



The 2013 National School Climate Survey

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Key Findings on the Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender 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, and transgender (LGBT) youth and that LGBT 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 continued need for current data by conducting the study every two years. Since then, the biennial National School Climate Survey has documented the unique challenges LGBT students face and identified interventions that can improve school climate. The survey documents the prevalence of anti-LGBT 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 LGBT 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 LGBT students' educational outcomes and well-being. Finally, the survey reports on the availability and the utility of LGBT-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 LGBT youth. For example, in the 2013 survey we added a question about hearing negative remarks about transgender people (e.g., "tranny"). The National School Climate Survey remains one of the few studies to examine the school experiences of LGBT students nationally, and its results have been vital to GLSEN's understanding of the issues that LGBT students face, thereby informing our ongoing work to ensure safe and affirming schools for all.

PHOTO CREDIT: Photography on this page under Creative Commons license, Clint Gardner. Quotes throughout are from students' responses to open-ended questions in the survey. Visit glsen.org/nscs for the full 2013 National School Climate Survey.

In our 2013 survey, we examine the experiences of LGBT 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 classes or days of school because of safety reasons;
- Experiencing harassment and assault in school; and
- Experiencing discriminatory policies and practices at school.

We also examine:

- The possible negative effects of a hostile school climate on LGBT students' academic achievement, educational aspirations, and psychological well-being;

- Whether or not students report experiences of victimization to school officials or to family members and how these adults address the problem; and
- How the school experiences of LGBT students differ by personal and community characteristics.

In addition, we demonstrate the degree to which LGBT students have access to supportive resources in school, and we explore the possible benefits of these resources:

- Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) or similar clubs;
- School anti-bullying/harassment policies;
- Supportive school staff; and
- Curricula that are inclusive of LGBT-related topics.

Given that GLSEN has been conducting the survey for over a decade, we also examine changes over time on indicators of negative school climate and levels of access to LGBT-related resources in schools.

METHODS

The 2013 National School Climate Survey was conducted online. To obtain a representative national sample of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth, we conducted outreach through national, regional, and local organizations that provide services to or advocate on behalf of LGBT youth, and conducted targeted advertising on the social networking sites, such as Facebook and Reddit. 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 7,898 students between the ages of 13 and 21. Students were from all 50 states and the District of Columbia and from 2,770 unique school districts. About two thirds of the sample (68.1%) was White, slightly less than half (43.6%) was cisgender female, and over half identified as gay or lesbian (58.8%). Students were in grades 6 to 12, with the largest numbers in grades 10 and 11.

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a yellow pencil, pointing it at a bubble test form. The form has rows of bubbles labeled with letters A through E and numbers 39 and 40. A semi-transparent blue box is overlaid on the top part of the image, containing the text 'SUMMARY OF FINDINGS'.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

HOSTILE SCHOOL CLIMATE

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

SCHOOL SAFETY

- 55.5% of LGBT students felt unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation, and 37.8% because of their gender expression.
- 30.3% of LGBT students missed at least one entire day of school in the past month because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable, and over a tenth (10.6%) missed four or more days in the past month.
- Over a third avoided gender-segregated spaces in school because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable (bathrooms: 35.4%, locker rooms: 35.3%).
- Most reported avoiding school functions and extracurricular activities (68.1% and 61.2%, respectively) because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable.

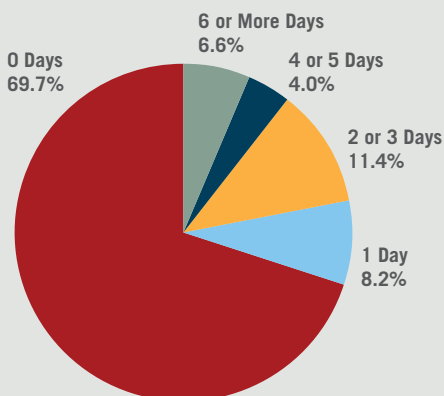
ANTI-LGBT REMARKS AT SCHOOL

- 71.4% of LGBT students heard “gay” used in a negative way (e.g., “that’s so gay”) frequently or often at school, and 90.8% reported that they felt distressed because of this language.
- 64.5% heard other homophobic remarks (e.g., “dyke” or “faggot”) frequently or often.
- 56.4% heard negative remarks about gender expression (not acting “masculine enough” or “feminine enough”) frequently or often.
- A third (33.1%) heard negative remarks specifically about transgender people, like “tranny” or “he/she,” frequently or often.
- 51.4% of students reported hearing homophobic remarks from their teachers or other school staff, and 55.5% of students reported hearing negative remarks about gender expression from teachers or other school staff.

HARASSMENT AND ASSAULT AT SCHOOL

- 74.1% of LGBT students were verbally harassed (e.g., called names or threatened) in the past year because of their sexual orientation and 55.2% because of their gender expression.
- 36.2% were physically harassed (e.g., pushed or shoved) in the past year because of their sexual orientation and 22.7% because of their gender expression.
- 16.5% were physically assaulted (e.g., punched, kicked, injured with a weapon) in the past year because of their sexual orientation and 11.4% because of their gender expression.
- 49.0% of LGBT students experienced electronic harassment in the past year (via text messages or postings on Facebook), often known as cyberbullying.
- 56.7% of LGBT students who were harassed or assaulted in school did not report the incident to school staff, most commonly because they doubted that effective intervention would occur or the situation could become worse if reported.
- 61.6% of the students who did report an incident said that school staff did nothing in response.

Frequency that LGBT Students Missed Days of School in the Past Month Because of Feeling Unsafe or Uncomfortable



DISCRIMINATORY SCHOOL POLICIES AND PRACTICES

- 55.5% of LGBT students reported personally experiencing any LGBT-related discriminatory policies or practices at school (see below), and almost two thirds (65.2%) said other students had experienced these policies and practices at school.
- 28.2% of students reported being disciplined for public displays of affection that were not disciplined among non-LGBT students.
- 18.1% of students were prevented from attending a dance or function with someone of the same gender.
- 17.8% of students were restricted from forming or promoting a GSA.
- 17.5% of students were prohibited from discussing or writing about LGBT topics in school assignments.
- 15.5% of students were prevented from wearing clothing or items supporting LGBT issues 9.2% of students reported being disciplined for simply identifying as LGBT.
- Some policies particularly targeted transgender students:
 - 42.2% of transgender students had been prevented from using their preferred name (10.8% of LGBT students overall);
 - 59.2% of transgender students had been required to use a bathroom or locker room of their legal sex (18.7% of students overall); and
 - 31.6% of transgender students had been prevented from wearing clothes considered inappropriate based on their legal sex (19.2% of students overall).

EFFECTS OF A HOSTILE SCHOOL CLIMATE

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

EFFECTS OF VICTIMIZATION

- LGBT students who experienced higher levels of victimization because of their sexual orientation:
 - Were more than three times as likely to have missed school in the past month than those who experienced lower levels (61.1% vs. 17.3%);
 - Had lower grade point averages (GPAs) than students who were less often harassed (2.8 vs. 3.3);
 - Were 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 (8.7% vs. 4.2%); and
 - Had higher levels of depression and lower levels of self-esteem.
- LGBT students who experienced higher levels of victimization because of their gender expression:
 - Were more than three times as likely to have missed school in the past

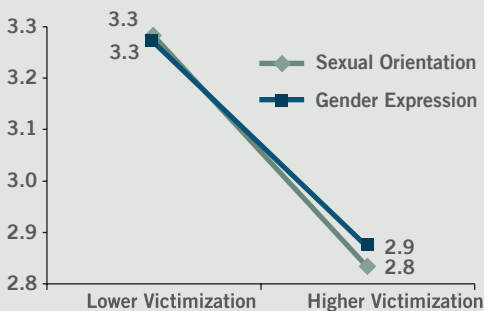
month than those who experienced lower levels (58.6% vs. 18.2%);

- had lower GPAs than students who were less often harassed (2.9 vs. 3.3);
- Were twice as likely to report that they did not plan to pursue any post-secondary education (e.g., college or trade school; 8.2% vs. 4.2%); and
- Had higher levels of depression and lower levels of self-esteem.

EFFECTS OF DISCRIMINATION

- LGBT students who experienced LGBT-related discrimination at school were:
 - More than three times as likely to have missed school in the past month as those who had not (42.3% vs. 13.8%);
 - Had lower GPAs than their peers (3.0 vs. 3.3); and
 - Had lower self-esteem and higher levels of depression.

Academic Achievement and Severity of Victimization (LGBT Students' Mean Reported Grade Point Average)



Academic Achievement and Experiences of Discrimination (LGBT Students' Mean Reported Grade Point Average)



LGBT-RELATED SCHOOL RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS

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

GAY-STRAIGHT ALLIANCES

AVAILABILITY AND PARTICIPATION

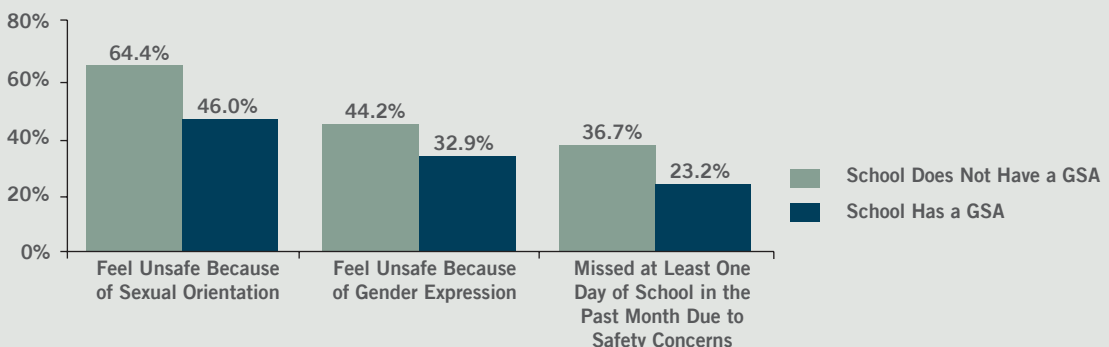
- Only half (50.3%) of students said that their school had a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) or similar student club.
- Although most LGBT students reported participating in their GSA at some level, almost a third (32.3%) had not.

UTILITY

- Compared to LGBT 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 (67.2% compared to 81.1% of other students);
 - Were less likely to hear homophobic remarks such as “fag” or “dyke” often or frequently (57.4% vs. 71.6%);

- Were less likely to hear negative remarks about gender expression often or frequently (53.0% vs. 59.6%);
- Were more likely to report that school personnel intervened when hearing homophobic remarks—20.8% vs. 12.7% said that staff intervene most of the time or always;
- Were less likely to feel unsafe because of their sexual orientation (46.0% vs. 64.4%);
- Experienced lower levels of victimization related to their sexual orientation and gender expression. For example, 19.0% of students with a GSA experienced higher levels of victimization based on their sexual orientation, compared to 36.2% of those without a GSA; and
- Felt more connected to their school community.

Presence of Gay-Straight Alliances and Feelings of Safety and Missing School





75.2% OF LGBT STUDENTS IN SCHOOLS WITH AN INCLUSIVE CURRICULUM SAID THEIR PEERS WERE ACCEPTING OF LGBT PEOPLE, COMPARED TO 39.6% OF THOSE WITHOUT AN INCLUSIVE CURRICULUM.

INCLUSIVE CURRICULAR RESOURCES

AVAILABILITY

- Only 18.5% of LGBT students were taught positive representations about LGBT people, history, or events in their schools; 14.8% had been taught negative content about LGBT topics.
- Less than half (44.2%) of students reported that they could find information about LGBT-related issues in their school library.
- Less than half of students (45.3%) with Internet access at school reported being able to access LGBT-related information online via school computers.

UTILITY

- LGBT students in schools with an LGBT- inclusive curriculum:
 - Were less likely to hear “gay” used in a negative way often or frequently (54.7% compared to 78.5% of other students);
 - Were less likely to hear homophobic remarks such as “fag” or “dyke” often or frequently (46.3% vs. 68.7%);

- Were less likely to hear negative remarks about gender expression often or frequently (43.5% vs. 59.2%);
 - Were less likely to feel unsafe because of their sexual orientation (34.8% vs. 59.8%);
 - Were less likely to miss school in the past month (16.7% of students with an inclusive curriculum missed school in past month because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable compared to 32.9% of other students);
 - Were more likely to report that their classmates were somewhat or very accepting of LGBT people than other students (75.2% vs. 39.6%); and
 - Felt more connected to their school community.
- LGBT high school seniors were more likely to be interested in studying STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, or Math) or Social Science in college if their relevant high school classes had included positive LGBT content (35.8% vs. 18.5% for STEM majors; 29.0 vs. 19.7% for Social Science majors).

SUPPORTIVE EDUCATORS

AVAILABILITY

- Almost all LGBT students (96.1%) could identify at least one staff member supportive of LGBT students at their school.
- Less than two thirds of students (61.0%) could identify at least six supportive school staff.
- Only 38.7% of students could identify 11 or more supportive staff.
- Over a quarter (26.1%) 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

- LGBT students with many (11 or more) supportive staff at their school:
 - Were less likely to feel unsafe than students with no supportive staff. (36.3 % vs. 74.1%);
 - Were less likely to miss school because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable (14.7% vs. 50.0%);
 - Felt more connected to their school community;
 - Had higher GPAs than other students (3.3 vs. 2.8); and
 - Were less likely to not plan on attending college (3.0% vs. 12.0%).
- Students who had seen a Safe Space sticker or poster in their school were more likely to identify school staff who were supportive of LGBT students and more likely to feel comfortable talking with school staff about LGBT issues.

COMPREHENSIVE BULLYING/HARASSMENT POLICIES

AVAILABILITY

- Although a majority (82.1%) of students had an anti-bullying policy at their school, only 10.1% of students reported that their school had a comprehensive policy (i.e., that specifically enumerate both sexual orientation and gender identity/expression).

UTILITY

- Students in schools with a comprehensive policy:
 - Were less likely to hear “gay” used in a negative way often or frequently (59.2% compared to 77.1% of students with a generic policy and 80.2% of students with no policy);
 - Were less likely to hear homophobic remarks such as “fag” or “dyke” often or frequently (50.4% compared to 66.4% of students with a generic policy and 72.4% of students with no policy);
 - Were less likely to hear negative remarks about gender expression often or frequently (41.7% compared to 57.6% of students with a generic policy and 62.3% of students with no policy); and
 - Were more likely to report that staff intervene when hearing homophobic remarks.

“I am so glad to have teachers who are cool with students being LGBT. If it weren’t for them, I know I would’ve dropped out of high school.”

CHANGES IN SCHOOL CLIMATE FOR LGBT YOUTH OVER TIME

School climate for LGBT students has improved somewhat over the years, yet remains quite hostile for many. Increases in the availability of many LGBT-related school resources may be having a positive effect on the school environment.

CHANGES IN INDICATORS OF HOSTILE SCHOOL CLIMATE

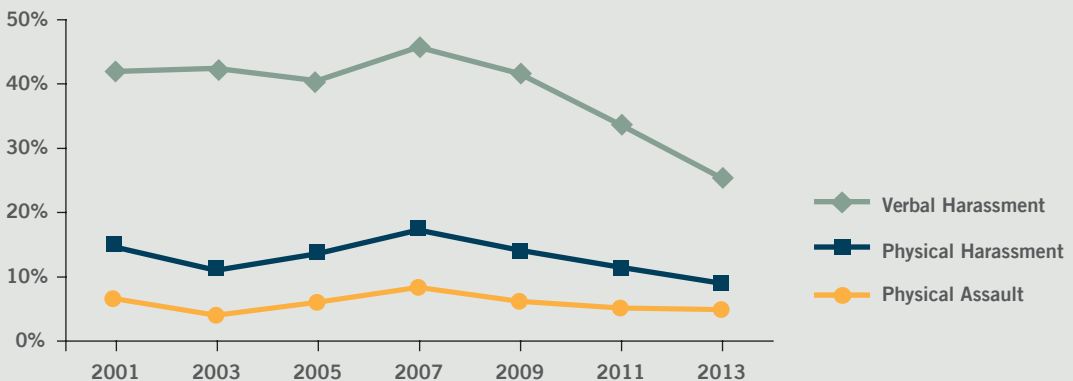
HARASSMENT AND ASSAULT

- LGBT students in the 2013 survey experienced lower verbal and physical harassment based on sexual orientation than in all prior years, and lower physical assault based on sexual orientation since 2007.
- Changes in harassment and assault based on gender expression were similar to those for sexual orientation—verbal and physical harassment were lower than in all prior years of the survey, and physical assault has been decreasing since 2007.

ANTI-LGBT REMARKS

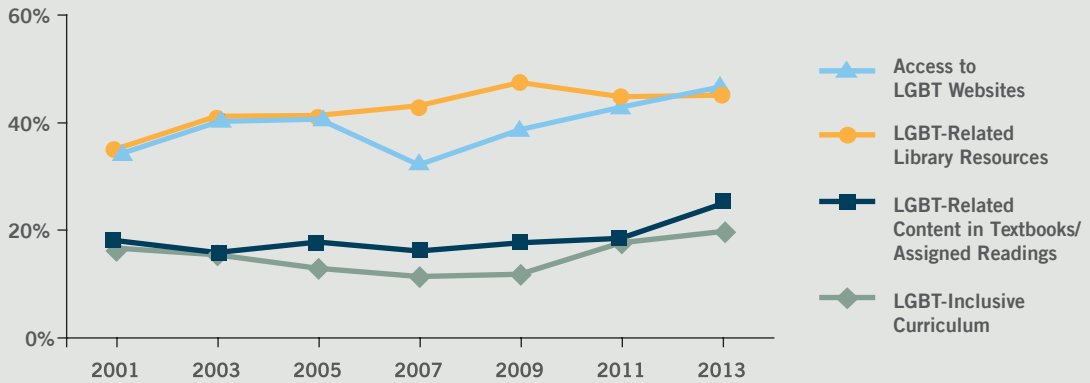
- LGBT students in the 2013 survey reported a lower incidence of homophobic remarks than in all prior years. The percentage of students hearing these remarks frequently or often has dropped from over 80% in 2001 to about 60% in 2013.
- Although the expression “that’s so gay” remains the most common form of anti-LGBT language heard by LGBT students, its prevalence has declined consistently since 2001.
- In 2013 the prevalence of hearing negative remarks about gender expression was at its lowest levels.

Frequency of Harassment and Assault Based on Sexual Orientation Over Time
Percentage of LGBT Students who Experienced Event Often or Frequently in the Past School Year (Based on Estimated Marginal Means)



Availability of Curricular Resources Over Time

Percentage of LGBT Students who Report Having Resources in School
(Accounting for Covariates)



CHANGES IN AVAILABILITY OF LGBT-RELATED SCHOOL RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS

- The percentage of students with LGBT-related resources in their school library has not changed noticeably in recent survey years.

GAY-STRAIGHT ALLIANCES

- The percentage of LGBT students reporting that they have a GSA in their school was higher in 2013 than in all prior survey years.

SUPPORTIVE EDUCATORS

- A higher percentage of LGBT students reported having supportive school staff in 2013 than in all prior survey years.

CURRICULAR RESOURCES

- The percentage of LGBT students reporting positive representations of LGBT people, history, or events in their curriculum was significantly higher in 2013 than in all prior survey years.
- The percentage of students with access to LGBT-related Internet resources was higher in 2013 than in all prior survey years.
- More students also had access to LGBT-related content in their textbooks than in all prior survey years.

ANTI-BULLYING/HARASSMENT POLICIES

- More LGBT students reported having an anti-bullying/harassment policy at their school in 2013 than in all prior survey years, including a modest increase in the percentage of students reporting that their school had a comprehensive policy, i.e., one that included protections based on sexual orientation and gender identity/expression.

DEMOGRAPHIC AND SCHOOL CHARACTERISTIC DIFFERENCES IN LGBT STUDENTS' SCHOOL EXPERIENCES

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

DIFFERENCES IN LGBT STUDENTS' SCHOOL EXPERIENCES BY PERSONAL DEMOGRAPHICS

RACE OR ETHNICITY

- Overall, Asian/South Asian/Pacific Islander students experienced the lowest frequencies of victimization based on sexual orientation and gender expression.
- White/European American LGBT students experienced lower frequencies of victimization based on race/ethnicity than all LGBT youth of color groups.

GENDER IDENTITY

- Compared to other LGBT students, transgender, genderqueer, and other non-cisgender students faced the most hostile school climates.
- Cisgender female students experienced the lowest frequencies of anti-LGBT victimization.

GENDER NONCONFORMITY

- Gender nonconforming cisgender students (students whose gender expression did not align to traditional gender norms) experienced worse school climates compared to gender conforming cisgender students.

“I hate my school’s discrimination of me for being transgender. Kids would spit on me, kick me, call me a dyke, and push me down the stairs. An administrator told me ‘you should expect to be treated that way.’”

DIFFERENCES IN LGBT STUDENTS' SCHOOL EXPERIENCES BY SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS

SCHOOL LEVEL

- LGBT students in middle school were more likely than students in high school to hear anti-LGBT language in school.
- Students in middle school reported higher frequencies of victimization based on sexual orientation and gender expression than students in high school.
- Students in middle school were less likely to have access to each LGBT-related school resource: GSAs, supportive educators, inclusive curriculum, and comprehensive anti-bullying/harassment policies; the disparity between middle and high school students was greatest for GSAs (7.5% for middle school students vs. 58.5% for high school students).

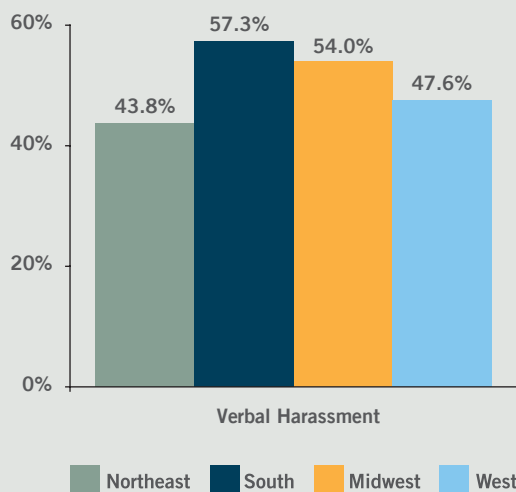
SCHOOL TYPE

- LGBT students in private, non-religious schools were less likely to hear anti-LGBT biased language than students in other schools.
- Students in public schools experienced higher frequencies of victimization based on sexual orientation and gender expression compared to students in private or religious schools.
- Overall, students in private schools had greater access to LGBT-related resources and supports in school than students in other schools.

REGION

- Students in the Northeast and the West reported hearing “gay” used in a negative way less frequently than students in the South and the Midwest.
- Overall, LGBT students from schools in the Northeast and the West reported significantly lower levels of victimization

Experiences of Harassment Based on Sexual Orientation by Region (Percentage of LGBT Students who Experienced Harassment Sometimes, Often, or Frequently)



based on sexual orientation and gender expression than students from schools in the South and the Midwest.

- In general, students in the Northeast were most likely to report having LGBT-related resources at school, followed by students in the West. Students in the South were least likely to have access to these resources and supports.

SCHOOL LOCALE

- Students in rural/small town schools reported the highest frequency of hearing anti-LGBT language at school.
- Students in rural/small town schools experienced higher frequencies of victimization in school based on sexual orientation and gender expression.
- Students in rural/small town schools were least likely to have LGBT-related school resources or supports, particularly GSAs and supportive school personnel.



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is clear that there is an urgent need for action to create safe and affirming learning environments for LGBT students. Results from the 2013 National School Climate Survey demonstrate the ways in which school-based support—such as supportive staff, anti-bullying/harassment policies, curricular resources inclusive of LGBT people, and GSAs—can positively affect LGBT students’ school experiences. Based on these findings, we recommend:

- Increasing student access to appropriate and accurate information regarding LGBT people, history, and events through inclusive curricula and library and Internet resources;
- Supporting student clubs, such as GSAs, that provide support for LGBT students and address LGBT 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 LGBT 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.

“I firmly believe that it does not just ‘get better.’ I am an example of someone who went out of their comfort zone to change their school environment for future LGBT students. I am graduating my high school this year and leaving it a very different place.”

LEARN MORE

The full 2013 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 harassment and assault and feelings of safety based on race/ethnicity, religion and disability;
- Frequency of sexual harassment, relational aggression, cyberbullying, and property damage;
- Relationship between being out (i.e., open about one's sexual orientation or gender identity) and students' school experiences and well-being;
- LGBT students' future education plans, including relevant factors for those who plan to drop out and intended college majors for those choose to continue on to higher education.
- Experiences of school discipline and involvement in the criminal/ juvenile justice system due to school disciplinary actions.
- LGBT students' housing status, and educational outcomes for homeless LGBT students.



GLSEN (the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network) is the leading national 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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