GLSEN®

The 2021 National School Climate Survey

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Experiences of LGBTQ+
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 study documents the prevalence of indicators of a hostile school climate for LGBTQ+ students, and explores the effects that a hostile school climate may have on LGBTQ+ students' educational outcomes and well-being. The study also examines 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. Across the years, the survey has been slightly modified with each installment to reflect new or emerging concerns about school climate for LGBTQ+ students, but its content has remained largely the same since 2001. However, the data used for this current report is from the 2020–2021 academic year, when schools had to respond to the COVID pandemic. Because of that, we had to adapt and modify some survey questions accordingly to changes in school structures and instructional methods. While the report includes findings about LGBTQ+ students' experiences in schools overall, we also discuss key findings about the differences between the experiences of students in online only, in-person only, and hybrid learning environments throughout the report. 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.

Visit glsen.org/nscs for the full 2019 National School Climate Survey.

In our 2021 report, 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, gender, or race/ethnicity;

• Missing classes or days of school because of safety reasons;

• Experiencing harassment and assault in school and online; 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 examine how the school experiences of LGBTQ+ students vary by personal and community characteristics.

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 and nonbinary student policies;

• Supportive school staff; and

• Curricular resources that are inclusive of LGBTQ+-related topics.

Given that GLSEN has been conducting the survey for 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 2021 National School Climate Survey was conducted online from April through August 2021. 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 media sites, such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and Snapchat. 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 22,298 students between the ages of 13 and 21. Students came from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, and Northern Mariana Islands. Just over two-thirds of the sample (67.2%) was White, 33.8% identified as cisgender and 31.5% as nonbinary, and 30.1% identified as bisexual and 28.8% as gay or lesbian. The average age of students in the sample was 15.4 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

- 81.8% of LGBTQ+ students in our survey reported feeling unsafe in school because of at least one of their actual or perceived personal characteristics.

- 68.0% of LGBTQ+ students felt unsafe at school because of their SOGIE (sexual orientation, gender identity and/or gender expression) characteristics—50.6% because of their sexual orientation, 43.2% because of their gender expression, and 40.3% because of their gender.

- Overall, LGBTQ+ students in online-only learning environments were least likely to feel unsafe at school due to a personal characteristic and those in in-person only learning environments were most likely.

- LGBTQ+ students most commonly avoided school bathrooms, locker rooms, and physical education or gym classes, with approximately 4 in 10 students avoiding each of these spaces because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable (45.1%, 42.6%, and 39.4% respectively).

- Most reported avoiding school functions or extracurricular activities (78.8%) because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable.

- LGBTQ+ students who had been only in in-person learning environments did not differ from those who had been in hybrid learning environments with regard to avoiding spaces at school.

- 32.2% of LGBTQ+ students missed at least one entire day of school in the past month because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable, 11.3% missed four or more days in the past month.

- Nearly a fifth of LGBTQ+ students (16.2%) reported having ever changed schools due to feeling unsafe or uncomfortable at school.
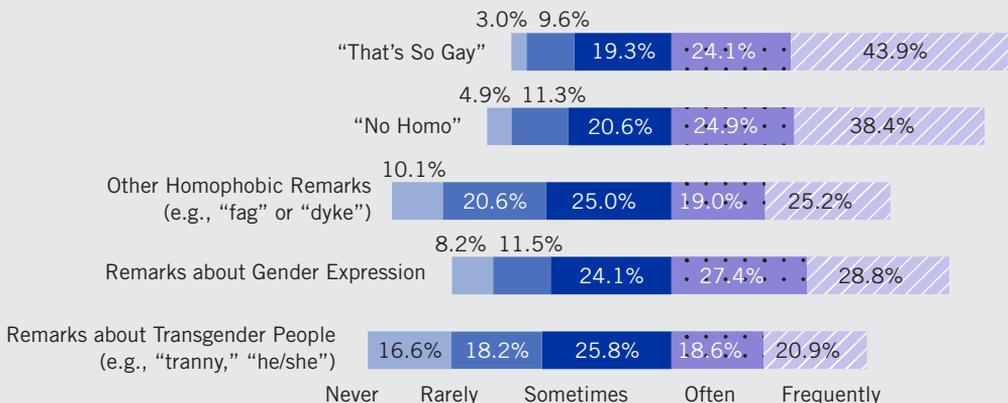
Frequency of Missing Days of School in the Past Month Because of Feeling Unsafe or Uncomfortable

1 Day 8.2%

2 or 3 Days 12.7%

4 or 5 Days 3.7%

6 or More Days 7.6%

0 Days 67.8%
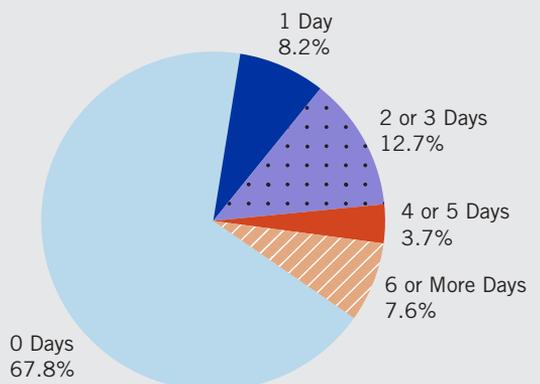
ANTI-LGBTQ+ REMARKS AT SCHOOL

- Nearly all LGBTQ+ students (97.0%) heard "gay" used in a negative way (e.g., "that's so gay") at school; 68.0% heard these remarks frequently or often, and 93.7% reported that they felt distressed because of this language.

- 95.1% of LGBTQ+ students heard the phrase "no homo" at school, and 63.3% heard this phrase frequently or often.

- 89.9% of LGBTQ+ students heard other types of homophobic remarks (e.g., "dyke" or "faggot"); 44.2% heard this type of language frequently or often.

- 91.8% of LGBTQ+ students heard negative remarks about gender expression (not acting "masculine enough" or "feminine enough"); 56.2% heard these remarks frequently or often.

- 83.4% of LGBTQ+ students heard negative remarks specifically about transgender people, like "tranny" or "he/she;" 39.5% heard them frequently or often.

- 58.0% of students reported hearing homophobic remarks from their teachers or other school staff, and 72.0% of students reported hearing negative remarks about gender expression from teachers or other school staff.

- Overall, students who attended school only in-person heard anti-LGBTQ+ remarks more frequently than did students who attended school only online or in a hybrid setting

- Only one-tenth of LGBTQ+ students (10.9%) reported that school staff intervened most of the time or always when overhearing homophobic remarks at school, and less than one-tenth of LGBTQ+ students (8.8%) reported that school staff intervened most of the time or always when overhearing negative remarks about gender expression.

- LGBTQ+ students who were in in-person only learning environments reported the lowest levels of staff intervention on anti-LGBTQ+ remarks.

Frequency of Hearing Anti-LGBTQ+ Remarks at School

Remark	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Frequently
"That's So Gay"	3.0%	9.6%	19.3%	24.1%	43.9%
"No Homo"	4.9%	11.3%	20.6%	24.9%	38.4%
Other Homophobic Remarks (e.g., "fag" or "dyke")		10.1%	20.6%	25.0%	19.0%	25.2%
Remarks about Gender Expression	8.2%	11.5%	24.1%	27.4%	28.8%
Remarks about Transgender People (e.g., "tranny," "he/she")	16.6%	18.2%	25.8%	18.6%	20.9%

HARASSMENT AND ASSAULT AT SCHOOL

The vast majority of LGBTQ+ students who attended school in-person at some point during the 2021-2022 academic year (83.1%) experienced in-person harassment or assault based on personal characteristics, including sexual orientation, gender expression, gender, religion, actual or perceived race or ethnicity, and actual or perceived disability. Among LGBTQ+ students who were in in-person only or hybrid learning environments:

- 76.1% experienced in-person verbal harassment (e.g., called names or threatened) specifically based on sexual orientation, gender expression, and gender at some point in the past year—60.7% of LGBTQ+ students were verbally harassed based on their sexual orientation, 57.4% based on gender expression, and 51.3% based on gender.

- 31.2% were physically harassed (e.g., pushed or shoved) in the past year based on based on their sexual orientation, gender expression, or gender—22.4% of LGBTQ+ students were physically harassed at school based on their sexual orientation, 20.6% based on gender expression, and 20.5% based on gender.

- 12.5% were physically assaulted (e.g., punched, kicked, injured with a weapon) in the past year based on their sexual orientation, gender expression or gender—8.8% were physically assaulted based on their sexual orientation, 8.2% based on gender expression, and 8.3% based on gender.

- A sizable number of LGBTQ+ students were harassed or assaulted at school based on other characteristics—34.4% based on actual or perceived disability, 29.0% based on religion, and 23.3% based on actual or perceived race or ethnicity.

- 53.7% of LGBTQ+ students were sexually harassed (e.g., unwanted touching or sexual remarks) in the past year at school.

LGBTQ+ students who attended school online at some point during the 2020–2021 academic year were asked about their experiences with online harassment based on personal characteristics during the school day by students from their school. Among those who attended school online at some point during the 2021-2022 academic year:

- 36.6% were harassed online based on their sexual orientation;

- 31.8% were harassed online based on their gender expression; and

- 30.3% were harassed online based on their gender.

Students who were in online only learning environments experienced higher rates of online harassment based on sexual orientation, gender, and gender expression than those who were in hybrid learning environments.

Additionally, many LGBTQ+ students reported online harassment based on other characteristics:

- 17.3% reported being harassed online based on their actual or perceived disability,

- 13.7% reported being harassed online based on their religion; and

- 13.2% reported being harassed online based on actual or perceived race or ethnicity.

STUDENT REPORTING OF HARASSMENT AND ASSAULT INCIDENTS

- 61.5% of LGBTQ+ students who were harassed or assaulted in school did not report the incident to school staff, most commonly (69.6% of students experiencing harassment or assault) because they did not think school staff would do anything about the harassment even if they did report it.

- Students in in-person learning environments reported harassment to school staff at higher rates than did students in online only or hybrid settings; half of students (49.5%) who attended school online (both online only and hybrid), stated that they did not report victimization online and instead only reported these experiences to staff when they attended school in person.

- 60.3% of the students who did report an incident said that school staff did nothing in response or told the student to ignore it.

- Staff responses to reports of harassment and assault were similar across all three types of learning environments.

DISCRIMINATORY SCHOOL POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Most LGBTQ+ students (58.9%) had experienced LGBTQ+-related discriminatory policies or practices at school. Some of the most common discriminatory policies and practices experienced by LGBTQ+ students were those that targeted students' gender, potentially limiting their ability to make gender-affirming choices and negatively impacting their school experience:

- 29.2% had been prevented from using their chosen name or pronouns in their schools;

- 27.2% had been prevented from using the bathroom that aligned with their gender;

- 23.8% had been prevented from using the locker room that aligned with their gender;

- 20.6% had been prevented from wearing clothes deemed "inappropriate" based on gender; and

- 16.0% had been prevented from playing on the sports team that is consistent with their gender.

Many LGBTQ+ students also experienced other forms of discrimination:

- 25.2% of LGBTQ+ students were disciplined for public affection, such as kissing or holding hands, that is not similarly disciplined among non-LGBTQ+ students;

- 16.6% of LGBTQ+ students were prevented from writing or talking about LGBTQ+ issues in extracurricular activities;

- 15.6% of LGBTQ+ students were prevented from writing about or doing school projects about LGBTQ+ issues;

- 12.3% of LGBTQ+ students were prevented from wearing clothing supporting LGBTQ+ issues;

- 12.3% of LGBTQ+ were prevented from forming or promoting a GSA; and

- 11.3% of LGBTQ+ students shared that school staff or coaches had prevented or discouraged them from playing sports because they identified as LGBTQ+.

LGBTQ+ students who had only been in in-person learning environments during the academic year were far more likely to experience any form of LGBTQ+-related discrimination than those in the other types of learning environments.

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 in-person victimization because of their sexual orientation:

• Were nearly three times as likely to have missed school in the past month than those who experienced lower levels (60.7% vs. 23.3%);

• Felt lower levels of belonging to their school community, performed poorer academically, (2.83 vs. 3.15 average GPA), and were nearly twice as likely to report that they did not plan to pursue any post-secondary education (e.g., college or trade school) than those who experienced lower levels (16.6% vs. 9.4%) ;

• Were nearly twice as likely to have been disciplined at school than those who experienced lower levels of victimization (61.1% vs. 33.6%); and

• Had lower self-esteem and higher levels of depression than those who experienced lower levels of victimization.

LGBTQ+ students who experienced higher levels of in-person victimization because of their gender expression:

• Were almost three times as likely to have missed school in the past month than those who experienced lower levels (60.7% vs. 23.6%);

• Felt lower levels of belonging to their school community, performed poorer academically, (2.76 vs. 3.17 average GPA), and were twice as likely to report that they did not plan to pursue any post-secondary education (e.g., college or trade school; 18.3% vs. 8.8%) than those who experienced lower levels of victimization;
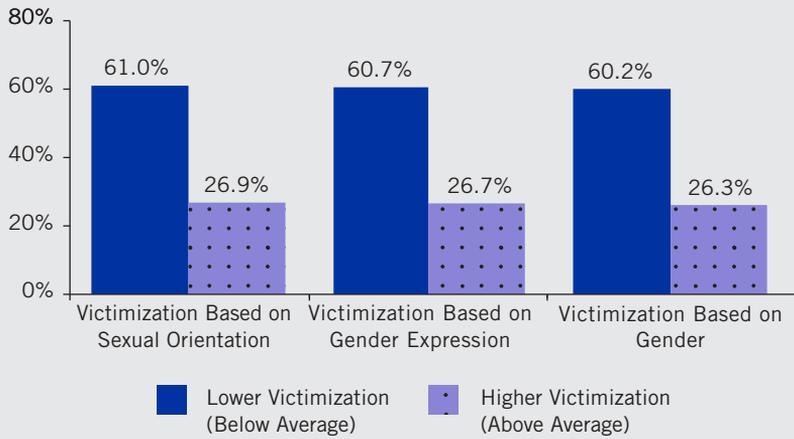
• Were more likely to have been disciplined at school than those who experienced lower levels of victimization (59.8 % vs. 34.7%), and

• Had lower self-esteem and higher levels of depression.

LGBTQ+ students who experienced higher levels of in-person victimization because of their gender:
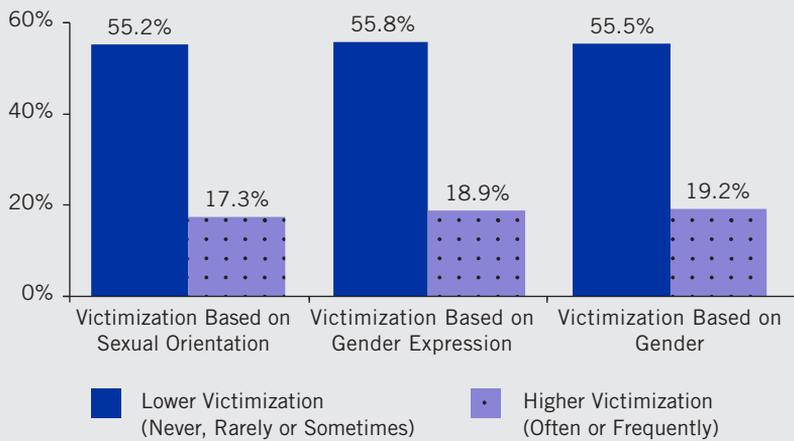
• Were almost three times as likely to have missed school in the past month than those who experienced lower levels (60.3% vs. 24.4%);

• Felt lower levels of belonging to their school community, performed poorer academically (2.76 vs. 3.17 average GPA), and were twice as likely to report that they did not plan to pursue any post-secondary education (e.g., college or trade school; 18.1% vs. 9.0%) than those who experienced lower levels of victimization;

• Were more likely to have been disciplined at school than those who experienced lower levels of victimization (60.9% vs. 33.9%); and

• Had lower self-esteem and higher levels of depression than those who experienced lower levels of victimization.

Of the LGBTQ+ students who indicated that they were considering dropping out of school, half (51.5%) indicated that they were doing so because of a hostile school climate, including issues with harassment, unsupportive peers or educators, and gendered school policies/practices.

School Belonging by Experiences of In-Person Victimization at School
(Percentage of LGBTQ+ Students Demonstrating Positive School Belonging)

	Victimization Based on Sexual Orientation	Victimization Based on Gender Expression	Victimization Based on Gender
Lower Victimization (Below Average)	61.0%	60.7%	60.2%
Higher Victimization (Above Average)	26.9%	26.7%	26.3%

School Belonging by Experiences of Online Victimization at School
(Percentage of LGBTQ+ Students Demonstrating Positive School Belonging)

	Victimization Based on Sexual Orientation	Victimization Based on Gender Expression	Victimization Based on Gender
Lower Victimization (Never, Rarely or Sometimes)	55.2%	55.8%	55.5%
Higher Victimization (Often or Frequently)	17.3%	18.9%	19.2%

EFFECTS OF DISCRIMINATION

LGBTQ+ students who experienced LGBTQ+-related discrimination at school were:

- Nearly three times as likely to have missed school in the past month as those who had not (43.3% vs. 16.4%);

- Had lower GPAs than their peers who experienced no anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination (2.92 vs. 3.20);

- Were more likely to have been disciplined at school (51.2% vs. 26.2%); 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, a sizable percentage (31.4%) indicated that they were doing so because of the hostile climate created by gendered school policies and practices.

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.

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

Availability and Participation

- Only a third of LGBTQ+ students (34.8%) said that their school had an active GSA or similar student club in the 2020–2021 academic year.

- LGBTQ+ students in in-school only learning environments were less likely to have a GSA available than those in online only or hybrid learning environments (26.5% vs. 36.8% and 35.6%, respectively).

- About half (47.8%) of LGBTQ+ students with a GSA at school reported having participated in the club.

Utility

Compared to LGBTQ+ students who did not have a GSA in their school, students who had an active GSA in their school:

- Were less likely to hear homophobic remarks at school — using "gay " in a negative way (56.6% compared to 74.3% reporting often or frequently), "no homo" (56.6% vs. 67.0% reporting often or frequently), and other homophobic remarks such as "fag" or "dyke" (34.0% vs. 49.8%) often or frequently;

- Were less likely to hear negative remarks often or frequently about gender expression (48.9% vs. 60.3%);

- Were less likely to hear negative remarks often or frequently about transgender people (30.5% vs. 44.4%);

- Were more likely to report that school personnel intervened when hearing homophobic remarks (16.0% vs. 10.2% reporting staff intervene most of the time or always) and negative remarks about gender expression (11.5% vs. 7.1% reporting staff intervened most of the time or always);

- Were less likely to feel unsafe regarding their sexual orientation (41.1% vs. 55.8%), gender expression (36.6% vs. 46.9%) and gender (35.5% vs 43.0%);

- Experienced lower levels of in-person victimization related to their sexual orientation (17.7% vs 33.0%), gender expression (18.2% vs 31.9%) and gender (17.7% vs 30.2%);

- Were more likely to report having many supportive school staff (67.9% vs 46.6%) and more accepting peers (55.4% vs 32.4%);

- Were less likely to have missed school in the past month because of feeling unsafe or uncomfortable (24.4% vs. 36.3%);

- Felt greater belonging to their school community, performed better academically in school and were more likely to plan on pursuing post-secondary education; and

- Reported better psychological well-being than students in schools without GSAs: higher levels of self-esteem, lower levels of depression, and a lower likelihood of having seriously considered suicide in the past year.

INCLUSIVE CURRICULAR RESOURCES

Availability

- A majority (71.6%) of LGBTQ+ students reported that their classes did not include any LGBTQ+ topics in class.

- Only 16.3% of LGBTQ+ students were taught positive representations about LGBTQ+ people, history, or events in their schools; 14.4% had been taught negative content about LGBTQ+ topics.

- Students who attended school online, either hybrid or only online, were more likely to report that LGBTQ+ topics had been discussed in a positive way than were students who attended school only in-person.

- Only 7.4% received LGBTQ+ sex education, which included positive representations of both LGB and transgender and nonbinary topics.

- Students who attended school online, either in online only or hybrid learning environments, were more likely to report receiving any kind of sex education, and LGBTQ+ inclusive sex education than were students who attended school only in person.

- Under a fifth of LGBTQ+ students reported that LGBTQ+-related topics were included in textbooks or other assigned readings, with only 0.4% of students reporting that these topics were included in many of their textbooks and readings.

- Students who attended school only in-person reported having fewer LGBTQ+ textbooks or other assigned reading than students who attended hybrid or online-only school.

- Under half of students (42.8%) reported that they could find information about LGBTQ+-related issues in their school library.

- Just under half of students (48.2%)

with internet access at school reported being able to access LGBTQ+-related information online via school computers.

Utility

Compared to students in school without an LGBTQ+-inclusive curriculum, LGBTQ+ students in schools with an LGBTQ+-inclusive curriculum:

- Were less likely to hear homophobic remarks — "gay" used in a negative way (48.7% compared to 72.0% reporting often or frequently), "no homo" (51.2% vs. 65.7% reporting often or frequently), and other homophobic remarks such as "fag" or "dyke" (26.7% vs. 47.8% reporting often or frequently);

- Were less likely to hear negative remarks about gender expression often or frequently (42.8% vs. 58.9%);

- Were less likely to hear negative remarks about transgender people often or frequently (23.6% vs. 42.7%);

- Were less likely to feel unsafe because of their sexual orientation (23.4% vs. 34.0%), gender expression (34.0% vs. 54.0%) and gender (29.1% vs 42.6%);

- Experienced lower levels of in-person victimization related to their sexual

Representations of LGBTQ+-Related Topics Taught in Any Classroom Curriculum

Figure 2.1 Representations of LGBTQ+-Related Topics Taught in Any Classroom Curriculum

Only Positive 14.1%

Only Negative 12.2%

Both Positive and Negative 2.2%

None 71.6%
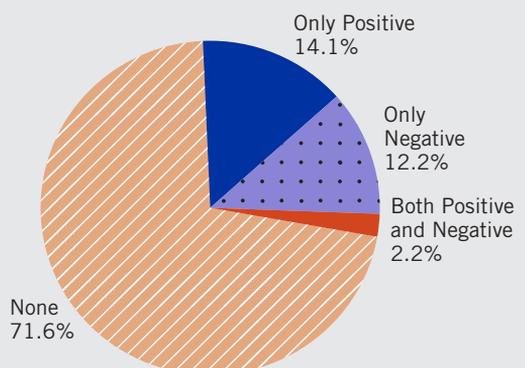
orientation (3.4% vs 7.7%), gender expression (5.1% vs 9.5%) and gender (4.2% vs 8.7%);

• Were less likely to miss school in the past month because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable (54.7% vs. 67.1%);

• Felt greater belonging to their school community, performed better academically in school 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 (66.9% vs. 35.3%); and

• Reported better psychological well-being than students in schools without GSAs — higher levels of self-esteem; lower levels of depression, and a lower likelihood of having seriously considered suicide in the past year.

SUPPORTIVE EDUCATORS

Availability

• Almost all LGBTQ+ students (96.3%) could identify at least one staff member supportive of LGBTQ+ students at their school.

• More than half of students (58.2%) could identify at least six supportive school staff, but fewer (34.7%) of students could identify 11 or more supportive staff.

• Those students who were in online learning environments for the entire school year reported a higher number of supportive educators than those in hybrid online and in-person learning environments and those who were only in in-person learning environments.

• Less than a quarter (23.7%) reported that their school administration was somewhat or very supportive of LGBTQ+ students.

• LGBTQ+ students who were in in-person only learning environments were less likely to report that their administration was supportive than those in online only and hybrid learning environments.

• Most students (82.9%) reported having security personnel at school. More than a quarter (30.8%) felt safe at school because of their presence, and a smaller percentage (25.1%) felt unsafe because of their presence.

• About half (51.9%) had seen at least one Safe Space sticker or poster at their school (these stickers or posters often serve to identify supportive educators).

• LGBTQ+ students who were in hybrid learning environments (both online and in-person) were most likely and students in online-only learning environments were least likely to Safe Space stickers or posters at school.

Utility

Compared to LGBTQ+ students with few supportive school staff or none (0 to 5), students with many (11 or more) supportive staff at their school:

• Were less likely to feel unsafe because of their sexual orientation (34.7% vs. 64.2%), gender expression (32.6% vs. 51.7%) and gender (30.1% vs 48.3%);

• Were less likely to miss school because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable (20.1% vs. 42.4%);

• Felt greater belonging to their school community, performed better academically in school and were more likely to plan on pursuing post-secondary education; and

• Reported better psychological well-being: higher levels of self-esteem, lower levels of depression, and lower likelihood of having seriously considered suicide in the past year.

Students who had seen a Safe Space sticker or poster in their school were more likely to identify a high number of supportive staff (11 or more) in their schools, compared to students who had not seen a Safe Space sticker or poster at school (50.1% vs 17.8%).

INCLUSIVE AND SUPPORTIVE SCHOOL POLICIES

Availability

- Although a majority (76.1%) of students had an anti-bullying policy at their school, only 12.0% of students reported that their school had a comprehensive policy (i.e., one that specifically enumerates both sexual orientation and gender identity/expression).

- LGBTQ+ students who had been in in-person instruction during the entire academic year were, in fact, less likely to report having a comprehensive policy, and more likely to have a generic policy, than students who had been only in online instruction, even after accounting for school characteristics.

- Only 8.2% of LGBTQ+ students reported that their school or district had official policies or guidelines to support transgender or nonbinary students.

- Those students who were in in-person only learning environments were less likely to report having an affirming policy or guidelines for transgender and nonbinary students than students who were in online only and hybrid learning environments, even after considering school characteristics.

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 (53.9% compared to 69.8% of students with a generic policy and 72.0% of students with no policy);

- Were less likely to hear the phrase "no homo" often or frequently (54.7% compared to 64.9% of students with a generic policy and 63.9% of students with no policy);

Supportive School Staff and Feelings of Safety and Missing School
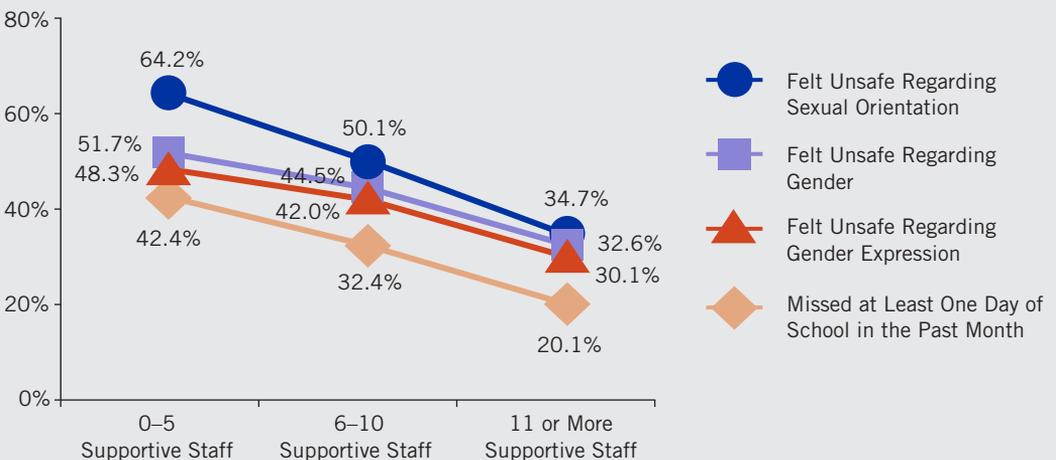
- Were less likely to hear other homophobic remarks such as "fag" or "dyke" often or frequently (33.8% compared to 44.8% of students with a generic policy and 49.3% of students with no policy);

- Were less likely to hear negative remarks about gender expression often or frequently (47.1% compared to 56.9% of students with a generic policy and 59.4% of students with no policy);

- Were less likely to hear negative remarks about transgender people often or frequently (30.6% compared to 39.9% of students with a generic policy and 43.4% of students with no policy);

- Were more likely to report that staff intervene when hearing anti-LGBTQ+ remarks (24.5% compared to 11.6% of students with a generic policy and 7.2% of students with no policy);

- 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 and nonbinary students, those in schools with a transgender/nonbinary student policy or guidelines:

- Were less likely to experience anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination in their school than their transgender and nonbinary peers. Specifically, they were:

  - Less likely to be prevented from using their name or pronoun of choice in school (19.4% vs. 54.2%);

  - Less likely to be prevented from using bathrooms aligned with their gender (25.6% vs. 59.3%);

  - Less likely to be prevented from using locker rooms aligned with their gender (29.0% vs. 59.0%); and

  - Less likely to be prevented from wearing clothes thought to be "inappropriate" based on gender (8.8% vs. 31.9%);

  - Less likely to be prevented from playing on the school sports team that is consistent with their gender (18.5% vs 37.9%);

- Were less likely to miss school because of feeling unsafe (30.7% vs. 38.2% missed at least one day of school in the past month for safety reasons); and

- Were more likely to feel a part of their school community (69.2% vs. 42.0% reported higher levels of school belonging).

CHANGES IN SCHOOL CLIMATE FOR LGBTQ+ STUDENTS OVER TIME

Although school climate for LGBTQ+ students has improved, overall, since our first installment of this survey in 1999, school remains quite hostile for many LGBTQ+ students. In 2021, we saw few positive changes from the results of the 2019 installment of this survey.

CHANGES IN INDICATORS OF HOSTILE SCHOOL CLIMATE

Anti-LGBTQ+ Remarks

- Homophobic remarks had been on the decline from 2001 to 2015, and remained consistent from 2015 to 2017, However, in 2019, the frequency of remarks declined and remained static in 2021.

- Use of expressions such as "that's so gay" has remained the most common form of biased language heard by LGBTQ+ students in school. These remarks had been in consistent decline until 2015, but increased from 2015 to 2019 and remained at a similar level in 2021.

- Hearing the expression "no homo" had consistently been less common than most other types of LGBTQ+-related biased remarks, and the frequency had been on a decline from 2011 to 2017. In 2019, we saw a sizeable increase from 2017, and remained at a similar level in 2021.

- Hearing negative remarks about gender expression had not changed in the early years of the survey, but decreased from 2011 to 2013. These remarks increased in 2015 but declined in 2017 and again in 2019. In 2021, the frequency of remarks was higher than in 2019, but lower than all years prior.

- Negative remarks about transgender people had steadily increased from 2013, when we first asked this question, to 2017, but decreased in 2019 and remained at a similar level in 2021.

- Hearing homophobic remarks and negative remarks about gender expression from teachers or schools staff increased from 2019 to 2021 and were significantly higher than most recent years.

Harassment and Assault

- With regard to victimization based on sexual orientation:

  - After years of decline, the frequency of verbal harassment has not changed from 2015 to 2021;

  - Since 2007, the frequency of physical harassment has generally been in decline. Although there was no change from 2019 to 20201, but both years were lower than all years prior to 2017.

  - Physical assault changed little between 2001 and 2007, but generally has declined from 2011 to 2021.

- With regard to victimization related to gender expression:

  - Verbal harassment did not change between 2001 and 2007, and generally decreased from 2009 to 2019 and did not change in 2021, but 2019 and 2021 were lower than most prior years;

  - Physical harassment has not changed from 2017 to 2021, but was lower in these years than prior years.

  - Physical assault continued a pattern of modest decline, and was lower in 2021 than all previous years.

- The rates of victimization related to gender (verbal harassment, physical harassment and physical assault) had not changed in 2021 from 2019, but were all lower than early years of the survey.

- There have been no changes in the frequency of LGBTQ+ students reporting victimization to school staff from 2017 to 2021, and LGBTQ+ students' ratings of the effectiveness of staff intervention when incidents had been reported have remained similar from 2013 to 2017.

CHANGES IN EXPERIENCES OF DISCRIMINATION

Overall, over half of LGBTQ+ students experienced some type of LGBTQ+-related discrimination at school at all five time points. In 2019, we saw the percentage of LGBTQ+ students who experienced any form of anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination at school decline from the previous year; however, the percentage increased in 2021 where it did not differ from the years 2013 to 2017.

With regard to the specific forms of discrimination, the percentages for most forms were highest in 2013. In 2019, we had seen a decline in most forms of discrimination from prior years. In 2021, however, many of these forms of discrimination increased, specifically, restrictions on the use of names and pronouns, clothing based on gender, clothing supporting LGBTQ+ issue, and school dances, as well as generally being disciplined for identifying as LGBTQ+.

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

CHANGES IN AVAILABILITY OF LGBTQ+-RELATED SCHOOL RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS

Supportive Student Clubs (GSAs)

- In 2021, the percentage of LGBTQ+ students who had a GSA available at their school dropped significantly. Whereas more than half of LGBTQ+ students had reported having a GSA at school in recent years, less than 40% reported having an active GSA at their school in 2021.

- About half of LGBTQ+ students with a GSA at school participated in the club (47.8%).

Curricular Resources

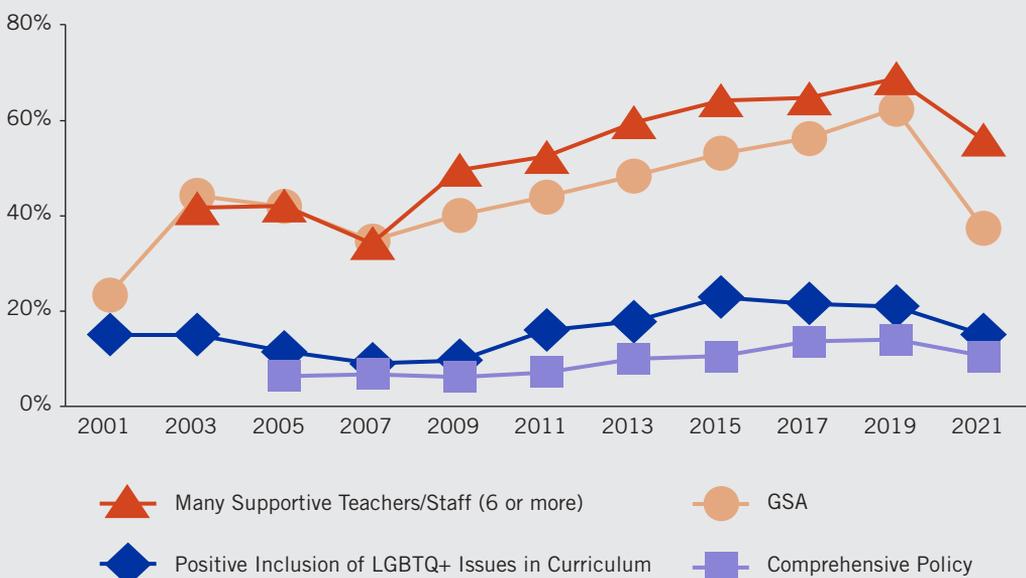Overall, there has been few positive changes in LGBTQ+-related curricular resources

- Access to LGBTQ+-related internet resources through their school computers was highest in 2019 but decreased in 2021.

- Access to LGBTQ+-related books and resources in school libraries was highest in 2019 but decreased in 2021. Overall, there have been few changes across the years in the availability of school library resources.

- Being taught positive LGBTQ+ material in class has been one of the least common curricular supports, has changed little across prior survey years, and was even lower in 2021 than in 2019.

- The availability of LGBTQ+ information in textbooks and class resources has also historically been one of the least commonly reported curricular supports for LGBTQ+ students, and was not different in 2021 than 2019.

Supportive Educators

- Since 2011, more than 95% of LGBTQ+ students reported having at least one supportive school personnel at school.

Availability of LGBTQ+-Related School Resources Over Time
(Percentage of LGBTQ+ Students Reporting Resource in School, Accounting for Covariates)

Legend:
- Many Supportive Teachers/Staff (6 or more)
- GSA
- Positive Inclusion of LGBTQ+ Issues in Curriculum
- Comprehensive Policy

- In 2021, however, the number of supportive school personnel was lower than in recent years, specifically 2013 to 2019. Nevertheless, the number of supportive school personnel in 2021 was higher than early years of the survey, specifically 2009 and earlier.

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. From 2011 to 2015, there had generally been small increases with regard to any type of anti-bullying/harassment policy, followed by a small decline from 2015 to 2017. In 2021, the rate had not changed from 2019 but was somewhat lower than 2017.

- With regard to enumerated policies, there was little change from 2005 to 2013. However, from 2015 to 2019, we saw a pattern of small increases in the percentages of LGBTQ+ students who reported having comprehensive policies (i.e., fully enumerated), and small decreases in those who reported partially enumerated policies. However, in 2021, the percentage of LGBTQ+ students reporting comprehensive policies was lower than in 2019 and the percentage reporting partially enumerated policies had not changed.

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. We examined differences in LGBTQ+ student experiences, based on: 1) sexual orientation, including differences between gay and lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, queer, asexual and questioning students; 2) gender identity, including differences between and among transgender, nonbinary, cisgender, and questioning students; and 3) racial/ethnic identity, including differences between Arab American/Middle Eastern/North African (MENA), Asian American/Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian (AAPI), Black, Latinx, Native American/American Indian/Alaska Native (referred to as "Native and Indigenous"), multiracial, and White LGBTQ+ students.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

- Overall, pansexual students reported the most negative school experiences in comparison to students of other sexual orientations. Pansexual students experienced higher levels of sexual harassment, victimization based on sexual orientation, victimization based on gender identity, and victimization based on gender, than students of many other sexual orientations. They also experienced more discriminatory policies and practices, missed more school due to feeling unsafe, changed schools more often and had lower educational aspirations than LGBTQ+ peers of many other sexual orientations.

- Compared to students of other sexual orientations, queer or gay and lesbian students were more likely to be "out" about their sexual orientation at school — both to other students and to school staff.

GENDER

- Transgender students, in general, experienced the most hostile school climates compared to their peers. Among transgender students, transgender boys and students who identified as only transgender reported somewhat more negative school experiences than transgender nonbinary students and transgender girls.

- Nonbinary students who did not also identify as transgender had somewhat better school experiences than transgender-identified students. Among nonbinary students, those who identified as nonbinary male or nonbinary female experienced less hostile school climates than those who identified only as nonbinary or genderqueer and those with other nonbinary identities (e.g., agender, demigender).

- Among cisgender LGBQ students, 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.

- Questioning students differed quite significantly from cisgender students, as they reported significantly worse school experiences.

RACE AND ETHNICITY

Overall, we found that Native and Indigenous LGBTQ+ students experienced more hostile school climates than their peers of other racial/ethnic groups. Native and Indigenous students were more likely to experience higher rates of victimization based on sexual orientation, gender expression, gender, and race/ethnicity than almost all other races/ethnicities. Additionally,

they were more likely to report poorer outcomes when considering their feelings about education as they reported the lowest levels of school belonging compared to students of all other races/ethnicities.

- Black students were more likely than most other students to feel unsafe due to their race/ethnicity, except for AAPI and Native and Indigenous students.

- Over half of all LGBTQ+ students of color experienced in-person victimization based on race/ethnicity.

- More than a quarter of all LGBTQ+ students of color experienced online victimization based on race/ethnicity in their online classrooms.

- White students were less likely than all other racial/ethnic groups to feel unsafe or experience victimization because of their racial/ethnic identity.

Among the LGBTQ+ students in most racial/ethnic groups, the majority had experienced some form of anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination at school, and the percentages were similar across most of the racial/ethnic groups. Although AAPI students were the least likely to report experiencing anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination, when compared to students of all other races/ethnicities, and Native and Indigenous and Latinx students were more likely than Black students to report experiencing anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination.

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 type and location of the schools they attend.

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 school personnel, LGBTQ+-inclusive curricular resources, and inclusive policies.

SCHOOL TYPE

- Overall, LGBTQ+ students in private non-religious schools had fewer hostile school experiences than those in public schools and those in religious schools.

- LGBTQ+ public school students were most likely to hear homophobic remarks at school and experienced the greatest levels of gender-based victimization, whereas those in religious schools were most likely to hear negative remarks about gender expression.

- LGBTQ+ students in public schools generally experienced higher levels of anti-LGBTQ+ victimization than others.

- Students in religious schools were the most likely to report experiencing anti-LGBTQ+ discriminatory school policies and practices.

- Overall, students in religious schools were less likely to report having LGBTQ+-related resources and supports in their schools, and

students in private schools were more likely to report having these resources and supports. Additionally, students in charter schools in general had greater access to resources and supports than those in regular public schools.

SCHOOL LOCALE

- LGBTQ+ students in rural 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 suburban schools experienced lower levels of both in-person and online anti-LGBTQ+ victimization than all others.

- 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 had more negative school experiences overall than students in all other regions, including higher rates of biased language, victimization, and anti-LGBTQ+ discriminatory school policies and practices, and LGBTQ+ students in the Midwest had more negative experiences overall than those in the Northeast and West.

- 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.

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 2021 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.

Instituting these 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. Especially given the decline in LGBTQ+ supports in schools that we found in this year's report, it is imperative that all who are committed to ensuring safe and affirming schools for all students intensify their efforts in policy, advocacy, and classroom practices.

GLSEN®

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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