

Great Public Schools
for Every Student

National Education Association

A Report on the Status of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender People in Education: Stepping Out of the Closet, Into the Light



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Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and
Transgender People in
Education:

Stepping Out of the Closet, into the Light

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*Great Public Schools
for Every Student*

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The Status of Underserved Groups in Education

The National Education Association's commitment to creating great public schools for every student requires working to ensure all students are learning and succeeding in schools. This task is challenging. From their beginnings, our nation's schools have treated students differently depending on their race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, social class, sexual orientation, immigration status, language proficiency, or ability. Even today, significant gaps in academic attainment and achievement persist among these and other groups.

In 2005, NEA began publishing a series of reports on the status of underserved groups in education. To date, four reports have been published: American Indians and Alaska Natives; Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders; Hispanics; and Blacks. These reports draw on the proceedings of national summits that brought together researchers, community, and NEA members to discuss the problems experienced by each group and explore the promising strategies for change in policy and practice.

Like the other reports in the series, this report on the status of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender students is based on the basic principle that every student has the human and civil right to a quality public education. The content of the report derives largely from the presentations and research of more than 25 scholars and education employees from the United States and Canada who convened for a two-day summit in Chicago, Illinois, in July 2008.

Interspersed throughout this report are vignettes from students we were able to interview courtesy of the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN). We have also included a photo spread and more testimonials from students attending the Harvey Milk School in New York City. NEA is grateful to GLSEN, the Harvey Milk School, the Hetrick-Martin Institute, and all of the students for their contributions to this report.

A Note to the Education Community

This report is about young people.

It is about young people like Matthew. Matthew was so mercilessly teased and taunted in middle school—“It was like everyone knew I was gay before I did”—that he eventually stopped going to school altogether. And that was the end of the road until he found a small public high school that was safe, a school where Matthew was able to be Matthew *and* learn. And so instead of becoming another grim statistic, Matthew is graduating from high school this spring and going on to college.

This report is about our students—gay, straight, male, female, queer, transgender—missing school, underachieving, or dropping out. It’s about student-on-student cruelty, which in our schools we refer to as harassment and bullying.

It’s about their parents and guardians and the communities in which they live.

It’s also about educators reaching out to students who are in emotional and psychological distress. And it’s about all of our colleagues, gay or straight, being able to do the best job they can do.

In short, this is a report for and about the education community, about *education*.

We emphasize this point because we are acutely aware that the conflicts over issues involving sexual orientation and gender identity divide American society—as well as American schools, which are a microcosm of our society. We do not think these conflicts will go away any time soon, for they are deeply rooted in differing cultural, historical, political, and religious beliefs, and in differing understandings of human sexual and identity development.

We do believe, however, that education employees, regardless of their beliefs or views about homosexuality or gender nonconformity, share a commitment to the well-being of their students and a solidarity with their fellow colleagues.

We also believe that education employees share a commitment to bedrock constitutional principles that apply to every public school in the country. These include the protection of freedom of speech and expression and the guarantee of equal protection under the law for all people.

A shared commitment to the education community and the Constitution: this seems a solid common ground on which to stand when we address the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) issues that arise in today’s schools.

But we also need facts to inform our actions. The purpose of the NEA Summit, upon which this report is based, was to elicit the best available research regarding the impact of GLBT issues on students and education and to examine what is working and what is not.

The research presented at our Summit documents the stunning toll harassment and bullying take on GLBT and gender-nonconforming students, as well as on heterosexual students who are perceived as, or afraid to be perceived as, gay. It tells us how vital it is for school personnel to know what to do when confronted with GLBT-related issues in their schools. It tells us how dangerous it is when schools deny or ignore the existence of homophobic violence.

According to the research, just *one* caring and well-informed adult in a school can make a world of difference in a student's life. In the words of poet and educator Mary Oliver: "To pay attention, this is our endless and proper work."¹

The findings that fill these pages exhort us to pay closer attention. They give us some sense of how far we have come—and how much further we have yet to go before we can truly say that all students are respected for who they are.

And when we can say this, we will know that we have defended, cherished, and advanced each and every student's right to an equal educational experience, and a shot at success in whatever lies ahead.

Executive Summary

On July 17-18, 2008, the National Education Association hosted the NEA National Summit on GLBT Issues in Education in Chicago, Illinois. The purpose of the Summit was to gather leading researchers, scholars, and practitioners on gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) issues in education to assess the status of GLBT students in the United States educational system and to make recommendations on improving the learning conditions and academic achievement of GLBT youth.

A synopsis of the Summit presenters and panels appears in **Appendix A** of this report.

The chief observations and findings from the Summit include the following:

On GLBT Issues in Society and Education

- Hostility and apprehension toward homosexuality and gender nonconformity—reinforced over many decades by law, medicine, religion, and other cultural and societal institutions and conventions—continue to plague GLBT youth and adults in schools in every region of the nation, even as signs of greater inclusion and acceptance appear in some areas.

On GLBT Youth Identities and Experiences

- We have much to learn about the factors that influence adolescent sexual and gender identity development.
- Students of *all* sexual orientations, genders, and racial or ethnic backgrounds are directly victimized and impacted by homophobic acts.
- Youth of color who are GLBT are at elevated risk of harassment and social, familial, or community estrangement.
- Bullying of GLBT students stems largely from discomfort with students who do not conform to traditional gender roles in their appearance or behavior, i.e., who are gender-nonconforming. A student's actual sexual orientation may be far less relevant to his or her social victimization than his or her gender identity or gender expression.
- Transgender students are at elevated risk of severe harassment and physical harm as well as dropping out of school.
- GLBT students from poor and rural communities are acutely disadvantaged in obtaining resources, finding allies, and integrating into school culture.

- Students who are “questioning” their sexual orientation may be more at risk than students who have established sexual identities as gay, straight, or bisexual.
- The intense bullying and harassment GLBT students experience have led in some cases to declining academic performance and increased truancy and dropouts. This hostility occurs at school, at home, and in the community—a harmful trifecta that leads to further health and safety risks, including homelessness, anxiety, depression, and suicide.
- Students who engage in homophobic bullying strongly influence, and are influenced by, their peers and group dynamics; homophobic bullying may be perpetuated by peer groups even when the bullying by one individual within the group is curbed.
- In some communities, support services such as community centers and student-led Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) may not be equally welcoming or equipped to address the needs of all students, depending on the racial, economic, religious, and geographical background of the student population.

On Homelessness, Truancy, and Dropping Out Among GLBT Youth

- There is a powerful relationship between GLBT identity, family life, school truancy/dropping out and housing instability or homelessness. Many students become homeless as a result of their families’ intolerance to their GLBT identity, making it difficult to stay in school, much less meet basic emotional and physical needs.
- GLBT students of all racial and ethnic backgrounds miss or drop out of school because of a lack of safety or respect for their sexual or gender identity. The number of such students is hard to measure due to absence of, and difficulty in obtaining, reliable data.

On the Role and Experience of Adults on GLBT Issues

- GLBT school personnel face tremendous societal and legal pressures to stay “in the closet” at school, especially in front of students. This can lead to feelings of isolation and a diminished sense of safety or belonging, which in turn can hamper their efforts to teach and mentor students. Many GLBT and even heterosexual school personnel don’t feel comfortable mentoring GLBT students because of their own personal risk.
- An alarming number of school personnel ignore homophobic bullying when they witness it.
- Adult members of the school community—such as administrators, school counselors and psychologists, classroom teachers, coaches, education support professionals who supervise and interact with students, and parents—can serve as powerful allies to GLBT students and colleagues.

On Intervention Strategies and Recommendations

- The presence of a single, supportive adult in the lives of GLBT students at school is the most critical factor in increasing the GLBT students' sense of safety and academic achievement and in decreasing the risk of truancy or dropping out.
- The existence of school district policies that specifically define and prohibit bullying, discrimination, and harassment based on sexual orientation and gender identity or expression improves school safety, whereas generic anti-bullying or anti-discrimination policies do little to help those who are GLBT or perceived as GLBT.
- The presence of student-led organizations such as GSAs has a positive impact on the school climate for both school personnel and students, regardless of whether they attend GSA meetings or events.
- While the inclusion of GLBT people or issues in classroom curricula has been shown to improve youths' feelings of safety and belonging, the vast majority of American schools do not include GLBT-related materials in classroom instruction.
- There are not only "at-risk youth," but "risky environments" that make campuses unsafe for GLBT and other marginalized students. Risky environments include those in which students, staff, and administrators are unaware of, or resistant to addressing, homophobic bullying and bias, and in which students feel unsafe if they are GLBT or gender-nonconforming, or perceived as such.
- Community organizing is indispensable to reforming school policies and practices on GLBT issues; community organizations have helped schools engage parents, address incidents, provide training and professional development, sponsor events, and facilitate research.
- There is a dearth of research on many aspects of GLBT issues in education as well as a lack of awareness among schools of existing research.

As you begin this report, take a look at the brief glossary in Appendix B for helpful definitions of frequently used terms.

Introduction

Stepping Out of the Closet, into the Light

While we have come a long way since the Stonewall riots in 1969, we still have a lot of work to do. Too often, the issue of [GLBT] rights is exploited by those seeking to divide us. But at its core, this issue is about who we are as Americans. It's about whether this nation is going to live up to its founding promise of equality by treating all its citizens with dignity and respect. — President Barack Obama²

Today, when we think of the status of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) people in American society, we may be inclined to think of how receptive attitudes toward GLBTs are when compared to even the recent past. Forty years ago, law enforcement routinely harassed GLBT people; the police raided their public meetings and violated their privacy in their homes. GLBT people were denigrated as sexual miscreants, lampooned in the media, and vilified in communities. Few GLBT people were willing to be open or “come out of the closet” about their sexual orientation or gender identity. No GLBT public school teacher dared to “come out.” No GLBT student dreamed of it.

In contrast, these days, GLBT personalities regularly appear on television and in movies; many people can identify a GLBT coworker, friend, neighbor, or relative; and thousands of schools now host student clubs known as Gay-Straight Alliances. Moreover, GLBT civil rights have progressed, bit by bit. Within the last dozen years, the U.S. Supreme Court has affirmed that homosexuals are protected from discrimination and intrusions into their privacy by the U.S. Constitution.³ As of April 2009, same-sex marriage is legal in Connecticut, Iowa, Massachusetts, and Vermont, and New York recognizes same-sex marriage licenses issued in another state. Several other states and the District of Columbia provide state-level spousal benefits to same-sex couples.⁴

And yet, if things are so different, the question becomes: Why is the school experience still so difficult for the typical GLBT youth—or for that matter, the typical GLBT employee?

The truth is that, even today, in every region of this nation, GLBT people are still afraid to “come out” to their employers or to their families. Fear of disclosing or discussing one’s sexual orientation, whether in public or in private, still pervades every community in the United States—including San Francisco, New York, and other communities that are over-broadly labeled as “gay-friendly.” In nearly every school, GLBT employees still fear being isolated, criticized, demoted, or fired because of who they are or what they say, in some cases irrespective of whether a law or policy exists to protect them. (Twenty states do outlaw unlawful discrimination against some or all of the GLBT population.⁵)

In nearly every school, millions of students, gay and straight, suffer in isolation as victims of anti-GLBT bullying. Millions of other students wield anti-GLBT epithets without any understanding of their meaning or knowledge of their impact. In a recent national school climate survey, nine out of 10 students reported verbal

harassment at school because of their sexual orientation; two out of three were harassed because of their gender expression. Nearly a quarter of students were physically assaulted—punched, kicked, or injured with a weapon—because of their sexual orientation.⁶

They were the lucky ones. In 2008, 15-year-old Lawrence King of Oxnard, California, was murdered at school for being gender-nonconforming—a full decade after the homicide of gay youth, Matthew Shepard, shocked the nation. These two crimes are emblematic of countless untold others.

In most schools, any discussion of sexual orientation or GLBT issues is still considered verboten. This is due to perceptions that it is inappropriate to teach children about differences in sexual orientation because they are “at risk” of being “recruited” or steered toward homosexuality. Few, if any, K-12 textbooks include any reference, positive or negative, about any GLBT individual in American society. Overwhelmingly, the U.S. curriculum is devoid of a single reference to milestones in GLBT civil rights history or to GLBT communities, as if they did not exist.

As we analyze this situation, an unsettling truth emerges: the outward signs of GLBT advancement represent undeniable progress and liberation for GLBTs, yet also mask anti-GLBT attitudes and fears that pervade almost every school and community.

In short, we are witness to a society in conflict and transition regarding homosexual and gender-nonconforming people.

As a national organization representing diverse constituencies, NEA surely comprises members who sit on different sides of this societal divide. We respect the opinions of all our members. Our mission, however, compels us to strive for great public schools for every student, and this necessarily includes our GLBT students. Moreover, as this report reveals, homophobia, heterosexism, and sexual prejudice impact *all* students, whether gay or straight.

We also serve all members of our Association. Anti-GLBT behavior also affects *all* school personnel, both gay and straight. We intentionally discuss the roles and experiences of adults on GLBT issues in this report, not only because GLBT school personnel face serious challenges themselves but because GLBT youth suffer when their adult support systems and mentors (gay or straight) are affected by the same prejudice and discrimination faced by youth.

Ultimately, none of us working in schools can be effective if we ourselves, our colleagues, or our students don't feel safe and supported in the most basic element of our lives: our own identity.

So while there is a chasm between where we are today in our schools and where we want to be, we know that, through honest discussion and hard work, we can bridge the chasm and improve the lives of our GLBT students and colleagues.

We can push GLBT issues out of yesterday's closet, and into the light of the present day.



Chapter 1: Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Issues in Society and Education

Guiding Question: What past, current, and future societal forces affect how GLBT issues are addressed in schools?

On most challenging topics in education, it's tempting to pause to consider some pedagogical or institutional obstacles—and then head straight for the solutions. On GLBT issues, however, we resisted this impulse. Instead, it seemed to make sense to take a broader path and ask ourselves: What is it about GLBT issues in society that so bedevils us as we try to address GLBT issues in education? In other words, what's the big problem here?

There is no getting around the fact that the school is a microcosm of society and that what happens in school is a barometer of societal values at large. The success or failure at addressing GLBT issues in school is intricately tied to the prevailing attitudes and feelings toward GLBT issues in the surrounding community.

And so, we step back to reflect upon the broader historical and cultural circumstances that feed today's cauldron of emotions around GLBT issues. We then look at how GLBT issues in education are being "framed" in today's world. Finally, we turn to the future and look toward promising trends and new directions for schools.

Historical Attitudes Toward GLBTs

Rutgers University Professor Catherine Lugg places current attitudes toward GLBT people and rights in a historical context. Historically, she argues, GLBTs have been viewed in one of three ways: "sick," "criminal," and "sinful."⁷ While noting that historian John Boswell and others have documented a trend toward religious and secular condemnation of homosexuality from the twelfth century in Europe,⁸ Professor Lugg turns to more recent U.S. history.

"Sick"

In the United States, homosexuality was pathologized as a mental illness until 1973, when the American Psychiatric Association (APA) declassified it as an illness and removed it from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). (A new designation called "ego-dystonic homosexuality" made an appearance in the DSM's third edition in 1980, only to be removed in 1986.⁹) The consequences of the mental illness designation were profound for gay men and lesbians in the teaching profession: teachers and administrators were banned from licensure if they were deemed mentally ill.

Professor Lugg notes that, although a consensus had been forming in the medical profession from the 1940s and 1950s that homosexuality was not a mental illness, it took several decades for the APA to act. Indeed,

Student Profile: *Jesús*

Jesús remembers the day that rocked his life. “My sixth grade class was going on a field trip to the zoo. I had looked forward to this trip for weeks. I loved nature and animals, but my parents were working minimum wage and we never got a chance to see the city. I was so excited, but as I was about to get on the bus, my teacher pulled me aside and told me there was no room for gays.”

Stunned and devastated, Jesús felt as if his life couldn't get any worse. But the day quickly went downhill. As his classmates headed for the zoo, 11-year-old Jesús was sent to a detention hall full of troubled students. “Everybody got chairs and books and started hitting me with everything they could find.”

The unthinkable incident was a defining moment in the life of the shy 11-year-old. That's when his suicide mentality started kicking in, says Jesús, who had no friends at school and who walked the halls or stayed in the bathroom during lunch hour.

After hiding throughout middle school, Jesús “came out” to his family at 15 by sending a text message to his mom, mailing a letter to his dad, and directing his sister to his MySpace page. “I had read stories of people who had gotten killed by their own family members. I didn't know how my parents were going to react. That's why I decided not to tell them in person; that's how big my fear was.”

Jesús was relieved when his family assured him of their love, and after moving to a more inclusive school with supportive teachers, his life began to turn around. Now in the top five percent of his class, Jesús will be the first in his family to graduate from high school and the first to go to college. He's planning to get a masters degree so he can come back to his community and work on issues of GLBT equality.

He already has a head start: the bisexual teen is president of his school's Gay-Straight Alliance and is on the leadership team of his local chapter of the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network. “It's a big thing to know there are people with life experiences like mine. I didn't know there were all these resources that could have helped me. I want other kids to know there's hope out there.”

even after the 1973 declassification, many people thought that GLBT people should not serve in public schools. Witness the so-called “Briggs Initiative” (Proposition 6, named after its author) in California in 1978, which would have banned homosexual employees from working in public schools. The Briggs Initiative was defeated. (Its defeat was dramatized in the 2008 movie “Milk.”)

Significantly, Professor Lugg points out that while the science appears to indicate that gender identity is established “in utero,” gender identity remains pathologized in the current DSM as “gender identity disorder.” As with homosexuality in the mid-1900s, this has created a gap between social and civil rights understandings and the medical classifications of transgenderism and gender-nonconformity.¹⁰ The American Psychological Association states that the “[Gender Identity Disorder] diagnosis is highly controversial among some mental health professionals and transgender people. Some contend that the diagnosis inappropriately pathologizes gender variance and should be eliminated. Others argue that, because the health care system in the United States requires a diagnosis to justify medical or psychological treatment, it is essential to retain the diagnosis to ensure access to care.”¹¹ In turn, the American Psychiatric Association has established a “DSM-V Sexual and Gender Identity Disorders Workgroup” to conduct literature reviews, obtain feedback from stakeholders, and to “attend to the basis of reform of specific diagnostic criteria” for the forthcoming version of the DSM.¹²

The impact of past and current treatment of GLBT identities by the medical health profession is significant. Not only may school psychologists and counselors have been influenced by the direction of these professional associations, but the entire public’s perception of GLBTs also may

have been impacted. While it may be impossible to calculate to what extent the current and former medical classification of GLBTs has influenced the education system, our understanding of the historical relationship between medicine and GLBT identities helps to contextualize the contemporary attitudes toward GLBTs both in and outside of schools.

“Criminal”

Professor Lugg also notes that GLBTs have been treated and prosecuted as “criminals” in recent U.S. history.¹³ Much of the basis for criminalizing gay and lesbian people has been a narrow focus on same-sex sexual behavior through laws banning “sodomy,” which in many states has been defined as same-sex, private, consensual sexual activity. The legal prohibition of *same-sex* sexual conduct is relatively recent: As the U.S. Supreme Court has observed, early American sodomy laws did not apply to same-sex conduct per se but to all nonprocreative sexual activity more generally. American laws specifically targeting same-sex couples did not develop until the last third of the 20th century.¹⁴

In 2003, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Lawrence v. Texas*, invalidated all bans on private, same-sex sexual conduct, stating that “the State cannot demean [the gay and lesbian community’s] existence or control their destiny by making their private sexual conduct a crime.”¹⁵

As for gender nonconformity, Professor Lugg informs us that “cross-dressing” criminal statutes were codified in states in the 1920s and were later removed, thanks in part to the women’s movement; however, she notes, transgender and gender-nonconforming people continue to experience discrimination and violence, often on a daily basis.¹⁶

What is the current impact of past criminalization of GLBTs on schools? Professor Lugg argues that the indirect effects on school climates and pedagogy are palpable: until 2003, gay and lesbian adults were still *de facto* criminals in many jurisdictions. Therefore, until recently, the law encouraged the conflation of GLBT issues (including GLBT people, history, rights) and crime.¹⁷

What may be even more influential on American schools is the conflation of GLBT issues and *sex*, which has led educators to believe that teaching GLBT rights or history is akin to teaching sex education. This conflation is arguably the greatest inhibitor to discussion of GLBT issues in K-12 schools; it is what most often leads school administrators and employees to conclude that discussion of GLBT issues is inappropriate in most classroom settings, even when age-appropriate ways to include GLBT issues in K-12 curricula do exist.

“Sinful”

Professor Lugg concludes by touching upon how religion has affected past and present attitudes toward GLBT issues. She notes that, while religious institutions are increasingly split on how they perceive homosexuality, and while some religions and religious denominations do not maintain that homosexuality or GLBT identity is inconsistent with religious doctrine, strong religious and theological objections to homosexuality do exist—in force—today. These religious attitudes and values, Lugg argues, influence some public school employees to avoid, or take an opposing stance toward, GLBT issues. Moreover, they influence some parents, guardians, and students.¹⁸ (In Chapter 3, Professor Stacey Horn observes that “[a student’s] religious denomination is more directly related to levels of sexual prejudice than [his or her] ethnicity or race.”¹⁹)

So religious or faith-based objections to GLBT issues and people have a significant impact on the willingness of some public schools to engage in GLBT issues. For these schools, addressing GLBT issues would appear to challenge the religion or faith of their employees or those of their community. On the other hand, other schools maintain that engaging in GLBT issues serves pedagogical and institutional purposes that are secular in nature (such as fostering respect for or awareness of diversity, civil rights, history, and contemporary society) and that must not be influenced by individual religious objections. Even so, for many schools, the mere possibility of religious objection leads to the exclusion of GLBT issues as part of their educational mission or activities.

Professor Lugg’s overview of historical attitudes toward and treatment of GLBTs suggests that many Americans continue to view GLBT people through a profoundly negative cultural and historical prism. Positive images and associations with GLBT people do increasingly compete with this prism. For many schools, the question is whether those positive images and associations are occurring in their community with enough force and regularity to alter the prism through which GLBT issues are viewed.

Current Political Climate On GLBT Issues

In describing today’s political climate on GLBT issues, University of Illinois at Chicago Professor Kevin Kumashiro argues that conservative movements and organizations have been “incredibly successful,” and progressive organizations unsuccessful, at framing the discourse on GLBTs thus far. He makes five points in support of this thesis.

First, he argues that major organizations (including the NEA) have coalesced around the “language of safety” as their rationale for supporting GLBT individuals.²⁰ In other words, whatever our differences, we can all agree that GLBTs, particularly youth, should be “safe” from bullying and harassment.

This “frame,” Professor Kumashiro observes, has been adopted by some conservative organizations that support the notion GLBT people would be better off if they “changed” to become heterosexual, and it has limited organizations supportive of GLBTs to addressing interpersonal safety as opposed to seeking broader protections and equity for GLBTs.²¹

(Not everyone agrees that “safety” is a flawed theme with which to frame GLBT issues in the educational setting; Professor Horn counters that, in conservative and religious communities in which GLBT students literally are “getting the s--- kicked out of them,” safety is not only the most accurate frame but the *only* frame in which to begin the discussion.²²)

Second, Professor Kumashiro asserts that GLBT-supportive organizations have been unprepared to address issues of institutional bias affecting GLBTs. He notes, for example, that the National Council on the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) has yet to include sexual orientation and gender identity in their standards for teacher preparation and school accreditation. Organizations have been more successful at addressing individual cases of bias such as bullying than at implementing broader, institutional measures protecting the GLBT community.

Third, Professor Kumashiro points out that conservative organizations have been more

successful than GLBT-supportive organizations in framing the debate around the well-being of young people. He states that conservative organizations (including certain politically engaged religious groups) have advanced the notion that young people should be “protected” from any influences that would “promote” homosexuality. Such influences include children’s television programming. (Recall various allegations of GLBT “promotion” in cartoon characters such as Postcards from Buster, Sponge Bob Squarepants, and Teletubbies.) Implicit in these efforts by conservatives is the notion that homosexuality is something akin to a contagion—that it can be “promoted” and/or “prevented”—and is therefore a cause for advocacy rather than an intrinsic aspect of one’s identity.²³

Fourth, Professor Kumashiro states that GLBT-supportive organizations have failed to address the diversity within the GLBT population and, as a result, marginalized some GLBT people. For example, he points to studies suggesting that GSAs in some schools cater mostly to White female students and exclude male or ethnic minority students. He also notes that portrayals of GLBTs in the media have excluded some GLBTs who are non-White, female, gender-nonconforming, transgender, poor, or disabled. Therefore, he cautions GLBT advocates to be aware of this “contradictory” outcome in their efforts. “Activism will always create its own margin,” he states. “When we fail to acknowledge and grapple with that, are we allowing those margins to exist? Are we actually sanctioning them?”²⁴

Finally, Professor Kumashiro argues that conservative organizations have framed GLBT issues as outside the realm of mainstream “family values” and “character.” Whereas the left has focused on “issues,” the right has focused on

“character” and “values” and has therefore controlled the national perception of what is “natural” or “normal.” This frame, he suggests, has been devastating to GLBTs, who not only do not fit inside this frame but challenge it by their very existence.²⁵

Kumashiro’s arguments paint a bleak picture for GLBTs as they seek acceptance and understanding. He suggests that, despite significant gains in recent decades, GLBT issues are currently subsumed within a cultural discourse of family values and morality, and that to the extent that GLBTs garner any support, it is largely limited to their basic need for safety and protection, as opposed to greater visibility and equality. In many regions of the country, and perhaps in most schools, Professor Kumashiro’s observations ring true.

On the Horizon: GLBT Issues and A Brighter Future?

While University of Arizona professor Stephen Russell does not consider himself a “futurist,” he can speak to recent developments in GLBT studies that augur well for the future. Specifically, he highlights four strategies that have emerged from multiple studies in different communities across the country that make a difference in schools for GLBT young people and educators:²⁶

1. *Policy Reform.* Studies have shown that students feel safer and do better in school when there are non-discrimination policies that are inclusive of sexual orientation and gender identity and gender expression. Indeed, GLBT-inclusive policies “both reduce risk and promote resilience in the lives of young people and the schools that they grow up in.” Moreover, generic or non-enumerated “anti-

bullying” policies are *ineffective* in establishing climates that are free of bias-motivated harassment.

2. *Engaged School Personnel.* Studies also show that students do better when teachers and other school employees intervene and stop harassment when it happens, and when students know there is an adult who can serve as a resource on GLBT issues.
3. *Student-Led Organizations.* Studies show that the mere presence of a student-led peer organization such as a Gay-Straight Alliance fosters safer school climates.
4. *Curricular Inclusion.* Inclusion of GLBT issues in school curricula was the “single strongest factor” in studies analyzing what produces better school climates for GLBT students. In other words, when students learn about GLBT people and history in a structured setting, it makes students feel safer and dispels the notion that it is inappropriate to study GLBT people or issues in an educational setting.

Looking toward the future, Professor Russell stresses that further advances must be made in each of the four areas above. On policy reform, he advocates for further research that “makes the case crystal clear that non-enumerated anti-bullying policies are ineffective for establishing school climates free of stigma, discrimination, and harassment on the basis of students’ status characteristics—including their actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity.” Moreover, he argues that policies must address the oppression and discrimination that spark bias-motivated bullying and specify follow-up procedures that serve both the youth who is bullied as well as the bully himself or herself.²⁷

On school personnel, Professor Russell states that we need to know more about what motivates education employees to intervene when harassment take place, to be inclusive through curriculum, or to be proactive in serving as a resource for marginalized youth. We need to know better what types of interactions and professional development will reduce bias and foster empathy toward GLBT students among staff.²⁸

In the matter of student-led organizations and clubs, Professor Russell recommends that schools analyze which characteristics of Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) are meaningful for students, and share those characteristics with other schools. In addition, we need to study the impact of GSAs on parent-adolescent relationships as well as the connection between the presence of GSAs and the educational mission of schools.²⁹

Regarding GLBT-inclusive curriculum, Professor Russell observes that we must find out more about what aspects of curriculum are important: is it the context (i.e., formal instruction vs. informal conversations or schoolwide assemblies)? Or the

content (such as social studies; history, English, or diversity lessons; and the arts)? We also need to address institutional and cultural obstacles that prevent any kind of curriculum from being introduced irrespective of its context or content.³⁰

Take-Away Points: Professors Lugg and Kumashiro give us useful historical and political frames with which to understand GLBT bigotry, while Professor Russell presents strategies and new directions in research that could lead to future improvements in pedagogy, counseling, and advocacy for GLBT students. As schools today grapple with the dilemma of whether simply to “mandate” compliance with GLBT nondiscrimination policies among their staff (with the risk of only nominal compliance and continuing bias), or whether to go deeper by challenging the underlying beliefs and possible biases among staff toward GLBT people (with the risk of discomfort, confrontation, and resistance among some staff), one thing is clear: To move forward in a new direction, it helps to know how societal and historical forces have brought us to where we are today.



Photographs by Norman Y. Lono

Chapter 2: GLBT Youth Identities and Experiences

Guiding Question: Who are GLBT youth—and how do their identities affect their experience at school?

Gay, lesbian, and bisexual people have a sexual identity—a personal sense of whom they’re attracted to—that is different from that of heterosexual people. And queer people generally, including transgender and gender-nonconforming people, have a gender identity—a personal way of relating to and expressing masculinity or femininity—that may also differ from the gender identity of heterosexuals.

We often talk about sexual and gender identities as if they were static traits akin to skin or eye color. As a result, we don’t often talk about how sexual and gender identities are formed. We don’t discuss how the development of sexual and gender identities are challenging for youth. Discussion of sexual identity development that is inclusive of GLBT people has long been challenging in a school environment. For one thing, it requires acknowledging that there is more than one “valid” sexual orientation—heterosexual—and that a person’s gender identity or expression is fluid rather than fixed according to one’s biological sex. It also requires talking about the nature of sexual attraction—a topic that few school personnel outside of sexual education, health, or family life instructors are equipped or authorized to address with youth. Moreover, even advocates for GLBT students tend to steer away from discussion of sexual identity development out of fear that their audience will continue to equate all things GLBT with sexual behavior instead of something more universal and appropriate for discussion outside of the “sex ed” context—civil rights and diversity, for example.

As with *sexual* identity, all youth have a *gender* identity, an internal compass that guides their social and expressive behaviors and informs who they are. We have a long way to go before we fully understand how gender identity develops. Most leading researchers agree that discomfort with another person’s way of expressing his or her gender identity is a powerful, perhaps the most powerful, factor fueling sexual prejudice.³¹

And how do sexual and gender identities combine with racial identity? GLBT students of all racial and ethnic backgrounds face unique stressors; as University of Toronto Professor Lance McCready and others indicate, we are still in the infancy stage when it comes to ethnographic studies that reveal how GLBT identities complement and complicate our racial or ethnic identities as White, Black, Asian, Pacific Islander, Native Hawaiian, American Indian, Alaska Native, Hispanic, or multiracial.³²

To come to terms with the multitude of identities within each person and within the GLBT population is to recognize the diversity that cuts across racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, gender, sexual, geographical, and other lines. This panel briefly explored but a few of these dimensions of diversity in its discussion of GLBT youth identities.

Student Profile: *Abi*

It was in middle school that kids started to ask Abi if she was gay. Everyone seemed so eager to label her because her hair was very short and she wore neutral or boy's clothes. "I guess I didn't conform to the feminine stereotype, but I really didn't know what I was. When my mom asked her if I was a lesbian, I said, 'No,' and I was telling the truth."

Then the rumors started to fly around school that Abi and a girl with whom she liked to talk were in love. Abi found the rumors very embarrassing. She continued going to school and doing well academically. But she felt increasingly uncomfortable—so uncomfortable in fact that when it came time to attend high school, she did not go to the local high school. Instead Abi, the academically-inclined student who is determined to go to college, enrolled in a technical high school in another town. "I needed a fresh start—I needed to get away from the rumors." She adds: "My middle school experience bummed me out for sure, but it was not nearly as bad as some other kids went through. I know kids who have had 'dyke' spray-painted on their lockers, kids who had their noses broken, kids who became suicidal."

Abi's high school is half-academics, half-shop. And it turns out she likes shop (manufacturing technology), and she likes having a part-time job outside of school where she can earn some money. Her best friend at school is gay boy who is a senior. And her favorite teacher is a history teacher who, at the beginning of the year, tells the students he will not tolerate the harassment or bullying of any student for any reason, including their sexual orientation or gender identity/expression.

Sixteen years old and a junior, Abi is feeling "strong and independent and very cool." She has hooked up with an organization called "True Colors," which supports GLBT teenagers in New England, and she has come out on her Facebook page. "I said I am transgender and it felt great. Then of course I freaked out about what might happen to me. But nothing really did. One boy at school came up to me and said what's transgender, and I told him to look it up on Wikipedia."

GLBT Students of Color

Ethnic minority students who are GLBT face what has been called a “tricultural experience”:³³

First, the homophobia or transphobia that White GLBT students face;

Second, the racism that heterosexual students of color face;

Third, and perhaps most critically, exclusion from both the GLBT and ethnic minority communities with whom they would normally identify.

That is, GLBT youth of color may experience alienation/racism from the predominantly White GLBT community and alienation/homophobia from predominantly heterosexual communities of color. It's this third leg of the “tricultural experience” that makes the experience of GLBT students of color unique.

Why is this exclusion so important? All students need a support base. For some, it's their family. For others, it's their school/community peer or social group. Consider how these sources of support are jeopardized because of the following:

- An African American parent or guardian rejects homosexuality as against her community and religious values.
- A GLBT community center is located in an affluent, White neighborhood, away from predominantly ethnic minority neighborhoods.
- A student of color does not feel comfortable joining a predominantly White GSA at school.
- The church, synagogue, temple, or mosque that a student and her family attend preaches against homosexuality.

- An Asian-American parent or guardian rejects a GLBT son or daughter because GLBT people “do not exist in our culture.”
- GLBT services and materials do not exist in languages other than English.
- A Latino household rejects boys who are not masculine or girls who are not feminine as against cultural “norms.”

The consequences of not having a reliable support base from home, school, and the community are dire; they include high levels of dropping out and homelessness and severely compromised mental and physical health.

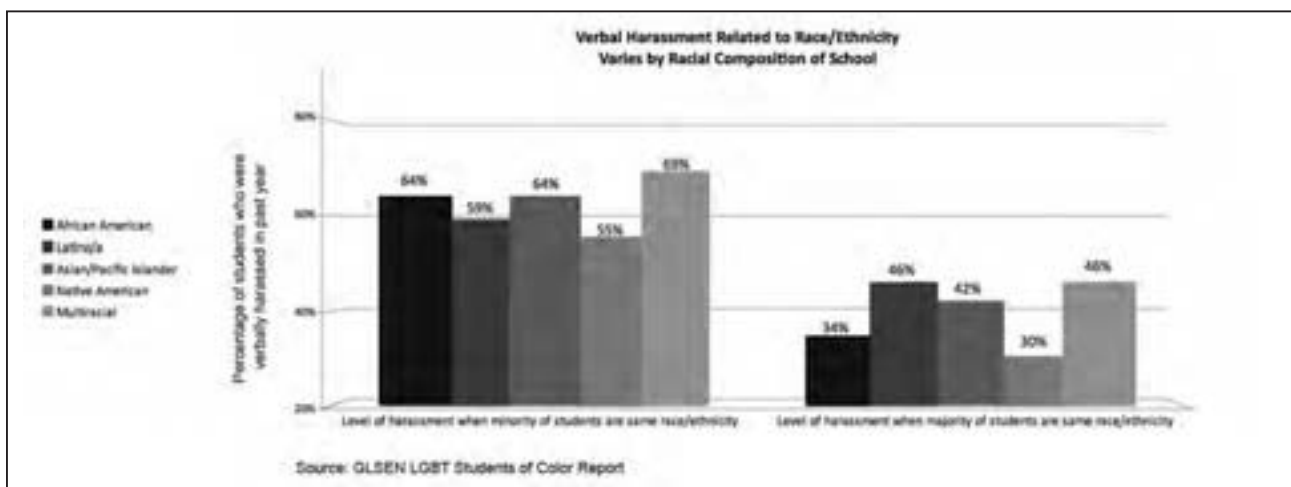
For many GLBT youth of color, the integration of racial, sexual, and other identities calls for skilled navigation. Homophobia within ethnic-minority communities, media images of GLBT people, and even terminology within the predominantly White GLBT community reinforce the stereotype that all gay people are White; indeed, terms such as “GSA” or even “gay” may not feel comfortable to some youth of color.

GLBT youth of color have multiple affiliations related not only to race, gender identity, and sexual orientation but also to neighborhoods and class, often navigating between very different communities. GLBT youth of color experience “shifting hierarchies” within their “multiple affiliations,” sometimes expressing one over the other. Says Professor McCready, “We need to develop teachers’ ability to observe, interpret, and understand the relationship between multiple social and cultural identities of queer youth of color.”³⁴ Researchers caution against lumping all GLBT youth of color together as one. “It is important to be looking within ethnic minority populations,” says Elizabeth Diaz, a researcher at the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), “because

there can be important differences in their experience based on the location and the racial composition of their school.³⁵ A 2007 GLSEN study found that, for all GLBT students of color, racial minority status within schools combined with suburban or rural location increased social victimization; GLBT Latino students who were in the racial majority in urban schools were harassed less than those in the racial minority in suburban or rural schools. The

born Americans and that many have limited English proficiency. Many API youth grow up in close-knit, faith-based immigrant communities, with children often taking on the role of English interpreter and being integral to the social and economic stability of family.

The poverty level among Hmong, Cambodians, Laotians, and Vietnamese is high (26 to 64 percent).



experience of GLBT students differs significantly depending on their race, ethnicity, and other factors; GLBT American Indian or Alaska Native students, for example, cite more victimization related to their *religion*, particularly in the American South.³⁶

We can't automatically assume life is "twice as hard" for "double minorities"; Professor Russell observes that some youth of color may actually handle the stigma of GLBT status *better* than some White GLBT youth because they have already dealt with discrimination in the form of racism.³⁷

The pressures of integrating into American society appear to make "coming out" as GLBT extraordinarily challenging for ethnic-minority and immigrant youth. Myron Quon, director of the Asian American Institute, states that the majority of Asian and Pacific Islander (API) students are non-native

According to Quon, such API youth, many of whom are first-generation immigrants, "are just trying to get through poverty. They're trying to get through settlement. They're just trying to get through how to become an American citizen: How do they go from being undocumented to documented, from legal permanent resident status to U.S. citizen?"³⁸ To the extent that GLBT identity can be seen as a threat to economic and family stability, it's not surprising that many immigrant youth, including APIs and Latinos, don't feel comfortable "coming out."

Professor McCready calls for more research on GLBT youth of color—not only quantitative studies, but ethnographic qualitative studies.³⁹ He states that we need richer understandings of the impact of race and ethnicity among GLBT young people to begin to understand how they approach their experience at school. We must support the creation

of organizations, programs, and activities for queer youth of color beyond the gentrified and clearly established gay (and possibly White, upper-class) neighborhoods.⁴⁰

And our research and understanding of GLBT youth of color must translate to school personnel at the institutional level. In the words of Professor McCready: “Who is responsible at the different levels for building the capacity of educators to support queer youth of color? Who is responsible at the school level? At the district level? At the state level?” In other words, schools must identify those staff who are responsible for keeping tabs on GLBT youth of color and making sure they get the support and attention they need.⁴¹

“I started transitioning when I was sixteen. I started wearing my hair in a ponytail and wearing unisex clothes, arching my eyebrows. [People] called me a faggot, called me a cross-dresser, called me a queer . . . I started missing a lot of classes because of all this impact. I think that if my high school instructors had intervened, I would have made it through high school and not dropped out in the ninth grade. The combination of homophobia, transphobia, racism, classism, and age discrimination attacks GLBT youth of color who are struggling with instability and homelessness.”

—Ebonii Warren-Watts, former student, Chicago Public Schools

Transgender and Gender-Nonconforming Youth

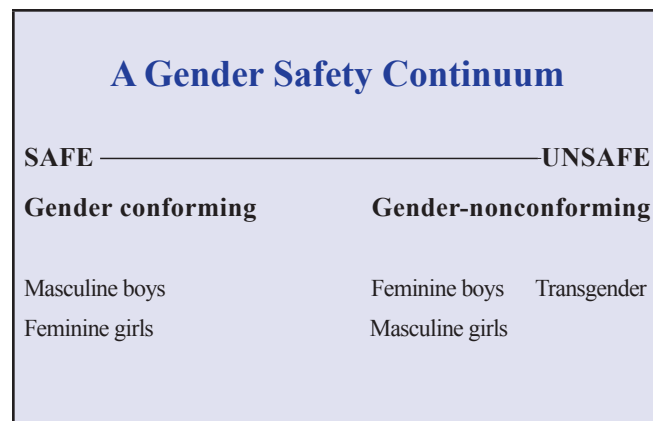
Many experts agree that gender nonconformity—not appearing or acting masculine or feminine enough according to invisible yet powerful societal standards—is perhaps the root cause of why students and adults discriminate against not only GLBT people, but heterosexual people who are perceived

as GLBT. Therefore, in order to understand homophobia and heterosexism, we must understand gender. “Pay attention to gender,” says Jerald Newberry, Director of NEA Health Information Network. “I’m personally convinced that if you boil GLBT down like maple syrup, in the bottom of the pot you’re going to find gender—the issue of how we, as a country, view men and women, and how we define femininity and masculinity.”⁴²

Regardless of sexual orientation, the more gender-nonconforming a youth, the more likely he or she is to face homophobic violence. Gender-conforming GLBT youth may face relatively little harassment or discrimination, even if their sexual orientation is known. A gender-nonconforming heterosexual youth, by comparison, may be ruthlessly bullied and harassed.

Youth whose gender-nonconformity stands out—particularly transgender youth—face the most violence and risk of serious physical harm. For this reason, even if they have never graduated a student who identifies as “transgender,” all K-12 schools should take preparatory steps to protect youth who are gender-nonconforming.

The diagram below shows how student safety relates to gender, irrespective of the actual sexual orientation of students.



It bears repeating: Many straight students suffer from anti-GLBT harassment because of their gender nonconformity. According to University of Illinois at Chicago Professor Stacey Horn, “It’s bad to be gay in terms of harassment. But it’s equally bad to be a straight kid who doesn’t fit into the box of what people think a boy should be or what a girl should be. I had one student say to me, ‘Well, the gay kid, you can’t make fun of him because he’s gay and can’t help it. But that boy who looks like a girl, he’s fair game, because he’s just being weird.’”⁴³

Youth who identify as transgender or “genderqueer” are those whose gender identity and expression differ from the culturally dominant gender identity and expression associated with their biological sex. Youth who are gender-nonconforming may or may not identify as “transgender” or “genderqueer.” These are labels for the individual to determine; choice of terminology is an important aspect of identity and self-definition.

Did You Know? Sexual orientation is completely distinct from gender identity. The sexual orientation of transgender or genderqueer youth may be gay, straight, or bisexual. Again, transgender does not equal gay; many transgender people identify as heterosexual. Others do not define themselves within a strict category of sexual orientation.

While there are similarities between the experiences of gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLB) youth on the one hand and transgender youth on the other, important differences also exist. According to Professor Jenifer McGuire at Washington State University⁴⁴:

- Transgender youth are less likely to be supported by their family and have more difficulty getting their family to respond to school harassment.
- Transgender youth are more likely to drop out of traditional schools.

- Transgender students are more likely to hear school personnel make negative comments than hear them intervene to stop a negative comment.
- Policies and practices that support gay, lesbian, or bisexual youth are not necessarily applied toward transgender youth.
- The presence of or “attachment” to a supportive adult is critical for transgender youth—more so than actions of schools generally.

The lack of adult support for transgender students is devastating. Transgender students report thwarted efforts to obtain support from school personnel or parents, some of whom “seemed to believe that it was the responsibility of the student to divert harassment from themselves.”⁴⁵ In focus groups of transgender youth, intervention by school personnel was universally nonexistent. Indeed, between 11 and 31 percent of students reported hearing negative comments about their gender presentation *by school personnel*.⁴⁶

Sadly, transgender students often find allies only by transferring to a different school.⁴⁷

Their primary needs include the following:

- Help locating private, safe restrooms and locker rooms
- Respect for choice of name and pronoun (“he”, “she”) consistent with gender identity
- Records and student identification cards that are consistent with preferred name/pronoun
- Allowing appropriate attire that is consistent with gender identity
- Maintaining privacy and anonymity over transgender status
- Protection from bullying and harassment from staff and students in hallways and during physical education instruction

According to Ebonii Warren-Watts, a transgender former high school student in Chicago, “When I used the girls’ room, I was escorted out, suspended from school. I didn’t feel comfortable going into the boys’ room because of my presentation. And I just didn’t feel comfortable, period, to present as a male. After that I would just never go to the restroom. It made me have bladder problems or whatever. I would wait to go to the nurse’s office and use a private restroom there or something.” She recommended that transgender students wear “unisex” clothing to school to avoid problems with dress codes and to keep a copy of court orders of their name change with them at all times to display to school personnel who did not respect their identity.⁴⁸

There is no doubt that accommodating transgender students presents an unfamiliar situation for many schools. To protect students from harm, schools may be tempted to ask students to conform more to traditional gender roles by behaving or dressing in a manner that attracts less negative attention from other students. For some students, such a request may be acceptable; for others, it may be difficult or impossible.

Compelling a student to dress in a way that *conflicts* with his or her gender identity, e.g., by requesting that a gender-nonconforming girl wear a skirt as part of a uniform, is very different from requiring that a student dress more “appropriately” or tastefully (e.g., by banning tank-tops or cutoff shorts) in a way that is *consistent* with his or her gender identity. Some gender-nonconforming students may feel as if they are being forced to choose between their identity and their safety.

While school dress codes and uniforms have generally been upheld by courts, if a school is situated in a state or municipality that outlaws discrimination on the basis of gender identity or

expression, it may be limited in its ability to require that students conform to strict or traditional gender roles in their dress or appearance.

In the end, although every situation is unique, it’s advisable for schools to focus on fostering good behavior among potential perpetrators of gender-related violence, instead of simply seeking conformity from gender-nonconforming students.

Students in Rural or Poor Communities

According to a national GLSEN survey, students who come from small towns and rural areas experience higher levels of victimization based on sexual orientation and gender expression than students in suburban or urban areas.⁴⁹ Professor Horn, who has also examined the difference between rural and urban settings, confirms that “gay kids in urban schools seem to be in many instances much safer than those in suburban or rural schools.” She also notices a relationship between racial diversity and school safety for GLBT students; her research has shown that a protective factor for GLBT students is whether or not their school is ethnically diverse.

According to Professor Horn, “schools that are stereotypically seen as more dangerous, like big, urban ethnic schools, in many instances are safer for the gay kids. One explanation is that there are more ecological niches in a big, urban school than there are in an all-White, little rural school. And there are all kinds of resources in an urban community.”⁵⁰

Moreover, students who live in “high poverty” communities (in which greater than 75 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch) experience victimization based on sexual orientation, gender expression, and race at *higher* levels than those who come from “low poverty” communities (in which less than 25 percent of

students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch).⁵¹ GLSEN attributes this to greater access to resources and interventions, including professional development for staff, and better teacher/student ratios in wealthier communities—all of which could create safer schools for GLBT students.⁵² In poor districts, GLBT issues may be overwhelmed by other concerns: “If a school is in a high-poverty or high-need area,” says Professor Horn, “it’s a harder sell to say you have to protect your gay kids because there’s just so much crisis going on in school.”⁵³

Students in rural or poor communities may struggle to “come out” as GLBT or express their GLBT identity differently than students in urban or wealthier communities. Why? For youth in rural areas who would otherwise identify as GLBT, the lack of visible role models or supportive organizations, and, most critically, the absence of peers who are GLBT may inhibit them from coming out.

As for low-income youth, some research shows that being poor may make it more difficult for people to identify as GLBT in part because of the economic risks associated with adopting a further disadvantaged status. Indeed, some low-income GLBTs, particularly in urban areas, may “sacrifice their sexual identities” to gain political and economic access and security.⁵⁴

We must also acknowledge that many GLBT students who are homeless or face housing instability, even if they were not low-income before “coming out,” have become desperately poor after being ejected from their household. (We explore GLBT identity, homelessness, and their consequences in greater depth in Chapter 4.)

Take-Away Points: In this chapter, we explored aspects of GLBT identity, with an emphasis on gender, racial, economic, and geographical diversity within the GLBT population. What can we gain from this information?

First, we must educate ourselves about sexual and gender identity development and foster honest dialogue among school staff on how this impacts students and staff interaction with those students.

We must also recognize that because the GLBT population is diverse, addressing GLBT issues may differ from community to community, and person to person. How we interact with one student’s family on GLBT issues will differ from how we interact with a different family. How we address GLBT issues in wealthy or predominantly White schools may differ from how we address them in poor schools or schools with predominantly ethnic-minority students.

White GLBT students struggle to deal with stigma and prejudice, but GLBT youth of color may face challenges integrating racial and sexual identities with cross-cutting class and community affiliations.

Finally, we must pay attention to gender and gender nonconformity. Every student has a unique gender identity. In most cases, the more gender-nonconforming a student is, the more likely he or she is to be victimized. In particular, we must take affirmative steps to prevent violence against transgender students.

Protecting students on the basis of gender-nonconforming identity and expression is a way of

protecting them on the basis of sexual orientation. That is, while it may be difficult or impossible—and, frankly, unnecessary—to ascertain a student’s sexual orientation, most adults can recognize gender nonconformity in students and act to ensure that gender-nonconforming students, irrespective of their sexual orientation, are protected.



Chapter 3: GLBT Youth Health, Safety, Support

Guiding Question: If I do not feel healthy, safe or a sense of belonging, what happens—and how can I succeed?

Roots of Homophobic Bullying: Sexual Prejudice

We know that GLBT youth face a number of risks to their physical health and safety; these include homophobic bullying, harassment, violence, and discrimination, which may cause bodily injury, illness, sleep deprivation, anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts or behavior. We also know that when many GLBT youth don't feel healthy or safe, they don't do well academically, or they drop out of school altogether.

What we don't know as well is what *causes* homophobic bullying. As Professor Horn describes it, homophobic bullying is fueled by “sexual prejudice,” or attitudes and beliefs reflecting negative assumptions and stereotypes about sexual orientation and gender identity.⁵⁵ While sexual prejudice may take root during early childhood, it gains strength during adolescence, when youth are grappling with a number of developmental transitions at once, including biological, cognitive, and social transitions. During this transitional phase, a number of individual and contextual factors shape youths' beliefs about homosexuality, as well as their perception about themselves as heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual.⁵⁶ Individual factors include age, religion, geography, and race. Contextual factors include situations and circumstances that heighten sexual prejudice.

Professor Horn's research on individual and contextual factors contributing to sexual prejudice among adolescents reveals the following:

- *Age.* Older adolescents (11th and 12th grade) express more tolerant attitudes than younger (9th and 10th grade) adolescents. Ninth and tenth graders are the least tolerant of sexual minorities.
- *Religion vs. Race/Ethnicity.* Belonging to a particular religious denomination appears to correlate more to higher levels of sexual prejudice than belonging to a particular race or ethnicity. Of course, not every religion is the same; some denominations accept GLBT identity more than others.
- *Context.* Students are more likely to exhibit sexual prejudice during situations involving higher levels of intimacy or unsupervised interaction—for example, sharing a room on an overnight class trip, or changing in the locker room on a sports team.⁵⁷

Student Profile: *Alex*

When Alex walked through the halls of her high school, students called her a dyke and told her she was going to burn in hell. “I got called really, really crappy things no one should have to hear,” says Alex, who was bumped in corridors, cornered in staircases, and jumped on by five guys as she tried to walk home from school.

“I got so frustrated with hearing terrible things about myself,” says the high school senior, “I had to spend the first 20 minutes of class calming down from being angry. By that point, you’re lost for the last 20 minutes because they’re only like 40 minute periods.” Alex had to repeat a year of Algebra 2; math was not her strongest subject and having to deal with constant verbal and physical harassment made it even harder to perform.

After visiting a friend in Maine over the summer, Alex decided to leave her rural New York town and attend high school in Portland, Maine, where she felt the school environment was more tolerant. “The people here still say, ‘That’s so gay,’ just like they do at my old school, but I’m not verbally attacked anymore. My math grade is in the 80s and 90s now instead of the 50s and 60s.”

Alex attributes her miraculous turnaround to her new school’s compassionate climate. “It’s very diverse, especially racially, and everyone is really respectful of each other. There’s a no tolerance policy for harassment, and the bullying policy includes sexual orientation.”

At the beginning of the year, says Alex, students are given a handbook with all of the school’s guidelines. The entire school gathers for a PowerPoint presentation, and teachers go over the handbook in homeroom. Both the teachers and students enforce the rules. Rather than being brushed under the table, open harassment leads to suspensions.

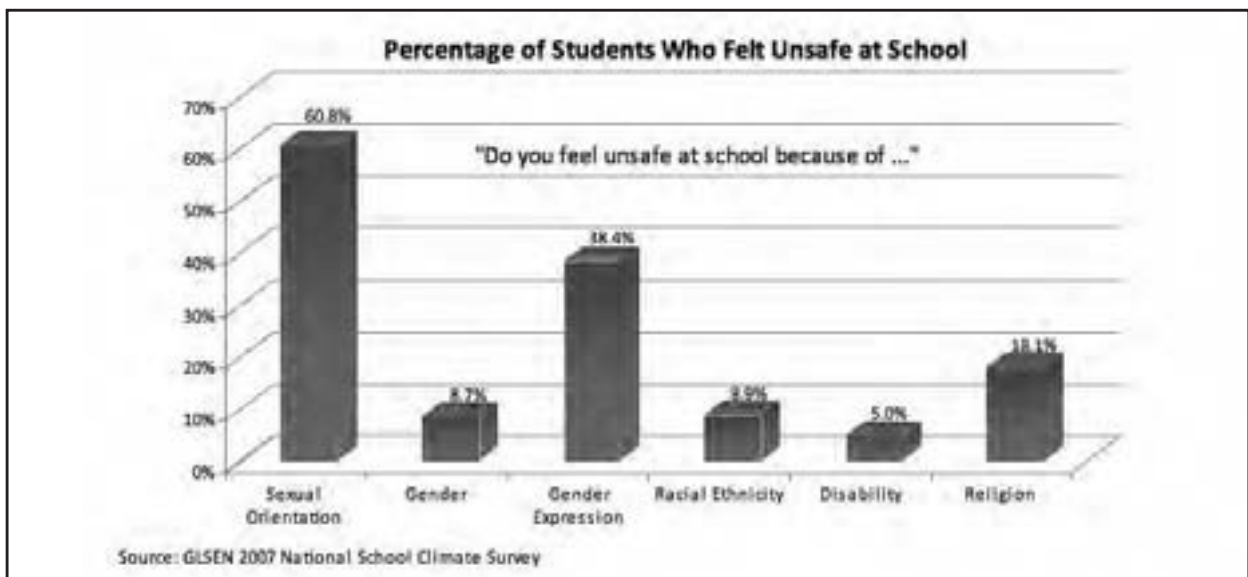
“Harassment,” confides Alex, “makes you feel you’re at ground level—that you’re stupid, horrible, bad, with zero value. When I first told my parents I wanted to stay up here and do my thing, they were like, ‘Are you kidding me!’ But now they see I’m happy and that my grades are good, and they get it.”

Homophobic Language and Bullying

Bullying is the act of exerting power over a weaker individual. Bullying may be verbal, physical, or psychological in nature. Educators know the telltale signs of bullying among youth: teasing, taunting, making threats, pushing, kicking, shoving, tripping, physical intimidation, stealing, ostracization, humiliation, and other forms of aggression.

Homophobic bullying is an act of aggression fueled by homophobic attitudes or beliefs. While

Professor Paul Poteat of Boston College cautions us to pay attention to the language used by students. In his research, Poteat has found a strong correlation between the use of homophobic epithets and more serious forms of aggression, including bullying, fighting, and other acts of violence.⁵⁸ In other words, verbal bullying leads to physical violence. Far from being “just words,” Professor Poteat argues that homophobic epithets serve a variety of purposes among perpetrators: by expressing homophobia, these epithets demonstrate heterosexuality and, for boys, masculinity. Homophobic epithets also “help”



it’s impossible to predict how much bullying is homophobic in nature, there is little question that it is one of the most common forms of bullying. Although boys engage in homophobic bullying more than girls, girls also use homophobic epithets to bully others.

Verbal homophobic bullying is extremely common. Epithets like “queer,” “faggot” and “dyke” are common parlance among youth, and students call each other “gay” as a put-down with regularity. So common is such language that adults may be tempted to dismiss it as an inevitable part of youth culture.

youth prove themselves in peer settings, cementing friendships and their status within peer networks.⁵⁹ Therefore, a great deal of homophobic bullying reflects a strong peer influence. Professor Poteat has found that there’s much more likelihood of students engaging in homophobic banter if their friends are homophobic, and that “whenever we intervene with one individual student, what gets lost is that student goes back to their peers and gets resocialized.”⁶⁰

Victims of homophobic epithets include both heterosexual and homosexual students. According to Poteat, “[students] report using homophobic epithets regardless of the actual or perceived sexual

orientation of their target.”⁶¹ For boys, victimization predicts higher levels of anxiety and depression, higher levels of distress, and a lower sense of school belonging. Says Poteat, “It’s important to point out [this impact] is felt among the general student population.”⁶²

School Safety and Health: Trends and Influences

Attending school remains a risky proposition for many GLBT youth. In a 2007 GLSEN survey of more than six thousand GLBT K-12 youth from all 50 states and the District of Columbia, nearly nine in 10 students were verbally harassed because of their sexual orientation, and two in three were verbally harassed because of their gender expression.

A significant percentage of GLBT students are physically harassed and even assaulted because of their sexual orientation or gender expression. Most disturbingly, one in three students state that school staff did not respond at all to reported incidents; it’s no surprise, then, that nearly two in three student victims don’t even bother to report harassment to staff.⁶³

The GLBT K-12 Student Experience

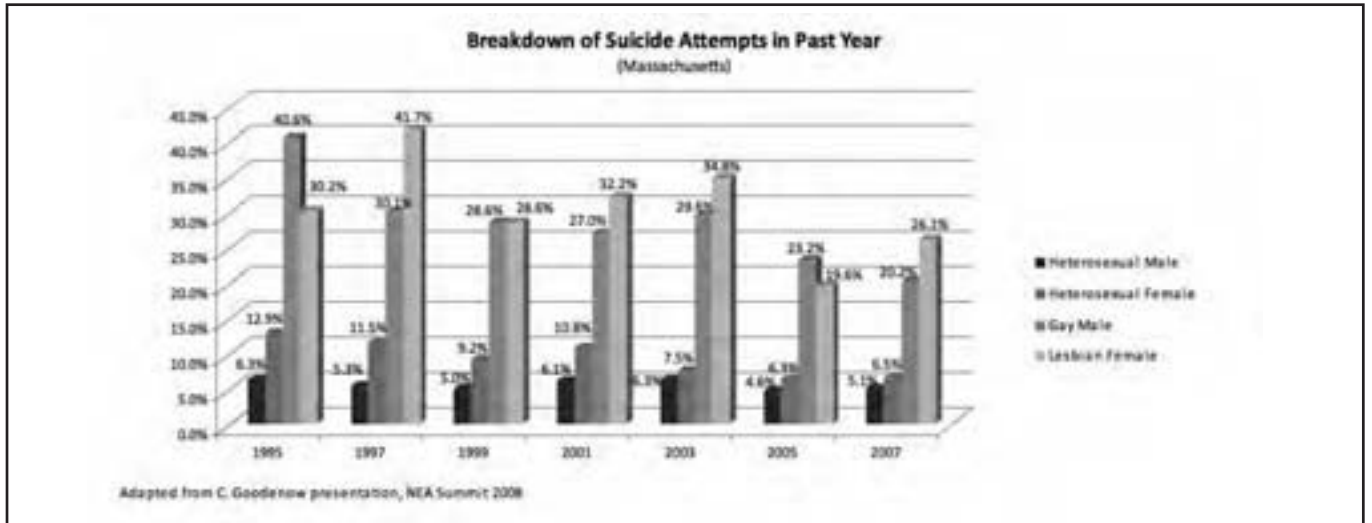
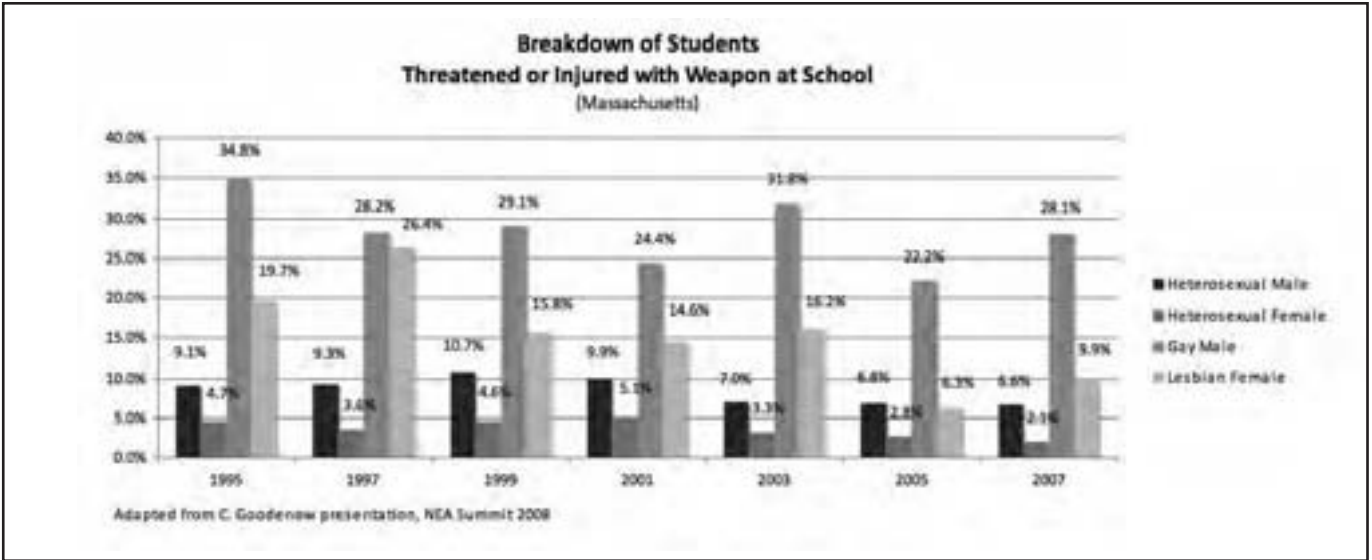
The GLSEN 2007 National School Climate Survey reports the following on the harassment of GLBT students⁶⁴:

- 74 percent heard homophobic remarks at school often or frequently at school.
- 86 percent were verbally harassed at school because of their sexual orientation.
- 67 percent were verbally harassed at school because of their gender expression.
- 44 percent were physically harassed at school because of their sexual orientation.

- 30 percent were physically harassed because of their gender expression.
- 22 percent were physically assaulted because of their sexual orientation.
- 14 percent were physically assaulted because of their gender expression.
- 31 percent of students who reported incidents said that school staff did nothing in response.
- 61 percent of students who were harassed or assaulted did not report the incident to school staff.
- 33 percent of GLBT students missed at least one day of school in the past month because they felt unsafe (compared to less than 5 percent of all students).

Students who are harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation are more than twice as likely to report depression (feeling so sad and hopeless they stopped normal activities for two weeks) or to use methamphetamines or inhalants. They are also more likely to smoke cigarettes, drink alcohol, or use other illicit drugs. And they are more likely to be victims of violence.⁶⁵

Studies show generic school safety measures that do not specifically address GLBT issues may be ineffective for GLBT students. “A school that’s safe in general isn’t necessarily safe for gay students,” says Carol Goodenow of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Indeed, according to Goodenow’s research, “Average school safety . . . not only doesn’t seem to have much effect on whether gay kids are suicidal, it has a negative effect.”⁶⁶ Given that homosexuality and gender nonconformity are still considered “taboo” in schools, it’s not surprising that the absence of action to ameliorate homophobia or transphobia would have the same effect as deliberate inaction.



Goodenow states that the presence of weapons at school represents a grave threat to GLBT and heterosexual students and staff alike. In Massachusetts, she has found that the number of GLBT youth who were threatened or injured with a weapon at school is significantly higher than what their heterosexual peers report.⁶⁷ Gay or bisexual boys, in particular, consistently report being threatened at high rates—greater than 20 percent.⁶⁸ Among the consequences of such harassment is retaliation: the U.S. Secret Service reports that nearly three in four perpetrators of school shootings have been persecuted, bullied, threatened, or

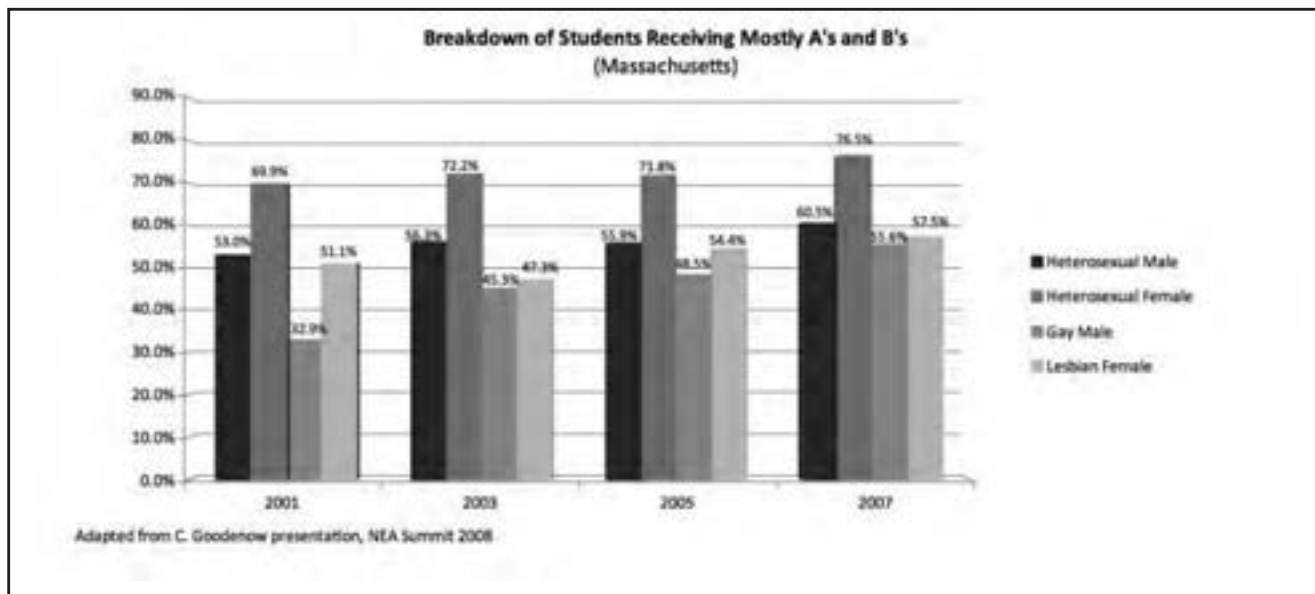
injured by others prior to committing the shooting.⁶⁹ Students who are harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation are more than *three* times as likely to carry a weapon to school.⁷⁰

Suicide remains a serious concern with regard to GLBT youth. In Massachusetts, lesbian and gay youth attempt suicide three to four times the rate of heterosexual youth. The good news is that the disparity between gay and straight youth has narrowed somewhat in the past decade—in 1997, lesbian and gay youth were four to six times more likely to attempt suicide than heterosexual youth—

but, as Goodenow notes, “this is hardly a cause for celebration.”⁷¹

Lesbian and gay students who were threatened or injured with a weapon at school were nearly three

students who frequently experienced harassment because of their sexual orientation reported grades of C and lower more often than those who did not.⁷⁴ And GLBT students who are frequently harassed are more likely to say that they will not go to college,



times as likely to attempt suicide than lesbian or gay students who weren't threatened. Likewise, if lesbian or gay students skipped school because they felt unsafe, they were almost three times as likely to have made a suicide attempt.⁷²

Effect on Academic Achievement

Sexual prejudice, bullying, and other forms of victimization, both at school and at home, cause many GLBT youth to do worse in school. While not every GLBT student is hampered by GLBT identity—some rely on resilience skills to succeed in school—we know GLBT identity negatively affects performance in many students. The 2007 GLSEN School Climate Survey found that the GPA of students who were frequently harassed for their sexual orientation or gender expression was lower than students who were less frequently harassed.⁷³ The California Safe Schools Coalition reported that

compared with those who are less frequently harassed.⁷⁵

“Although I have always been an honor student and took all honors and AP classes, my grades definitely suffered whenever I had a bad night or had fought recently. Needless to say, I simply did not care about school on the days I was tired. How would knowing the subjunctive form of French verbs help me in life when I wasn't even sure if I was welcomed back to my parents' house that night?”

– Stephanie Gentry-Fernandez, former student, Chicago Public Schools

Certain factors in schools either improve or worsen academic achievement among GLBT youth. In Massachusetts, gay students who are threatened or injured with a weapon are less than half as likely to be getting passing grades; students who skipped

school because they felt unsafe were a third less likely to be getting passing grades.⁷⁶ Conversely, lesbian and gay students who thought there was a staff person they could talk to were more than twice as likely to receive passing grades. Lesbian and gay students who attended a school with a policy on safety that specifically mentioned sexual minority issues were more than three and a half times more likely to be getting A's and B's. Likewise, gay students in schools with GSAs were more than twice as likely to be getting A's and B's.⁷⁷

Take-Away Points: School administrators and staff must address sexual prejudice, especially among middle school and young high school students, and should focus on being vigilant in situations outside of the classroom, such as team sports and field trips. Educators must understand the impact of homophobic behavior on all students, including heterosexual students.

We must treat homophobic slurs and epithets seriously, as both harmful acts of bullying and as precursors to physical violence. And we must target not only bullying perpetrators but also their peer group whenever we hear derogatory comments about GLBT students.

GLBT youth are at risk of physical assault and/or suicide; they both carry weapons to school to protect themselves and are victimized by weapons at higher than average rates. A single suicide or homicide devastates an entire school.

GLBT victimization harms academic performance, but factors such as the existence of GLBT-supportive policies, clubs, and staff improve academic performance.

Finally, generic school safety measures that do not specifically address GLBT issues do not protect GLBT students.



Chapter 4: Truancy, Dropout and Homelessness Among GLBT Students

Guiding Question: Does being GLBT lead to truancy, dropping out, and homelessness?

One of the most serious problems many GLBT students face is that they experience torment and alienation not only at school, but at home. The combination of educational, social, and familial instability can lead to problems far worse than simply not doing well at school. So we raise a number of interrelated questions, for which there are few definitive answers:

- How many youth are missing school or dropping out because they are GLBT or heterosexual/gender-nonconforming?
- How many youth are homeless because they are GLBT?
- Which GLBT youth are most at risk of truancy/dropping out/homelessness—and why?
- Which GLBT youth are the most resilient—and why?
- What is the impact of family instability on school performance and attendance?
- What is the impact of housing instability or homelessness on school performance and attendance?

Homelessness and Housing Instability

We need to develop a keener awareness of the tragic consequences for some GLBT youth when their support systems disappear or turn against them, leaving them suddenly, and often disastrously, to fend for themselves as solitary, shelterless adolescents on the streets. For these youth, education sinks into irrelevancy as the struggle for survival takes over. Some GLBT youth experience poverty and homelessness while remaining in supportive family structures, but thousands of GLBT youth *come into* poverty and homelessness as a result of involuntary separation from their families. As harmful as poverty and housing instability are to youth in general, we can't emphasize how much worse the situation typically becomes when a youth must face such conditions alone, having been separated suddenly and often violently from his or her familial support structure.

“My mother and I got into fights that typically ended in me realizing I was not welcome in her home or just flat out kicked out. When this happened, I would walk up to a friend's house whose parents were never home. I used to sleep in his backyard on warm nights. When it was cold out, I had another friend who would leave his basement door unlocked. I would sneak into his basement and sleep on his parents' couch, sneaking out before his parents woke up.”

– Stephanie Gentry-Fernandez, former student, Chicago Public Schools

Student Profile: *Lynette*

Born and raised in Germany, Lynette went into culture shock when she first moved to the U.S.

“In Germany, they aren’t as focused on the gender binary as they are in the States,” says Lynette, who didn’t feel as if she had to pick an identity and stick to it until she moved to America. “I kind of acted like a boy as I grew up. I was one of these kids who destroyed Barbies and played with Hot Wheels. I hung out with a group of guys in school, and the other students didn’t really mess with us.”

But life became confusing, says the multi-lingual teenager, when she and her family moved to the Colorado suburbs before her sophomore year of high school. “My friend Hillary, who’s like super gay, and a group of her friends adopted me. That’s when I first started coming out. I would say, ‘I’m bisexual,’ and they’d say, ‘no you’re not.’ I had an identity crisis. I knew I wasn’t trans, but I knew I wasn’t straight-up lesbian either.” “Coming out” had painful repercussions; the summer after her sophomore year, Lynette was jumped by two guys who “kept yelling faggot as they beat the crap out of me.” That was a wakeup call, says Lynette, who decided to go to Finland for a six-month high school exchange program. While there, she saw a film that changed her life and turned her into a dedicated GLBT activist. “*Gender Rebel* was all about the genderqueer identity. It was a really big thing for me because I was like, FINALLY, that’s how I feel.”

When Lynette returned to Colorado, she started a GLBT school club called Coexist, which was shut down because of a backlash from the surrounding community. And even though a proposed “school challenge week”—dedicated to tolerance and understanding—was also shut down, Lynette isn’t giving up. “We’ll just have to do more in the community,” she says. “I’m already organizing a Day of Silence.”

It's clear that family instability leads to homelessness for many GLBT youth. Homosexuality and gender nonconformity place many GLBT students in a minority status that is different from that of their parents or guardians who are not GLBT and who may be uncomfortable about or hostile to GLBT issues; many parents become bitterly angry, depressed, or violent upon learning their child is GLBT. "Coming out" may release intense emotions among all members of the family. Even siblings can react negatively: according to Stephanie Gentry-Fernandez, who now works at Chicago's Broadway Youth Center, "My brother and I got into fights that were fueled by his homophobia and that escalated so badly that for years I slept with a knife under my pillow because I felt unsafe."⁷⁸ The fact is, many GLBT youth eventually leave or are ejected from home after "coming out" to their family.

The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force reports that between 20 and 40 percent of all homeless youth in America identify as GLBT.⁷⁹ Homelessness includes not only those who are permanently homeless, but "housing-unstable" young people who "couch surf" or stay with multiple different households, never in the same place for more than a few days at a time.⁸⁰ The main causes of homelessness are family conflict coupled with experiences of anti-GLBT stigma and violence in the social services (shelter or foster housing) system.⁸¹

According to one study, 26 percent of GLBT youth were kicked out of their homes when they "came out" to family members.⁸²

In Chicago alone, more than 15,000 young people experience homelessness each year.⁸³ For these Chicago youth, fewer than fifty beds exist, leading youth to "doze on the train all night" or to sleep in "hallways, basements, abandoned buildings, warehouses, or outside by the lake," says Lara Brooks of the Broadway Youth Center.

Homelessness leads to other serious problems, including sexual trauma, violence, and criminalization. According to Brooks, many youth trade sex for money as well as steal, trespass, and turnstile-jump to cover basic needs.⁸⁴

The reaction of schools to homeless pupils is sometimes less than supportive: one formerly homeless youth in Chicago explains that schools sometimes "don't know how" to enroll homeless students or are even skeptical that they are actually homeless, thinking that they are simply regular students who are trying to transfer to a more desirable school.⁸⁵

A lot of people don't know why so many GLBT young people drop out of high school. I think this happens for a number of reasons. Those who drop out don't know where they're going to be staying after they leave school each day. They don't know where they're going to get support from when they leave school each day. They don't have transportation to get home or to get back to school. They experience harassment in the schools all the time. They experience trauma all the time, at school, on the train, at home, in the neighborhood. They don't have sources of income for basic needs."

– Ebonii Warren-Watts, former student,
Chicago Public Schools

Truancy and School Dropouts

As we examine the current understanding of truancy and dropouts in the United States, two troubling conclusions have emerged.

First, we know from community-based surveys and research studies that many students miss or drop out of school at least in part because of difficulties related to their GLBT identity. For example, we

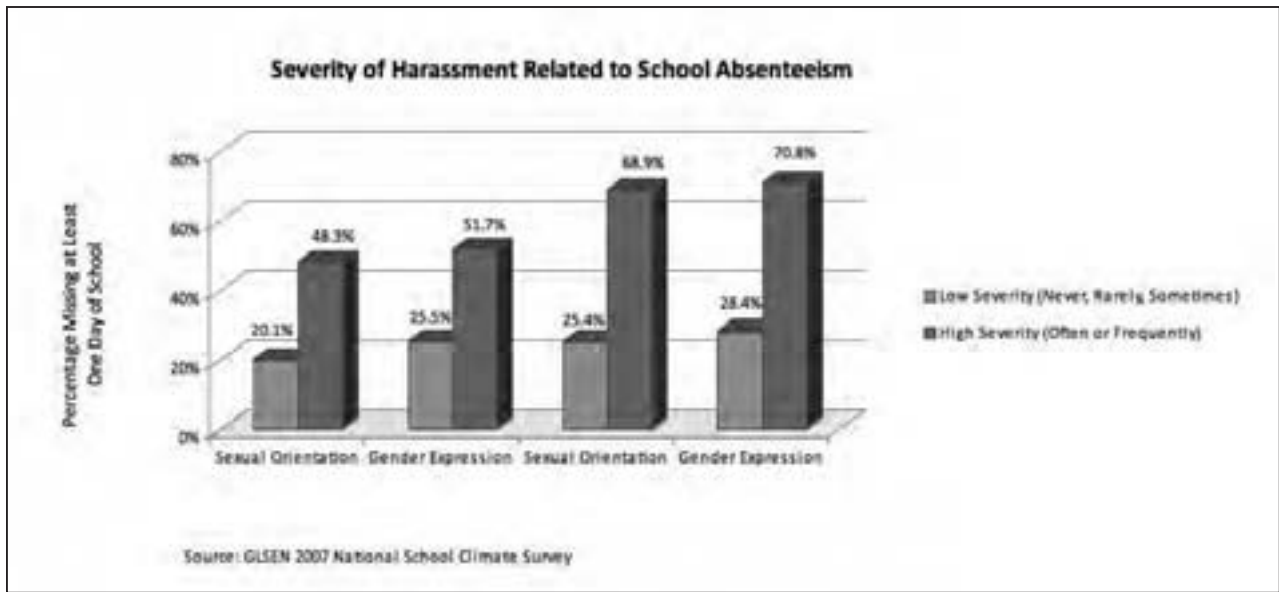
know that lesbian and gay students in Massachusetts are two to six times more likely to miss school than heterosexual students because they feel unsafe.⁸⁶ Students who are harassed because of actual or perceived sexual orientation in California are three times as likely to miss school.⁸⁷

Gay, lesbian, or bisexual students with high levels of victimization are more likely to miss or drop out of school and do worse in school. Students with low levels of victimization are not that different from heterosexual students.⁸⁸

On a nationwide scale, half of students (48-52 %) who experience frequent or severe *verbal* harassment because of their sexual orientation or gender expression miss school at least once a month,

peers, a student who is *questioning*—i.e., in the process of determining his or her sexual orientation—is seven times as likely as heterosexual students, and *four* times as likely as a lesbian, gay, or bisexual student, to consider dropping out of school.⁹⁰

According to Professor Poteat, “A number of students who are questioning their sexual orientation are feeling marginalized by not only the heterosexual peers but also by LGBT peers because they don’t feel like they necessarily fit as much into there.”⁹¹ This suggests that questioning students, who are at the most vulnerable stage of their identity development, must find supportive and nonjudgmental support systems, including counselors and other trusted peers or adults.



and more than two in three students (69-71 %) who experience frequent or severe *physical* harassment because of their sexual orientation or gender expression miss school at least once a month.⁸⁹

Interestingly, while students who report being lesbian, gay, or bisexual are 1.75 times as likely to consider dropping out of school as their heterosexual

The second conclusion is that school districts are, for the most part, completely in the dark about which students are at risk of dropping out or have dropped out due to their GLBT identity. Schools don’t know what correlation GLBT identity has with their dropout rates. Why? On the surface, it’s because they’re unable to determine which students identify

as GLBT. Legally and practically, it's difficult or impossible for schools to seek and maintain data on students' sexual orientations.

But knowledge of students' sexual orientations is unnecessary to address GLBT-related dropouts: As this report reveals, a student's actual sexual orientation is irrelevant to addressing homophobic behaviors against that student. It's the expression of gender nonconformity, which is readily visible among students, that often causes students to *perceive* their targets as gay or lesbian (as opposed to knowing their *actual* sexual orientation), and that perception fuels much, if not most, of their homophobic behavior.

Students who commit homophobic acts need not rely on actual knowledge that their target is GLBT; heterosexual students, particularly those who are gender-nonconforming, may be targeted as GLBT just as often as GLBT students. Many students, particularly elementary and middle school children, both commit and are victimized by homophobic acts even before they have any awareness of their own or others' sexual orientation. Thus, schools can

identify youth who are likely targets of homophobia without knowing or inquiring into their actual sexual orientation (which would be legally problematic in any event) and can also foster a climate that is safe for all youth—even those who are not visibly gender-nonconforming.

Take-Away Points: Many students miss or drop out of school at least in part because they are GLBT or are perceived as GLBT. We don't know enough about the precise relationships between family, housing instability, and truancy/dropping among GLBT youth.

Educators should focus on ensuring that gender-nonconforming youth are protected and remain in school. They should also be aware that students who are questioning or exploring their sexual identity are at even greater risk of missing or dropping out of school. Finally, school administrators and staff need to work with colleagues, parents, guardians, family counselors, and community organizations to prevent and address GLBT youth housing instability and homelessness.



Photographs by Norman Y. Lono

Chapter 5: The Role and Experience of Adults on GLBT Issues

Guiding Question: What experiences do adults have around GLBT issues—and how can they help GLBT youth and coworkers?

Not only is the well-being of school personnel in and of itself important, but the role and experience of adults is an integral part of any discussion on issues faced by GLBT students. This is because there is a strong connection between the welfare of educators and parents or guardians and student success. Therefore, we must examine the challenges that all adults—particularly those who are GLBT—face when addressing GLBT issues at school.

On “Coming Out” as a GLBT Educator

For many GLBT personnel, coming out professionally still remains a formidable challenge. Pedro O. Carrasquillo was lucky to have been in a school district where honesty earned him the respect and support of his students and their parents. Sadly, this is still not the case for many across the nation.⁹²

“I was born and raised in Puerto Rico and I have been a classroom teacher in New England for over 28 years. I remember the first time I sang publicly as a gay man. I had joined a community chorus—a gay chorus. I remember the day two students asked another faculty member and myself to sell a bag of candy so the school drama club and chorus could take a field trip to New York City. I told them I wasn’t sure. I came up with a number of excuses, until one of the students said that maybe I could try to sell some of the candy to people in my chorus. That brought the conversation to a sudden and abrupt halt. I asked, ‘What chorus?’ He said, the one that my father and his partner heard last weekend and saw you singing in. And by the way, they liked the Rodgers and Hammerstein medley. I remember a moment of panic. I also remember their grins. My coworker and I decided it was probably time to talk to the principal . . .”

—Pedro O. Carrasquillo, high school teacher, Massachusetts

If the experiences educator Pedro Carrasquillo describes serve as an example of what all GLBT educators, to a greater or lesser degree, face in their workplace, then what emerges is the realization that many GLBT school personnel feel embattled each day. They struggle to perform their jobs while negotiating which aspects of their lives to share or suppress. And they face reprisal or even termination because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Student Profile: *Chris*

Chris has heard the words “faggot” and “queer” directed at him, and he’s heard the popular put-down, “That’s so gay.” He knows gay students who have been threatened, spat upon, and had food thrown at them. And Chris has come to the conclusion that his school is not a safe place either for himself or his fellow LGBTQ students.

But instead of withdrawing into himself and getting ever more depressed, Chris is dealing with the situation by coming out to his family and becoming an activist. He has become involved in the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) and has focused on the task of trying to make his high school, with its 1,000-plus students, a safer place.

At every step of the way, Chris has been opposed by the school’s administration, although individual teachers have supported him. A straight-A student, Chris understands the challenge he faces. “I live in Middle America (southwestern Ohio) in a conservative community surrounded by cornfields, and a lot of people here are religious and not sympathetic to gays or our cause.”

When Chris went to his principal to say he wanted to organize a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) at the school, she turned him down flat. And so, armed with materials from GLSEN and Lambda Legal, he returned to tell the principal he could sue. She relented, and Chris found a faculty sponsor and organized a GSA.

Chris was not finished. He began organizing a “Day of Silence” at the school to spotlight the harassment and bullying to which some students are constantly subjected. And again, the principal said, “No.” This time, however, the dispute spilled out into the community, where opposition to the “Day of Silence” was voiced. Eventually, the “Day of Silence” was held. About 120 students participated.

Chris looks forward to going to college next year and carrying on the fight for LGBTQ rights.

In her seminal article, *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*, Peggy McIntosh lists examples of “unearned” advantages or privileges in society that Whites not only enjoy but are often unaware that they possess.⁹³ Taking McIntosh’s lead, various individuals have subsequently published examples of “heterosexual privilege.”⁹⁴ Among the examples:

- I don’t have to worry about hiding my friends, partner, and my weekend activities; I can talk about them when I come into work Monday morning.
- I don’t have to feel like a split personality.
- I am able to be fully who I am at work or school without having to worry about what others may say about my partner or friends.
- I don’t have to lead a double life.
- I can, at my workplace, talk about my partner or have a picture on my desk, without fearing that people will automatically disapprove or think I am being flamboyant, blatant, or forcing my beliefs upon them.
- I can be open about my sexual orientation at work without fear of reprisal in terms of job promotion, job loss, or being accused of negatively affecting the work climate.
- I can bring my partner to work-related parties and events and be seen as promoting a positive familial climate.
- I can get paid leave from work and/or condolences when grieving the death of a long-term partner.
- I can teach from pre-school through high school without fear of being fired any day.
- I can teach about lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgender, or intersex people without being seen as having a bias because of my orientation or as forcing a homosexual or personal agenda on students.

- I can easily find academic courses and institutions that give attention to people of my sexual orientation.⁹⁵

As this partial list demonstrates, in contrast to lesbian and gay school employees, heterosexual school employees are privileged in that their relationships are never automatically sexualized. Also, mention of one’s heterosexual life partner or spouse is rarely considered inappropriate, particularly to adult colleagues.

The fact that heterosexual teachers don’t regularly mention their own life partners or spouses in the workplace doesn’t mean they aren’t free to do so. Heterosexual identity or relationships are not automatically considered controversial or political in nature. By contrast, in many communities, mention of one’s same-sex identity and relationships automatically conjures up a topic related to politics, religion, or a “mature” topic—all of which may be considered inappropriate for the K-12 workplace. Most heterosexuals are privileged because none of this comes up when they “reveal” their sexual orientation in countless ways each day.

In contrast, even experienced, tenured educators experience sheer terror in “coming out” (whether voluntarily or involuntarily) to students. They worry that their jobs are on the line if a parent or guardian were to complain about their sexual orientation. They may engage in self-censoring, and they battle their own internalized feelings of shame or guilt about being GLBT. They struggle to balance their commitment to raising or responding to GLBT issues in the classroom with keeping the discussion on a universal, as opposed to a personal, level.

“At times, [to avoid personal discussion with students] I have had to keep the discussion of GLBT issues in the abstract – other times [due to students’ questions] I have found it impossible not to make it about myself. I remember talking to my coworkers about why GLBT issues were so important. I remember explaining why they mattered so much to me. But since our lives are not a Jerry Springer or Oprah Winfrey show, this is easier said than done. For some of us, this can be a very difficult thing.”⁹⁶

—Pedro Carrasquillo, high school teacher,
Massachusetts

On Bringing Up GLBT Issues in School

Because of the obstacles faced by GLBT school personnel, GLBT students rarely encounter any positive GLBT role models. Few GLBT teachers are “out” to students. Moreover, students’ perceptions of GLBT issues and the GLBT community are shaped by the silence, secrecy, and rumors that swirl around particular school personnel who are “suspected” of being GLBT. GLBT students carry these influences with them as they develop their own sexual and gender identities.

GLBT School Personnel: The Right to Be “Out”?

The lengths to which GLBT school personnel must go to hide their identity at school raises the question: What happens when GLBT teachers *do* “come out” to colleagues or students? What happens when they talk about GLBT issues in the classroom? What happens when a parent or guardian complains about the fact that his or her child’s teacher is GLBT? While each situation is unique, it’s not difficult to imagine a number of fraught situations that may quickly turn into legal disputes.

There has long been evidence that GLBT persons experience employment discrimination. Many GLBT persons report that they have been treated unfairly at work or have lost or been denied employment because of their GLBT status.⁹⁷ A patchwork of federal constitutional and statutory laws, as well as a number of state and local statutes, ordinances, and executive orders protects gay, lesbian, and bisexual (and sometimes transgender) people from certain kinds of discrimination depending on where they live or work.

Yet, as of April 2009, Congress has yet to pass national legislation broadly protecting employees against GLBT-related discrimination (although the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, which would serve just this purpose, is supported by the Obama Administration).⁹⁸

GLBT school personnel may also find protections in school policies, collective bargaining agreements, and employment contracts that may be greater than those found in the law in their state or region.⁹⁹ But it’s clear they don’t have an unqualified right of free speech at school and must therefore tread with caution before “coming out” or engaging in GLBT-related speech in school settings.¹⁰⁰

Tip: For a more detailed explanation of the legal rights of school employees, please refer to *Strengthening the Learning Environment: a School Employee’s Guide to GLBT Issues, 2nd ed.* (© 2006 National Education Association). www.nea.org/assets/docs/mf_glbguide.pdf

Professor Stuart Biegel, who teaches at the UCLA Schools of Law and Education, explains that gay and lesbian educators do have a “right to be out” that stems from the constitutional rights of free speech (First Amendment) and equal protection (Fourteenth Amendment). He characterizes this right as both a

“right to express an identity and a right to be treated equally as a result of expressing this identity.”¹⁰¹

However, many GLBT school employees don’t feel comfortable being out about their sexual orientation or expressing gender nonconformity in schools. This discomfort is partially reflected in established limitations on educators’ free speech rights. K-12 educators have free speech rights but are expected to act “professionally.”¹⁰² They are held to a higher standard as role models and in formal education settings, they’re expected to adhere to approved curricula and topics controlled and set forth by the school district. In addition, they have limited ability to speak on matters of public concern if it would disrupt the work environment.¹⁰³

While on the surface, a teacher’s sexual orientation alone does not conflict with any of these principles, in practice it often does. Professor Biegel gives examples of actions by GLBT educators that he deemed “safe” versus “problematic” in many areas of the country.

SAFE	PROBLEMATIC?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serving as faculty advisor for a GSA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Often</i> displaying GLBT-related objects, books, etc., on one’s desk in classroom
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being “out” to coworkers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing “coming out” stories with students on school-sponsored field trips
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wearing a “pink triangle” button to show support for GLBTs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coming out in the classroom while expressing strong GLBT-related opinions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coming out if directly asked 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appearing at school events arm-in-arm with same-sex partner
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introducing a spouse in a jurisdiction in which same-sex partners may be married 	

Professor Biegel stresses that the previous examples are not contextualized; we have no sense of the circumstances or the school climate of each situation; depending on the context, each situation could be more or less problematic for the GLBT educator. Nevertheless, it’s clear that GLBT school personnel, particularly those in the classroom, must continually assess their actions to determine the level of “appropriateness” for actions that heterosexual colleagues take for granted.

GLBT Parents/Guardians and Children of GLBT Parents/Guardians

The Williams Institute in Los Angeles estimates that, as of 2005, there were 777,000 same-sex households spread across every county and state in the U.S. and some 270,000 children living in same-sex-headed households.¹⁰⁴ So educators must be aware of two populations—GLBT parents or guardians of students, and students of GLBT parents or guardians—both of which have encountered difficulty attending or interacting with schools.

According to a recent GLSEN study, 26 percent of GLBT parents or guardians said they were mistreated by other parents or guardians in the school community; 16 percent felt unable to fully participate in their child’s school community because they were a GLBT parent. Moreover, 23 percent of students with GLBT parents felt unsafe at school for having GLBT parents, and 40 percent stated that they had been verbally harassed in school because of their family. Twenty-three percent of students with GLBT parents had been mistreated by, or received negative comments from, the *parents* of other students. Thirty percent of students reported feeling they could not fully participate in school because they had a GLBT parent.¹⁰⁵

These statistics suggest that anti-bullying and anti-discrimination policies and diversity training

curricula should include information about GLBT families—and that students, parents, and guardians in the school community should have access to programs and materials that include information about GLBT families. School policies should protect students and adults in the school community not only against direct discrimination, but against indirect discrimination because of their association with or connection to a GLBT family member or student.

“One of my challenges is not to forget that I need allies. I need allies as sources of compassion and strength and courage in this most important work. What kind of personal system of support do you have? Who provides you with emotional support at work? Where are your allies? Are there any school-based groups in your building to tackle [GLBT] issues? Are there any nearby colleges or universities with multicultural or social justice or diversity programs?”

—Pedro Carrasquillo, high school teacher, Massachusetts

Heterosexual Allies

In light of the risks associated with being a GLBT employee in the public school setting, the responsibility to address GLBT issues cannot fall on GLBT school personnel alone. Heterosexual school personnel and community organizations play a critical role. Why? Consider the following:

- Many GLBT school personnel still face professional risks in drawing any attention to their sexual orientation and therefore may be reluctant to take the lead on improving the climate for GLBT youth.
- In some communities, GLBT issues are taken more seriously if addressed by staff who are not perceived (often unfairly) as “promoting a personal agenda.”
- The majority of schools still do not have “out” GLBT school personnel.
- Addressing the welfare of GLBT students requires the commitment of those in positions of power in the community, whatever their sexual orientation.

School personnel with special skills or access to information may play a lead role. For example, Joseph Kosciw, Research Director at GLSEN, emphasizes the role of school counselors on GLBT issues. “School counselors often make up about half of the participants at trainings on GLBT issues, but the students are more likely to talk to classroom teachers on GLBT issues,” says Kosciw. “Students spend hours and hours with teachers; it’s a built-in interaction.” Kosciw’s observation suggests that there may be a potential chasm between the keepers of critical information on GLBT issues and those who need to apply it on a daily basis.

Kosciw notes that, according to surveys, counselors and mental health professionals are less likely than teachers to see their role as intervening when harassment occurs, most likely because they are not often in classrooms and hallways. At the same time, teachers are often placed in the role of mental health counselor or “expert” on GLBT issues despite the lack of mental health or counseling expertise. The question becomes: how do we encourage teachers and counselors to work together to share knowledge, intervene, and prevent GLBT related harassment before it reaches a crisis stage?¹⁰⁶

Other critical actors in the school community include physical education teachers, coaches, hallway monitors, security guards, cafeteria and playground aides or monitors, and bus drivers. These staff supervise or monitor students outside of the classroom in contexts that are most conducive to bullying and harassment. And yet these personnel, many of whom are education support professionals

and/or serve as volunteer, part-time, contract, and non-certificated staff, are often excluded from training on how to address bullying and harassment.

Local community organizations that serve GLBT youth are natural allies to schools that have few resources. Not only can they provide health services, counseling, and recreational activities for youth, but they are often good providers of professional development training to help schools begin to talk about GLBT issues in classrooms and communities.

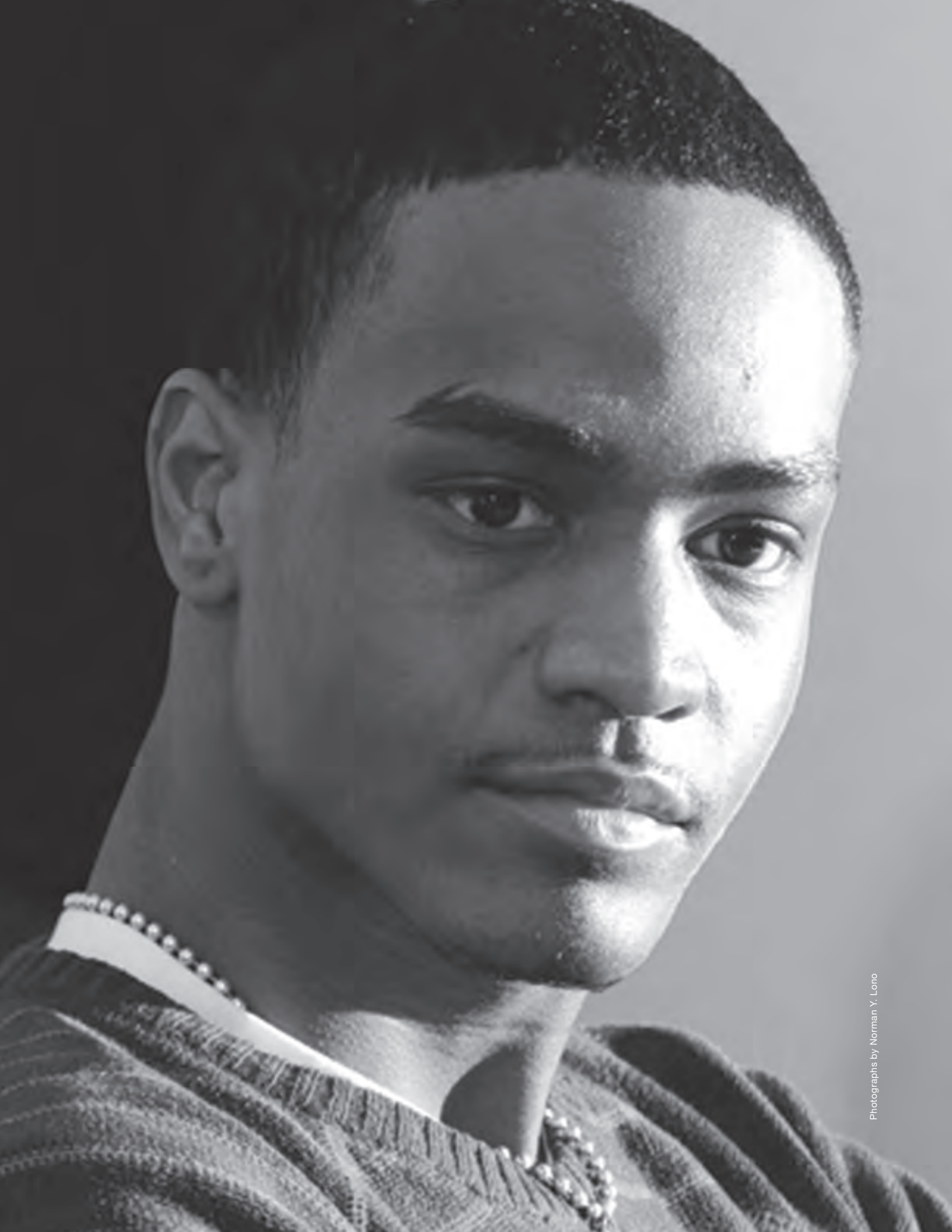
Heterosexual parents and guardians in the community must support school administrators on GLBT issues. Studies show that fear of parental backlash is one of the main reasons why school employees don't engage in GLBT-related curricula or discussion.¹⁰⁷ Therefore, parent allies are critical to the success of school initiatives to foster GLBT inclusion and safety.

Finally, school administrators and board members must demonstrate leadership on GLBT issues. Effectively addressing GLBT issues depends on an array of factors that are largely in the purview of school leadership, including professional development, curricula, parent and community relations, and allocation of resources.

Take-Away Points: GLBT school personnel face significant obstacles integrating GLBT identity with their professional role, leaving GLBT students with few role models or resources in the school community. School administrators need to work toward eliminating fear and uncertainty among staff by providing clear and equitable guidelines on when and how GLBT issues may arise, and when and how staff may appropriately express their identity or discuss GLBT issues with students.

GLBT parents (and their children) also feel marginalized and victimized by members of the education community.

While classroom teachers interact with GLBT students the most, other members of the school community—including school counselors, social workers, nurses, coaches, guards, bus drivers, monitors, parents, community organizations, and school district administrators and board members—play an important role in supporting GLBT staff and students. School counselors, mental health professionals, and education support professionals should be included in staff discussions on GLBT issues to ensure the exchange of information among all those who are responsible for supervising and interacting with students.



Photographs by Norman Y. Lono

A GLBT Friendly School in Manhattan

Harvey Milk High School

The origins of Harvey Milk High School and its host, the Hetrick-Martin Institute, are rooted in the gay rights movement.

In the late 1970s, Damian Martin and Dr. Emery Hetrick, two gay men and a couple, saw an acute need to address the problems of gay and lesbian youth in the city. By 1983, they had raised enough money to found the Institute for the Protection of Lesbian and Gay Youth. Its mission was to deliver social services to GLBT kids, especially those who were homeless because their parents had thrown them out.

Then, in 1985, Joyce Hunter, a social worker with the Institute, and a teacher, Steve Ashkinazy, founded the Harvey Milk High School. Both Hunter and Ashkinazy were gay rights activists. The Institute provided both the facility used by the school as well as after-school programs and supportive services. The New York City Department of Education operates the school as part of its program of small public schools for students who struggle in mainstream schools.

Martin and Hetrick died of AIDS in the early 1990s, and the agency they founded was renamed after them. And the Hetrick-Martin Institute continues to be the host agency for Harvey Milk High School.

Today about half of the school's students are GLBT, and all of its student are considered "at-risk"—for any number of reasons: poverty, dysfunctional families, homelessness, abuse, and chronic harassment and bullying. Harvey Milk is what the New York City school system calls a "transfer school." All the students at Harvey Milk come from other schools. These are students who were on the verge of falling through educational cracks, never to be heard from again.

Harvey Milk has an impressive record of success. The school provides a safe place where different students can be themselves and learn. Many of the students will tell you that they would be dropouts today if it weren't for the Harvey Milk High School. Ninety-six percent of the school's seniors graduate, which is well above the New York City average. And more than 60 percent of the students go on to advanced programs or college.

The school's staff includes a principal, an assistant principal, seven teachers, two paraprofessionals, and one fulltime clinical social worker, for about 100 students. No student gets lost in the crowd at this school; every student is an individual. Says Harvey Milk teacher Orville Bell: "When these kids come to us, what they need more than anything else is an adult in their life who is invested in them, an adult who is empathetic, grounded, and skilled—and that's what we provide."



Photographs by Norman Y. Lono





Matthew

I went to school in Florida. We lived in a football town, and I was the skinny little sissy boy. It was like everyone knew I was gay before I did. I was miserable.

Then my mother and I moved back to New York City, but things were not much better. I felt lost in the big schools here. I was on my way to becoming a fulltime dropout. Then I heard about the after-school program at Harvey Milk High School. It was a place where I was free to be myself and learn—and they served you a great dinner because they have a terrific cook. So from the after-school program, I became a student at Harvey Milk High School.

I've attended Harvey Milk now for three years. I will graduate this spring and go to college. There are kids here who are homeless, kids who dropped out of other schools, kids who've been abused—you name it. The teachers and staff here don't judge you—they accept you for who you are. They help you succeed. I hate to think where I would be without them. I love this school and the people in it.



Alex

I'm a kid from the hood in Brooklyn who dances ballet and plays the piano. You put those two things together and people say, "Well, he must be gay." They don't understand a guy

can be straight and a ballet dancer. It doesn't fit their stereotypes.

It's even worse because I come from a Spanish macho background where the man is really the man. You have to be strong. I don't even think my father knows exactly what Harvey Milk is, yet I've learned a lot more here in one year than I did in the past three years at my old school. There's a lot of outreach to students who don't have the urge to learn.

There are people who have trouble with themselves so they point the finger at you. When some of the guys in my neighborhood found out I had a scholarship to the American School of Ballet they said, "Only faggots do that." But I tell them: I get to see girls in tights and leotards. I get to lift them and dance with them—and I get paid for it. You're sitting on the steps all day. Which one of us has a life?



Jesenia

My mother gave birth to a boy but she raised a girl. I think she has the best of both worlds. I can say this 'cause I'm fortunate. Most kids like me get kicked out of the house early

and end up on the street. But my whole family is supportive—mother, father, sisters, and brothers. They have a lot of heart. They accept everything. My mom raised us to love everyone equally and to treat them as individuals.

I wasn't so lucky at school. I couldn't be myself. When I was the other gender, you could tell I was trying to be a girl. My teachers didn't like it. When

I tried to talk to them about the unfair treatment I was getting and the trouble I was having with the other kids, my teachers would say, “It’s just life.” I finally gave up arguing with them about it. Students want to talk to someone who’s going to listen. How can you talk to someone who gives you limits?

Not until this year could I speak to my teachers again. The teachers at Harvey Milk accept who I am. All kinds of kids go here—it makes me feel like I’m not so alone. I can actually sit down and concentrate on my work. I’m happy now, but if I hadn’t transferred to Harvey Milk, I would have dropped out of high school. Now I’m planning for college.



Luis

Harvey Milk is not a gay school at all. I really take offense at that. Half of the population doesn’t even identify as LGBTQ. It’s a safe space high school and a community of inclusion. And for me, a

life-changing experience.

The people at my previous school were close-minded and abusive, physically and verbally. It wasn’t possible to learn even if you applied yourself to learning. Since transferring to Milk, I’ve been able to express my true self *and* get an education.

At Milk, we don’t fear our teachers; we respect them. Everyone—from the principal to the counselors to the teachers—is here for us. Honestly, I don’t think I ever would have graduated if I hadn’t come here. I’ve never been the type with a passion for learning, but now I look forward to each morning.

One thing I’ve learned in this place—how much an education determines who you are, where you fit, what your future will be. All the LGBTQ students who don’t have a high school like Milk—stay strong! Don’t let anything or anyone get in the way of your education. My own mother struggled with my decision to come to this school. Now she sees how much I’ve improved and how I’m growing into the man I’m going to become.



Chapter 6: Interventions and Strategies on GLBT Issues

Guiding Question: What actions on GLBT issues will help all students in school?

The following is an amalgam of ideas and recommendations generated from invited panelists at the NEA Summit on GLBT Issues in Education as well as from community organizations around the nation.

Reforming School Policies

Nearly all studies examining GLBT bullying and harassment have found that comprehensive anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies that specifically protect gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender students and staff from bullying and harassment are not only effective but necessary.¹⁰⁸

Generic anti-bullying policies are not sufficient; policies should specifically define and prohibit bullying and harassment on account of sexual orientation and gender identity or expression. Policies should be published to all members of the community in plain language and also posted in common areas on school campuses.

Employees in collective bargaining states may also advocate for inclusion of specific anti-discrimination language in employment contracts.

TIP: The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education states: Schools are encouraged to develop policies protecting gay and lesbian students from harassment, violence, and discrimination. In order to guarantee the rights of all students to an education and to prevent dropping out, school policies should include sexual orientation within anti-discrimination policies, as well as within policies which guarantee students' rights to an education and to equal access to school courses and activities. In order to make schools safe for all students and to prevent violence and harassment, schools should amend existing anti-harassment policies to include prohibiting violence, harassment, and verbal abuse directed against gay and lesbian students and those perceived to be gay or lesbian. Incidents of anti-gay abuse should be treated with the same discipline procedures as other incidents involving bias and hatred.¹⁰⁹

Curriculum

“For the most part, my teachers repeatedly showed me that queer issues, along with Latino, Black and other people of color issues and struggles, were not of any importance to them. Queer history or queer anything was never covered in class, and many of us were silenced when we tried to bring [them] up.”

- Stephanie Gentry-Fernandez, former student, Chicago Public Schools

Many studies show that inclusion of GLBT issues in the school curriculum improves students' health, safety and performance in school.¹¹⁰ According to University of Illinois at Chicago Professor Laura Szalacha, school personnel also recognize the importance of curricula: In a survey of school personnel in California, Minnesota and Massachusetts, school personnel cited “lesson plans and materials” as their top need with respect to addressing GLBT issues in school.¹¹¹

Survey of School Personnel in California, Massachusetts and Minnesota:

What do you need to address LGBT concerns in school?

- Lesson Plans and Materials – 61%
- Strong Administrative Leadership – 57%
- Support from Parents – 54%
- Professional Development – 55%
- District Wide Support – 48%
- Have everything needed – 9%
- Should not address LGBT concerns in school – 7%

And yet GLBT issues are rarely systematically included in any formal curriculum in U.S. public school education. According to Scott Hirschfeld, Education Director at the Anti-Defamation League, most K-12 curricula in U.S. classrooms are circumscribed by what is included in a handful of approved textbooks. And yet a 2002 content analysis of 13 of the most widely used high school U.S. history textbooks found that lesbian and gay content was discussed *on less than one page* in over twelve thousand pages of U.S. textbooks.¹¹² Moreover, any brief mention of GLBT issues took place in four historical contexts: The Holocaust; the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and 1970s; the onset of HIV/AIDs; and the conservative movement of the 1980s. Overall, Hirschfeld observed a pattern of “omission, inaccuracy, and bias ranging from inadvertent to blatant.”¹¹³

Hirschfeld reports that since 2002, “there has been very little systemic change with regard to curriculum to make it more inclusive. When you look at the curricular standards and the instructional materials that exist, they are still largely devoid of LGBT people, events, history, experiences, and so forth. The LGBT movement is never talked about as a movement in its own right with its own struggles and its own victories. It is always portrayed as a faceless opposition movement against mainstream values and against conservative forces.”¹¹⁴ Hirschfeld states that there is very little “connective tissue” in textbooks between GLBT events in the past and current events. He points to one reason for the dearth of GLBT information: the textbook “adoption” process, which tends to strip textbooks of any content that could be perceived as “controversial” in any region of the nation.¹¹⁵

As for “informal curriculum”—which consists of ad hoc lessons, discussions (“teachable moments”) and assignments located outside of the formal, adopted curriculum of school districts—teachers typically tread with caution, for reasons described earlier (see Chapter 5). Moreover, some teachers aren’t sure how to raise GLBT issues, particularly to K-8 students, in an age-appropriate manner. Other practical constraints on teachers include the lack of time, resources and authority to cover topics not specifically included in high-stakes tests mandated by state and federal law (such as the No Child Left Behind Act). Thus, school personnel lack clarity over what GLBT-related materials they may introduce to students, in what contexts, and how to cover such materials in age-appropriate ways.

TIP: To view a valuable historical and pedagogical account of how teachers around the country have addressed GLBT issues in the classroom, see *It’s Still Elementary* (© 2008 Groundspark).

A Teachable Moment: Who Is Bayard Rustin?¹¹⁶

Bayard Rustin was an African American civil rights activist and adviser to Dr. Martin Luther, King, Jr. As early as 1942, he defied Jim Crow seating on a bus near Nashville, TN. In 1947, Rustin organized a north-to-south bus trip with interracial volunteers who challenged Jim Crow practices. Always behind the scenes, it was Rustin who organized the Montgomery bus boycott. And he spearheaded the great March on Washington. Although he had been gay, he did not become an advocate for gay rights until the last part of his life. During those last years of his life, Rustin said, “Indeed, if you want to know whether today people believe in democracy, if you want to know whether they are human rights activists, the question to ask is: what about gay people? Because this is now the litmus test by which this democracy is to be judged.”

California Teachers Association (CTA) President David Sanchez, NEA Summit, July 18, 2008

Staff Development

School trainings are an effective way to raise awareness and encourage positive behaviors among staff on GLBT issues.

The Illinois Safe Schools Alliance (formerly CESO) recommends taking the following steps to maximize in-service training in schools:¹¹⁷

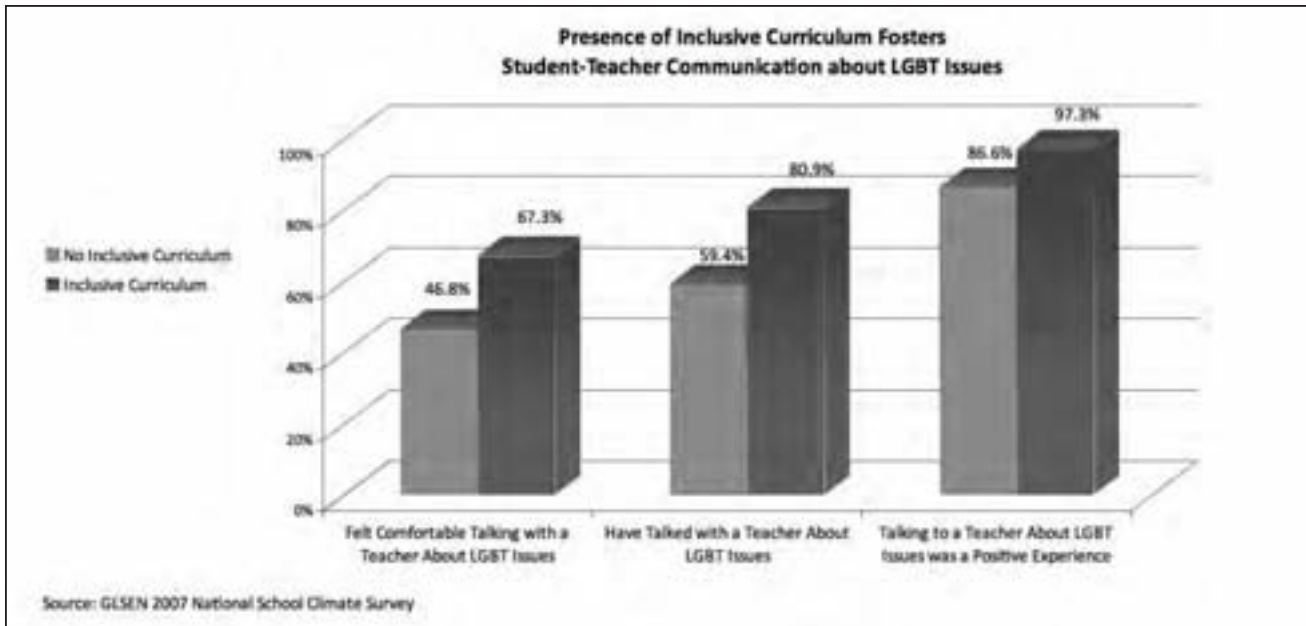
1. Incorporate local information into the training—for example, what the school policies and procedures are.
2. Prioritize the obligation (whether professional, legal or moral) that school personnel have in creating safe learning environments for all students.

3. Acknowledge the diversity of views regarding sexual orientation to create a space for staff to negotiate how their own personal beliefs will comport with their professional role.
4. Include the most up-to-date research on GLBT youth, using local data where possible.

In addition, the NEA Safety, Bias and GLBT Issues Training Program contains several key components in one or more of its training modules:

- Ground rules or operating norms
- Explanation of GLBT terms
- Distinguishing professional role from personal or private religious beliefs or values
- Contextual information: why GLBT issues relate to student health, safety and achievement
- Statistics on bullying, harassment, discrimination
- Activities and discussion on bias, stereotypes and myths about GLBT people
- Activities on connection between sexual orientation and gender/gender identity/gender expression
- Videos on bullying and diversity
- Demonstration on lessons and activities for the classroom
- Responding to community concerns
- Legal considerations
- Resources for school employees
- Creating an action plan

NEA's publication, *Strengthening the Learning Environment*, 2nd ed., provides additional practical



and legal advice for education employees on how to address a number of situations, including when students “come out” to them and how to respond to GLBT-related bullying or discrimination.

Not all trainings on GLBT issues are created equal: According to Emily Greytak at GLSEN, training programs should be continually evaluated for their effectiveness. Training programs are most effective when the content matches the desired outcomes, and the evaluation mechanism is also aligned with the content and outcomes.¹¹⁸

Bullying Intervention and Prevention

TIP: In addition to its Safety, Bias and GLBT Issues Training Program, NEA has a Bullying and Sexual Harassment Training Program that provides useful information on bullying prevention and intervention. Contact NEA Human and Civil Rights at hcrinfo@nea.org more details.

Bullying intervention and prevention begin with a supportive presence. According to research, the perceived presence of adults who are supportive of GLBT and gender-nonconforming students is one of the most effective predictors of decreased feelings

of threat, truancy and suicide attempts. “If gay kids felt that they had a teacher or other school support staff they could talk to about a problem,” says Carol Goodenow, “then they were about half as likely to be threatened, half as likely to be skipping school, and less than half as likely to have made a suicide attempt.”¹¹⁹

TIP: Safe Schools North Carolina says: Guarantee confidentiality with students. Students need to know their privacy will be respected or they will not be honest about this important issue. If you cannot maintain confidentiality for legal reasons, let students know this in advance.¹²⁰

Sometimes a “supportive presence” means nothing more than letting students know that you are there to listen. “While dropping out of high school constantly crossed my mind . . . I was lucky enough to have teachers who knew that I was queer and always, always, always had the door open for me to talk,” says Stephanie Gentry-Fernandez, a former student in Chicago Public Schools.

TIP: The California Safe Schools Coalition says: Train teachers and staff to intervene when they hear slurs or negative comments based on sexual orientation or gender nonconformity AND ensure that students know where to go for information and support.

Another characteristic of supportive presence is a proactive and communicative stance toward bullying intervention. Consider this message from school staff to student: “If you are being bullied, tell me. You don’t have to tell me who it is.”¹²¹ High School Teacher, Pedro Carrasquillo developed a reputation for intolerance to bullying:

I remember when a student in my homeroom said “that’s so gay” to another student as the room went silent and twenty-two heads turned to see my reaction. After a few tense moments, I remember that this same student stood up and said “I’m sorry, señor. I did not mean to hurt you or anyone else.” I nodded and thanked him. Needless to say there was a collective sigh of relief from the group.¹²²

Adopt simple preventive measures, such as these recommended at our Summit by former students:¹²³

- Identify a safe space for a gender-nonconforming youth to use the restroom or change during P.E.
- Allow safe passage for [vulnerable] youth in hallways. Hold them for two minutes longer after class. Monitor hallways. Stand at door watching departure and entry.
- Something as simple as a rainbow sticker or a safe space poster literally meant the difference between safety and danger for me.

Make it easier to supervise large spaces and large numbers of students.

- “At our school,” says Susan McFarland, a teacher in Salt Lake City, “we have an advisory program where every teacher is responsible for a certain number of students in a small learning community. The students tell us that it makes a huge difference in the way that they feel as far as safety.”

Focus on places where bullying occurs, such as hallways, cafeterias, playgrounds, locker rooms, buses:

- “My friends were always being jumped on in the hallways,” says Ebonii Warren-Watts, a former student in Chicago Public Schools. “They always got these transphobic comments made to them. We would just stay in the library until the hall died down because there was so much drama going on in the hallways. None of the staff members would help. Not even the security guards. It made it very, very difficult for us to get to class.”
- “We really need to think about how we understand spaces of discomfort for kids and how spaces differently create the context in which kids are going to bully or harass,” says Professor Horn.

Finally, we must *act* to address bullying. “If my high school instructors had intervened, I would have made it through high school and not dropped out at the first opportunity, which was ninth grade,” says Warren-Watts.

- Small acts may be as effective as large ones. For example, in a crowded hallway: “I saw you bully her. That’s not okay with me. Let’s talk about this at noon today.”
- Inaction sends a clear message to students that bullying is acceptable. As the 2007 GLSEN school climate survey starkly reveals, many students observe that adults do not intervene when they witness bullying; and *most* students

do not bother to report when they are bullied.¹²⁴ What's the correlation between these two findings?

- When we intervene, explain *why*: “Suspending somebody because they said, ‘Oh you’re such a fag’, doesn’t really help them understand what about that was disruptive,” says Horn. “Did I get suspended because I used a bad word, or because I used it in a hurtful way to harm somebody else?”

Student Engagement

Professor Poteat states that the peer influence among youth cannot be underestimated: Students listen to each other and follow each other's lead. Therefore, student engagement is critical to address homophobia and transphobia in our schools. The thousands of peer-led organizations that exist in the U.S. schools, such as GSAs, are often effective forums for student engagement. Studies show that GSAs are effective not merely because of their activities, but by their very presence.¹²⁵ The presence of GSAs has a large impact on students’ feeling of threat as well as their truancy and suicide attempts. If a school had a GSA, they were about as third as likely to be threatened or injured at school; they were less than half as likely to have made a suicide attempt. Students don’t even have to belong; just its existence makes a difference and “affects the whole tenor of the school.” The GSA serves as an automatic center for finding people and resources on GLBT issues.¹²⁶

Moreover, according to Professor Szalacha, the presence of GSAs appears to positively impact staff in schools generally even if they do not participate directly in the GSA. More than 40 percent of the professional staff in schools with GSAs would be very comfortable in assisting a student with GLBT-related questions, in contrast with 29 percent of the staff in schools without GSAs. And 39 percent

of the professional staff in schools without GSAs indicated never hearing positive or supportive comments about lesbian and gay people among the faculty/staff, in contrast with just 23 percent of the staff in schools with GSAs.¹²⁷

GSAs are not welcomed by all students and schools. The existence of GSAs varies by district and region. While many GSAs do exist in rural or suburban districts, for some, “gay-straight alliances [are] a faraway dream, something that happened at good suburban schools or in places like New York City or San Francisco.”¹²⁸ Because GSAs exist in public, peer-dominated spaces—and because of the differences in students' comfort levels and identification with their sexual orientation and gender identity—it may be challenging for GSAs to serve all students, instead of students of a particular race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or other social group.¹²⁹

Community Organizing

Shannon Sullivan, executive director at Illinois Safe Schools Alliance (formerly CESO), asserts: “Without community organizing in every single effort that you are doing to talk about sexual orientation and gender identity issues in schools, you will not get very far at all. The first thing that schools will say: the parents will not allow [GLBT-related discussion or activities] to happen in this place. The only way to combat that is to do genuine community organizing.”¹³⁰

TIP: The Illinois Safe Schools Alliance says: Encourage parents to participate in the educational process addressing all forms of discrimination and harassment.

Sullivan notes that parents and guardians in the community, as well as local students, often take the lead in addressing GLBT issues at community

school board meetings. She stresses the importance of basing arguments for reform on what is actually going on in local schools. Issues should be contextualized around local circumstances. Local organizations with expertise on GLBT or school safety issues should partner with schools.¹³¹ Community organizations may fill the gaps in GLBT-related knowledge, training, and student services that exist in schools. For example, Frieda Takamura, a former human and civil rights coordinator at the Washington Education Association, notes that groups like the Safe Schools Coalition (www.safeschoolscoalition.org) play a vital role in providing comprehensive services and web resources on GLBT issues for schools in Seattle public schools and beyond. And Lara Brooks, who works at the Broadway Youth Center, a division of the Howard Brown Center in Chicago, states that her organization partners with schools to help students receive their high school diploma or GED.

Responding Proactively to Advocacy and Litigation

In many school districts, GLBT issues become contentious disputes resulting in advocacy measures and even litigation. James Madigan, an attorney at Lambda Legal, notes that he and his colleagues are increasingly involved in school disputes around curriculum, discipline, teacher academic freedom, and hiring/firing of school employees. In one case, Lambda Legal advocated on behalf of a school teacher who was disciplined by his school for acting to stop students from calling each other “gay” in a negative way. In another case, Lambda Legal acted to defend school districts’ adoption of a medically accurate sexual health curriculum that was inclusive of GLBT issues.¹³²

Litigation related to GLBT issues has occurred on a number of fronts. With respect to peer-to-peer harassment, several federal courts have held

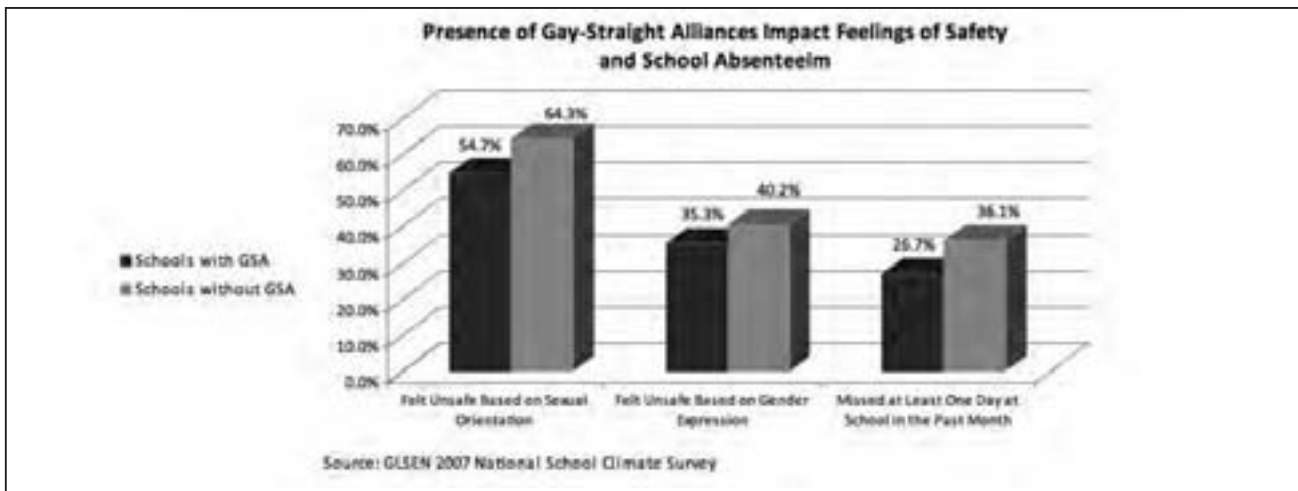
that students who are subjected to severe anti-gay harassment may sue school officials and districts under both Title IX and the Equal Protection Clause of the U.S. Constitution. GLBT school personnel have sued employers under Title VII and Title IX for failure to address severe same-sex sexual harassment, as well as under the Equal Protection Clause of the U.S. Constitution. Courts have also addressed the issue of free speech (for example, concerning whether pro-GLBT or anti-GLBT messages, events or clubs are permissible in school), GLBT-inclusive curriculum, same-sex domestic partner benefits, and other situations.¹³³

Aggrieved students and school personnel often sue schools to seek policy changes on GLBT issues in schools; judicial opinions resulting from such litigation often impact entire states or regions. School district administrators and employees must be aware of the possibility of litigation around GLBT issues. School districts and union representatives have a role in ensuring that their GLBT members, employees and students are protected from discrimination or harassment through express language in school policy handbooks, collective bargaining agreements and employment contracts. The existence of such provisions may result in greater or speedier protection of GLBT individuals in arbitration and administrative hearings and proceedings than those individuals could obtain through costly and time-consuming litigation.¹³⁴ Other strategies mentioned above, such as staff training, bullying prevention, and community engagement may also prevent litigation.

Research

Schools play a role in facilitating research on GLBT issues. There are so many things about which we need to know more. For example:

- How do experiences of GLBT youth differ by region?



- How does homophobic bullying among girls differ from boys?
- How do we identify and support “questioning” students?
- How do we identify and support transgender students?
- As students “come out” at earlier ages, how should approaches to GLBT elementary or middle school students differ from approaches to high school students?
- How do GLBT risk factors such as depression, suicide and victimization relate to each other and to academic achievement?
- Why are some school environments riskier for GLBTs than others?

Researchers play an important role in uncovering trends and experiences in the lives of GLBT youth and measuring which strategies are most effective. But they face significant obstacles in conducting GLBT-related research, including lack of funding and professional support for pursuing such research. What’s more, in contrast to data based on race, ethnicity or sex, K-12 institutions do not gather statistics or data related to students’ sexual orientation or gender identity that would enable research to occur. States like California, Illinois and Massachusetts, however, have succeeded in completing research on GLBT

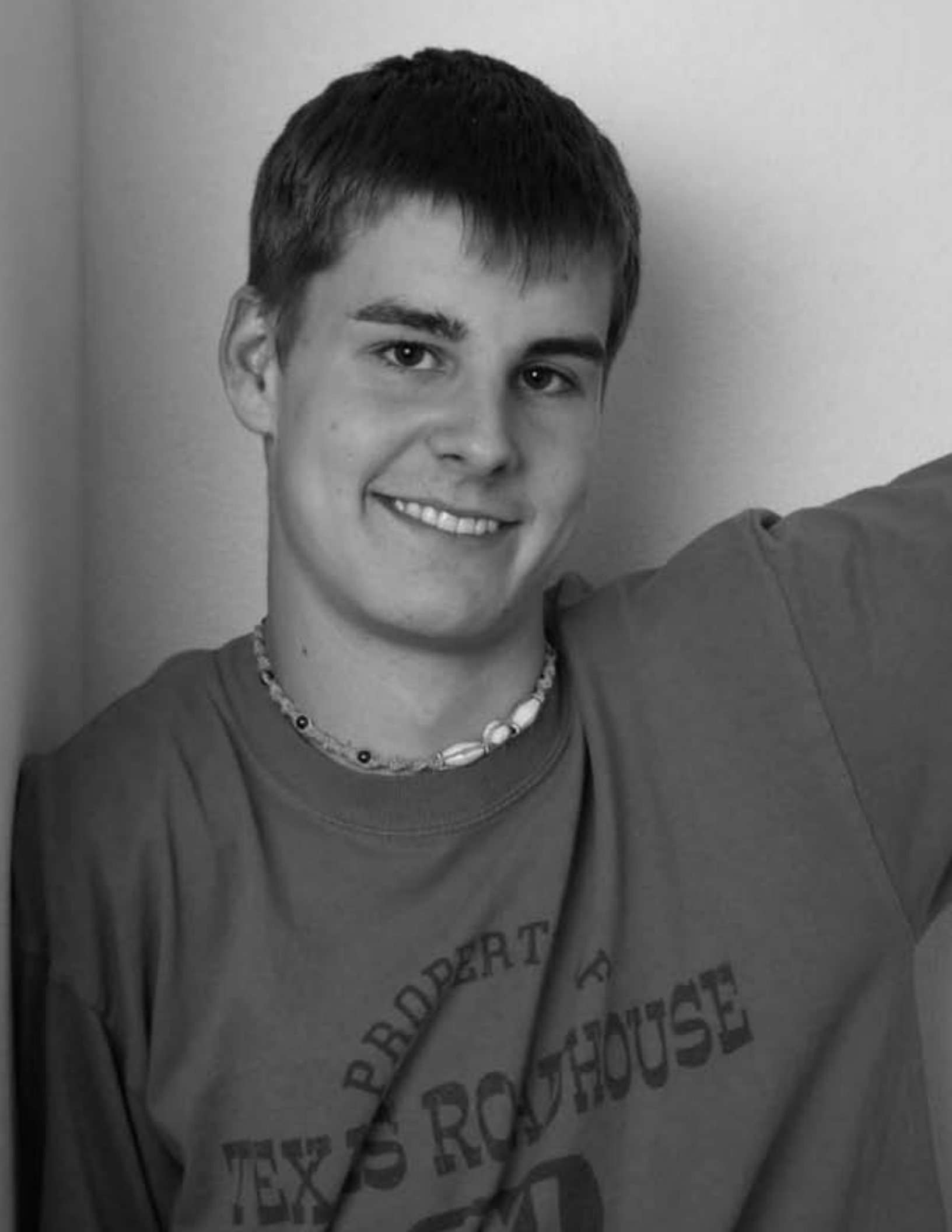
students through the partnership of universities, philanthropic institutions, nonprofit organizations, school districts and government agencies. For example, some schools have cooperated with states and municipalities by administering voluntary and anonymous surveys to be answered by high school students related to sexual orientation or gender identity, bullying and harassment. The data from these surveys have helped researchers issue reports and recommendations for the benefit of K-12 and postsecondary schools.

Take-Away Points: Individuals and school authorities may act on a number of fronts to help GLBT and gender-nonconforming students. School districts, boards and union representatives may work to reform policies to prevent GLBT-related bullying, harassment and discrimination, or adopt curricula that are inclusive of GLBT issues or people. School staff should engage in training or professional development on GLBT issues, accommodate student-led GSAs or similar student clubs, work with community members and organizations, and take other measures to address and respond proactively to outside advocacy and litigation efforts concerning GLBT issues.

Most of all, individuals can act in small but powerful ways to assist GLBT students and colleagues by demonstrating that they are an ally and that they will not tolerate acts of cruelty, bullying or harassment.

Six Tips for Educators When Dealing with Harassment or Bullying of GLBT Students

1. *Take complaints seriously.* If a student comes to you with a complaint about being harassed or bullied, don't dismiss it as "just teasing" or by telling the student to "toughen up"—or saying, "You brought this on yourself." Listen to the student, and tell the student you will take the appropriate action. No allegation about potential harassment or bullying should be ignored because the charge seems improbable or because the behavior seems unlikely to recur or is perceived as a harmless rite of passage.
2. *Report the alleged harassment or bullying.* Immediately report the student's complaint of harassment or bullying to the authority in your district designated for investigating such incidents (often it is the district's Title IX grievance officer). If you don't know who that authority is, ask your principal. And follow up. Check back with the student to find out whether he or she has been informed by the school system the steps it is taking. According to GLSEN's National School Climate Survey, nearly a third (31 %) of the students who do report a harassment or bullying incident say the school or district staff did nothing. Don't be one of them.
3. *Reassure, do not judge.* If a GLBT student comes to you for help, reassure the student that you care about him or her and will do what you can. Do not, however, question the student about his or her sexual orientation. The actual sexual orientation of a student harassed or bullied for being GLBT is irrelevant. The behavior of the perpetrator is what matters. If a student volunteers information about his or her sexual orientation, do not judge the student and keep it confidential. It is not your job to endorse or condemn—the student's safety and education should be your concern.
4. *Offer professional help when appropriate.* If a student seems to be in severe emotional or psychological distress, offer to help the student get in touch with a counselor, social worker, or school psychologist right away; be supportive, but don't give advice beyond your expertise. And if the student seems in imminent physical danger, alert the school administration immediately.
5. *Stand up and speak out for students in need.* If a student comes to you looking for a faculty adviser for a Gay Straight Alliance, seriously consider doing it. Research shows that GSAs make a difference in a school. And speak up at faculty meetings for comprehensive policies that expressly prohibit harassment and bullying of a student because of his or her sexual orientation and gender identity/ expression.
6. *Do something.* If in the hallway, stairwell, or some other school space, you witness a student being harassed and humiliated by another student, step in. Don't pretend you don't see or hear it simply because it is not in your classroom. Everyone involved—the victim, the perpetrator and the witnesses—needs to know this is unacceptable behavior. Get back-up if you need it. And afterwards, always report the incident.



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Chapter 7: Recommendations and Conclusion

Based on the research and presentations delivered at this Summit, here are the suggested recommendations for the education community:

School Districts and Community Organizations

- School districts, nonprofit organizations and philanthropic foundations should partner to bridge the gap in resources and support for GLBT students in poor or rural communities.
- Community centers and student-led organizations such as gay-straight alliances or GSAs must adapt their outreach and programs to the racial, economic, religious, and geographical backgrounds of the local student population.
- School administrators and employees must work together to foster workplace environments in which GLBT employees are treated respectfully and equally; they should also address questions or concerns that GLBT employees and communities have about school employees being “out” in the workplace and clarify if, when and how GLBT-related identity and issues may arise in the classroom.
- School district trainings on GLBT student safety should include all necessary staff, including school counselors, sports coaches, education support professionals and other part-time, volunteer or classified staff that have expertise on GLBT issues or supervisory duties over students.
- School leaders and staff must focus not only on “at-risk youth,” but on “risky environments” that make campuses unsafe for GLBT and other marginalized students. Strategies for eliminating risky environments may include: specific and enumerated policies that protect GLBT youth and employees; meaningful training of school personnel and activities for students; and district-wide approval of curricula that foster inclusion of GLBT people in history and contemporary society. These measures should be taken through collaboration among school administrators, staff and members of the community.
- Community organizations should be enlisted to help schools reform district anti-discrimination policies; address GLBT-related incidents; provide technical assistance and grants to increase awareness and reduce conscious and unconscious bias; identify and engage parent and community partners; sponsor GLBT-related events; and advise in the development of student support clubs.

Schools and Educators

- School employees should consider and discuss the historical and cultural forces impacting current attitudes toward GLBT individuals as they craft trainings and programs designed to improve the climate for GLBT students and school personnel.
- Schools should pursue awareness-building and violence prevention strategies that reflect the impact of homophobic aggression on all members of the school community, including heterosexual youth.

- Efforts to improve academic achievement and reduce truancy and dropouts should include consideration of the deleterious impact of GLBT-related hostility not only in schools but on home dynamics, ethnic and religious community ties, housing stability, and basic life needs such as shelter, nutrition and hygiene.
- Schools should focus on identifying and protecting gender-nonconforming students as an important strategy for protecting students based on actual or perceived sexual orientation.
- School employees must focus more on protecting gender-nonconforming or transgender youth and to help school personnel and students understand and process feelings toward those who are gender-nonconforming or transgender.
- School employees must be aware of the particular challenges of GLBT students of color and acknowledge possible differences in family and community attitudes toward homosexuality and gender nonconformity in communities of color.
- Schools campuses that do not include student-led noncurricular clubs such as GSA's should investigate and remove institutional obstacles to the formation of a GSA, if there is student support for one.
- When counseling youth and addressing social aggression, adults must address the impact of peers and group dynamics on homophobic behavior, i.e., “peer effects.”
- All schools should foster and identify GLBT-supportive school personnel among their ranks and encourage them to connect with at-risk students.
- Schools should partner with local organizations and research institutions to foster research on sexual orientation and gender identity formation and experience, sexual prejudice, ethnographic studies, and the relationship between sexual and gender identities and race, religion, income,

truancy, dropouts, homelessness and academic achievement.

Conclusion

Even as we issue these recommendations, we do not call for a blanket solution. The NEA is aware that the ability of each school to implement the above recommendations will vary from one community to the next. Some schools will be ready to take significant action; others may be prepared only to begin the conversation. In fact, dialogue may be the most valuable of all “reforms,” given that a school's ability to act will be difficult or impossible if members of the school community remain conflicted, divided and paralyzed by emotions or political divisions surrounding homosexuality or gender nonconformity.

Whatever its approach, we call on all schools and education employees to take some step to help our nation's GLBT students and to address GLBT issues, a topic that is inextricably linked to the broader themes of inclusion, respect, equal opportunity, health, safety and student success. By doing so, we adhere to our motto: “A Great Public School for Every Student.”

Diversity in Education: The Hetrick-Martin Institute

According to Thomas Krever, Executive Director of the Hetrick-Martin Institute, there are five overarching tenets or “pillars” that can and should be addressed when focusing on diversity in education and GLBT populations:

1. Cultural Competency: Awareness GLBT youth in language, diversity, celebrations, events, publications
2. School Leadership: Implementing policies, procedures, professional development, and programs on GLBT issues
3. Environmental and behavioral monitoring: Vigorously promoting safety and protecting all members of the school community
4. Mental and physical needs: Helping students and staff to cope with physical needs, stress and marginalization
5. Engagement and socialization: Linking with community activities and outside organizations



About the Author

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Robert Kim, Esq. is a senior policy analyst at the National Education Association, where he headed the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Issues Training Program in the NEA Human and Civil Rights Department from 2006-2009. He is the co-author of an NEA publication entitled *Strengthening the Learning Environment: An Employee's Guide to GLBT Issues, 2nd ed.* (NEA © 2006). Prior to joining the NEA, he served as an independent educational consultant, as staff counsel with the American Civil Liberties Union and the Legal Aid Society, and as an outreach and training director with The Respect for All Project. He was also Assistant to the Counsel at the Department of Juvenile Justice in New York City. Kim received a bachelor's degree from Williams College and a J.D. from Boston College Law School.

David Sheridan and Sabrina Holcomb are writer/editors in the Human and Civil Rights Department of the National Educational Association.

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Appendix A

NEA National Summit on GLBT Issues in Education

July 17-18, 2008

Chicago, IL

Presenters

July 17

Panel I: GLBTs in Society and Education

Historical perspective – where we've come from

Catherine A. Lugg, Ph.D., Rutgers - The State University of New Jersey

GLBT issues today – the framing of the GLBT movement, education, and politics

Kevin K. Kumashiro, Ph.D., University of Illinois at Chicago

On the horizon – GLBT issues, students and the future

Stephen T. Russell, Ph.D., University of Arizona

July 18

Panel II: Relationship of Youth Health and Safety to Academic Achievement

Dynamics of homophobic bullying and its psychosocial effects

V. Paul Poteat, Ph.D., Boston College

Individual and contextual factors related to GLBT prejudice in adolescence

Stacey S. Horn, Ph.D., University of Illinois at Chicago

School safety, health and suicide: trends and influences

Carol Goodenow, Ph.D., Director, School Health Programs, Massachusetts

Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Panel III: Youth Identity and Experiences – Impact on Academic Achievement

Issues faced by transgender and gender-nonconforming youth

Jenifer K. McGuire, Ph.D., M.P.H., Washington State University

Understanding the school experiences of GLBT students of color across diverse contexts

Elizabeth Diaz, Research Associate, Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network

Issues faced by queer youth of color in urban communities and schools

Lance T. McCready, Ph.D., OISE/University of Toronto

Asian and Pacific American identity and GLBT issues

Myron D. Quon, Esq., Legal Director, Asian American Institute

Panel IV: Truancy, School Dropout and Homelessness among GLBT Students

*Lara Brooks, Stephanie Gentry-Fernandez, and Ebonii Warren-Watts
Staff, Broadway Youth Center, Chicago*

Panel V: the Role and Experiences of Adults on GLBT Issues

Challenges for GLBT school personnel

Pedro O. Carrasquillo, M.A., M.Ed., Framingham High School

GLBT school personnel: rights, benefits, protections

Stuart Biegel, Esq., Professor of Law and Education, University of California, Los Angeles

Role of parents and counselors on GLBT issues

Joseph G. Kosciw, Ph.D., Research Director, Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network

Panel VI: Interventions – Policy and Practice

(A) Curriculum and Staff Development

Preparing future educators to raise GLBT and social justice issues in the classroom

Connie E. North, Ph.D., Constitutional Rights Foundation, Chicago

K-12 textbooks and GLBT education

Scott Hirschfeld, M.Ed., M.S., Director of Curriculum, Anti-Defamation League

Community-based, GLBT-related K-12 curricula and resources

Laura A. Szalacha, Ed.D., University of Illinois at Chicago

Educator trainings on GLBT issues: effectiveness and evaluation

Emily A. Greytak, M.S.Ed., Senior Research Associate, Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network

(B) Community Involvement and Responses

Community organizing and public policy

Shannon Sullivan, M.P.H., Executive Director, Illinois Safe Schools Alliance

The role and efficacy of litigation

Robert Kim, Esq., NEA Human and Civil Rights

Advocacy-based strategies

Jim Madigan, Staff Attorney, Midwest Regional Office, Lambda Legal

Appendix B

Glossary of Terms and Labels

Some terms used frequently during the Summit and in this report may be unfamiliar to some readers. Other terms may be considered derogatory or offensive when used out of context. We provide a short glossary here because we believe it's important to understand vocabulary that is commonly used both in the GLBT community, especially among youth, and in research.

Labels are not only personal, but political. As Summit presenter Connie North, who favors the acronym "LGBTQ" over "GLBT," reminds us: "Our labels for people have the power to limit an individual's ability to [adopt] affirming and authentic identities, and to keep intact a social order that [treats] homosexual and gender-nonconforming identities as wrong, pathological, or deprived."¹³⁵

- **Sexual Orientation:** The human characteristic defining whether someone is heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual.
- **Heterosexual:** A person who is attracted to those of the opposite sex. The colloquial equivalent is "straight."
- **Homosexual:** A person who is attracted to those of the same sex. The colloquial equivalent is "gay."
- **Gay:** A homosexual person; can refer to both men and women, but more often to men.
- **Lesbian:** A homosexual woman.
- **Bisexual:** A person who is attracted to men and women.
- **Transgender:** An umbrella term for people whose gender presentation or identity is different from their biological sex—for example, a biological male who appears or identifies at least in some respects as female, or a biological female who appears or identifies in at least some respects as male. "Transsexuals" are transgender people who have typically undergone medical or surgical treatment to reflect their gender identity.
- **Gender-nonconforming:** A person whose appearance or behavior does not match stereotypical or societal norms associated with his or her biological sex. For example, a masculine girl/woman or a feminine boy/man. Gender-nonconforming people may or may not identify as transgender.
- **Gender Expression:** The outward manifestation of a person's gender, e.g., through language, clothing, or behavior.

- **Gender Identity:** A person’s internal sense of where he or she fits along the gender spectrum, e.g., male, female, genderqueer, transgender.

- **GLBT:** Acronym for gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender. Other common configurations of acronyms include LGBT and LGBTQ, with Q standing for “queer” and/or “questioning.”

Note: In this report, we often refer to “GLBT” persons or issues unless a reference or finding is specific to one segment of the GLBT population—for instance, “gay and lesbian youth” or “transgender people.”

- **Queer:** A self-referential term referring to people who do not identify as heterosexual as well as those who are gender-nonconforming. “Queer” generally refers to all GLBT people, although not all GLBT people refer to themselves as “queer,” as it is considered derogatory when used as an epithet by non-GLBT people.

- **Questioning:** A youth or adult who is uncertain about, or exploring, his or her sexual orientation.

- **Mixed-gender:** A person who identifies as both male and female in some respects.

- **Genderqueer:** A person who does not identify as strictly male or female.

- **Homophobia:** Irrational fear of gay men or lesbians.

- **Transphobia:** Irrational fear of transgender people.

- **Sexual prejudice:** Attitudes and beliefs reflecting negative assumptions and stereotypes about sexual orientation and gender identity.

- **Sexual minority:** A gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender person.

- **Heterosexism:** The conscious or unconscious treatment of gay or lesbian people or issues as if they were inferior or nonexistent.



Resources

NEA Resources

For inquiries, or to request a workshop, contact NEA Human and Civil Rights, 202-822-7700, hcrinfo@nea.org.

Online

bNetS@vvy. A bimonthly e-newsletter from NEA's Health Information Network, in partnership with the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children and Sprint, designed to give adults tools to connect with kids and help them stay safer online.

Publications

Dealing with Legal Matters Surrounding Students' Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity. A handbook published by NEA, the National School Boards Association, and 11 other national organizations that offers practical guidance on schools' legal rights and responsibilities.

Focus on Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgendered Persons: In the Intersection—GLBT Youth of Color. A fact sheet on the unique issues faced by GLBT youth who are also ethnic and racial minorities.

Focus on Tomorrow: What Matters Most to Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgendered Persons. A fact sheet on the political priorities, voting patterns, and human and civil rights concerns of the GLBT community.

Just the Facts about Sexual Orientation and Youth: A Primer for Principals, Educators, and School Personnel. A fact sheet published by NEA, the American Psychological Association, and ten other national organizations that provides factual and scientific information about the development of sexual orientation in youth.

Know Your Rights: Legal Protection for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgendered Education Employees. A handbook that offers practical advice for victims of sexual orientation/gender identification discrimination.

Safe Schools Manual: A Resource on Making Schools, Communities, and Families Safe for Children. A scholarly compendium of research and strategies on fostering safety in and outside of schools.

Strengthening the Learning Environment: A School Employee's Guide to Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, & Transgender Issues, 2nd Edition. A manual on GLBT issues geared to education employees.

Trainings

National Training Program on Safety, Bias, and GLBT Issues. A training program designed for all school personnel interested in addressing issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity in schools. The program consists of these four workshops, which can be delivered separately or together: 1) Taking a Stand: Creating Safe Schools for All Students, 2) Walking the Talk: Classroom Strategies for Addressing Bias, 3) Making the Case:

Communication Strategies on GLBT Issues, and 4) Drawing Connections: Exploring Intersections of Gender, Race, and Sexual Orientation.

Bullying and Sexual Harassment Prevention/Intervention National Training Cadre. A national peer-to-peer training program that provides skills training to assist communities in developing solutions that will eradicate bullying and sexual harassment from America's public schools. The national cadre provides training to members at state, local, regional, and national training events, seminars, and conferences.

Other Resources

American Federation of Teachers
www.aft.org

American Civil Liberties Union: Making Schools Safe Program
www.aclu.org

Centerlink: The Community of LGBT Centers
www.lgbtcenters.org

Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network
www.glsen.org

Gender Public Advocacy Coalition
www.gpac.org

GSA Network
www.gsanetwork.org

Hetrick-Martin Institute
www.hmi.org

Human Rights Campaign
www.hrc.org

Lambda Legal
www.lambdalegal.org

Mental Health America
www.mentalhealthamerica.net/go/whatdoesgaymean

National Center for Lesbian Rights
www.nclrights.org

National Gay and Lesbian Task Force
www.thetaskforce.org
NEA Health Information Network
www.neahin.org

Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays
www.pflag.org

The Respect for All Project-Groundspark
<http://groundspark.org/respect-for-all>

The Safe Schools Coalition
www.safeschoolscoalition.org

Transgender Law Center
www.transgenderlawcenter.org

Youth Resource: A Project of Advocates for Youth
(includes resources for GLBT youth of color)
www.youthresource.com



Endnotes

Information derived from remarks made during the 2008 NEA National Summit on GLBT Issues in Education is cited as “Summit 2008” after the name of the presenter who made such remarks. We have made every attempt to be accurate; please note, however, that, in some instances, the presenter may have been either paraphrasing his or her own prior research or information of which he or she is not the original or sole author.

- ¹ Mary Oliver, *A Poetry Handbook*, Harcourt Brace and Company, 1994, pp. 37.
- ² See www.whitehouse.gov/agenda/civil_rights (viewed February 22, 2009).
- ³ See *Romer v. Evans*, 517 U.S. 620 (1996) and *Lawrence v. Texas*, 539 U.S. 558 (2003).
- ⁴ See Human Rights Campaign, www.hrc.org/documents/Relationship_Recognition_Laws_Map.pdf (as of April 7, 2009).
- ⁵ See www.hrc.org/documents/Employment_Laws_and_Policies.pdf (as of February 2009).
- ⁶ Kosciw, J.G., Diaz, E.M., and Greytak, E.A. (2008). *2007 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth in our nation's schools*. New York: GLSEN, pp. xxii-xxiii.
- ⁷ Catherine A. Lugg, “GLBT Issues and U.S. Public Schools: How We Got Here,” NEA National Summit on GLBT Issues in Education, Chicago (“Summit 2008”), July 17, 2008.
- ⁸ See Boswell, J. (1980). *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality*. University of Chicago.
- ⁹ Gregory M. Herek, Ph.D., “Facts About Homosexuality and Mental Health,” <http://psychology.ucdavis.edu/rainbow> (viewed December 2008).
- ¹⁰ Lugg, Summit 2008.
- ¹¹ American Psychological Association, www.apa.org/topics/transgender.html (viewed December 17, 2008).
- ¹² American Psychiatric Association, www.psych.org (viewed December 17, 2008).
- ¹³ Lugg, Summit 2008.
- ¹⁴ *Lawrence v. Texas*, 539 U.S. 558 (2003).
- ¹⁵ Id.
- ¹⁶ Lugg, Summit 2008.
- ¹⁷ Lugg, Summit 2008.
- ¹⁸ Lugg, Summit 2008.
- ¹⁹ Stacey S. Horn, “Individual and Contextual Factors Related to Sexual Prejudice in Adolescence,” Summit 2008.
- ²⁰ Kevin K. Kumashiro, “GLBT Issues Today—The Framing of the GLBT Movement, Education, and Politics,” Summit 2008.
- ²¹ Kumashiro, Summit 2008.
- ²² Horn, Summit 2008.
- ²³ Kumashiro, Summit 2008.
- ²⁴ Kumashiro, Summit 2008.
- ²⁵ Kumashiro, Summit 2008.
- ²⁶ Stephen T. Russell, “On the Horizon: GLBT Issues, Students, and the Future,” Summit 2008.
- ²⁷ Russell, Summit 2008.
- ²⁸ Russell, Summit 2008.
- ²⁹ Russell, Summit 2008.

- ³⁰ Russell, Summit 2008.
- ³¹ Horn, Summit 2008.
- ³² Lance T. McCready, “Queer Youth of Color in Urban School Communities,” Summit 2008.
- ³³ Cianciotto, J. & Cahill, S. (2003). *Education policy: Issues affecting lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth*. New York: The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute, p. 17. In this report, the “tricultural experience” is grouped somewhat differently: (1) homophobia within communities of color, (2) racism within GLBT communities, and (3) both racism and homophobia in society at large.
- ³⁴ McCready, Summit 2008.
- ³⁵ Elizabeth Diaz, “Understanding the School Experiences of LGBT Students of Color Across Diverse Contexts,” Summit 2008.
- ³⁶ Diaz, Summit 2008.
- ³⁷ Russell, Summit 2008.
- ³⁸ Myron D. Quon, “Asian American Pacific Islander and GLBT Identity,” Summit 2008.
- ³⁹ McCready, Summit 2008.
- ⁴⁰ McCready, Summit 2008.
- ⁴¹ McCready, Summit 2008.
- ⁴² Jerald Newberry, Facilitator, “Relationship of Youth Health and Safety to Academic Achievement,” Summit 2008.
- ⁴³ Horn, Summit 2008.
- ⁴⁴ Jenifer K. McGuire, “Issues Faced by Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Youth,” Summit 2008.
- ⁴⁵ McGuire, Summit 2008.
- ⁴⁶ McGuire, Summit 2008.
- ⁴⁷ Ebonii Warren-Watts, “Implications of GLBT Dropouts and Homelessness on Schools,” Summit 2008.
- ⁴⁸ Warren-Watts, Summit 2008.
- ⁴⁹ Kosciw et al. (GLSEN 2008), pp. 71-72.
- ⁵⁰ Horn, Summit 2008.
- ⁵¹ Kosciw et al. (GLSEN 2008), pp. 73-74.
- ⁵² Kosciw et al. (GLSEN 2008), p. 73.
- ⁵³ Horn, Summit 2008.
- ⁵⁴ See Maskovsky, J. (2004), *Sexual minorities and the new urban poverty, from Life In America: Identity and Everyday Experience* (ed. Baker, L.D., Blackwell Publishing), p. 234.
- ⁵⁵ Horn, Summit 2008.
- ⁵⁶ Horn, Summit 2008.
- ⁵⁷ Horn, Summit 2008.
- ⁵⁸ V. Paul Poteat, “Dynamics of Homophobic Bullying and its Psychosocial Effects,” Summit 2008.
- ⁵⁹ Poteat, Summit 2008.
- ⁶⁰ Poteat, Summit 2008.
- ⁶¹ Poteat, Summit 2008.
- ⁶² Poteat, Summit 2008.
- ⁶³ Kosciw et al. (GLSEN 2008), pp. 41, 51.
- ⁶⁴ Kosciw et al., *2007 National School Climate Survey: Executive Summary* (GLSEN 2008).

- ⁶⁵ California Safe Schools Coalition and 4-H Center for Youth Development, University of California, Davis. *Safe Place to Learn: Consequences of Harassment Based on Actual or Perceived Sexual Orientation and Gender Non-Conformity and Steps for Making Schools Safer* (2004).
- ⁶⁶ Carol Goodenow, “Trends and Influences in School Safety, Suicidality, and Achievement Among GLB Youth,” Summit 2008.
- ⁶⁷ Goodenow, Summit 2008.
- ⁶⁸ Goodenow, Summit 2008.
- ⁶⁹ U.S. Secret Service and the U.S. Department of Education (2002). *The final report and findings of the safe school initiative: implications for the prevention of school attacks in the United States*.
- ⁷⁰ California Safe Schools Coalition (2004).
- ⁷¹ Goodenow, Summit 2008.
- ⁷² Goodenow, Summit 2008.
- ⁷³ Kosciw et al. (GLSEN 2008), p. xiv.
- ⁷⁴ Russell et al. (2006). *Harassment in school based on actual or perceived sexual orientation: prevalence and consequences*. California Safe Schools Coalition. (Research Brief No. 2).
- ⁷⁵ Kosciw et al. (GLSEN 2008), p. 84.
- ⁷⁶ Goodenow, Summit 2008.
- ⁷⁷ Goodenow, Summit 2008.
- ⁷⁸ Stephanie Gentry-Fernandez, “Implications of GLBT Dropouts and Homelessness on Schools,” Summit 2008.
- ⁷⁹ Ray, N. (2006). *Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth: An epidemic of homelessness*. New York: National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute and the National Coalition for the Homeless.
- ⁸⁰ Warren-Watts, Summit 2008.
- ⁸¹ Ray (2006).
- ⁸² Ray (2006) (citing Ramafedi 1987).
- ⁸³ Lara Brooks, “Implications of GLBT Dropouts and Homelessness on Schools,” Summit 2008.
- ⁸⁴ Brooks, Summit 2008.
- ⁸⁵ Gentry-Fernandez, Summit 2008.
- ⁸⁶ Goodenow, Summit 2008.
- ⁸⁷ California Safe Schools Coalition (2004).
- ⁸⁸ Goodenow, Summit 2008.
- ⁸⁹ Kosciw et al. (GLSEN 2008), p. 86, Fig. 40.
- ⁹⁰ Poteat, Summit 2008.
- ⁹¹ Poteat, Summit 2008.
- ⁹² Pedro O. Carrasquillo, “Challenges for GLBT school personnel,” Summit 2008.
- ⁹³ Excerpt from Peggy McIntosh’s 1988 Working Paper #189, published in *Peace and Freedom*, July/August 1989; reprinted in *Independent School*, Winter 1990.
- ⁹⁴ See Carleton College, <http://apps.carleton.edu/campus/gsc/lgbtqa/ally/heterosexism/privilege/>, University of Denver, <http://www.du.edu/orgs/pride/HeterosexualP.html>, University of Missouri, <http://web.missouri.edu/~umcstudentlifelgbt/resources/heterosexualprivilegeintro.pdf>, University of Maryland, http://74.125.45.132/search?q=cache:2ZszzS-Lk9EJ:www.thataway.org/exchange/files/docs/What_Is_Heterosexual_Privilege.doc+heterosexual+privilege+university+maryland&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=1&gl=us&client=safari (all viewed December 2008).

- ⁹⁵ Used with permission by Shiva Subbaraman, University of Maryland, http://www.thataway.org/exchange/files/docs/What_Is_Heterosexual_Privilege.doc.
- ⁹⁶ Pedro O. Carrasquillo, Summit 2008.
- ⁹⁷ See Badgett, M.V.L., Lau, H., Sears, B., Ho, D. (2007). "Bias in the Workplace: Consistent Evidence of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Discrimination." The Williams Institute.
- ⁹⁸ See http://www.Whitehouse.gov/agenda/civil_rights/ (viewed January 13, 2009).
- ⁹⁹ See National Education Association (2006), *Strengthening the Learning Environment: a School Employee's Guide to GLBT Issues, 2nd ed.*, p. 14.
- ¹⁰⁰ *Strengthening the Learning Environment*, p. 16.
- ¹⁰¹ Stuart Biegel, "The Right to Be Out for GLBT Educators," Summit 2008.
- ¹⁰² Biegel, Summit 2008.
- ¹⁰³ Biegel, Summit 2008.
- ¹⁰⁴ Romero, Baumle, Badgett and Gates. The Williams Institute. Census Snapshot (December 2007).
- ¹⁰⁵ Kosciw, J.G. and Diaz, E.M. (2008). *Involved, Invisible, Ignored: The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Parents and Their Children in Our Nation's K-12 Schools*. New York: GLSEN.
- ¹⁰⁶ Kosciw, Summit 2008.
- ¹⁰⁷ Goodenow, Summit 2008.
- ¹⁰⁸ California Safe Schools Coalition (2004); GLSEN (2008).
- ¹⁰⁹ Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, website (viewed January 13, 2009): <http://www.doe.mass.edu/cnp/GSA/safegl.html>
- ¹¹⁰ E.g., Goodenow, Kosciw, and Russell, Summit 2008 (see reports of GLSEN (2008), California Safe Schools Coalition (2004), Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey (2007)).
- ¹¹¹ Laura A. Szalacha, "Within and Without: LGBT Programs In and Outside of the Classroom, K to 12," Summit 2008 (citing *What School Personnel Need to Address LGBT Issues In School – A Study of Personnel in California, Massachusetts, and Minnesota*).
- ¹¹² Hirschfeld, S., *Stonewall Jackson and the Stonewall Riots Together: When will LGBT themes be granted their rightful place in textbook accounts of U.S. history?* (© 2003 Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network).
- ¹¹³ Scott Hirschfeld, "K-12 Textbooks and GLBT Curriculum," Summit 2008.
- ¹¹⁴ Hirschfeld, Summit 2008.
- ¹¹⁵ From keynote speech of David A. Sanchez, President, California Teachers Association, Summit 2008.
- ¹¹⁶ See Shannon Sullivan, "Community Organizing and Public Policy," Summit 2008; www.illinoissafeschools.org.
- ¹¹⁷ Emily A. Greytak, "Educator Training on GLBT Issues: Effectiveness and Evaluation," Summit 2008.
- ¹¹⁸ Goodenow, Summit 2008.
- ¹¹⁹ Safe Schools NC, website (viewed January 13, 2009): <http://www.safeschoolsnc.com/Resources.asp>
- ¹²⁰ California Safe Schools Coalition, www.casafeschools.org.
- ¹²¹ Horn, Summit 2008.
- ¹²² Carrasquillo, Summit 2008.
- ¹²³ Brooks, Gentry-Fernandez, and Warren-Watts, Summit 2008.
- ¹²⁴ Kosciw et al. (GLSEN 2008), pp. 41, 51.
- ¹²⁵ Goodenow, Summit 2008.
- ¹²⁶ Goodenow, Summit 2008.

¹²⁷ Szalacha, Summit 2008 (citing her research).

¹²⁸ Gentry-Fernandez, Summit 2008.

¹²⁹ See McCready, Summit 2008 (observing that terminology such as “GSA” and “gay” may not be as popular in all socioeconomic and racial communities).

¹³⁰ Sullivan, Summit 2008.

¹³¹ Illinois Safe Schools Alliance, www.illinoissafeschools.org.

¹³² Sullivan, Summit 2008.

¹³³ James Madigan, “The Role of Advocacy in Addressing GLBT Issues in Schools,” Summit 2008.

¹³⁴ *Strengthening the Learning Environment*, pp. 14-19.

¹³⁵ Connie E. North, “Preparing Future Educators to Raise GLBT and Social Justice Issues in the Classroom,” Summit 2008.



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