



The 2017 National School Climate Survey

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual,
Transgender, and Queer Youth in Our Nation's Schools



ABOUT THE SURVEY

In 1999, GLSEN identified that little was known about the school experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) youth and that LGBTQ youth were nearly absent from national studies of adolescents. We responded to this national need for data by launching the first National School Climate Survey, and we continue to meet this need for current data by conducting the study every two years. Since then, the biennial National School Climate Survey has documented the unique challenges LGBTQ students face and identified interventions that can improve school climate. The survey documents the prevalence of anti-LGBTQ language and victimization, such as experiences of harassment and assault, in school. In addition, the survey examines school policies and practices that may contribute to negative experiences for LGBTQ students and make them feel as if they are not valued by their school communities. The survey also explores the effects that a hostile school climate may have on LGBTQ students' educational outcomes and well-being. Finally, the survey reports on the availability and the utility of LGBTQ-related school resources and supports that may offset the negative effects of a hostile school climate and promote a positive learning experience. In addition to collecting this critical data every two years, we also add and adapt survey questions to respond to the changing world for LGBTQ youth. For example, in the 2017 survey we included questions about negative remarks about immigration status, changing schools because of feeling unsafe or uncomfortable, LGBTQ inclusion in sex education, and students' experiences of activism. The National School Climate Survey remains one of the few studies to examine the school experiences of LGBTQ students nationally, and its results have been vital to GLSEN's understanding of the issues that LGBTQ students face, thereby informing our ongoing work to ensure safe and affirming schools for all.

**Quotes throughout are from students' responses to open-ended questions in the survey.
Visit [glsen.org/nscc](https://www.glsen.org/nscc) for the full 2017 National School Climate Survey.**

In our 2017 survey, we examine the experiences of LGBTQ students with regard to indicators of negative school climate:

- Hearing biased remarks, including homophobic remarks, in school;
- Feeling unsafe in school because of personal characteristics, such as sexual orientation, gender expression, or race/ethnicity;
- Missing school because of safety reasons;
- Experiencing harassment and assault in school; and
- Experiencing discriminatory policies and practices at school.

In addition, we examine whether students report these experiences to school officials or their families, and how these adults addressed the problem. Further, we examine the impact of a hostile school climate on LGBTQ students' academic achievement, educational aspirations, and psychological well-being.

We also demonstrate the degree to which LGBTQ students have access to supportive resources in school, and we explore the possible benefits of these resources:

- GSAs (Gay-Straight Alliances or Gender and Sexuality Alliances) or similar clubs;
- Supportive and inclusive school policies, such as anti-bullying/harassment policies and transgender/gender nonconforming student policies;
- Supportive school staff; and
- Curricular resources that are inclusive of LGBTQ-related topics.

Further, we examine how the school experiences differ by personal and community characteristics. Given that GLSEN has been conducting the survey for close to two decades, we also examine changes over time on indicators of negative school climate and levels of access to LGBTQ-related resources in schools.

METHODS

The 2017 National School Climate Survey was conducted online from April through August 2017. To obtain a representative national sample of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) youth, we conducted outreach through national, regional, and local organizations that provide services to or advocate on behalf of LGBTQ youth, and advertised and promoted on social networking sites, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Tumblr. To ensure representation of transgender youth, youth of color, and youth in rural communities, we made special efforts to notify groups and organizations that work predominantly with these populations.

The final sample consisted of a total of 23,001 students between the ages of 13 and 21. Students were from all 50 states and the District of Columbia and 5 U.S. territories. About two-thirds of the sample (67.5%) was White, a third (34.1%) was cisgender female, and 4 in 10 identified as gay or lesbian (41.6%). The average age of students in the sample was 15.6 years and they were in grades 6 to 12, with the largest numbers in grades 9, 10, and 11.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

HOSTILE SCHOOL CLIMATE

Schools nationwide are hostile environments for a distressing number of LGBTQ students, the overwhelming majority of whom routinely hear anti-LGBTQ language and experience victimization and discrimination at school. As a result, many LGBTQ students avoid school activities or miss school entirely.

SCHOOL SAFETY

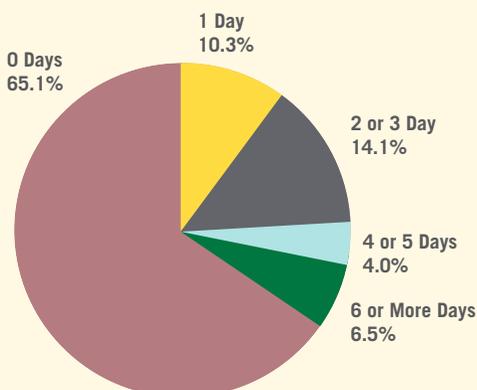
- 59.5% of LGBTQ students felt unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation, 44.6% because of their gender expression, and 35.0% because of their gender.
- 34.8% of LGBTQ students missed at least one entire day of school in the past month because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable.
- Approximately 4 in 10 students avoided gender-segregated spaces in school due to safety concerns (bathrooms: 42.7%; locker rooms: 40.6%).

- Most reported avoiding school functions (75.4%) and extracurricular activities (70.5%) because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable.

ANTI-LGBTQ REMARKS AT SCHOOL

- Almost all of LGBTQ students (98.5%) heard “gay” used in a negative way (e.g., “that’s so gay”) at school; 70.0% heard these remarks often or frequently, and 91.8% reported that they felt distressed because of this language.
- 95.3% of LGBTQ students heard other types of homophobic remarks; 60.3% heard this type of language often or frequently.
- 94.0% of LGBTQ students heard negative remarks about gender expression; 62.2% heard these remarks often or frequently.
- 87.4% of LGBTQ students heard negative remarks specifically about transgender people; 45.6% heard them often or frequently.
- 56.6% of students reported hearing homophobic remarks from their teachers or other school staff, and 71.0% of students reported hearing negative remarks about gender expression from teachers or other school staff.

Frequency that LGBTQ Students Missed Days of School in the Past Month Because of Feeling Unsafe



HARASSMENT AND ASSAULT AT SCHOOL

- The vast majority of LGBTQ students (87.3%) experienced harassment or assault based on personal characteristics, including sexual orientation, gender expression, gender, religion, race and ethnicity, and disability.
- 70.1% of LGBTQ students experienced verbal harassment (e.g., called names or threatened) at school based on sexual orientation, 59.1% based on gender expression, and 53.2% based on gender.
- 28.9% of LGBTQ students were physically harassed (e.g., pushed or shoved) in the past year based on sexual orientation, 24.4% based on gender expression, and 22.8% because based on gender.
- 12.4% of LGBTQ students were physically assaulted (e.g., punched, kicked, injured with a weapon) in the past year based on sexual orientation, 11.2% based on gender expression, and 10.0% based on gender.
- A sizable number of LGBTQ students were also bullied or harassed at school based on other characteristics – 26.9% based on religion, 25.6% based on race or ethnicity, and 25.5% based on disability.
- 48.7% of LGBTQ students experienced electronic harassment in the past year, often known as cyberbullying.
- 57.3% of LGBTQ students were sexually harassed in the past year at school.

STUDENT REPORTING OF HARASSMENT AND ASSAULT INCIDENTS

- 55.3% of LGBTQ students who were victimized in school did not report the incident to school staff, most commonly because they doubted that effective intervention would occur or feared the situation could become worse if reported.
- 60.4% of the students who did report an incident said that school staff did nothing in response or told the student to ignore it.

DISCRIMINATORY SCHOOL POLICIES AND PRACTICES

- Most LGBTQ students (62.2%) reported experiencing LGBTQ-related discriminatory policies or practices at school.
 - Disciplined for public displays of affection that were not disciplined among non-LGBTQ students: 31.3%.
 - Prevented from wearing clothes considered “inappropriate” based on their legal sex: 22.6%.
 - Prohibited from discussing or writing about LGBTQ topics in school assignments: 18.2%.
 - Prohibited from including LGBTQ topics in school extracurricular activities: 17.6%.
 - Prevented from attending a dance or function with someone of the same gender: 11.7%.
 - Restricted from forming or promoting a GSA: 14.8%.
 - Prevented from wearing clothing or items supporting LGBTQ issues: 13.0%.
 - Prevented or discouraged from participating in school sports because they were LGBTQ: 11.3%.
 - Disciplined for simply identifying as LGBTQ: 3.5%.
- Some policies particularly targeted transgender and gender nonconforming students:
 - 42.1% of transgender and gender nonconforming students had been prevented from using their preferred name or pronoun.
 - 46.5% of transgender and gender nonconforming students had been required to use a bathroom of their legal sex.
 - 43.6% of transgender and gender nonconforming students had been required to use a locker room of their legal sex.

EFFECTS OF A HOSTILE SCHOOL CLIMATE

A hostile school climate affects students' academic success and mental health. LGBTQ students who experience victimization and discrimination at school have worse educational outcomes and poorer psychological well-being.

EFFECTS OF VICTIMIZATION

- LGBTQ students who experienced higher levels of victimization because of their sexual orientation:
 - Were more likely to have missed school in the past month than those who experienced lower levels (63.3% vs. 23.1%);
 - Had lower grade point averages (GPAs) than students who were less often harassed (3.0 vs. 3.3);
 - Were nearly twice as likely to report that they did not plan to pursue any post-secondary education (9.5% vs. 5.0%);
 - Were more likely to have been disciplined at school (54.1% vs. 30.3%); and
 - Had lower self-esteem and school belonging and higher levels of depression.
- LGBTQ students who experienced higher levels of victimization because of their gender expression:
 - Were more likely to have missed school in the past month

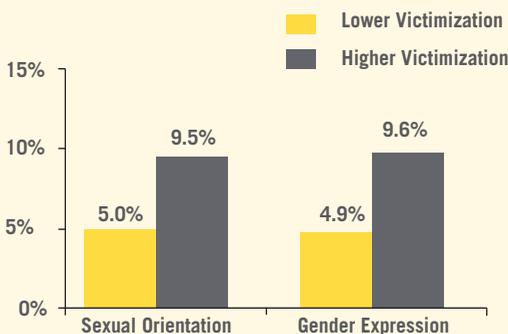
than those who experienced lower levels (61.6% vs. 23.2%);

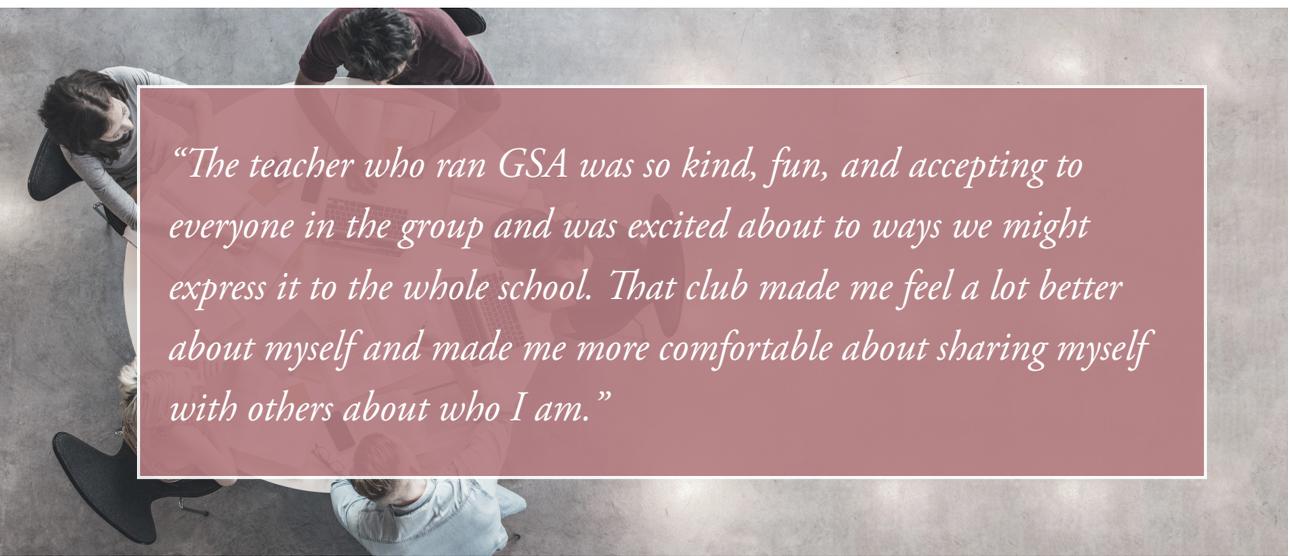
- Had lower GPAs (2.9 vs. 3.3);
- Were twice as likely to report that they did not plan to pursue any post-secondary education (9.6% vs. 4.9%);
- Were more likely to have been disciplined at school (52.1% vs. 30.8%); and
- Had lower self-esteem and school belonging and higher levels of depression.
- Of the LGBTQ students who indicated that they were considering dropping out of school, 42.2% indicated that they were doing so because of the harassment they faced at school.

EFFECTS OF DISCRIMINATION

- LGBTQ students who experienced LGBTQ-related discrimination at school were:
 - More than three times as likely to have missed school in the past month as those who had not (44.6% vs. 15.7%);
 - Had lower GPAs than their peers (3.1 vs. 3.4);
 - Were more likely to have been disciplined at school (44.0% vs. 26.5%); and
 - Had lower self-esteem and school belonging and higher levels of depression.
- Of the students who were considering dropping out of school, 33.9% indicated that they were doing so because of school harassment.

Educational Aspirations and Severity of Victimization
(Percentage of LGBTQ Students Not Planning to Pursue Post-Secondary Education)





“The teacher who ran GSA was so kind, fun, and accepting to everyone in the group and was excited about ways we might express it to the whole school. That club made me feel a lot better about myself and made me more comfortable about sharing myself with others about who I am.”

LGBTQ-RELATED SCHOOL RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS

Students who feel safe and supported at school have better educational outcomes. LGBTQ students who have LGBTQ-related school resources report better school experiences and academic success. Unfortunately, all too many schools fail to provide these critical resources.

GSA (GAY-STRAIGHT ALLIANCES/GENDER AND SEXUALITY ALLIANCES)

AVAILABILITY AND PARTICIPATION

- More than half (53.3%) of students said that their school had a GSA or similar student club.
- Most LGBTQ students reported participating in their GSA at some level, but more than a third (36.3%) had not.

UTILITY

- Compared to LGBTQ students who did not have a GSA in their school, students who had a GSA in their school:
 - Were less likely to hear “gay” used in a

negative way often or frequently (62.7% vs. 78.5% of other students);

- Were less likely to hear homophobic remarks such as “fag” or “dyke” often or frequently (53.4% vs. 68.1%);
- Were less likely to hear negative remarks often or frequently about gender expression (57.7% vs. 67.5%);
- Were less likely to hear negative remarks often or frequently about transgender people (40.7% vs. 51.3%);
- Were more likely to report that school personnel intervened when hearing homophobic remarks — 18.2% vs. 11.3% said that staff intervened most of the time or always;
- Were less likely to feel unsafe because of their sexual orientation (51.7% vs. 67.3%);

- Were less likely to miss school because of safety concerns (28.7% vs. 41.8%);
- Experienced lower levels of victimization related to their sexual orientation and gender expression;
- Reported a greater number of supportive school staff and more accepting peers; and
- Felt greater belonging to their school community.

INCLUSIVE CURRICULAR RESOURCES

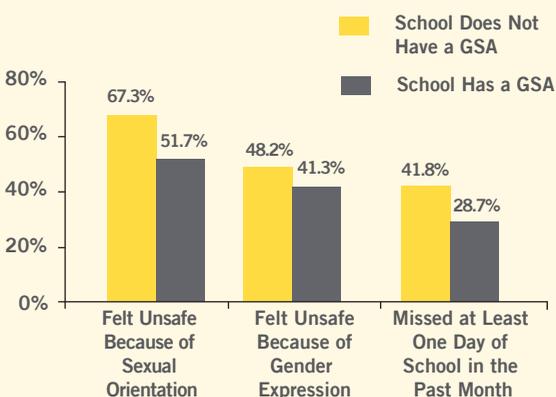
AVAILABILITY

- Only 19.8% of LGBTQ students were taught positive representations about LGBTQ people, history, or events in their schools; 18.4% had been taught negative content about LGBTQ topics.
- Only 6.7% of students reported receiving LGBTQ-inclusive sex education.
- Less than half (41.0%) of students reported that they could find information about LGBTQ-related issues in their school library.
- About half of students (49.2%) with internet access at school reported being able to access LGBTQ-related information online via school computers.

UTILITY

- Compared to students in schools without an LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum, LGBTQ students in schools with an LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum:
 - Were less likely to hear “gay” used in a negative way often or frequently (51.5% vs. 74.7%);
 - Were less likely to hear homophobic remarks such as “fag” or “dyke” often or frequently (42.9% vs. 64.6%);
 - Were less likely to hear negative remarks about gender expression often or frequently (51.1% vs. 65.1%);
 - Were less likely to hear negative remarks about transgender people often or frequently (29.9% vs. 46.3%);
 - Were less likely to feel unsafe because of their sexual orientation (41.8% vs. 63.3%) and gender expression (34.6% vs. 47.0%);
 - Experienced lower levels of victimization related to their sexual orientation and gender expression;
 - Were less likely to miss school in the past month because they felt unsafe (23.6% vs. 37.7%);
 - Performed better academically in school (3.3 vs. 3.2 GPAs) and were more likely to plan on pursuing post-secondary education;
 - Were more likely to report that their classmates were somewhat or very accepting of LGBTQ people (67.6% vs. 36.0%); and
 - Felt greater belonging to their school community.

Presence of GSAs and LGBTQ Students' Feelings of Safety and Missing School



SUPPORTIVE EDUCATORS

AVAILABILITY

- Almost all LGBTQ students (96.7%) could identify at least one staff member supportive of LGBTQ students at their school.
- Less than two thirds of students (61.0%) could identify at least six supportive school staff.
- Only 38.8% of students could identify 11 or more supportive staff.
- Over a third (39.8%) of students reported that their school administration was somewhat or very supportive of LGBTQ students.
- A little over half (51.9%) of students had seen at least one Safe Space sticker or poster at their school (these stickers or posters often serve to identify supportive educators).

UTILITY

- Compared to LGBTQ students with no supportive school staff, students with many (11 or more) supportive staff at their school:
 - Felt less unsafe because of their sexual orientation (43.4% vs. 79.2%) and were less likely to feel unsafe because of their gender expression (34.8% vs. 51.0%);
 - Were less likely to miss school because they felt unsafe (20.1% vs. 48.8%);
 - Had higher GPAs (3.3 vs. 3.0);

- Were less likely to say they might not graduate high school and more likely to plan on pursuing post-secondary education; and
- Felt greater belonging to their school community.
- Students who had seen a Safe Space sticker or poster in their school were more likely to identify school staff who were supportive of LGBTQ students and more likely to feel comfortable talking with school staff about LGBTQ issues.

INCLUSIVE AND SUPPORTIVE SCHOOL POLICIES

AVAILABILITY

- Although a majority (79.3%) of students had an anti-bullying policy at their school, only 12.6% of students reported that their school had a comprehensive policy (i.e., one that specifically enumerates both sexual orientation and gender identity/expression).
- Only 10.6% of LGBTQ students reported that their school or district had official policies or guidelines to support transgender or gender nonconforming students.

“I didn’t experience that much hate or obvious discrimination. Our GSA leader/English teacher was the best teacher that I had. She created a comfortable and amazing space for LGBTQ+ students.”

UTILITY

- LGBTQ students in schools with a comprehensive anti-bullying/harassment policy:
 - Were less likely to hear “gay” used in a negative way often or frequently (55.6% compared to 72.5% of students with a generic policy and 74.5% of students with no policy);
 - Were less likely to hear other homophobic remarks such as “fag” or “dyke” often or frequently (46.6% compared to 62.5% of students with a generic policy and 64.7% of students with no policy);
 - Were less likely to hear negative remarks about gender expression often or frequently (51.0% compared to 63.7% of students with a generic policy and 66.3% of students with no policy);
 - Were more likely to report that staff intervened when hearing anti-LGBTQ remarks;
 - Experienced less anti-LGBTQ victimization; and
 - Were more likely to report victimization incidents to school staff and were more likely to rate school staff’s response to such incidents as effective.
- Among transgender or gender nonconforming (trans/GNC) students, those in schools with a trans/GNC student policy or guidelines:
 - Were less likely to experience anti-LGBTQ discrimination in their school than their trans/GNC peers. Specifically, they were:
 - Less likely to be prevented from using their name or pronoun of choice in school (22.5% vs. 47.5%);
 - Less likely to be required to use bathrooms of their legal sex (23.5% vs. 51.9%);
 - Less likely to be required to use locker rooms of their legal sex (26.1% vs. 48.1%); and
 - Less likely to be prevented from wearing clothes thought to be “inappropriate” for their gender (9.0% vs. 28.3%);
 - Were less likely to miss school because they felt unsafe (54.7% vs. 67.0%); and
 - Felt greater belonging to their school community.

CHANGES IN SCHOOL CLIMATE FOR LGBTQ STUDENTS OVER TIME

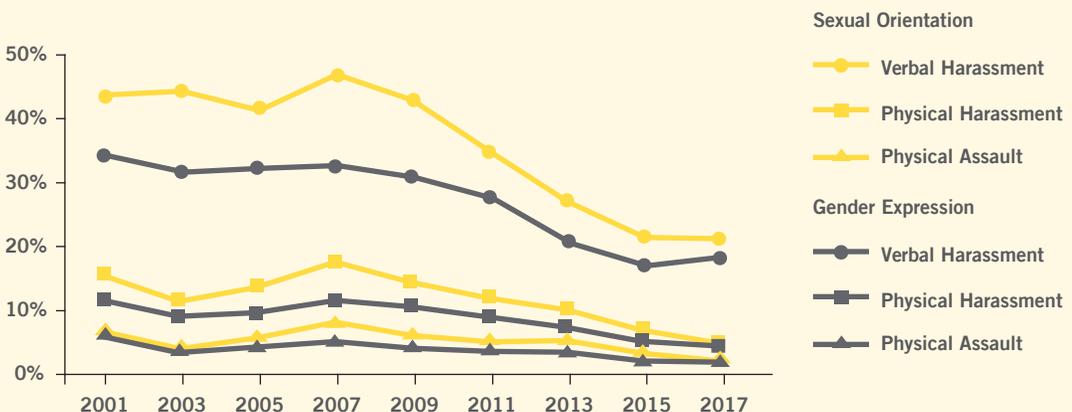
Considering the data from 2001 and 2017, it is evident that school climate remains quite hostile for many LGBTQ students. However, in 2017, we have seen fewer positive changes – decreased victimization and discrimination and increased school supports – than we had seen in the 2015 installment of the survey.

CHANGES IN INDICATORS OF HOSTILE SCHOOL CLIMATE

ANTI-LGBTQ REMARKS

- LGBTQ students in 2017 did not differ from those in 2015 in the frequency of hearing homophobic remarks like “fag” or “dyke,” but both years were lower than all previous years – the percentage hearing these remarks frequently or often has dropped from over 80% in 2001 to less than 60% in 2015 and 2017.
- The expression “that’s so gay” remains the most common form of anti-LGBTQ language heard by LGBTQ students, and its prevalence has increased slightly from 2015 to 2017, although both years were lower than all previous years.
- Negative remarks about gender expression decreased slightly from 2015 to 2017, although the frequency of these remarks was significantly higher in both 2015 and 2017 than in 2013.
- There has been a steady increase of negative remarks about transgender people between 2013 and 2017.
- There had been a steady decline in the frequency of school staff making homophobic remarks from 2007 to 2013, but there has been no change from 2013 to 2017.
- There has been an upward trend from 2013 to 2017 in the frequency of staff making negative remarks about gender expression.

Frequency of School Victimization Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Expression Over Time
(Percentage of LGBTQ Students Reporting Event Often or Frequently, Based on Estimated Marginal Means)



HARASSMENT AND ASSAULT

- With regard to harassment and assault based on sexual orientation, the frequency of verbal harassment did not change from 2015 to 2017, but was lower in both years than all previous years; however, physical harassment and assault based on sexual orientation did continue to decline in 2017.
- With regard to harassment and assault based on gender expression, the frequency of verbal harassment increased from 2015 to 2017, after years of decline, and there were no changes in physical harassment and assault from 2015 to 2017.
- The frequency of LGBTQ students reporting victimization to school staff has increased slightly in 2017; however, the frequency of students rating staff intervention as effective did not change between 2015 and 2017.

ANTI-LGBTQ DISCRIMINATION

- Overall, approximately 60% of LGBTQ students experienced some type of LGBTQ-related discrimination at school at all three time points we have assessed discrimination (2013, 2015, and 2017)—although the percentage was highest in 2013, and not different between 2015 and 2017.
- With regard to the specific types of discrimination, most had a higher incidence in 2013 than in 2015 and 2017.
- However, the forms of discrimination most specifically related to gender have not evidenced the same improvements. The percentage of students being required to use facilities of their legal sex and for being prevented from using their preferred name/pronoun were both higher in 2017 than in 2015 and 2013; and the percentage of students being prohibited from wearing clothes of “another” gender has not changed significantly over the three time points.

CHANGES IN AVAILABILITY OF LGBTQ-RELATED SCHOOL RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS

SUPPORTIVE STUDENT CLUBS (GSAs)

- The percentage of LGBTQ students reporting that they have a GSA in their school was higher in 2017 than in all prior survey years.

CURRICULAR RESOURCES

- Overall, there has been little change in LGBTQ-related curricular resources over time.
- The only increase in 2017 was regarding having access to LGBTQ-related internet resources through their school computers, with which we have seen continual increases since 2007.
- The percentage for being taught positive LGBTQ-related content in class was not different in 2017 than in 2015, although both years were higher than all previous years.
- The percentage being taught negative LGBTQ-related content in class increased between 2013 and 2015, and did not differ between 2015 and 2017.
- There were no significant differences between 2017 and 2015 regarding the availability of LGBTQ-related content in textbooks and LGBTQ-related materials in school libraries.

Availability of LGBTQ-Related School Resources Over Time

(Percentage of LGBTQ Students Reporting Resource in School, Accounting for Covariates)



SUPPORTIVE EDUCATORS

- The percentage of students who had at least one supportive educator did not change between 2015 and 2017, but both years were higher than all previous years.
- The percentage of students who had 6 or more supportive educators did not change between 2015 and 2017, but both years were higher than all previous years.

- With regard to enumerated policies, there was a small but significant increase in the percentage of students reporting comprehensive school policies (i.e., policies that enumerate protections for both sexual orientation and gender identity/expression) and a small but significant decrease in the percentage reporting a partially enumerated policies from 2015 to 2017.

ANTI-BULLYING/HARASSMENT POLICIES

- Overall, there was a sharp increase in the number of students reporting any type of policy after 2009, and the rate has remained more or less consistent since 2011. There were small increases in reports of having any such policy from 2011 to 2015 and a small decline in 2017.

DIFFERENCES IN LGBTQ STUDENTS' SCHOOL EXPERIENCES BY PERSONAL DEMOGRAPHICS.

LGBTQ students are a diverse population, and although they share many similar experiences, their experiences in school often vary based on their personal demographics.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

- Overall, pansexual students experienced more hostile climates than gay and lesbian, bisexual, queer, and questioning students.
- Compared to students of other sexual orientations, gay and lesbian students were more likely to be “out” about their sexual orientation at school – both to other students and to school staff.

- Cisgender male students experienced a more hostile school climate based on their gender expression and on sexual orientation than cisgender female students, whereas cisgender female students experienced a more hostile school climate based on their gender than cisgender male students.
- Cisgender students whose gender expression did not align to traditional gender norms had worse school experiences than LGBQ cisgender students with more “traditional” gender expression.

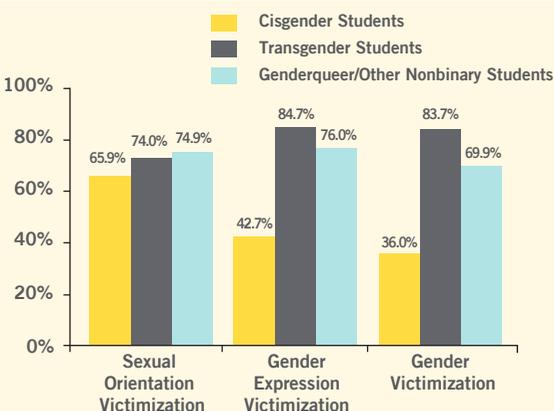
GENDER

- Transgender students reported more hostile school experiences than LGBQ cisgender students, genderqueer students, and students with other nonbinary identities.
- Genderqueer students and students with other nonbinary identities reported more hostile school experiences than LGBQ cisgender students.

RACE OR ETHNICITY

- Native American/American Indian/Alaska Native students were generally more likely than other racial/ethnic groups to experience anti-LGBTQ victimization and discrimination.
- White students were less likely than all other racial/ethnic groups to feel unsafe or experience victimization because of their racial/ethnic identity.
- Black/African American students were more likely than Hispanic/Latinx, White, and Asian/South Asian/Pacific Islander students to experience out-of-school suspension or expulsion.

Experiences of LGBTQ-Related Victimization by Gender (Percentage who Experienced Any Type of Harassment or Assault at School in Past Year)



DIFFERENCES IN LGBTQ STUDENTS' SCHOOL EXPERIENCES BY SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS.

LGBTQ students are a diverse population, and although they share many similar experiences, their experiences in school often vary based on the kind of school they attend and where they live.

SCHOOL LEVEL

- LGBTQ students in middle school had more hostile school experiences than LGBTQ students in high school, including experiencing higher rates of biased language, victimization, and anti-LGBTQ discriminatory school policies and practices.
- LGBTQ middle school students were less likely than high school students to have access to LGBTQ-related school resources, including GSAs, supportive educators, LGBTQ-inclusive curricular resources, and inclusive policies.

SCHOOL TYPE

- LGBTQ public school students were more likely to hear most biased remarks and to experience anti-LGBTQ victimization, as compared to students in religious schools and students in private non-religious schools. Although, public school students were less likely than religious school students to hear negative remarks about gender expression.
- Students in religious schools reported the most anti-LGBTQ related discrimination at school compared to students in other schools, whereas students in private non-religious schools reported the least anti-LGBTQ related discrimination.
- Overall, students in private non-religious schools had greater access to LGBTQ-related resources and supports in school than students in other schools, whereas students in religious schools had less access to most LGBTQ-related resources.

SCHOOL LOCALE

- LGBTQ students in rural/small town schools faced more hostile school climates than students in urban and suburban schools, including experiencing higher rates of biased language, victimization, and anti-LGBTQ discriminatory school policies and practices.
- LGBTQ students in rural/small town schools were least likely to have LGBTQ-related school resources or supports, as compared to students in urban and suburban schools.

REGION

- LGBTQ students in the South and Midwest had more negative school experiences overall than students in the Northeast and West, including higher rates of biased language, victimization, and anti-LGBTQ discriminatory school policies and practices.
- Overall, LGBTQ students in the South were least likely to have access to LGBTQ-related resources at school, whereas students in the Northeast were most likely to have LGBTQ-related school resources.

“Honestly, it’s a nightmare being part of the LGBTQ+ community in school, especially in a mostly conservative, rural area.”



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is clear that there is an urgent need for action to create safe and affirming learning environments for LGBTQ students. Results from the 2017 National School Climate Survey demonstrate the ways in which school-based supports – such as supportive staff, inclusive and supportive school policies, curricular resources inclusive of LGBTQ people, and GSAs – can positively affect LGBTQ students’ school experiences. Yet findings on school climate over time suggest that more efforts are needed to reduce harassment and discrimination and increase affirmative supports. Based on these findings, we recommend:

- Increasing student access to appropriate and accurate information regarding LGBTQ people, history, and events through inclusive curricula, and library and internet resources;
- Supporting student clubs, such as GSAs, that provide support for LGBTQ students and address LGBTQ issues in education;
- Providing professional development for school staff to improve rates of intervention and increase the number of supportive teachers and other staff available to students;
- Ensuring that school policies and practices, such as those related to dress codes and school dances, do not discriminate against LGBTQ students;
- Enacting 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; and
- Adopting and implementing 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 incidents that students experience.

Taken together, such measures can move us toward a future in which all students have the opportunity to learn and succeed in school, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

LEARN MORE

The full 2017 National School Climate Survey report goes into greater depth on the issues highlighted in this Executive Summary and explores a number of other topics, including:

- Experiences of bias and school safety based on race/ethnicity, religion, body type, citizenship, and disability;
- Frequency of sexual harassment, relational aggression, cyberbullying, and property damage;
- Participation in sociopolitical activism, including GLSEN's Days of Action;
- Parent/guardian advocacy efforts on behalf of LGBTQ students;
- Specific school experiences of LGBTQ immigrant students, including examination by citizenship status and English language proficiency;
- Specific school experiences of LGBTQ students with disabilities, including bullying/harassment and school engagement; and
- Division of students by gender in school, including separating by gender in school activities, and experiences of students in single-sex schools.



GLSEN is the leading education organization focused on ensuring safe schools for all students. Established in 1990, GLSEN envisions a world in which every child learns to respect and accept all people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/ expression. GLSEN seeks to develop school climates where difference is valued for the positive contribution it makes to creating a more vibrant and diverse community.

For more information on our educator resources, research, public policy agenda, student leadership programs or development initiatives, visit www.glsen.org.

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