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. The historical stigma, bias and misinformation about LGBTQ people should compel decision makers to require annual professional development for all staff on supporting and protecting LGBTQ students. Most educators are eager to learn how to facilitate conversations about LGBTQ topics, how to effectively intervene in anti-LGBTQ bullying and how to create inclusive classrooms.

“After hearing a colleague make a biased comment about an LGBTQ student, I encouraged our principal to schedule staff training. Sadly, she responded that our community wasn’t ready for LGBTQ discussions, but that she’d revisit the idea next year.”

**– Middle school art teacher,
Sacramento**

“As a school administrator, I wasn’t always knowledgeable or comfortable talking about LGBTQ inclusion. A few years ago, I decided to attend a conference focused on supporting LGBTQ students. At the middle school site where I worked, I decided to hire someone to train my staff, who were hungry for information and resources on the topic. We quickly created an active GSA club and took other actions to improve school climate. Ever since, at every site I’ve worked at, I’ve made sure that there is an active GSA and that there is a school culture where LGBTQ students feel welcomed, included, valued and respected.”

– Secondary principal, Chula Vista

Identifying Supportive Staff

The lack of easy-to-identify LGBTQ-supportive staff is likely contributing to students’ high levels of stress, feeling unsafe in the classroom and difficulty concentrating on school work. Educators may avoid enacting visible, vocal allyship for LGBTQ students for fear of potential push-back from parents, community members or colleagues and may be unsure if school or district leadership will support their advocacy for LGBTQ inclusion. However, educators should remember that LGBTQ identities are considered protected characteristics under California law and public schools are required to have LGBTQ-inclusive non-discrimination and anti-bullying policies.²⁸

Question:

Do you support LGBTQ students? List three ways that your students can easily identify you as an ally.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

When students feel safe, supported and affirmed, they are less likely to miss school, and more likely to excel both socially and academically.²⁹ Schools should assess how LGBTQ students find trusting and affirming adults on campus. Are there LGBTQ-Safe Space posters in classrooms or offices? Does the school principal use LGBTQ terms in a positive way? Are school counselors culturally competent enough to support the unique needs of LGBTQ students? Have teachers been trained to use LGBTQ-inclusive language and curricula? Do school bookshelves include LGBTQ-themed literature? If students are unable to confirm, without a doubt, that an educator is an ally, they may be less likely to seek needed support.

²⁸ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2017, June 20). California Anti-Bullying Laws & Policies. Retrieved from <https://www.stopbullying.gov/laws/california/index.html>

²⁹ Zewditu, D., Rasberry, C., Steiner, R., Brener, N., & McManus, T. (2018). Trends in Secondary School's Practices to Support Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Students, 2008-2014). *American Journal of Public Health*, 108 (4), 557-564.

"I've always considered myself an ally, but for some reason that did not translate into students identifying me as a supportive adult they could speak to. This was evident the day I placed a Safe Space sticker in my office. Within days, several students were sharing and recounting stories of rejection and harassment that no child should ever experience alone. Every student should know they have support from a caring adult, an educator. I now know that calling myself an ally without action isn't enough."

– School Counselor, Riverside

"It makes me more comfortable to talk about LGBTQ identities when I know for certain that I am talking to someone not only accepting, but supportive of the community. However, it always makes me less comfortable when I don't know someone's stance on LGBTQ issues or if I know for certain that they are not supportive."

– Calif. respondent

"I don't really talk about my identity with a counselor because I don't know if they are accepting of LGBTQ people. None of my counselors make it obvious if they are accepting or not."

– Calif. respondent

"What makes me more comfortable is if they have a sticker or poster that shows that they are supportive of LGBTQ people."

– Calif. respondent



Only
10%
of LGBTQ youth in California say all of their school staff are supportive of LGBTQ students³⁰



Only **27%** feel comfortable talking with their school counselor about questions related to their LGBTQ identity³¹

The following page is a poster intended for display in a classroom or office to show support for LGBTQ students, staff and families. Visuals like these help LGBTQ individuals identify trusting adults and improve feelings of safety and connectedness.



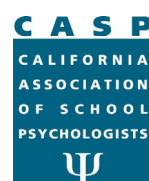
³⁰ Percentage of California respondents who indicated that all of their school staff are supportive of LGBTQ students

³¹ Percentage of California respondents who indicated that they feel comfortable talking with their school counselor about questions related to their LGBTQ identity

DO YOU NEED SUPPORT?

→ *ASK ME!* ←

I PROUDLY AFFIRM
LGBTQ STUDENTS,
STAFF AND FAMILIES.



School Climate

Because youth spend the majority of their time in school, their experiences in the classroom, in the halls, at lunch and during extracurricular activities can have a critical impact on their overall health and well-being.³² For some LGBTQ students in California, schools have created safe, supportive and affirming spaces that enable them to realize their full potential. Far too many LGBTQ students, however, still experience negative and even hostile school environments.

28% of LGBTQ youth in California have been threatened with physical violence at least once because of their sexual orientation or gender identity³³

50% have been teased or bullied because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity.³⁴

34% have been electronically bullied during the past 12 months (through email, chat rooms, instant messaging, websites or texting)³⁵

"I have one teacher who talks openly about his brother and his brother's partner with respect and as if it's no big deal, but the only other time we've referred to LGBTQ topics has been ... doing scenes about LGBTQ people in drama class."

– Calif. respondent

No school is automatically safe and inclusive for LGBTQ students. Creating a safe and inclusive school climate takes concerted planning, effort and follow-through by staff at all levels. Recent studies have shown that LGBTQ-inclusive instructional materials are linked to greater student safety, increased feelings of connectedness and lower rates of bullying.³⁶

Achieving LGBTQ visibility in curriculum promotes self-worth among LGBTQ students and builds acceptance with their non-LGBTQ peers.

In 2011, California passed Senate Bill 48, mandating the inclusion of LGBTQ individuals in history and social science curricula.³⁷ Since then, the State Board of Education has updated the History and Social

Science Framework and approved LGBTQ-inclusive textbooks. As of 2018, all new history and social science textbooks recommended by the California Department of Education are compliant with SB 48.³⁸



Only 20% of LGBTQ youth in California hear positive messages about being an LGBTQ person in schools³⁹

"LGBTQ topics aren't brought up at all in any of my classes. It could possibly be because my school is a bit homophobic."

– Calif. respondent

"In other classes, LGBTQ issues are always met with negativity. If someone is trans, they're an abomination, and if someone is gay, they're living in sin because of their lifestyle."

– Calif. respondent

"Despite living in a pretty liberal area, none of our teachers discuss anything related to personal identity."

– Calif. respondent

SB 48:

To learn more about the legal requirements for LGBTQ-inclusive curricula, see the California Department of Education's Frequently Asked Questions related to the implementations of SB 48 at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/senatebill-48faq.asp>.

³² Zewditu, D., Rasberry, C., Steiner, R., Brener, N., & McManus, T. (2018). Trends in Secondary School's Practices to Support Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Students, 2008-2014). *American Journal of Public Health*, 108 (4), 557-564.

³³ Percentage of California respondents who indicated that they have been threatened with physical violence at least once because of their sexual orientation or gender identity

³⁴ Percentage of California respondents who indicated that they have been teased or bullied because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation

³⁵ Percentage of California respondents who indicated that they have been electronically bullied during the past 12 months

³⁶ Kosciw, J. G., Ph.D., Greytak, E. A., Ph.D., Zongrone, A. D., M.P.H., Clark, C. M., Ph.D., & Truong, N. L., Ph.D. (2018). *The 2017 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth in our nation's schools*. New York: GLSEN.

³⁷ Pupil Instruction: Prohibition of Discriminatory Content, S. B. 48 (Cal. 2011).

³⁸ Equality California & Zuniga, M. V. (2017, November 10). *California State Board of Education Approves LGBTQ Inclusive Textbooks*. Retrieved from <https://www.eqca.org/sbelgbtqtextbooks/>

³⁹ Percentage of California respondents who indicated that they hear positive messages about being an LGBTQ person in school

The Power of Student Activism

LGBTQ students in California showcased an incredible amount of leadership, activism and resilience with regard to their overall safety and inclusion in schools. One way that students have successfully improved school climate is by starting extra-curricular clubs, such as a Gay and Straight Alliance or a Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA). These student-run clubs in middle and high schools bring together LGBTQ and allied peers to support each other, socialize and advocate for improved safety and inclusion of LGBTQ and other marginalized students. GSAs have amplified the voices of LGBTQ students and provided educators with an invaluable account of the persistent and emerging challenges they face in school.

With a safe and affirming platform to speak out, share stories and organize advocacy efforts, club members are taking the lead on shifting school culture. In many cases, GSAs have helped to promote leadership skills, self-esteem and resilience. Research has shown that schools with an active GSA improve feelings of safety and connectedness among LGBTQ students, leading to improved attendance and academic performance.⁴⁰

30%
of LGBTQ youth in California do not
have access to a GSA or similar club
or support group at school⁴¹

"Being able to speak on diversity, inclusivity and equity at my school has led me to leadership opportunities and become a vocal activist on campus. I am very comfortable to stand up for any identity I am a part of including my multicultural background and bisexuality."

– Calif. respondent

Although this survey found that most LGBTQ students in California have access to a middle or high school GSA, others continue to experience unnecessary and discriminatory roadblocks when attempting to set one up.

For some students in the state, finding a supportive staff member willing to advise the club is impossible. Other students experience discriminatory limitations on facility use for meetings or unequal participation in school activities. In certain cases, school leaders have prohibited the start of a GSA in the first place. Under the Equal Access Act, if a middle or high school has even one other non-curricular club, students have the legal right to form a GSA. The Equal Access Act also protects the club from being treated differently than other non-curricular clubs. Middle and high school educators should further research the significant benefits of having an active and sustainable GSA. Guidance on starting a GSA can be found at [GSANetwork.org](https://gsanetwork.org) or at [GLSEN.org](https://glsen.org).

Equal Access Act:

To learn more about legal protections for GSAs, go to the GSA Network at <https://gsanetwork.org/resources/federal-equal-access-act>.

The Need for an Intersectional Approach

LGBTQ youth of color often experience additional stress and adverse effects to their health and well-being as a result of bias related to their multiple intersecting identities. In addition to homophobia, biphobia or transphobia, LGBTQ students of color often encounter racial discrimination and/or xenophobia that can further complicate their ability to thrive in school and beyond. Educators must acknowledge that LGBTQ youth of color are more likely to experience police brutality, homelessness and the school-to-prison pipeline.⁴⁴



⁴⁰ Heck, N., Flentje, A., & Cochran, B.N., (2011). Offsetting Risks: High School Gay-Straight Alliances and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Youth. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 26 (2), 161-174.

⁴¹ Percentage of California respondents who indicated that they do not have access to a GSA or similar club or support group at school

⁴² Lambda Legal, Friedman, M., & Huard, K. (2000, February 4). Judge Rules El Modena High Gay-Straight Alliance Must Be Allowed to Meet. Retrieved from https://www.lambdalegal.org/news/ca_20000204_judge-rules-el-modena-high-gsa-must-be-allowed

⁴³ 20 U.S.C. § 4071(a).

⁴⁴ Russel, S. T. & Truong, N. L. (2001). Adolescent sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, and school environments: A national study of sexual minority youth of color. In K. Kumashiro (Ed.), *Troubling intersections of race and sexuality: Queer studies of anti-oppressive education* (pp. 113–130). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

To address these disparities, school programs are needed that focus on the specific needs of LGBTQ youth of color, including anti-racism, anti-bias and LGBTQ-specific programs. As schools assess professional development or policy and procedure updates, using an intersectional lens will significantly improve outcomes. An intersectional approach recognizes the fact that we all have multiple identities including, but not limited to, race, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, ability, immigration status and faith. These identities are not isolated or separate, but rather they overlap and are part of the complexity that determines how individuals experience the world in relation to privilege and oppression. To truly address LGBTQ discrimination and other disparities in the data, we all must acknowledge the intersectional identities of the young people we serve.

Students with multiple marginalized identities may experience multiple forms of oppression – often simultaneously. Consider the case of a seventh-grade transgender student of color who recently immigrated to the U.S. In a single school day, this student might be denied access to the restroom that corresponds with their gender identity and be taunted with racial epithets or threats of deportation. These experiences create anxiety and isolation and impact the student's ability to excel in school and in life. In order to fully support this student, educators must recognize how the student's specific combination of identities impacts their lived experience and exposes them daily to multiple forms of oppression. It is not uncommon for well-intentioned educators to implement interventions or preventions with the intention to support LGBTQ students but to forget to address other forms of discrimination that LGBTQ students experience. The ultimate goal should be to dismantle systems of oppression and outdated policies that continue to disproportionately benefit privileged identities while creating barriers for others.

"My counselor is [an] intersectional feminist, which makes me more comfortable having this conversation."

– CA Respondent

82% LGBTQ youth of color in California have experienced racism and racial prejudice⁴⁵

60% say their race(s)/ethnic group(s) are regarded negatively or very negatively in the United States⁴⁶

60% think about racism often or every single day⁴⁷

"My school is a very white-based school with little diversity since I live in a small town. My school counselors have never conveyed any support for the LGBTQA+ community and I don't feel close enough or comfortable to talk to them about it safely and confidentially."

– Calif. respondent

Supporting Transgender and Non-Binary Students

Transgender and non-binary students often face serious challenges in the school system. In addition to more overt forms of discrimination such as verbal and physical harassment, they also report being barred from using locker rooms or bathroom facilities that match their gender identity and not being addressed by the appropriate pronouns or their chosen names. These negative school experiences have damaging implications for transgender and non-binary students and further contribute to hostile learning environments where they feel unsafe and unprotected.

⁴⁵ Percentage of California respondents of color who indicated that they have experienced racism and racial prejudice in their lifetime

⁴⁶ Percentage of California respondents of color who indicated that their race/ethnic group is regarded negatively or very negatively in the United States

⁴⁷ Percentage of California respondents of color who indicated that they think about racism often or every single day

Only
40%

of transgender and non-binary students
in California are always called by their
affirmed names at school⁴⁸

Only
21%

are always called
by their correct
pronouns in school⁴⁹



65% cannot always
dress in accordance
with their gender
identity at school⁵⁰

43% can **NEVER** use the bathroom/locker room at
school that matches their gender identity⁵¹



- **58%** do not feel safe doing so⁵²
- **38%** do not have restrooms (or not enough)
that match their gender identity at school⁵³
- **47%** don't know if they're allowed to
use those restrooms⁵⁴



- **12%** were told by teachers or administrators
that they weren't allowed to use them⁵⁵

In 2013, California passed Assembly Bill 1266, a comprehensive law clarifying the rights of transgender and non-binary students in K-12 public schools. AB 1266 clarifies that students must be permitted to participate in sex-segregated school programs, such as sports teams or activities, and to use facilities like locker rooms and bathrooms consistent with their gender identity. It does not matter what the gender is listed on the student's records, whether or not the student has changed their legal name or gender or if their parents or legal guardians are supportive. Additionally, the law requires that school staff refer to transgender and non-binary students

using their chosen name and pronouns.⁵⁶ AB 1266 also provides guidelines on updating a student's official and unofficial records. School districts in California are required to maintain permanent student records that include the student's legal name and gender. If a student receives a legal name or gender change and provides appropriate documentation, the school district must update the student's official records with the new name and gender. Even if a student has not had a legal name or gender change, public schools in the state are required to update unofficial records at the student's request, including attendance sheets, student IDs, lunch cards, yearbook photos, etc., to match the student's gender identity. In recent years, a growing number of districts in California have adopted official policies on supporting transgender students, including the process for updating unofficial records.



AB 1266:

To learn more about the legal rights of transgender and non-binary students in California, see the California Department of Education's Frequently asked Questions regarding the implementation of AB 1266 at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/re/di/eo/faqs.asp>.

Tools to Support Transgender and Non-Binary Students

Just as all students have individual lived experiences and needs, so too do transgender and non-binary students, which are further complicated by high rates of rejection, harassment and bullying.

⁴⁸ Percentage of transgender and non-binary California respondents who indicated that they are always called by their affirmed name at school

⁴⁹ Percentage of transgender and non-binary California respondents who indicated that they are always called by their correct pronouns in school

⁵⁰ Percentage of transgender and non-binary California respondents who indicated that they cannot always dress in accordance with their gender identity at school

⁵¹ Percentage of transgender and non-binary California respondents who indicated that they can never use the bathroom or locker room at school that matches their gender identity

⁵² Percentage of transgender and non-binary California respondents who indicated that they can never use the bathroom or locker room at school that matches their gender identity because they do not feel safe doing so

⁵³ Percentage of transgender and non-binary California respondents who indicated that they can never use the bathroom or locker room at school that matches their gender identity because there are no restrooms (or not enough) that match their gender identity at school

⁵⁴ Percentage of transgender and non-binary California respondents who indicated that they can never use the bathroom or locker room at school that matches their gender identity because they do not know if they are allowed to use them

⁵⁵ Percentage of transgender and non-binary California respondents who indicated that they can never use the bathroom or locker room at school that matches their gender identity because teachers or administrators told them that they are not allowed to use them

⁵⁶ Pupil Rights: Sex-Segregated School Programs and Activities, A. B. 1266. (Cal. 2013).

Equally important to note is that no gender transition is the same. It is strongly recommended that educators partner with each individual student (and parents or guardians, if supportive) to meet their unique and specific needs.

To help with this process, educators can use a Gender Communication Plan, or a Gender Support Plan, designed by a California-based organization called Gender Spectrum. These useful tools help educators to systematically support transgender and non-binary students who are planning to or have already started the transition process.

Gender Communication Plan:

To download the Gender Communication Plan template, please visit https://www.dropbox.com/s/9vztvtckhcyrt8q/Student_Gender_Communication_Plan.pdf?dl=0.

Gender Support Plan:

To download the Gender Support Plan template, please visit https://www.dropbox.com/s/ck-b54ytc8b0obwg/Student_Gender_Support_Plan.pdf?dl=0.

Even when schools update policies and provide staff training on supporting transgender and non-binary students, some may continue to feel unsafe in restrooms due to past or potential harassment. For LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ students, multi-stall restrooms can cause unease for a number of reasons. In 2016, California passed Assembly Bill 1732, requiring all single-occupancy restrooms in public places, including public schools in the state, to be designated as all-gender restrooms.⁵⁷ All-gender restrooms are for individuals of any gender. Although a transgender or non-binary student may feel most safe using an all-gender restroom, school officials cannot require these as their only option. As previously mentioned, AB 1266 requires that students be permitted to use restrooms that align with their gender identity.

In 2017, California passed Senate Bill 179 to make it easier for transgender and non-binary individuals living in or born in the state to obtain California identity documents that match their gender identity, including male, female or non-binary.⁵⁸ No longer is a certification or declaration from a physician required to update a state issued ID, driver's license or birth certificate. This law is inclusive of minors who have a parent or legal guardian's consent.

Sexual Health and Education

Every year, approximately 50,000 Americans acquire HIV. Youth and young adults ages 13–29 comprise one-third of that number.⁵⁹ A lack of LGBTQ-inclusive sexual health education is a significant barrier to promoting healthy practices among LGBTQ youth. Sex education is a logical venue to help students learn unbiased information about sexual orientation and gender identity and to encourage acceptance for LGBTQ people and diverse families. Unfortunately, the data shows that many schools in California are using outdated sexual health curriculum and heteronormative instruction.

AB 1732:

To learn more about the laws on all-gender restrooms in California's public schools, see the fact sheet produced by Equality California at <https://www.eqca.org/wp-content/uploads/AB1732.pdf>.

SB 179:

To learn more about the legal rights of transgender and non-binary students in California to update their state identification documents, see the SB 179 Factsheet from the Transgender Law Center <http://transgenderlaw-center.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/SB-179-Timeline-and-Factsheet.pdf>.

Just
15% of LGBTQ youth in California report receiving LGBTQ-related information about safer sex⁶⁰

Only
22% report receiving education on how to prevent HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections⁶¹

⁵⁷ Single-User Restrooms, A. B. 1732. (Cal. 2016).

⁵⁸ Gender Identity: Female, Male, or Nonbinary, S. B. 179 (Cal. 2017).

⁵⁹ CDC. (2013, January 8). HIV Among Youth in the US. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/hivamongyouth/index.html>

⁶⁰ Percentage of California respondents who indicated that they receive LGBTQ-related information about safer sex

⁶¹ Percentage of California respondents who indicated that they receive education on how to prevent HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infection

In 2016, California passed Assembly Bill 329, mandating that all public schools include comprehensive information on sexual orientation, gender identity and HIV prevention in their sexual health curriculum for students in grades seven through 12. It also requires schools to offer sexual health education, which had previously been optional.⁶² In addition to adopting curriculum compliant with AB 329, schools should consider requiring specialized professional development on LGBTQ inclusion for educators who provide sexual health instruction.

AB 329:

To learn more about the legal requirements for LGBTQ-inclusive sex education in California, review information from the California Department of Education at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/he/se/>.

"In the sex education I have received, none of it ever talked about sex as an LGBTQ person and how to still be safe. I wish they would've because there are many LGBTQ people in the world and they need to have that information before engaging in any sexual activity."

– Calif. respondent

"I'm the only out LGBTQ+ member of my health class. I ask how things apply to our community as much as I can, but it's a little hard because I don't want to be annoying to my teacher or have other kids not like me because of it."

– Calif. respondent

Professional Development Opportunities

TIME TO THRIVE

PROMOTING SAFETY, INCLUSION AND WELL-BEING FOR LGBTQ YOUTH EVERYWHERE

Time to THRIVE

Each year, the HRC Foundation, in partnership with the National Education Association

and the American Counseling Association, presents Time to THRIVE, the national conference to promote safety, inclusion and well-being for LGBTQ youth everywhere. Time to THRIVE provides a comprehensive opportunity for K-12 educators, parents and other youth-serving professionals to continue to build awareness and cultural competency, learn current and emerging best practices and gather resources from leading experts and national organizations in the field. The annual Time to THRIVE conference takes place over Presidents' Day Weekend in February. To learn more, go to www.TimeToTHRIVE.org.



An Elementary School Approach to LGBTQ Inclusion

We know that many children first hear about

LGBTQ people while in early elementary school and usually from a peer, someone at home or by simply watching a television. First experiences with a topic are foundational and leave a lasting impression. Survey data on LGBTQ youth might have very different outcomes over time if children regularly heard positive messages about LGBTQ people and families in school. If we are going to change what happens at the secondary level, we must be proactive within elementary schools.

Research makes the case for early intervention at the elementary level. According to Dr. Dorothy Espelage, professor and researcher at the University of Florida and a leading expert in bullying and youth aggression, efforts to address gender-based aggression in elementary school are a significant factor in reducing sexual harassment in older students. Students who learn about LGBTQ people in a respectful way

⁶² GLSEN. (2012). *Playgrounds and Prejudice: Elementary School Climate in the United States*. Retrieved [https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/Playgrounds & Prejudice.pdf](https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/Playgrounds%20Prejudice.pdf)

acquire the skills necessary for being in a diverse school environment and are less likely to engage in bias-based bullying.⁶⁴

“Primary prevention efforts may need to begin even earlier than middle school ... and focus on gender-based aggressive acts that precede sexual harassment perpetration, especially homophobic name-calling.”

– Dr. Dorothy Espelage

Additional program outcomes associated with earning the Welcoming Schools Seal of Excellence include higher attendance rates, increased ally behavior, greater family involvement and improved academic performance. To learn more about HRC's Welcoming Schools Program, go to www.WelcomingSchools.org.

A proactive approach also benefits elementary students who identify as LGBTQ, those who have LGBTQ families and those who have emerging LGBTQ identities. All students, especially transgender and non-binary children, need supportive school environments that affirm their identities.

In order to lay a foundation for respectful attitudes and behaviors later on, elementary schools must cultivate an inclusive school climate. Best practices include modeling inclusive language; providing diverse books and images; interrupting put-downs and teasing around sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression and setting a positive, inclusive tone for all through policies, procedures and relationships. Perhaps the most essential piece, however, is training teachers and other educators in the school.

HRC Foundation's Welcoming Schools is a professional development program that speaks directly to the need for LGBTQ-inclusive elementary schools. The program trains educators to create safe and welcoming learning spaces for all students. Welcoming Schools' training modules, combined with implementation of its lesson plans and recommended books, are highly effective at helping schools develop positive LGBTQ and gender-inclusive climates where all families and students are welcome and can thrive. Elementary schools using the Welcoming Schools approach experience a 50 percent reduction in bullying behavior within the first two years of full Welcoming Schools implementation.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Espelage, D. L., Basile, K. C., De La Rue, L., & Hamburger, M. E. (2015). Longitudinal Associations Among Bullying, Homophobic Teasing, and Sexual Violence Perpetration Among Middle School Students. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 30(14), 2541-2561. doi:10.1177/0886260514553113

⁶⁵ Human Rights Campaign Foundation, & Szalacha, L. A., Ph.D. Welcoming Schools Pilot and Evaluations. Retrieved https://assets2.hrc.org/welcoming-schools/documents/Welcoming_Schools_Pilot_Evaluation.pdf

What You Can Do

Parents and Family Members Can...

- Thoroughly review this report to learn about issues that impact LGBTQ youth;
- Encourage educators in your area to follow the guidelines in the report;
- Tell the children and teens in your family that you love and support them unconditionally, regardless of their sexual or gender identity;
- Join your local PTA and advocate for LGBTQ-inclusive schools using the guidance in this report as well as from the California PTA at www.capta.org/lgbtqia;
- Attend one of more than 30 PFLAG chapters located throughout California, many offering monthly support groups for parents and families who have LGBTQ children. To find the nearest chapter to your home, go to www.pflag.org/find-a-chapter;
- Ask your school district to provide a training for educators, parents and families on supporting LGBTQ youth;
- Attend HRC's annual Time to THRIVE Conference held over Presidents' Day Weekend each February.

Teachers, School Counselors and Other School Staff Can...

- Thoroughly review this report and consider how you and colleagues can better support LGBTQ students;
- Request annual staff training on supporting LGBTQ students;
- Display the poster from page 12 of this report to show that you support and affirm LGBTQ students, staff and families;
- Use LGBTQ-inclusive language and LGBTQ-inclusive curricula;
- Support middle and high school students who wish to start an LGBTQ-inclusive club, such as a GSA;
- Interrupt bias-based comments based on sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression with a teachable moment;
- Ensure students and staff can understand and follow the district's anti-bullying policy, including how to anonymously report incidents of bullying;

- Use Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) or restorative justice-type practices to curb bullying behaviors;
- Attend HRC's annual Time to THRIVE conference held over Presidents' Day Weekend each February.

School District Leaders, School Board Members and Policy Makers Can...

- Thoroughly review this report and assess what more the district could do to support and improve school climate for LGBTQ students;
- Update, publicize and enforce LGBTQ-inclusive non-discrimination and anti-bullying policies throughout the district and community;
- Ensure all school administrators and school staff understand their legal obligation to protect LGBTQ students from bullying and discrimination;
- Review other legal obligations with school administrators, including LGBTQ-inclusive curricula, LGBTQ-inclusive sex education and the rights of transgender and non-binary students to be treated in a way that is consistent with their gender identity;
- Provide annual professional development for district and school staff on creating and maintaining inclusive and supportive school climates for LGBTQ students;
- Create a district policy on supporting transgender and non-binary students, including developing a gender communication plan and a gender support plan;
- Attend HRC's annual Time to THRIVE Conference held over Presidents' Day Weekend each February;
- Review the CSBA's policy brief on providing a safe, nondiscriminatory school environment for transgender and gender non-confirming students at <https://www.csba.org/~media/E68E16A652D34EADA2BFDCD9668B1C8Fashx>.

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Thank you to our partners



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Resources

Human Rights Campaign | www.HRC.org/Youth

Welcoming Schools | www.WelcomingSchools.org

Time to THRIVE Conference | www.TimeToTHRIVE.org

Equality California | www.EQCA.org

PFLAG | www.PFLAG.org

The Trevor Project | www.TheTrevorProject.org

National Center for Transgender Equality | www.TransEquality.org

GSA Network | www.GSANetwork.org

GLSEN | www.GLSEN.org

Gender Spectrum | www.GenderSpectrum.org

Campus Pride | www.CampusPride.org

Litigation Resources

ACLU of California | www.ACLUCA.org

Transgender Law Center | www.TransgenderLawCenter.org

Lambda Legal | www.LambdaLegal.org

National Center for Lesbian Rights | www.NCLRights.org

Southern Poverty Law Center | www.SPLCenter.org

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