

Inclusive Learning:

**A Synthesis of 20+ years of
Research on the Education and
Wellbeing Impacts of Inclusive
Curriculum, Instruction, and
School Books**

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Acknowledgements

This Issue Brief was shaped and strengthened by the input of several individuals working in schools, communities, and organizations to advance educational justice. Special thanks to the Center for Native American Youth; the Hispanic Federation; UnidosUS; Alissa Bey, PhD; Kory Geller, GLSEN Mid-Hudson Chapter; and TJ Mitchell, H.S. Librarian, TX for their thoughtful review and feedback on earlier versions. Thanks to the Movement Advancement Project for state policy data that supported the analyses in this brief.

Report Design

Carrie Chatterson Studio

When referencing this document, we recommend the following citation:

GLSEN (2024). *Inclusive Learning: A Synthesis of 20+ years of Research on the Education and Wellbeing Impacts of Inclusive Curriculum, Instruction, and School Books*. New York: GLSEN.

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First published in the United States of America in 2024

By GLSEN

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT¹

Especially in the past three years, most of our activities are virtual and digital. We want to take a moment to consider the legacy of colonization embedded within the technology, structures, and ways of thinking we use every day. In Turtle Island, much of this infrastructure sits on stolen land acquired under the extractive logic of white settler expansion. We are using equipment and high-speed internet, not available in many Indigenous communities. The technologies we use leave significant carbon footprints, contributing to changing climates that disproportionately affect Indigenous people worldwide. As an organization, we recognize this history and uplift the sovereignty of Indigenous people, data, and territory. We commit, beyond symbolic rhetoric, to dismantling all ongoing settler-colonial practices and their material implications on our digital worlds.

Our website www.glsen.org runs on servers located on Turtle Island. To learn whose land you are on visit <https://native-land.ca/>. We invite you to read this poem out loud to yourself and to your community.

A Digital Land Acknowledgement • Existing As a Settler On Unceded Land: A Guide • By Dierdre Lee

Step one

Read this poem aloud
Ideally outside
in the sun
So the trees & the wind can listen in
If this makes you roll your eyes
Stop
Go away
Have a nap
Try again

Step two

Learn what “unceded” means
Understand that this
is just the beginning

Step three

Be present
with feelings of being uncomfortable
or embarrassed
You could probably use the practice
realizing
these feelings are not life-threatening

Step four

Locate yourself
Specifically
Geographically
Time for Q&A
Time to know
Time to say
Whose traditional territory
do you live
& breathe
& work
& love upon?
Who was here
for thousands of years
before you?

Step five

Recognize
that though
Indigenous Peoples
are ancient
We are also
still alive
Resist the urge to mythologize
Reject what
little
(if anything)
you have been taught in school
or in most mainstream media
Embrace this truth:
You have no idea

Step six

It's not your job to fix this
Or it is
But as an accomplice
You are not the boss
No matter your activist street cred
In this
you are a rookie
Let go of expectation
Of being in charge
Of being lauded
Of getting an ally cookie

Step seven

Seven generations
Seven teachings
Seven months to seventy
1752 Treaty
Elders
& youth
Are rising
Are speaking
Are you listening?
Are you learning?

Step eight

Infinity
Pace yourself on this journey
This
is not an on-off switch
This
is no magic-spell scenario
This
is more like encouraging plants to grow
Nurture your skills
& heart
Absorb
Process
Try
Fuck up
Rest
Restart

Step nine

This guide
is not permanent
Or definitive
Or chronological
There is no such thing as linear time
This work does not come with finish line

¹ We have adapted this land acknowledgement from <https://www.theatreto.com/digital-land-acknowledgement/> and <https://datasociety.net/digital-land-acknowledgement/>

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Introduction

For over twenty years, GLSEN has researched K-12 school conditions for LGBTQI+ youth, as well as the policies and practices that support their wellbeing and educational success.

From this research, GLSEN identified Four Supports:

- 1 GSAs (Gay Straight Alliances or Gender and Sexuality Alliances) and other clubs that facilitate youth leadership;
- 2 Supportive school staff, including teachers, administrators school mental health professionals, and school nurses;
- 3 Inclusive Learning, encompassing curriculum, instruction, school libraries, and school internet access that includes or provides access to positive representations of LGBTQI+ people, history, or topics; and
- 4 Comprehensive policies that prohibit discrimination² and harassment³, assault⁴, or bullying⁵ based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

When these Four Supports are in place, LGBTQI+ students experience less harassment and discrimination, do better in school, and experience a better school climate.

These Four Supports are the focus of GLSEN's programs, advocacy, research, and policy work. This issue brief focuses on "inclusive learning," which encompasses and extends beyond GLSEN's historic focus on classroom instruction, previously referred to as the

² In GLSEN's survey research, "discrimination" refers to students' self-reported experiences of policies or practices that either unfairly specifically target LGBTQI+ students or are applied differentially to LGBTQI+ students. For example, being prevented from using gender-consistent bathrooms or being disciplined at school for identifying as LGBTQI+.

³ In GLSEN's survey research, "harassment" refers to students' self-reported experiences of verbal harassment (e.g., name-calling, threats), or physical harassment (e.g., being shoved or pushed). GLSEN has asked about students' experiences with harassment based on sexual orientation, gender, race, disability, and other personal characteristics. Separately, GLSEN has researched LGBTQI+ students' experiences with sexual harassment, including targeted sexual remarks or inappropriate touching, and with online harassment or cyberbullying. GLSEN uses the term "victimization" to refer collectively to harassment and assault.

⁴ In GLSEN's survey research, "assault" refers to students' self-reported experiences of physical assault (e.g., being punched, kicked, or injured with a weapon). GLSEN has asked about students' experiences with assault based on sexual orientation, gender, race, disability, and other personal characteristics. GLSEN uses the term "victimization" to refer collectively to harassment and assault.

⁵ GLSEN's survey research does not specifically ask about students' experiences with "bullying." "Bullying" is used interchangeably with "harassment" in GLSEN's discussion of survey findings and relevant scholarship. Some may use the term bullying to differentiate harassment based on personal characteristics, including sexual orientation and gender identity, from sexual harassment.

Inclusive Learning refers to K-12 instruction, school books, and other resources that provide students access to affirming representations of LGBTQI+ people, BIPOC communities, disabled people, and other marginalized peoples and communities.

“inclusive curriculum” core support.⁶ Inclusive instruction, instructional material, school library books, and other learning resources serve as a mirror when reflecting youth and their experiences back to themselves, as a window when providing the opportunity to understand the experiences and perspectives of those who possess different identities, and as a sliding glass door when empowering youth to move towards embracing one’s authentic self.⁷

GLSEN has assessed the impact of LGBTQI+ inclusive instruction and consistently found that LGBTQI+ students who report being taught positive representations of LGBTQI+ people, history, or topics experience less severe anti-LGBTQI+ victimization, are less likely to miss school because they feel unsafe, report greater feelings of belonging at school and improved mental health, compared to LGBTQI+ students who are not taught positive representations of LGBTQI+ people, history, or topics.⁸ Separately, GLSEN has asked youth about their access to information about LGBTQI+ people, history, and topics via school libraries, textbooks and other instructional material, and school internet access.⁹ **For the first time, this brief includes an assessment of the impact of these other inclusive learning supports.** We found that LGBTQI+ inclusive instructional materials, LGBTQI+ inclusive school libraries, and the ability to access information about LGBTQI+ topics via school internet are associated with more positive school climates where LGBTQI+ students report higher levels of peer acceptance, a lower likelihood of reporting that they felt unsafe related to their LGBTQI+ identity, and a lower likelihood of missing schools due to feeling unsafe, compared to LGBTQI+ students who lacked access to these LGBTQI+ inclusive learning supports.

Taken together, the issue brief synthesizes GLSEN’s research on all of these different sites of student learning to:

- Assess what progress has been made in advancing evidence-based policies and practices that best support LGBTQI+ students’ wellbeing, mental health, and educational success.
- Clarify the different levers that are available for policymakers, educators, and community members to affect change.

⁶ “Curriculum” is commonly used to refer both to the unified program of learning adopted by local education agencies and by the particular program of learning provided by individual teachers. The use of the same term for both can obscure levers to affect change. As discussed in the following section, we use “curriculum” to refer to locally adopted curriculum and “instruction” to refer to what students are taught by teachers.

⁷ Bishop, Rudine Sims (1990). “Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors.” *Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom*, 6(3). Johnson, Nancy J., Melanie D. Koss, and Miriam Martinez. (2018). *Through the sliding glass door: # EmpowerTheReader.* *The Reading Teacher* 71.5: 569-577.

⁸ GLSEN. (N.D.). [National School Climate Survey Report Archive.](#)

⁹ GLSEN has used different terminology to refer collectively to these different sites of learning. Between 2001 and 2005, GLSEN’s biennial National School Climate Survey (NSCS) reports used “resources and curricula” to capture LGBTQI+ secondary students’ access to LGBTQI+ inclusive learning. Our 2007 and 2009 NSCS reports referred to supports as “curricula resources” and our 2011 through 2021 biennial NSCS reports referred to the same supports as “inclusive curricular resources.”

GLSEN's vision of schools as places of liberation where young people thrive and reach their full potential is part of education justice movements across the country that advance racial, gender, and disability justice outcomes in education.

GLSEN's vision of schools as places of liberation where young people thrive and reach their full potential is part of education justice movements across the country that advance racial, gender, and disability justice outcomes in education. Our research has demonstrated that LGBTQI+ students who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC)¹⁰, students with disabilities¹¹, and who otherwise hold multiple marginalized identities have unique experiences and generally face more hostile school climates. For example, at least two in five LGBTQI+ youth who are Asian or Pacific Islander¹², Black¹³, Latine¹⁴, and Native American, American Indian, or Alaska Native¹⁵ experienced both harassment or assault based on their sexual orientation and their race/ethnicity. Students who experienced both anti-LGBTQI+ and racist bullying reported the poorest wellbeing and are most likely to report feeling unsafe at school, compared to those who experienced one or neither form of victimization. By analyzing patterns in extremists' attacks on inclusive schools (see pp. 6-9), as well as by listening to what members of GLSEN's National Student Council (NSC) spoke of when participating in policy convenings in 2021 through 2023, we have found a recurring theme: learning that is inclusive of LGBTQI+ communities cannot be distinguished from the demands and advocacies of inclusive learning representative of BIPOC communities and other communities that experience marginalization.¹⁶ Consideration of intersectionality¹⁷ is not a value-add or a luxury, but a necessity. This framework is essential to the achievement of our mission.

¹⁰ See Footnotes 11-14. GLSEN's NSCS reports include additional research on BIPOC LGBTQI+ youth. GLSEN. [National School Climate Survey Report Archive](#). See also: Truong, N. L., & Kosciw, J. G. (2022). [The Experiences of Middle Eastern and North African \(MENA\) LGBTQ Students in US Secondary Schools. Research Brief](#). GLSEN.

¹¹ For example, compared to their non-disabled LGBTQI+ peers, disabled LGBTQI+ students were more likely to report being disciplined at school and more than twice as likely to report being referred to law enforcement as a result of school discipline. Palmer, N. A., Greytak, E. A., and Kosciw, J. G. (2016). [Educational exclusion: Drop out, push out, and school-to-prison pipeline among LGBTQ youth](#). New York: GLSEN.

¹² 40.0% of Asian or Pacific Islander LGBTQI+ youth experienced harassment or assault based on both their sexual orientation and their race/ethnicity. Truong, N. L., Zongrone, A. D., & Kosciw, J. G. (2020). [Erasure and Resilience: The Experiences of LGBTQ Students of Color. Asian American and Pacific Islander LGBTQ Youth in US Schools](#). GLSEN.

¹³ 40.0% of Black LGBTQI+ youth experienced harassment or assault based on both their sexual orientation and their race/ethnicity. Truong, N. L., Zongrone, A. D., & Kosciw, J. G. (2020). [Erasure and Resilience: The Experiences of LGBTQ Students of Color. Black LGBTQ Youth in US Schools](#). GLSEN.

¹⁴ 41.6% of Latine LGBTQI+ youth experienced harassment or assault based on both their sexual orientation and their race/ethnicity. Zongrone, A. D., Truong, N. L., & Kosciw, J. G. (2020). [Erasure and Resilience: The Experiences of LGBTQ Students of Color. Latinx LGBTQ Youth in US Schools](#). GLSEN.

¹⁵ 41.2% of Indigenous LGBTQI+ youth experienced harassment or assault based on both their sexual orientation and their race/ethnicity. Zongrone, A. D., Truong, N. L., & Kosciw, J. G. (2020). [Erasure and Resilience: The experiences of LGBTQ students of color, Native American, American Indian, and Alaska Native LGBTQ youth in U.S. schools](#). GLSEN.

¹⁶ GLSEN Research values participatory research practices of involving people closest to the ground as a strategy of education justice. Refer to Appendix for a description of the process design used to create this brief.

¹⁷ Intersectionality is a concept defined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw to illuminate the unique experiences of individuals who hold multiple marginalized identities and are often inadequately served by policies, procedures, or programs that consider only one aspect of their identity. Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics. University of Chicago Legal Forum, 1989 (Article 8). <http://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8>.

This brief draws on education research centering BIPOC youth and other youth who experience marginalization to supplement prior GLSEN research and lay a foundation for future research. **The term “inclusive” without further specification is used to refer to K-12 learning sites, resources, and policies that are inclusive of LGBTQI+ people, BIPOC communities, people with disabilities, and other communities that experience marginalization.**

Key Terms

Curricular Standards

Goals, including minimum expectations, for student learning determined by the state education agency and/or state law.

Curriculum

A detailed plan for a series of unified lessons, including instructional material, for achieving student learning goals in a particular subject, adopted by a local education agency (LEA).

Inclusive

K-12 learning sites, resources, and policies that are inclusive of LGBTQI+ people, BIPOC communities, disabled people, and other marginalized peoples and communities.

Instruction

Learning activities, including lectures and facilitated discussions, that implement curriculum. Generally, teachers tailor instruction to best support student learning.

Instructional Material

Textbooks and other materials assigned to students some of which are determined by curriculum. Generally, teachers may supplement in alignment with their LEA curriculum.

Local Education Agency (LEA)

The body governing public schools within a specific district, unit, or other locality that is commonly referred to as a local school board.

School Climate

Overall quality of school experiences and environment. GLSEN measures LGBTQI+ students' perceptions of school climate. A hostile school climate is one where students experience more anti-LGBTQI+ discrimination and victimization, including harassment (e.g., name-calling and threats) and physical assault (e.g., being punched, kicked, or injured with a weapon), both of which are associated with poorer educational out-comes and wellbeing. GLSEN's Four Supports are associated with a less hostile or more positive school climate, and with better educational, mental health, and wellbeing outcomes.

Selection/Collection Development Policies

Procedures by which school library books and resources are selected, reviewed, and updated.

State Education Agency (SEA)

The state body governing K-12 education, commonly referred to as a Department of Education or a State Board of Education.

Student-Driven Learning

Practices through which youth direct their own education, including selection of a project topic and independent research using school library resources or school internet.



Systems Shaping What Students Learn

In K-12 public schools, curriculum is determined locally by a local education agency (LEA), often referred to as a school board.¹⁸ For each subject, the curriculum includes the core instructional content, including sequencing and instructional materials, such as textbooks and other assigned reading, listening, or viewing content. Generally, locally adopted curriculum is shaped by state curricular standards that establish goals or minimum expectations for student learning, including promotion to the next grade and graduation.

Many LEAs form committees or work groups to lead curriculum review and adoption.¹⁹ Local teachers and administrators serve on or advise the committee. Students, parents or guardians, and other community members may have the opportunity to advise curriculum committees.²⁰ In nineteen states, the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, the state education agency (SEA) plays a key role in the selection of instructional materials by curating a list of required or recommended instructional materials; in other states, LEAs are responsible for selecting instructional materials, though they may be able to refer to an SEA resource for guidance.²¹ Teachers generally

¹⁸ Some LEAs delegate the adoption of curriculum to schools or a hyperlocal school governance entity. For example, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) delegates curriculum adoption to the local school councils that govern individual schools within CPS, while providing CPS-specific curricular standards, termed “frameworks,” that specify additional learning goals beyond those established by the Illinois State Board of Education and state law. Chicago Public Schools. (N.D.) Educational Standards. <https://www.cps.edu/academics/educational-standards/> (Accessed November 3, 2023).

Additionally, while charter schools are public schools, they are empowered to adopt curriculum independent of an LEA. Valant, J. (2019, October 15). [What are charter schools and do they deliver?](#) Brookings Institute. Prothero, Arianna. (2018, August 9). [What are Charter Schools?](#) EducationWeek.

¹⁹ Allen, I. E., and Seaman, J. (2017). What We Teach: K-12 School District Curriculum Adoption Process, 2017. Babson Survey Research Group. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED582435>.

Some LEAs, especially those that are smaller and rural, have no centralized guidance around curriculum or textbooks, and teachers develop curriculum on their own. This is especially the case for non-core / non-tested subjects.

²⁰ Allen, I. E., and Seaman, J. (2017). What We Teach. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED582435>.

²¹ The role of the SEA varies from more prescriptive (e.g., Oklahoma) to advisory (e.g., Utah). Education Commission of the States, “Response to Information Request,” (January 1, 2022), https://www.ecs.org/wp-content/uploads/State-Information-Request_Textbook-Adoption-Policies.pdf.

See also Allen, I. E., and Seaman, J. (2017). What We Teach. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED582435> (p. 13).

have the discretion to build upon locally adopted curriculum in alignment with the learning goals established therein. As a result, it is possible for two students enrolled in different 9th-grade history classes in the school district to have different classroom learning experiences. For clarity — and to center students' experience — we refer to the curriculum that an individual teacher develops and implements in their class as instruction.

In states with inclusive curricular standards, LEAs are empowered to adopt inclusive curriculum and, in turn, teachers are empowered to provide inclusive instruction, including lessons, direct instruction, facilitated discussions, and learning activities that include the stories, perspectives, and contributions of LGBTQI+ people, BIPOC communities, people with disabilities, and other marginalized communities. Inclusive curricular standards also empower local educators to respond effectively to efforts to censor instruction on marginalized communities.

Youth are not passive recipients of instruction. Through their choice of a topic for a classroom project, reading beyond assigned pages, and exploring resources available in a school library through school internet, student-driven learning refers to the multiple ways in which youth direct their own education.²² In addition to inclusive curricular standards (SEAs) and curriculum (LEAs), other inclusive learning policies and programming expand and support students' independent inquiry. For example, the books and resources available through school libraries are shaped by selection or collection development policies.²³ In most cases, LEAs have selection or collection development policies that are informed by standards set by national and state school library associations.²⁴

As with instruction, inclusive state policies empower LEAs and school librarians to develop holdings that include books and resources about LGBTQI+ people, BIPOC communities, people with disabilities, and other marginalized communities and prepare educators to respond effectively to bias-based book removal requests.

²² Student-driven learning largely encompasses self-directed learning, however, students may engage in self-determined learning particularly as they progress through their K-12 education (e.g., independent research that is not required for class, for which a student may use school library resources). Brandt, W. C. (2020). Measuring Student Success Skills: A Review of the Literature on Self-Directed Learning. 21st Century Success Skills. *National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment*. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED607782.pdf>.

²³ Dawkins, A. M., & Eidson, E. (2021). A Content Analysis of District School Library Selection Policies in the United States. *School Library Research*, 24. www.ala.org/aasl/slr/volume24/dawkins-eidson. Mumma, K. S. (2023). **Politics and school libraries: What shapes students' access to controversial content**. Brookings Institute. Mumma, K. S. (2023). *Politics and Children's Books: Evidence from School Library Collections*. (EdWorkingPaper: 22-693). Retrieved from Annenberg Institute at Brown University: <https://doi.org/10.26300/NT5F-FB03>.

²⁴ Mumma, K. S. (2023). **Politics and school libraries: What shapes students' access to controversial content**. Brookings Institute. Lieberman, M. (2023, Feb. 27). **How School Libraries Buy Books, Struggle for Funds, and Confront Book Bans: An Explainer**. EducationWeek.

Where both inclusive state curricular standards and locally adopted inclusive curriculum are absent, educators may or may not implement inclusive instruction owing to factors including the degree of autonomy they have²⁵ and their access to related professional development.²⁶ This creates inconsistencies and gaps in the landscape of inclusive learning in a grade level or district. Further, it can create unique pressures for LGBTQI+ and other underrepresented educators,²⁷ potentially contributing to educator burnout and attrition that intensifies shortages and inhibits local efforts to diversify the educator workforce to reflect and better serve diverse students.

Curriculum censorship laws and book bans that restrict affirming representations of LGBTQI+ people and accurate representations of history have a chilling effect on inclusive learning and harm marginalized students, as discussed later in this brief (see: [Harms of Censoring Inclusive Learning](#)).

²⁵ GLSEN's 2015 survey of secondary school teachers found that one-third (33.1%) were comfortable (somewhat or very) including LGBTQI+ topics in their curriculum and fewer (14.9%) reported doing so. The survey asked teachers about their reasons for not engaging in LGBTQI+ supportive practices, including providing LGBTQI+ inclusive instruction. 15.4% of teachers cited a lack of autonomy as a reason for not engaging in LGBTQI+ supportive practices, including providing LGBTQI+ inclusive instruction, and 11.0% cited a lack of administrative support. Greytak, E. A., Kosciw, J. G., Villenas, C., & Giga, N. M. (2016). [From Teasing to Torment: School Climate Revisited. A Survey of US Secondary School Students and Teachers](#). GLSEN. (pp. 67-68).

²⁶ A 2016 survey of teacher educators found that, while the majority (80.6%) agreed that including LGBTQI+ people, history, or events in their K-12 curricula or teaching is somewhat or very important, just over 1 in 3 (33.7%) received any professional development on how to do so themselves and a smaller share (28.8%) reported professional development specifically related to LGBTQI+ history or significant LGBTQI+ people in the subject they teach. Clark, C. M. & Kosciw, J. G. (2022). [Educating educators: Knowledge, beliefs, and practice of teacher educators on LGBTQ issues](#). New York: GLSEN. See also: Ladson-Billings, G. (2006). It's Not the Culture of Poverty, It's the Poverty of Culture: The Problem with Teacher Education. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 37(2), 104–109. <https://doi.org/10.1525/aeq.2006.37.2.104>. Picower, B. (2021). *Reading, Writing, and Racism*. Penguin RandomHouse.

²⁷ GLSEN, found that one in ten LGBTQ teachers (11.1%) said that engaging in LGBTQI+ inclusive practices could jeopardize their employment (vs. 7.4% of non-LGBTQ teachers). GLSEN. (2020). [LGBTQ-Inclusive and Supportive Teaching: The Experiences of LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ Educators](#). A 2022 survey of educators found that 18% of BIPOC principals and 14% of BIPOC teachers reported they were singled out to perform additional tasks because of their race or ethnicity, compared to 3% of white principals and 2% of white teachers. Steiner, E. D., Doan, S., Woo, A., et al. (2022). *Restoring teacher and principal well-being is an essential step for rebuilding schools*. Rand Corporation. <https://doi.org/10.7249/RR1108-4>.



Understanding the Current Landscape

K-12 schools are key sites where legacies of racism, white supremacy, colonial capitalism, gendered oppression, and ableism impact students.

For example:

- In the 19th and 20th centuries, federal Indian Boarding Schools separated Indigenous youth from their families, communities, and languages in an explicit effort to “kill the Indian... [to] save the man.” After the closure of boarding schools, there have been repeated failures to meaningfully engage Indigenous communities and sovereign tribes, and schools have perpetuated the erasure of tribal histories, cultures, and values to the detriment of Indigenous youth;²⁸
- In the post-Civil War South, states adopted policies that effectively censored accurate representations of slavery, ultimately prompting textbook companies to create different instructional materials for Northern and Southern audiences.²⁹ In subsequent years, Northern textbooks came to echo content included in Southern textbooks.³⁰
- In the early 1980s, a movement to censor access to inclusive learning and school library books followed after the affirmation of federal nondiscrimination protections. Those seeking to censor inclusive student learning suggested that teaching about sex and race-based disparities undermined “respect for our nation’s heritage.”³¹
- Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, Spanish language suppression within schools attempted to assimilate Hispanic/Latino students into Anglo-American culture. Across the southwestern U.S., students were punished and beaten for the use of their native tongue, even taking it as far as proclaiming “death to Mr. Spanish” in Marfa, Texas.³²

²⁸ Rudiger, A. (2020). Pathways to Education Sovereignty: Taking a Stand for Native Children (SSRN Scholarly Paper 3877444). <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3877444>.

²⁹ Halterman, J. (2023, Jan. 30). [A Brief History of Curriculum Censorship](#). Facing History & Ourselves.

³⁰ Rainey Marquez, Jennifer. (N.D.) [Rewriting History](#). *Georgia State University Research Magazine*.

³¹ Pincus, Fred. L. (2022, Mar. 7). [Battles Over Book Bans Reflect Conflicts from the 1980s](#). *University of Maryland, Baltimore County Magazine*. See also: Thimakis, N. (2022, Jan. 10). [Then and now: Banning Like it's 1981](#). Intellectual Freedom Blog. The American Library Association. Brady, A. (2016, Sept. 22). [The History \(and Present\) of Banning Books in America](#). Literary Hub.

³² Bacigalupo, Chantelle. (2019, April 29). [No Spanish allowed: Texas school museum revisits history of segregation](#). *The World*.

Decades of education research have documented how K-12 teaching and learning resources have perpetuated stereotypes and more subtly erased the histories of marginalized communities.

For example:

- Culturally responsive and culturally sustaining pedagogies illuminate how white normativity undergirds deficit approaches in education that perpetuate structural inequality by detaching symptoms, like racial disparities in chronic absenteeism or school discipline, from the systematic devaluation and erasure of BIPOC and other marginalized communities' assets, including their languages, knowledge practices, and values.³³
- A review of social studies curricular standards found that the majority of women named in social studies curricular standards (53%) were included for their domestic roles and that standards overrepresented white and wealthy women.³⁴ Subsequent analysis found that one woman was named in reviewed social studies curricular standards for every three men.³⁵
- Disabled people and disability studies scholars have documented the lack of representation of people with disabilities as well as the disability justice movement in K-12 curriculum.³⁶

The large and growing evidence base for educational programming (including Ethnic Studies and Disability Studies) and institutions (including Rosenwald Schools and Historically Black Colleges and Universities) made by and for BIPOC and other marginalized communities have been instrumental in making the case for inclusive learning, including culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies.³⁷

³³ Ladson-Billings, G. (2006). It's Not the Culture of Poverty, It's the Poverty of Culture: The Problem with Teacher Education. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 37(2), 104–109. <https://doi.org/10.1525/aeq.2006.37.2.104>.

Paris, D. (2021). Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies and Our Futures. *The Educational Forum*, 85(4), 364–376. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131725.2021.1957634>.

Picower, B. (2021). *Reading, Writing, and Racism*. Penguin RandomHouse.com. <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/659474/reading-writing-and-racism-by-bree-picower/>.

³⁴ Maurer, E., Patrick, J., Britto, L. & Millar, H. (2017) **Where Are the Women?** National Women's History Museum.

³⁵ White, A. (2019, March). **What Schools Teach About Women's History Leaves a Lot to Be Desired.** *Smithsonian Magazine*.

³⁶ Mueller, C. O. (2021). "I Didn't Know People With Disabilities Could Grow Up to Be Adults": Disability History, Curriculum, and Identity in Special Education. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 44(3), 189–205. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888406421996069>. Lalvani, P. (2015). "We are not aliens": Exploring the Meaning of Disability and the Nature of Belongingness in a Fourth Grade Classroom. *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 35(4). <https://dsq-sds.org/index.php/dsq/article/view/4963/4107>.

³⁷ Dee, T., & Penner, E. (2016). *The Causal Effects of Cultural Relevance: Evidence from an Ethnic Studies Curriculum*. CEPA Working Paper No. 16-01. Stanford Center for Education Policy Analysis. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED580355>.

Paris, D. (2021). Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies and Our Futures. *The Educational Forum*, 85(4), 364–376. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131725.2021.1957634>.

Positive Developments in Support of Inclusive Learning: Since 1999

GLSEN administered the first National School Climate Survey in 1999 in an environment where there were high rates of discrimination faced by LGBTQI+ communities, a refusal to acknowledge the existence of LGBTQI+ youth, and extremely limited research (and no national survey research) on the experience of LGBTQI+ youth in K-12 schools. No state legislation supported the inclusion of affirming representations of LGBTQI+ people, history, and topics in K-12 schools.³⁸ Worse, nine states had enacted so-called “no promo homo” laws in the context of sex and health education as a stigmatizing response to the HIV/AIDS crisis.³⁹ A more comprehensive NSCS was administered in 2001 and biennially through 2021.

There have been several positive policy developments since 1999. As of April 1, 2024, seven states (California, Colorado, Illinois, Nevada, New Jersey, Oregon, and Washington) have passed LGBTQI+ inclusive curricular standards laws that establish the expectation that locally adopted academic curricula include the stories, perspectives, and contributions of LGBTQI+ people, often in specific subjects, especially history or social studies.⁴⁰ Each of these states has also adopted BIPOC inclusive curricular standards legislation, and California, Nevada, New Jersey, Oregon, and Washington have adopted disability-inclusive curricular standards. Typically in all but one instance, LGBTQI+ inclusive curricular standards legislation simultaneously advanced BIPOC and/or disability inclusion.

SEAs in the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Massachusetts have adopted LGBTQI+ and BIPOC inclusive social studies standards without being required to do so by statute.⁴¹ Three additional states (Connecticut, Delaware, and Vermont) have passed legislation supportive of local adoption of LGBTQI+ inclusive academic curriculum, while not setting a standard for local adoption.⁴² Finally, five states that in 2001 had curriculum censorship laws on LGBTQI+ sex and health education have since repealed those laws, and nine states and the District of Columbia have adopted policies requiring that sex education be inclusive of LGBTQI+ people.⁴³

³⁸ Fights for inclusive curriculum had already begun in racial justice movements such as the fight for ethnic studies.

³⁹ Sosin, K. (2022, April 20). ‘Don’t Say Gay’ Bills Aren’t New. They’ve Just Been Revived. *The 19th*.

⁴⁰ GLSEN Navigator. [Inclusive Curricular Standards Policies](#). Accessed April 2024.

⁴¹ GLSEN Navigator. [Inclusive Curricular Standards Policies](#). Accessed April 2024.

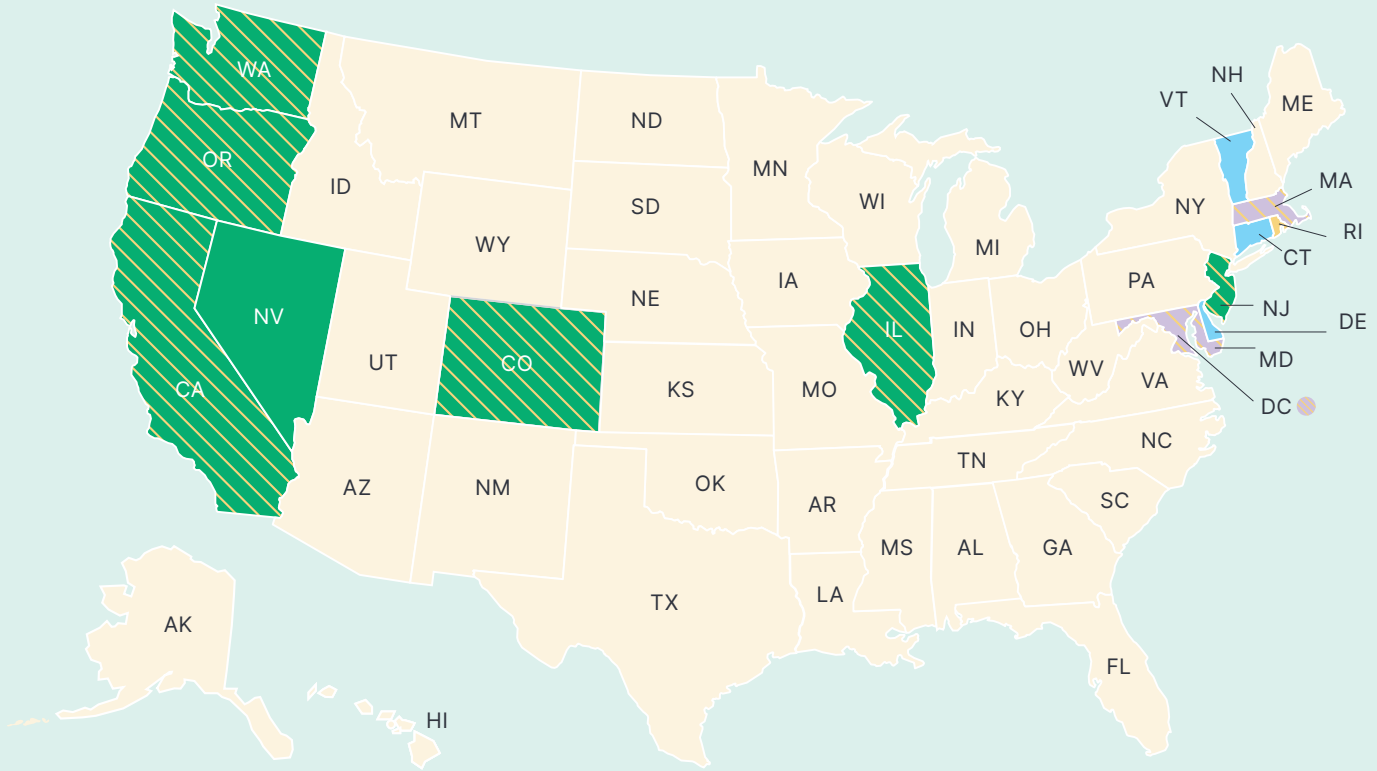
District of Columbia State Board of Education. Social Studies Standards. <https://sboe.dc.gov/page/social-studies-standards>.

⁴² Connecticut [H.B. 6619 \(2021\)](#) directed the SEA to create a model curriculum on LGBTQI+ studies.. Delaware passed a resolution ([H. Con. Res. 90, 2021-2022](#)) that has prompted the development of a model LGBTQI+ history curriculum (personal communication).

Vermont [H. 3 \(2019\)](#) established a working group to recommend updates and additional standards to recognize fully the history, contributions, and perspectives of ethnic groups and social groups, including LGBTQI+ people.

⁴³ California, Colorado, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Oregon, Rhode Island, Washington. GLSEN Navigator, “[Inclusive Curricular Standards Policies](#),” Accessed April 2024. SIECUS. (N.D.). [The SIECUS State Profiles](#).

Supporting Impacting Student Access to LGBTQI+ Inclusive Instruction



- State law sets a standard for LGBTQI+ inclusion in one or more academic subject
- State education agency sets a standard for LGBTQI+ inclusion in one or more academic subject
- State policy sets a standard for LGBTQI+ inclusion in sex education
- State legislation encourages LGBTQI+ inclusion in locally adopted curriculum
- No state policies supporting LGBTQI+ inclusive instruction at the local level

Curriculum censorship laws and book bans that restrict affirming representations of LGBTQI+ people and accurate representations of history have a chilling effect on inclusive learning and harm marginalized students.

The introduction and growth in support of LGBTQI+ inclusive learning policies since 2001 reflect a broader understanding of the importance of youth seeing their whole selves reflected in and beyond the classroom. Importantly, educational professionals and the associations that represent them, including the National Education Association, American Federation of Teachers, and American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, have taken strong public stances in support of K-12 teaching and learning that include affirming representations of LGBTQI+ people, BIPOC communities, and others who experience marginalization and erasure.⁴⁴

The Backlash to Advances in K-12 Inclusive Learning

Growing awareness and support for policies and practices that name and seek to address structural inequality in education and other contexts were met with resistance from those invested in the status quo. The unprecedented disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic and the actions of people in positions of authority ignited a backlash to inclusive learning. Notably, an executive order issued in the Fall of 2020 prohibited federal funding for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) training (rescinded January 2021), characterizing it as “promoting division.”⁴⁵ In 2021, the language of the executive order and its justification were picked up by extremists and echoed in a new wave of state legislation seeking to censor inclusive learning.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Gonzalez, M. A. (2022). [The Very Foundation of Good Citizenship: The Legal and Pedagogical Case For Culturally Responsive and Racially Inclusive Public Education for All Students](#). National Education Association, Law Firm Antiracism Alliance.

AACTE.. (2021). [Toolkit for Local Advocates: Teaching Diverse and Inclusive Curricula Materials and Defending Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion](#).

See also signatories of [GLSEN's letter of support for the LGBTQI+ and Women's History Education Act](#) and of the GLSEN-led [public comment priorities for a federal American History and Civics Education Grants](#).

⁴⁵ [Executive Order 13950 \(2020\)](#).

⁴⁶ Pendharkar, E.. (2022, Feb. 4). [What's Driving the Backlash Against LGBTQ Students?](#) *EducationWeek*.

Seven states enacted LGBTQI+ curriculum censorship laws that broadly prohibit or restrict instruction that addresses sexual orientation and gender identity (often referred to as “don’t say gay or trans” laws).⁴⁷ Unlike the anti-LGBTQI+ curriculum censorship laws of the 1980s and 1990s that were technically limited to sex and health education, the new strain of anti-LGBTQI+ curriculum censorship laws apply across subjects. Additionally, six states enacted laws that create separate rules for instruction on LGBTQI+ people, history, and topics.⁴⁸ These states require parental notification of such instruction and either permit parents to opt their child out or, in the case of Arizona, Tennessee, and Wyoming, require that parents opt their child in before students are taught any LGBTQI+ inclusive content. Considering both the new and the old curriculum censorship laws targeting LGBTQI+ communities, fifteen states have laws restricting LGBTQI+ inclusive learning in K-12 schools as of April 1, 2024.

During the same period — and often moving alongside LGBTQI+ curriculum censorship bills — political extremists have passed legislation censoring teaching about race and sex-based disparities by targeting foundational scholarship on structural inequality, framed as “divisive concepts.”⁴⁹ Often these laws misleadingly cite critical race theory, an analytic approach first developed by legal scholars to examine how seemingly race-neutral laws have functioned to maintain racial inequality.⁵⁰ As of April 1, 2024, fifteen states have enacted legislation that specifically prohibits or discourages K-12 curriculum or educational programming that addresses race and sex-based structural inequality.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, and North Carolina. GLSEN Navigator. [Inclusive Curricular Standards Policies](#). Accessed Jan. 2024.

⁴⁸ Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Montana, and Tennessee. GLSEN Navigator. [Inclusive Curricular Standards Policies](#). Accessed Jan. 2024. See also: Movement Advancement Project. [Equality Maps: LGBTQ Curricular Laws](#). Accessed 11/30/2023.

⁴⁹ African American Policy Forum. (N.D.). [#TruthBeTold Campaign](#). Accessed 11/30/2023.

⁵⁰ Secondary students might learn about the concept of intersectionality, which was defined by a foundational critical race theory and Black feminist theory scholar (see FN 16), or about systemic devaluing of BIPOC communities as a result of federal policies and their implementation (“redlining”) owing to critical race theory, however instruction on critical race theory as a field — its origin, commitments, and methods — is something students would encounter in a postsecondary education context, often specifically in graduate school. By putting a target on critical race theory, opponents of inclusive learning could avoid expressly stating their opposition to K-12 students learning about the histories and reality of structural inequality. Gross, T. (2021, June 24). [Uncovering Who Is Driving The Fight Against Critical Race Theory In Schools](#). Fresh Air, NPR. George, JI. (2021). [A Lesson on Critical Race Theory](#). American Bar Association. McLaughlin, Eliot C. (2021). [Critical race theory is a lens — Here are 11 ways looking through it might refine your understanding of history](#). CNN. Sawchuk, Stephen. (2021). [What Is Critical Race Theory, and Why Is It Under Attack?](#) *EducationWeek*.

⁵¹ States include: Arizona (subsequently struck down by its states supreme court), Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Iowa, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Dakota, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah. GLSEN Navigator. [Inclusive Curricular Standards Policies](#). Accessed Jan. 2024.

At the local level, schools and LEAs have been inundated with calls to remove and ban school library books and instructional materials by and about LGBTQI+ people and BIPOC people. PEN America reports that the first half of the 2022–2023 school year was characterized by a 28% percent increase in book bans compared to January - June 2022.⁵² Among the 874 unique titles banned between July - December 2022, 30% include characters of color or discuss race and racism and 26% include LGBTQI+ characters or themes (8% specifically included transgender characters). Similarly, a recent survey of public high school principals found that 50% reported that certain parents or other community members sought to restrict teaching and learning about issues of race and racism, 48% reported opposition to LGBTQI+ student rights, and 33% reported efforts to ban school library books.⁵³

Amid this backlash from a vocal minority, efforts to restrict access to inclusive materials have seen significant opposition in the broader community.⁵⁴ Despite significant spending in state and local elections in 2023, the majority of races focused on education issues — including school board races — were won by candidates favoring inclusive learning.⁵⁵

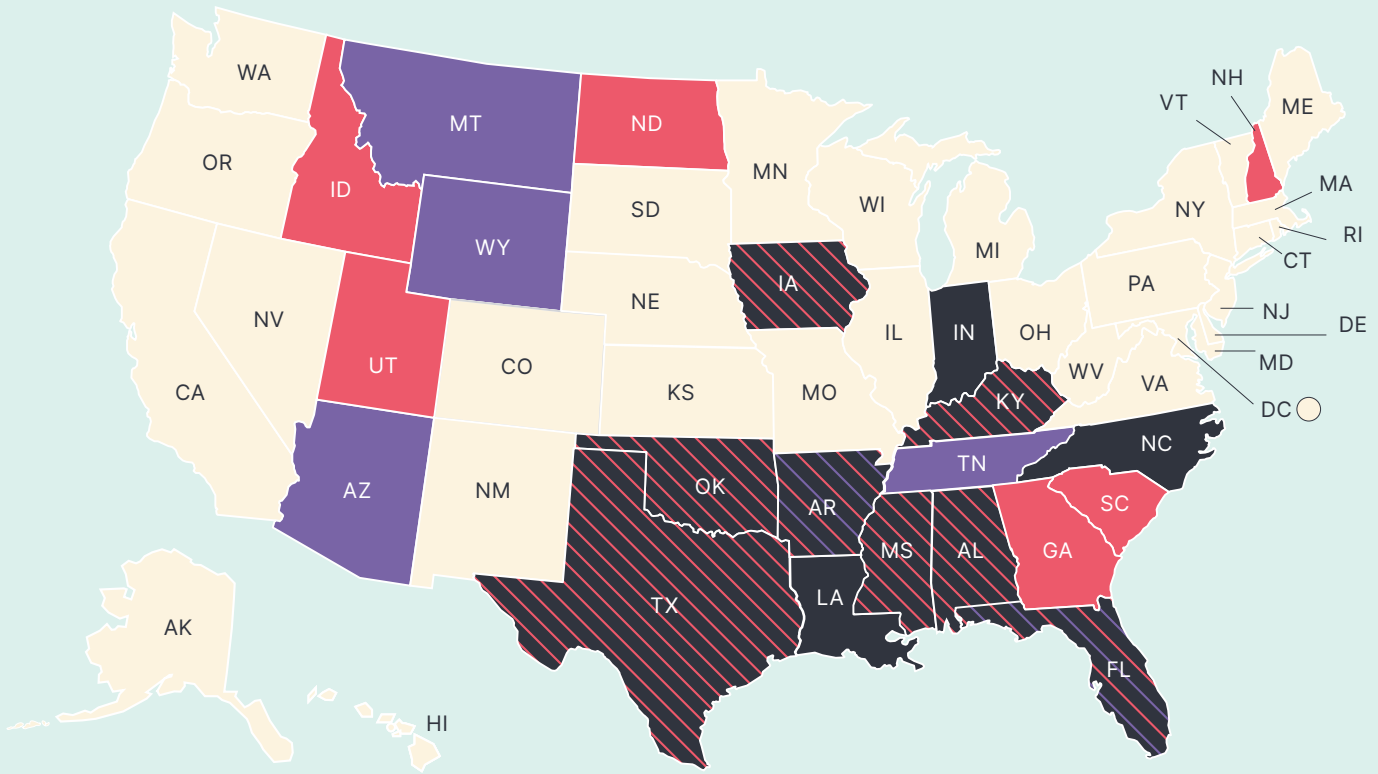
⁵² Meehan, K. and Friedman, J. (2023, April 20.) **Banned in the USA: State Laws Supercharge Book Suppression in Schools.** PEN America.

⁵³ Rogers, J. & Kahne, J. with Ishimoto, M., Kwako, A., Stern, S.C., Bingener, C., Raphael, L., Alkam, S., & Conde, Y. (2022). **Educating for a Diverse Democracy: The Chilling Role of Political Conflict in Blue, Purple, and Red Communities.** Los Angeles, CA: UCLA's Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access.

⁵⁴ For example, an **American Library Association poll** found that 67% of voters and 61% of parents oppose book bans in school libraries. Similarly, an **EveryLibrary Institute poll** found that 75% of American voters oppose book bans.

⁵⁵ Schultz, B. and Mulvihill, G. (2023, Nov. 8). **Liberal and moderate candidates take control of school boards in contentious races across U.S.** AP News.

Policies Restricting Student Access to LGBTQI+ Inclusive Instruction



- State law censors teaching about LGBTQI+ people and topics
- State law censors teaching about structural inequality and its impact on people of color, women, and LGBTQI+ people
- State law creates separate rules for teaching about LGBTQI+ people and topics but does not wholly censor instruction
- No state policies

Inclusive K-12 learning may also serve as a protective factor for LGBTQI+ and other youth who experience marginalization, discrimination, stigma, and instability elsewhere in their lives.

Synthesis of Research

Instruction, classroom assignments, instructional materials, school library books, and other learning resources allow youth to learn about themselves, their communities, and those who hold different identities.⁵⁶ Inclusive K-12 learning may also serve as a protective factor for LGBTQI+ and other youth who experience marginalization, discrimination, stigma, and instability elsewhere in their lives by promoting mental health and wellbeing.⁵⁷ GLSEN's research demonstrates both the positive impacts of LGBTQI+ inclusive learning and how scarce it remains, including as a result of harmful policies mandating censorship.

LGBTQI+ Inclusive Classroom Learning: Instruction and Instructional Materials

LGBTQI+ Inclusive Instruction in Core Subjects

Beginning with the 2005 National School Climate Survey, GLSEN has consistently found that LGBTQI+ youth with access to instruction on LGBTQI+ people, history, or topics report improved education outcomes, including a decreased likelihood of absenteeism because they felt unsafe;⁵⁸ less severe anti-LGBTQI+ victimization;⁵⁹ improved mental health outcomes, including lower levels of depression;⁶⁰ and greater feelings of belonging, including peer acceptance.⁶¹ In short, LGBTQI+ inclusive instruction is associated with

⁵⁶ Bishop, Rudine Sims (1990). Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. *Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom*, 6(3). Johnson, Nancy J., Melanie D. Koss, and Miriam Martinez. (2018). Through the sliding glass door: #EmpowerTheReader. *The Reading Teacher*. 71(5): 569-577.

⁵⁷ Russell, S. T., & Fish, J. N. (2016). Mental health in lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth. *Annual review of clinical psychology*, 12, 465-487.

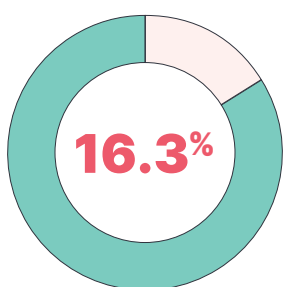
National Women's Law Center. (2019). [We Are Not Invisible: Latina Girls, Mental Health, and Philadelphia Schools](#).

⁵⁸ GLSEN has measured the relationship between LGBTQI+ inclusive instruction and missing school due to feeling unsafe since 2005. Beginning 2015, GLSEN reported on the positive relationship between receiving LGBTQI+ inclusive instruction and academic achievement (measured by GPA) and academic aspirations (measured by plans to pursue postsecondary education) respectively. GLSEN. [National School Climate Survey Report Archive](#).

⁵⁹ GLSEN first reported on the relationship between LGBTQI+ inclusive instruction and anti-LGBTQI+ harassment and bullying in the 2007 NSCS. GLSEN. (N.D.). [National School Climate Survey Report Archive](#).

⁶⁰ GLSEN has reported on the relationship between LGBTQI+ inclusive instruction and levels of depression since 2015. In 2017, GLSEN first reported on the positive relationship between LGBTQI+ inclusive instruction and higher levels of self-esteem. The 2021 NSCS was the first to examine the relationship between LGBTQI+ inclusive instruction and suicidality, finding that presence of LGBTQI+ inclusive instruction is associated with lower levels of suicidality. GLSEN. [National School Climate Survey Report Archive](#).

⁶¹ GLSEN has reported on the positive relationship between LGBTQI+ inclusive instruction and feelings of school belonging since 2005. In the 2009 NSCS, GLSEN first reported on the positive relationship between LGBTQI+ inclusive instruction and peer acceptance. GLSEN. [National School Climate Survey Report Archive](#).



LGBTQI+ students taught any positive representations of LGBTQI+ people, history, or topics

more positive school climates for LGBTQI+ youth. These findings hold when specifically considering the experiences of LGBTQI+ youth who identify as transgender or nonbinary, Asian American or Pacific Islander, Black, Indigenous, and Latine.⁶²

GLSEN research also suggests that LGBTQI+ inclusive instruction may be related to BIPOC-affirming school practices. Specifically, Asian American and Pacific Islander, Black, and Latine LGBTQI+ youth who reported they had access to LGBTQI+ inclusive instruction were less likely to report feeling unsafe because of their race or ethnicity than peers of the same race who did not have access to LGBTQI+ inclusive instruction.⁶³

Despite these benefits, the percentage of LGBTQI+ secondary students with **access to LGBTQI+ inclusive instruction has changed little over 20 years and remains a minimal share of the overall population.**⁶⁴ The 2021 NSCS found that only 16.3% percent of LGBTQI+ secondary students reported being taught any positive representations of LGBTQI+ people, history, or topics, a significantly lower percentage than in the four prior NSCS reports, including the 2019 NSCS, in which 19.4% of students reported LGBTQI+ inclusive instruction.⁶⁵ GLSEN considered whether shifts to online learning as a result of COVID-19 may have impacted students' access to LGBTQI+ inclusive instruction in the 2021 NSCS. Students who attended school online, either hybrid or only online, were more likely to report that LGBTQ+ topics had been discussed positively in one or more of their classes than were students who attended school only in person.⁶⁶ Policies targeting DEI training and inclusive learning, and public discussions thereof may have had a chilling effect on educators, likely impacting the change between 2019 and 2021.

⁶² GLSEN. (2021). **Improving School Climate for Transgender and Nonbinary Youth** (Research Brief). New York: GLSEN.

GLSEN's Erasure and Resilience reports on the experiences of LGBTQI+ youth of color specifically reported on the associations between access to LGBTQI+ inclusive instruction and (1) feeling unsafe due because of the student's sexual orientation (2) feeling unsafe due because of the student's gender identity, (2) peer acceptance, and (3) school belonging. All reports available at <https://www.glsen.org/lgbtq-youth-color>.

⁶³ Truong, N. L., et. al. (2020). **Erasure and Resilience: The Experiences of Asian American and Pacific Islander LGBTQ Youth in US Schools**. Truong, N. L., et. al. (2020). **Erasure and Resilience: The Experiences of Black LGBTQ Youth in US Schools**. Zongrone, et. al. (2020). **Erasure and Resilience: The Experiences of LGBTQ Students of Color**. **Latinx LGBTQ Youth in US Schools**.

⁶⁴ Kosciw, et al. **The 2021 National School Climate Survey**. (pp. 121-122). Beginning in 2011, the NSCS was updated to ask students if, in the past academic year, they had been taught any positive representations of LGBTQI+ people, history, events, or topics in class and, if yes, in which classes they received such instruction. Students were separately asked if they were taught any negative representations of LGBTQI+ people, history, events, or topics. This approach allowed us to report the specific subjects in which students are being taught positive representations.

⁶⁵ The 2021 NSCS added questions about learning modality (in-person, fully remote, hybrid). This percentage reflects all students, regardless of modality, who were taught any positive representations of LGBTQI+ people, history, and topics. Kosciw, et al. **The 2021 National School Climate Survey** (pp. 49, 58, 60).

⁶⁶ Kosciw, et al. **The 2021 National School Climate Survey**. (p. 49).

Kosciw, et al. **The 2021 National School Climate Survey**. (p. 164). Kosciw, J. G., Greytak, E. A., Giga, N. M., Villenas, C. & Danischewski, D. J. (2016). **The 2015 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth in our nation's schools**. New York: GLSEN.

Students enroll in different courses based on a variety of factors, including the grade that they're in, state curricular standards, locally adopted curriculum, and, in the case of electives, their interests and goals. Given available data, we would expect that nearly all secondary students were enrolled in an English or English language arts (ELA) course in the past academic year and that an overwhelming majority were also enrolled in a math course and a history or social studies course in the past academic year.⁶⁷ Many would be enrolled in a science course as well.⁶⁸ We would expect fewer secondary students to be enrolled in other subjects, including art, world languages, music, and health.⁶⁹

As Figure 1 shows, History/Social Studies and English have consistently been the subjects in which LGBTQI+ youth are most likely to report being taught positive representations of LGBTQI+ people, history, events, or topics. Even so, the proportion of LGBTQI+ secondary students reporting that they were taught positive representations of LGBTQI+ people, history, events, or topics in History/Social Studies hit a high point of 12.8% in 2015 and, for English, 9.7% (also in 2015).

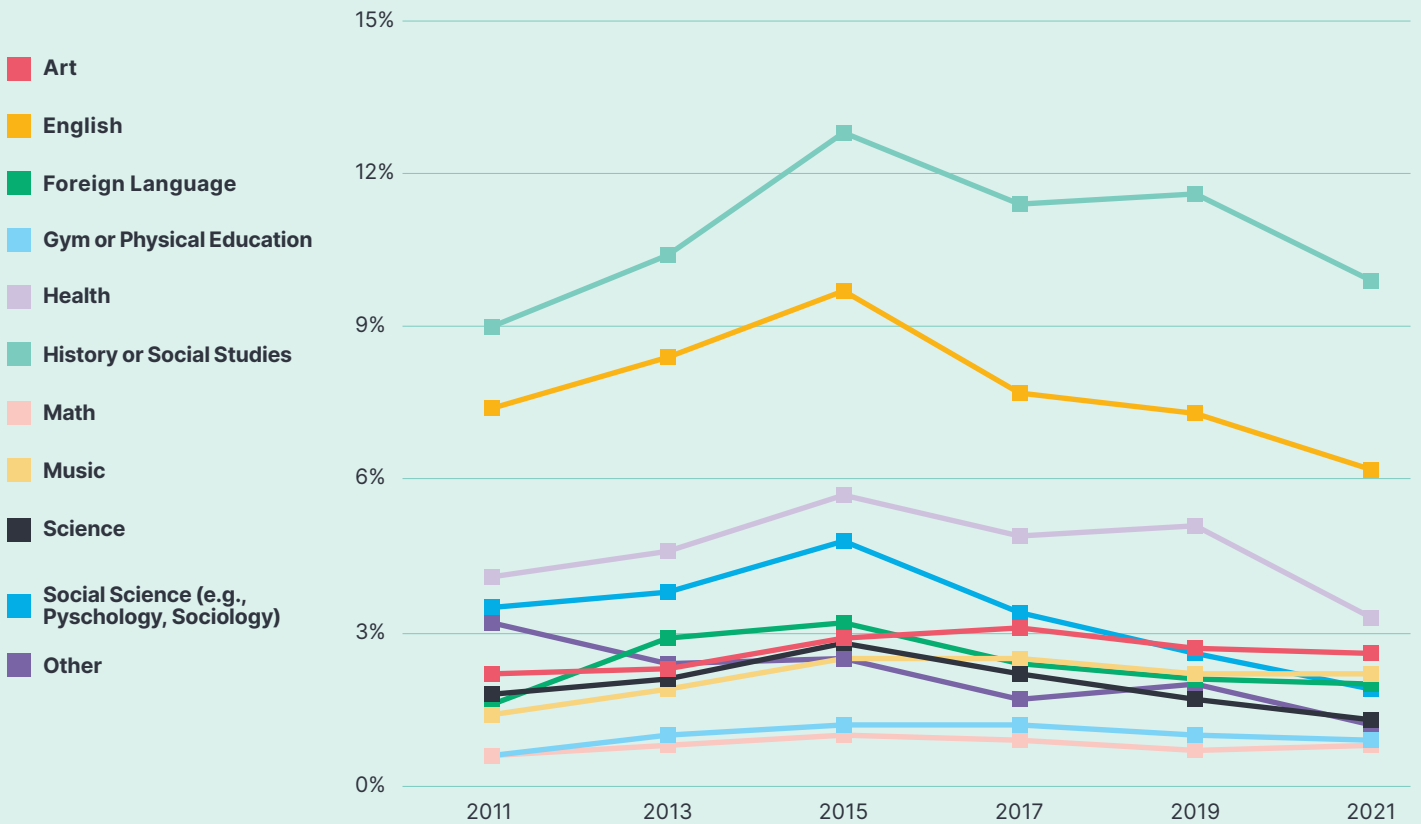
When the stories or contributions of LGBTQI+ people are not included in core subjects — including English, history or social studies, math, and science — it increases the odds of students completing an academic year without being taught any positive representations of LGBTQI+ people, history, events, or topics.

⁶⁷ High school graduates in 2019 earned, on average, 4.5 credits in English language and literature, 4.2 in mathematics, and 4.0 in social sciences and history, meaning that the average high school graduate took four or more year-long courses in each of these subjects. Most states require 4 credits of English (mean and median = 4.0) and 3 or more credits of Math (mean = 3.3; median = 3.0) and History or Social Studies (mean and median = 3.0) for graduation. The Nation's Report Card. (N.D.). [The 2019 National Assessment of Educational Progress \(NAEP\) High School Transcript Study](#). National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). [Table 234.30. Course credit requirements and exit exam requirements for a standard high school diploma and the use of other high school completion credentials, by state: 2019](#). See also: Education Commission of the States. (2023). [High School Graduation Requirements 2023](#).

⁶⁸ High School graduates in 2019 earned on average 3.7 credits in life and physical sciences. [The Nation's Report Card. The 2019 NAEP High School Transcript Study](#). Most states require 3 credits of science for graduation (mean = 2.9; median = 3.0). NCES. [Table 234.30](#). See also: Education Commission of the States. [High School Graduation Requirements 2023](#).

⁶⁹ High School graduates in 2019 earned on average 2.3 credits in visual and performing arts, amounting to fewer than 3 year-long courses. The Nation's Report Card. [The 2019 NAEP High School Transcript Study](#). Forty-two states require that arts education be offered or provided in middle school and 43 require that arts education be offered or provided in high school. Twenty-eight states require arts education in high school. Education Commission of the States. (2023). [ArtScan at a Glance](#). High School graduates in 2019 earned on average 2.2 credits in world languages, amounting to fewer than 3 year-long courses. The Nation's Report Card. [The 2019 NAEP High School Transcript Study](#). Eleven states have world language graduation requirements; an additional 19 states have graduation requirements that may be fulfilled by several subjects, including world languages. American Councils. (2017, Mar.) [The National K-16 Foreign Language Enrollment Survey Report](#).

Figure 1: LGBTQI+ Secondary Students Reporting Affirming LGBTQI+ Instruction by Subject, 2011—2021



So far, this issue brief has shared national results from the NSCS reports. GLSEN State Research Snapshots allow consideration of differences across states where a sufficiently large number of students from a given state responded to the survey.⁷⁰ We reviewed how LGBTQI+ youths' reports of inclusive instruction have changed since the first LGBTQI+ inclusive curricular standards law was enacted in California in 2011 in 30 states for which we have state research snapshots available for 2011 and 2021.⁷¹ Between 2011 and 2021, student reports of inclusive instruction in just over half of these states (16) increased between 1% and 9%, with an average and median increase of 3%. Oregon, which enacted an inclusive curricular standards law in 2019,⁷² saw the greatest increase (9%) in student reports of LGBTQI+ inclusive instruction, from 23% in 2011 to 32% in 2021. Detailed state analysis can be found in the [Appendix](#).

In three states, there was no change in the share of LGBTQI+ students reporting LGBTQI+ inclusive instruction between 2011 and 2021. In eleven states, student reports of LGBTQI+ inclusive instruction decreased between 1% and 12%, with an average decrease of 5% and a median decrease of 4%. Connecticut saw the greatest drop in reported LGBTQI+ inclusive instruction, with 22% of students reporting LGBTQI+ inclusive instruction in 2021, compared to over one-third (34%) in 2011.

⁷⁰ GLSEN Navigator. [State Research Snapshots](#). Accessed Jan. 2024. The 2007 through 2021 NSCS reports also include analyses of differences across regions in access to inclusive instruction and other inclusive learning supports. GLSEN. [National School Climate Survey Report Archive](#).

⁷¹ Comparisons did not include an analysis of the statistical significance of differences between 2011 and 2021.

⁷² [Oregon H.B. 2023 \(2019\)](#), which requires academic content standards for history, geography, economics and civics to include the histories, contributions and perspectives of individuals who are Native American; of African, Asian, Pacific Island, Chicano, Latino or Middle Eastern descent, are women, have disabilities, are immigrants or refugees, and are LGBT.

What Supports Implementation of Inclusive Curricular Standards?

Among the 30 states for which GLSEN has both a 2011 and 2021 state research snapshot, four states had passed inclusive curricular standards laws before the 2020–2021 school year: California (2011), Colorado (2019), New Jersey (2019), and Oregon (2019). Only two of these states, California and New Jersey, were expected to implement the LGBTQI+ inclusive standard prior to the administration of the 2021 NSCS. California saw a 5-point increase in LGBTQI+ students' reporting access to LGBTQI+ inclusive instruction in 2021, compared to 2011, while New Jersey saw a 3-point decline. Oregon, where implementation of the LGBTQI+ inclusive standard is required by the 2026–2027 school year, saw the greatest increase in LGBTQI+ students reporting access to LGBTQI+ inclusive instruction (9 points).

The 2020–2021 school year was the first year New Jersey's LGBTQI+ inclusive curricular standards law was to be implemented. Undoubtedly, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted implementation

as schools shifted to remote learning and otherwise responded to protect the health of students and educators. However, Oregon passed an inclusive curricular standards law in the same year as New Jersey and faced the same unexpected challenges presented by COVID-19. How did it accomplish so much despite having a longer runway for implementation? A key difference between Oregon and New Jersey is the specific enumeration of actions the SEA must take to support LEAs in adopting curriculum that meet the new, inclusive standard (**OR H.B. 2023**), including the provision of professional development to teachers and administrators on state standards adopted pursuant to the law. This observation aligns with GLSEN's prior research on the implementation of state anti-bullying policies, which indicates that LEAs are more likely to comply with state standards in support of LGBTQI+ youth when their SEA provides comprehensive guidance.⁷³

⁷³ Kull, R. M., Kosciw, J. G., & Greytak, E. A. (2015). **From Statehouse to Schoolhouse: Anti-Bullying Policy Efforts in US States and School Districts**. NY: GLSEN. (p. 6)

Inclusive sex education prepares youth to make healthy decisions about their bodies, identify abusive relationships and actions, and reach out to supportive adults when needed.

Sex Education that Addresses Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

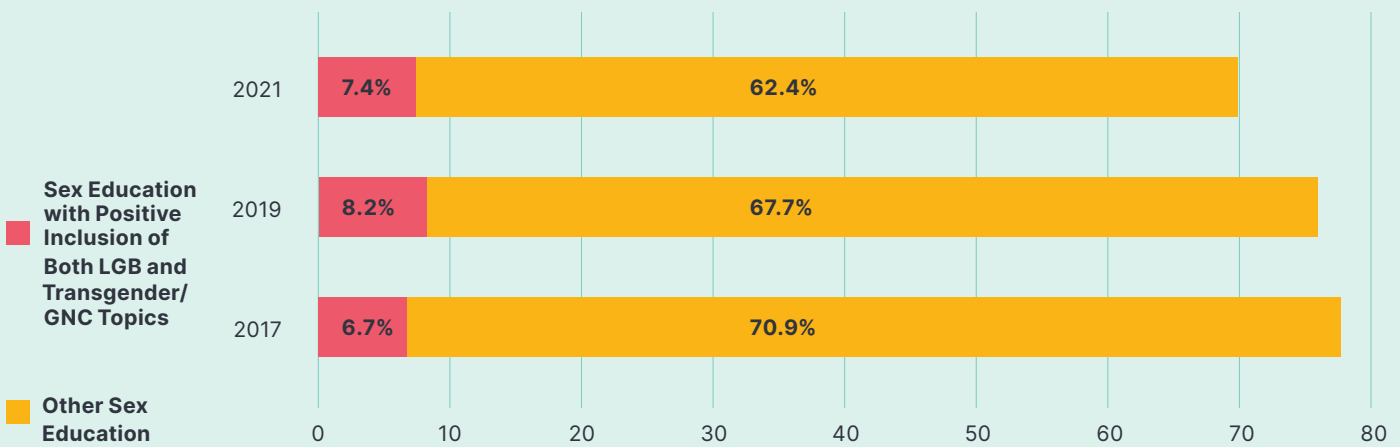
Youth must have access to sex education that is inclusive of LGBTQI+ people, BIPOC communities, and people with disabilities. Inclusive sex education prepares youth to make healthy decisions about their bodies, identify abusive relationships and actions, and reach out to supportive adults when needed. Since 2017, GLSEN has asked LGBTQI+ students specifically if they had received sex education instruction at any point during their K-12 education. Students who were provided such instruction were asked if the instruction provided included information about sexual orientation (specifically topics inclusive of lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB) individuals) and gender identity (specifically topics inclusive of transgender and gender nonconforming (TGNC) individuals) presented in a positive or affirming way.⁷⁴ Although a majority of LGBTQI+ secondary students reported having been taught sex education at school at some point in their K-12 education, fewer than one in ten indicated instruction included information about both LGB topics and Trans and Gender Non-Confirming (TGNC) topics that was presented positively (see Figure 3). The NSCS has not asked specifically about instruction on variations in sex characteristics (including intersex traits) in sex education, an important component for such instruction to be LGBTQI+ inclusive.⁷⁵

As discussed above, GLSEN has found that when LGBTQI+ students report being taught positive representations of LGBTQI+ people, history, and topics in the past year they experience a more positive school climate. We conducted new analyses of 2021 NSCS data to assess the impact of LGBTQI+ inclusive sex education. We found that access to school-based sex education (including in years prior to the current academic year) that addresses both LGB topics and TGNC topics is associated with a more positive school climate for LGBTQI+ students.

⁷⁴ When available, sex education is often only provided in limited and specific grades. Students may receive sex education in a health class which might also be captured by a general question on access to LGBTQI+ inclusive instruction. In 2017 and 2019, students who had been taught sex education at school were asked if instruction included LGB people and, separately, transgender and gender nonconforming people and whether inclusion was positive or negative. In 2021, this section of the survey was streamlined to ask if sex education instruction included positive representations of LGB people and, separately, transgender and gender nonconforming people.

⁷⁵ InterACT: Advocates for Intersex Youth. (N.D). [What We Wish Our Teachers Knew](#). Kenna. (N.D.). [8 Ways You Can Be An Ally to Intersex Students](#). GLSEN.

Figure 3: LGBTQI+ Students' Access to Sex Education



Compared to LGBTQI+ students with no sex education and to those who reported sex education that included no LGBTQI+ topics⁷⁶, those who had ever received school-based sex education instruction that addressed both LGB and TGNC topics were:

- Less likely to report feeling unsafe because of a student’s sexual orientation⁷⁷, gender identity⁷⁸, and gender expression⁷⁹;
- Less likely to have missed school due to feeling unsafe (22.4% vs. 36.0%, for students with no sex education⁸⁰, and 31.7%, for students with sex education that did not include any LGBTQI+ topics)⁸¹; and
- More likely to feel accepted by their peers (somewhat or very) (68.5% vs.32.5%, for students with no sex education⁸², and 39.1%, for students with sex education that did not include any LGBTQI+ topics)⁸³.

⁷⁶ Logistic regression was conducted with no school-based sex education instruction as reference group, followed by pairwise comparisons with Tukey correction for differences with non-inclusive sex education instruction.

⁷⁷ aORno-sexed = 0.39, 95% CI: [0.34, 0.43] ; aORnon-inclusive = 0.46, 95% CI: [0.41,0.52]

⁷⁸ aORno-sexed = 0.52, 95% CI: [0.46, 0.59] ; aORnon-inclusive = 0.61, 95%CI: [0.55, 0.69]

⁷⁹ aORno-sexed = 0.49, 95% CI: [0.43, 0.55] ; aORnon-inclusive = 0.55, 95% CI: [0.49, 0.62]

⁸⁰ aOR = 0.51, 95% CI: [0.45, 0.58]

⁸¹ OR = 0.62, 95% CI: [0.55, 0.70]

⁸² aOR = 4.51, 95% CI: [4.00, 5.09]

⁸³ aOR = 3.39, 95% CI: [3.03, 3.81]

LGBTQI+ Inclusive Instructional Materials

In 2001, 1 in 5 LGBTQI+ youth (20.1%) reported that their textbooks or other instructional material included content on LGBTQI+ people, history, or topics.⁸⁴ In 2021, 16.5% of LGBTQI+ students reported that any textbooks and other instructional materials included LGBTQI+ topics⁸⁵ (73.5% said their instructional materials included no content about LGBTQI+ people, history, or topics and 10.0% responded that they were unsure). This marked a significantly lower percentage from the high of 23.7% reported in the 2015 NSCS.⁸⁶

Through a new analysis of 2021 NSCS data, GLSEN found a moderately strong correlation between the presence of LGBTQI+ inclusive instructional materials and the presence of LGBTQI+ inclusive instruction,⁸⁷ the benefits of which were discussed earlier in the report. While it is unsurprising that teachers who choose to assign such materials would provide instruction on it, it is important to consider how the presence of LGBTQI+ inclusive instructional material in locally adopted curriculum supports teachers in providing LGBTQI+ inclusive instruction even when LGBTQI+ people, history, or topics are not expressly included in the curriculum. For example, a statistics class might specify that students are to learn about demographic characteristics and disaggregated data without specifying that instruction is to include disaggregating demographic data by sexual orientation and gender identity. Where the class textbook provides an example of an LGBTQI+ inclusive dataset, teachers would not need to locate supplemental instructional materials and may feel empowered to provide LGBTQI+ inclusive instruction.

We also analyzed the relationship between the presence of LGBTQI+ inclusive instructional materials and LGBTQI+ students' wellbeing and educational outcomes.⁸⁸ The results were significant. After controlling for the presence of LGBTQI+ inclusive instruction, we found that the presence of LGBTQI+ inclusive instructional materials was associated with a lower likelihood of students being made to feel unsafe because of their sexual orientation⁸⁹ and gender identity⁹⁰; lower likelihood of missing school due to feeling unsafe; and higher likelihood of peer acceptance (somewhat or very).⁹¹

⁸⁴ Kosciw, J. G. and Cullen, MK. (2001). [The 2001 National School Climate Survey: The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Youth in Our Nation's Schools](#). NY: GLSEN. (pp. 31-32).

⁸⁵ Kosciw, et al. The 2021 National School Climate Survey. (pp. 121-122).

⁸⁶ Kosciw, et al. [The 2021 National School Climate Survey](#). (p. 164). Kosciw, et. al. [The 2015 National School Climate Survey](#). (p. 60). The percentage of students reporting access to LGBTI+ inclusive instructional materials was lower in 2021 than in 2019 (19.6%) but the difference was not significant after controlling for demographic, method, and learning environment.

⁸⁷ Tetrachoric correlation of 0.61.

⁸⁸ Multiple logistic regression was conducted, controlling for presence of LGBTQI+ inclusive instruction. Reference group was those who reported no LGBTQI+ inclusive instructional materials. Responses of "don't know" were treated as missing.

⁸⁹ aOR = 0.91, 95% CI: [0.84, 0.99]

⁹⁰ aOR = 0.82, 95% CI: [0.76, 0.89]

⁹¹ aOR = 1.45, 95% CI: [1.34, 1.58]



LGBTQI+ Inclusive Learning Beyond the Classroom: School Libraries and Internet

Between 2001 and 2021, GLSEN's NSCS asked secondary students about their access to LGBTQI+ inclusive learning beyond the classroom. Specifically, students were asked if they had access to LGBTQI+ inclusive school library resources and if they could access information and resources on LGBTQI+ issues online using school-based internet.

For the first time, this brief assesses the impact or utility of inclusive learning supports other than LGBTQI+ inclusive classroom instruction. New analyses of 2021 NSCS data demonstrate that, similar to instruction, LGBTQI+ inclusion in school libraries and via school internet, are both associated with a more positive school climate for LGBTQI+ students.

LGBTQI+ Inclusive Libraries

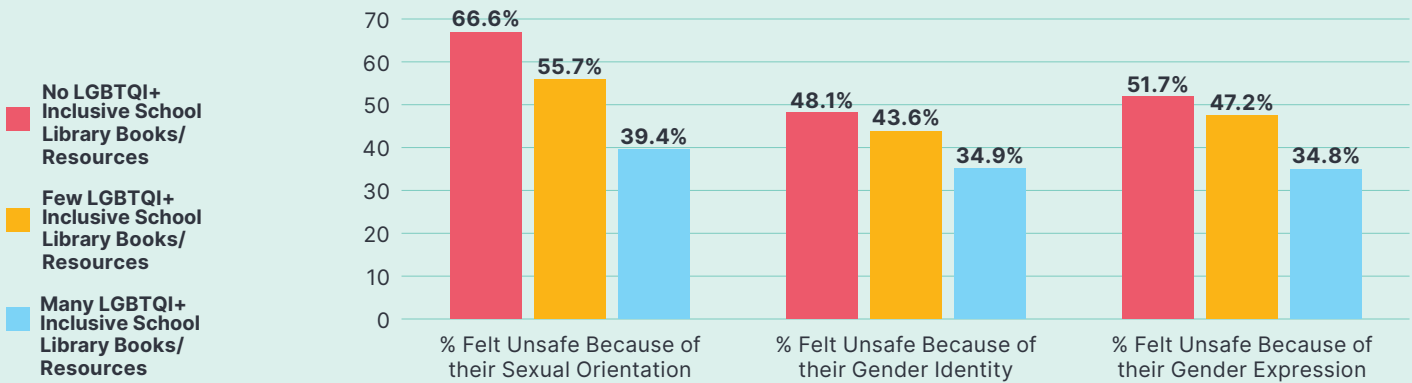
In 2001, 36.8% of LGBTQI+ students reported that their school library included any LGBTQI+ inclusive books or resources.⁹² LGBTQI+ students reporting access to LGBTQI+ inclusive library resources has generally increased over time, reaching a high of 48.9% of LGBTQI+ students reporting such access in 2019.⁹³ However, the 2021 NSCS found a significantly lower percentage of students with LGBTQI+ inclusive school libraries, with 42.8% reporting that their school library had any books or other resources about LGBTQI+ people, history, or topics (28.8% said their school library had no such resources and 28.4% responded that they were unsure). Recent curriculum censorship legislation and public discussions thereof may have had a chilling effect on school librarians or discouraged students from seeking such resources. Additionally, remote learning and other COVID-19 or precautions may have inhibited students' access to such resources.

⁹² Kosciw and Cullen. [The 2001 National School Climate Survey](#). (p. 31-32).

⁹³ 8.2% of students reported they could find many resources, and 40.8% reported they could find only a few. Kosciw, et al. [The 2021 National School Climate Survey](#). (p. 60). See also comparison to prior NSCS findings (p. 138).

New analyses of 2021 NSCS data indicate that the presence of any LGBTQI+ inclusive school library resources (few or many) is associated with a more positive school climate, as measured by fewer absences due to feeling unsafe, lower likelihood of feeling unsafe because one is LGBTQI+ (see Figure 4), and greater feelings of peer acceptance among LGBTQI+ students.⁹⁴ However, there were significant differences depending on the relative abundance of inclusive school library books and resources with substantial improvements in these metrics seen when many LGBTQI+ inclusive school library resources were available.

Figure 4: Percentage of LGBTQI+ Students who Felt Unsafe by Access to LGBTQI+ Inclusive School Libraries



⁹⁴ Multiple logistic regression was conducted between a two-level factor for inclusive library resources (few or many) and various indicators of school climate. Students who had access to many inclusive school library resources and students who had access to few inclusive school library resources, were more likely to report that they felt accepted by their peers (somewhat or very) [aORfew=1.83, 95% CI: [1.67, 2.00]; aORmany=5.22, 95% CI: [4.49, 6.07].; less likely to report feeling unsafe based sexual orientation (aORfew=0.69, 95% CI: [0.63, 0.74]; aORmany=0.42, 95% CI: [0.37, 0.49]) , gender identity (aORfew=0.89, 95% CI: [0.82, 0.96]; aORmany=0.71, 95% CI: [0.61, 0.81]), or gender expression (aORfew=0.88, 95% CI: [0.81, 0.95]; aORmany=0.59, 95% CI: [0.51, 0.67]); and less likely to miss school due to feeling unsafe(aORfew=0.88, 95% CI: [0.81, 0.95]; aORmany=0.59, 95% CI: [0.51, 0.67]), compared to those who reported no LGBTQI+ inclusive school library resources. Multiple logistic regression analyses controlled for the availability of LGBTQI+ inclusive instruction, which was found to be positively associated with the availability of inclusive LGBTQI+ school library resources.

In 2021, 7.2% of students reported they could find many LGBTQI+ related resources in their school library, while 35.6% reported they could find only a few resources. **Compared to students who reported few inclusive school library resources, students who reported having access to many LGBTQI+ inclusive school library resources were:**

- Less likely to report feeling unsafe because of their sexual orientation⁹⁵, gender identity⁹⁶, and gender expression⁹⁷ (see Figure 4);
- Less likely to miss school due to feeling unsafe⁹⁸ (26.8% compared to 34.8% for those reporting few); and
- Far more likely to report that they felt accepted (somewhat or very) by their peers (69.7% vs. 39.2% for those reporting few inclusive school library resources).⁹⁹

Access to LGBTQI+ Information Online through School Internet

In 2021, 48.2% of LGBTQI+ students with internet access at school reported that they were able to access LGBTQI+ information or websites, such as a local LGBTQI+ community center or the Trevor Project, using school computers (15.6% with internet access said they were unable to access such resources via school internet and 36.2% said they did not know if they could).¹⁰⁰ While this is higher than in 2001, when 37% of LGBTQI+ students reported such access,¹⁰¹ it was a significantly lower percentage than 2019 (55.9%) and a departure from the slow, but steady increase reported by LGBTQI+ secondary students between the 2007 and 2019 NSCS.¹⁰²

Actions taken to reduce transmission of COVID-19, including remote learning, may have impacted student access. The circulation of stigmatizing and transphobic views of social media in public discourse and through anti-LGBTQI+ and especially anti-trans legislation may also have impacted student access and encouraged censorship.¹⁰³ For example,

⁹⁵ Pairwise comparison with Tukey comparison between few and many resources. aOR = 0.62, 95% CI: [0.54, 0.71]

⁹⁶ Pairwise comparison with Tukey comparison between few and many resources, aOR = aOR = 0.80, 95% CI: [0.70, 0.91]

⁹⁷ Pairwise comparison with Tukey comparison between few and many resources. aOR = 0.67, 95% CI: [0.58, 0.76]

⁹⁸ Pairwise comparison with Tukey comparison between few and many resources. aOR = 0.77, 95% CI: [0.66, 0.88]

⁹⁹ Pairwise comparison with Tukey comparison between few and many resources. aOR = 2.85, 95% CI: [2.47, 3.29]

¹⁰⁰ Kosciw, et al. [The 2021 National School Climate Survey](#). (p. 50).

¹⁰¹ Kosciw and Cullen. [The 2001 National School Climate Survey](#). (pp. 31-32).

The percentage of LGBTQI+ students reporting such as in 2021 was significantly greater than in each NSCS administered between 2001 and 2013.

¹⁰² Kosciw, et al. [The 2021 National School Climate Survey](#). (p. 164).

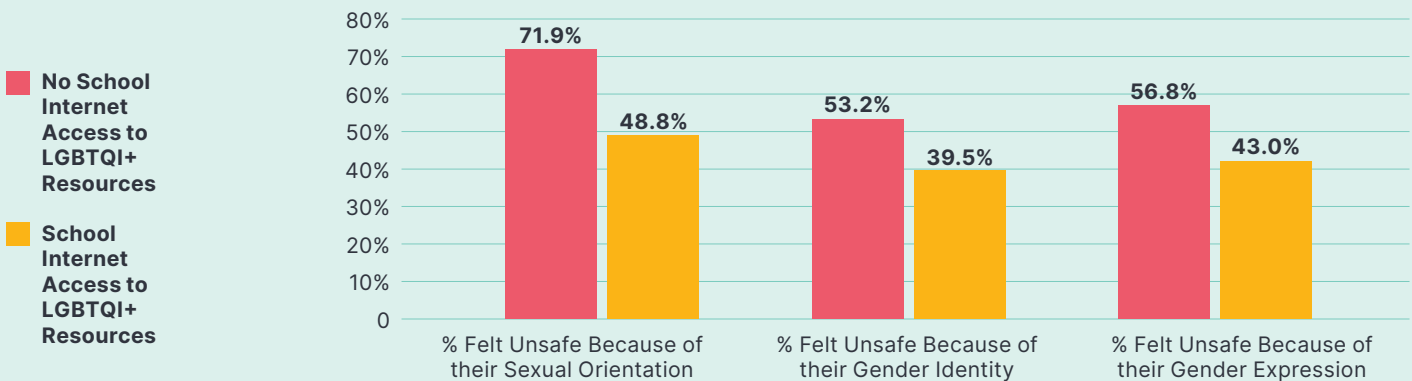
¹⁰³ Kessler, B. (2022, Aug. 18). [How the idea of a “transgender contagion” went viral — and caused untold harm](#). *MIT Technology Review*.

Departments of Education and Health in certain states, including Florida, Virginia, and Missouri have removed resources for LGBTQI+ students from their websites.¹⁰⁴ A recent Center for Democracy and Technology report found that schools are filtering and blocking LGBTQ+ and race-related content, with Title I and licensed special education teachers more likely to report such practices.¹⁰⁵

Our new analysis of 2021 NSCS data indicates access to LGBTQI+ information from school computers is associated with a more positive school climate for LGBTQI+ youth.¹⁰⁶ Compared to LGBTQI+ students who did not have LGBTQI+ inclusive school internet access, those who were able to access **LGBTQI+ affirming information and resources via school internet were:**

- Less likely to report feeling unsafe because of their sexual orientation¹⁰⁷, gender identity, and gender expression¹⁰⁸ (see Figure 5).
- Less likely to miss school due to feeling unsafe¹⁰⁹; and
- More likely to report that they felt accepted by their peers (somewhat or very).¹¹⁰

Figure 5: Percentage of LGBTQI+ Students who Felt Unsafe by Access to LGBTQI+ Inclusive School Internet



¹⁰⁴ Brown, D., (2021, Dec. 21). [FL Dept. of Ed removed LGBTQ resources from website; Nikki Fried fills info gap](#). Florida Phoenix. Vogelsong, S. (2023, July 6). [Youngkin administration removes webpage on LGBTQ resources for youth](#). Virginia Mercury. Bayless, K. (2023, Aug. 25). Missouri health agency quietly scrubbed sexual health, LGBTQ resources from website. The Kansas City Star.

¹⁰⁵ Laird, E., Dwyer, M., & Grant-Chapman, H.. (2023, Sept.). [Off Task: EdTech Threats to Student Privacy and Equity in the Age of AI](#). Center for Democracy and Technology.

¹⁰⁶ Multiple logistic regression was conducted, controlling for presence of LGBTQI+ inclusive instruction. Those who responded "don't know" were treated as missing. Reference group was those who reported no access.

¹⁰⁷ aOR = 0.42, 95% CI: [0.38, 0.46]

¹⁰⁸ aOR = 0.59, 95% CI: [0.54, 0.65]

¹⁰⁹ aOR = 0.41, 95% CI: [0.37, 0.45]

¹¹⁰ aOR = 3.51, 95% CI: [3.13, 3.93]

LGBTQI+ students in states with an **LGBTQI+ curriculum censorship law** reported higher levels of anti-LGBTQI+ harassment and bullying

Anti-LGBTQI+ discrimination and bullying are associated with poorer education and wellbeing outcomes, including lower GPAs, lower self-esteem, and higher levels of depression and suicidality.

Harms of Censoring Inclusive Learning

The two preceding sections discussed how LGBTQI+ inclusive learning is associated with a more positive school climate, in which LGBTQI+ students experience less anti-LGBTQI+ victimization and report greater feelings of belonging and better mental health and educational outcomes, compared to LGBTQI+ students without inclusive learning supports. In this section, we discuss GLSEN's research related to the harms of curriculum censorship and other policies and practices that prohibit LGBTQI+ inclusive learning.

Curriculum Censorship Laws Foster More Hostile School Climates

Lower reports of LGBTQI+ youth's access to LGBTQI+ inclusive instruction, school libraries, and school-based internet in 2021, relative to the peak observed in 2019, is likely an early indicator of the impact of efforts to censor inclusive learning. The first of the new wave of LGBTQI+ curriculum censorship laws was enacted in 2021¹¹¹, during of the administration of the 2021 NSCS, for this reason, GLSEN has not yet assessed differences in LGBTQI+ youth's experiences in K-12 schools between those living in states with one or more new curriculum censorship laws. However, GLSEN's prior research on the earlier curriculum censorship laws targeting LGBTQI+ inclusive sex and health education ("no promo homo laws") provides insight into the impacts we anticipate of these new anti-LGBTQI+ curriculum censorship laws.

Proponents of curriculum censorship laws sometimes point to provisions limiting censorship to particular grades to suggest the laws do not apply broadly, but GLSEN's research indicates that curriculum censorship laws have a chilling effect on LGBTQI+ inclusive instruction that extends well beyond the letter of the law. Laws censoring LGBTQI+ inclusive sex and health education technically applied narrowly to sex or health education contexts, however, GLSEN found that LGBTQI+ youth in states with such laws reported lower levels of LGBTQI+ classroom instruction across subjects.¹¹²

¹¹¹ TN H.B. 529/S.B.1229 (2021). Movement Advancement Project. [Equality Maps: LGBTQ Curricular Laws](#). Accessed 12/18/2023.

¹¹² GLSEN. (2018). [Laws that Prohibit the 'Promotion of Homosexuality': Impacts and Implications](#).

Furthermore, LGBTQI+ students in states with LGBTQI+ curriculum censorship laws reported less access to other LGBTQI+ inclusive supports (including resources in school libraries, supportive student clubs, and supportive educators), compared to their LGBTQI+ peers in states without curriculum censorship laws targeting LGBTQI+ inclusive sex and health education. Related, a 2022 study found that school library holdings are impacted by curriculum censorship laws: states that had curriculum censorship laws that refer to “critical race theory” had fewer school library books addressing race and racism and states that had “don’t say gay or trans” curriculum censorship laws had fewer school library books addressing LGBTQI+ topics.¹¹³

By censoring the lives, stories, and contributions of LGBTQI+ and other marginalized communities, curriculum censorship laws may communicate to the student community that it is acceptable to treat LGBTQI+ and other marginalized youth differently and without basic respect and dignity. Alarming, GLSEN found that LGBTQI+ students in states with an LGBTQI+ curriculum censorship law reported higher levels of anti-LGBTQI+ harassment and bullying and lower levels of peer acceptance, compared to their LGBTQI+ peers in states without a law censoring LGBTQI+ inclusive sex and health education.¹¹⁴

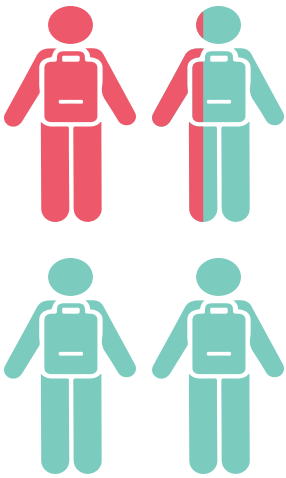
Other research provides further evidence of the harm of censoring inclusive learning:

- The Trevor Project’s 2023 U.S. National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ Young People found that nearly 2 in 3 LGBTQ+ youth aged 13 to 25 said that hearing about potential state or local laws banning people from discussing LGBTQ+ people at school made their mental health a lot worse.¹¹⁵
- The Williams Institute surveyed LGBTQI+ parents in Florida on the impacts of the state’s “Don’t Say Gay or Trans” bill (enacted March 2022) and found that 88% are very or somewhat worried about the effects of the bill on their children and families, 56% considered moving out of Florida, and 16.5% have taken steps to move out of Florida.

¹¹³ Mumma, Kirsten Slungaard. (2023). Politics and Children’s Books: Evidence from School Library Collections. Annenberg Institute at Brown University. <https://doi.org/10.26300/NT5F-FB03>.

¹¹⁴ GLSEN. [Laws that Prohibit the ‘Promotion of Homosexuality’: Impacts and Implications](#).

¹¹⁵ The Trevor Project. (2023). [2023 U.S. National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ Young People](#).



More than one in four students with an LGBTQI+ parent or caregiver were prevented from writing or doing a school project on LGBTQI+ issues.

Censoring Student-Driven Learning

Through student-driven learning, young people develop skills to act independently, explore their motivations and interests (including possible postsecondary education and career paths), and take ownership of their work and paths in life. K-12 education policies and practices that censor learning about LGBTQI+ people, BIPOC communities, and structural inequality not only harm students by prohibiting or discouraging educators from providing inclusive instruction and education resources that provide critical support to those who hold one or more marginalized identity¹¹⁶ but also by silencing students who seek to learn of these subjects independently.

The 2021 NSCS found that **15.6% of LGBTQI+ students were prevented from writing or doing school projects about LGBTQI+ topics for class.**¹¹⁷ Since GLSEN first asked LGBTQI+ youth if they had been prevented from writing or doing school projects about LGBTQI+ topics for class in 2012, students have reported similar rates of censorship. Compared to LGBTQI+ students who have not experienced discrimination at school, censorship and other experiences of anti-LGBTQI+ discrimination at school are associated with poorer education and wellbeing outcomes, including lower GPAs, lower self-esteem, and higher levels of depression and suicidality.¹¹⁸

School internet blocking or filtering software can contribute to the censorship of student-driven learning. The Center for Democracy and Technology (CDT) has found that software that was intended to target explicitly adult content is being used to target and restrict access to content deemed “inappropriate,” including LGBTQI+ and race-related content.¹¹⁹ CDT further found that a majority of all students (69%) report that it is sometimes hard to complete school assignments because they are blocked from being able to get all the online information they need. Compared to their peers who are not LGBTQI+, LGBTQI+ students are more likely to report they experience being blocked or filtered in ways that impact their ability to complete school assignments.

Censorship of student-driven learning on LGBTQI+ topics also impacts students with LGBTQI+ parents or caregivers and their families. In GLSEN’s 2022 survey of students with LGBTQI+ parents or caregivers, more than one in four students (28.5%) with an LGBTQI+ parent or caregivers reported being prevented from writing about or doing school projects on LGBTQI+ issues in classes.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ See our discussion in the Introduction and in the section on LGBTQI+ Inclusive Instruction. See also: Ma, A., Lauer, C., & Gomez Licon, A. (2023, June 7). **As conservative adults target schools, LGBTQ+ kids and students of color feel less safe.** PBS.

¹¹⁷ Kosciw, et al. **The 2021 National School Climate Survey.** (p. 32).

¹¹⁸ Kosciw, et al. **The 2021 National School Climate Survey.** (pp. 34-44).

¹¹⁹ Laird, E., et. al. **Off Task: EdTech Threats to Student Privacy and Equity in the Age of AI.**

¹²⁰ GLSEN, COLAGE & Family Equality. (2023). **Experiences of Students with LGBTQ+ Caregivers and their Families in K-12 Schools.** New York: GLSEN. (p. 27).

Considerations for Future Research in Education Justice

- 1 Considering the significant changes in the state policy landscape in the last three years, further research on the impacts of policies and practices that censor inclusive learning are needed to provide valuable insight into students' experiences.¹²¹
- 2 Research on the impacts of inclusive learning policies, including what best supports implementation in Title I and other schools serving low-income communities, is another important area for future research in light of new and not yet implemented legislation that sets standards for inclusion or prohibit discriminatory censorship in curriculum, instructional materials, and school libraries.¹²²
- 3 There is a need to redress the gap in research on the content of curricular standards and the availability of instruction and school library resources that use an intersectional framework. Efforts to foreclose inclusive learning have brought attention to the targeting of books authored by or centering BIPOC LGBTQI+ people¹²³ and of instruction centering Black history that includes the stories and contributions of Black LGBTQI+ people,¹²⁴ but there is limited research addressing this area.¹²⁵
- 4 There is an important question of equal access to inclusive content (when available) and whether LGBTQI+ students who hold multiple marginalized identities experience unique or disproportionate challenges in obtaining these supports, compared to those who are not LGBTQI+. For example, LGBTQI+ students who are disabled may need specific accommodations for equal access to inclusive instruction and instructional materials. LGBTQI+ students experiencing homelessness may need support with transportation for equal access to school library or school internet resources.

¹²¹ See in this Issue Brief: [The Backlash to Advances in K-12 Inclusive Learning](#) and [Harms of Censoring Inclusive Learning](#).

¹²² For example: OR HB 2023 (2019), CA AB 1078 (2023), and IL HB 2789 (2023). See in this Issue Brief: [Positive Developments in Support of Inclusive Learning: 2001-2023](#).

¹²³ Two of 2022's top 10 most banned books include both LGBTQI+ and BIPOC characters or themes. Natanson, H. (2023, May 23 [updated 2023, June 9]). [Objection to sexual, LGBTQ content propels spike in book challenges](#). *Washington Post*.

¹²⁴ Goldstein, D. (2023, Feb. 1). [Inside the College Board's Revised African American Studies Curriculum](#). *New York Times*.

¹²⁵ One example is an analysis of social studies standards' inclusion of women and girls which considers the inclusion of LGBTQI+ women and girls and of BIPOC women and girls, but not of BIPOC LGBTQI+ women and girls. Maurer, E., Patrick, J., Britto, L. & Millar, H. [Where Are the Women?](#)

Conclusion

Over 20 years, GLSEN's research has demonstrated that LGBTQI+ inclusive instruction promotes a more positive school climate, where LGBTQI+ youth are more likely to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally, and experience less severe anti-LGBTQI+ harassment and bullying, compared to LGBTQI+ youth without inclusive learning supports. This issue brief demonstrates that the benefits of LGBTQI+ inclusive learning extend beyond the classroom to school libraries, instructional materials, and school laptops or media centers (and other means of accessing school internet). We have intentionally moved to consider inclusive learning broadly here to illuminate a fuller range of sites and resources in K-12 schools that support student learning, including that which is student-driven. At the time of publication, each of these sites and resources is under attack by those opposed to inclusive learning.

It is important to reiterate that inclusion requires the use of an intersectional framework. When all students are free and empowered to learn about LGBTQI+ people, BIPOC communities, disabled people, and those who hold multiple of these and other marginalized identities, they are better resourced to live, learn, and work in a multiracial democracy and interconnected world.

In closing, we discuss recommendations for policymakers and stakeholders, including educators, students, and families based on the synthesis of research presented here. Our focus remains on just one of GLSEN's Four Supports — inclusive learning — however it is important to recognize the interplay between inclusive learning and our other Four Supports: GSAs and other opportunities for youth leadership and peer support; supportive school staff; and comprehensive policies that prohibit discrimination and harassment, assault, or bullying based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and other personal characteristics. For example, policies, programs, and funding in support of LGBTQI+ inclusive, culturally responsive educator professional development (including that which addresses tribal sovereignty¹²⁶ and the rights of immigrant and emergent bilingual youth) are needed to support the implementation of inclusive curricular standards and other inclusive learning policies and programs. Future GLSEN issue briefs will provide a synthesis of research on our three remaining Four Supports-related recommendations for policymakers and stakeholders.

¹²⁶ McCarty, T., & Lee, T. (2014). Critical Culturally Sustaining/Revitalizing Pedagogy and Indigenous Education Sovereignty. *Harvard Educational Review*, 84(1), 101–124. <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.84.1.q83746nl5pj34216>.



Recommendations for State & Local Policymakers

As discussed in [Systems Shaping What Students Learn](#), policy plays a critical role in determining whether students have access to inclusive instruction and other K-12 education resources that present affirming representations of LGBTQI+ people, BIPOC communities, people with disabilities, and others who experience marginalization. For example, research indicates that LEAs generally review and revise curriculum when required to do so, including after revision of state curricular standards.¹²⁷ Chief state school officers and state education agencies support compliant implementation of state laws and regulations through the provision of technical assistance and implementation resources, such as model curriculum.¹²⁸

State and local education agencies must act to ensure students have access to inclusive learning, including instruction and school libraries. In doing so, they may leverage funding from the federal government, including Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) formula grants and competitive grants, which can be used to support state and local adoption and implementation of inclusive learning policies.¹²⁹

State and local policymakers should also consider their obligations under federal law, including nondiscrimination protections. As discussed in our Synthesis of Research, inclusive learning is associated with less hostile school climates, including illegal sex-based bullying and harassment. Federal laws have been used to challenge state and local policies targeting inclusive learning. In 2017, a federal judge struck down an Arizona state law banning ethnic studies that were demonstrably motivated by racial animus.¹³⁰ In 2023, the U.S. Department of Education found that Forsyth County Schools in Georgia likely violated federal protections from a hostile school climate based on race and sex (including sexual orientation and gender identity) because of the district's library book removal policies.¹³¹

¹²⁷ Allen, I. E., and Seaman, J. (2017). What We Teach. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED582435>.

¹²⁸ GLSEN's research has found that LEAs are more likely to adopt compliant policies in support of LGBTQI+ youth when their SEA has issued comprehensive guidance. Kull, et. al. (2015). [From Statehouse to Schoolhouse: Anti-Bullying Policy Efforts in US States and School Districts](#). (p. 6).

¹²⁹ Washick, B., Tobin, H. J., Ridings, A., Juste, T. (2021). [States' Use of the Every Student Succeeds Act to Advance LGBTQ+ Equity: Assessment of State Plans and Recommendations](#). DC: GLSEN

¹³⁰ Stephenson, H. (2021, Jul. 11). [What Arizona's 2010 Ban on Ethnic Studies Could Mean for the Fight Over Critical Race Theory](#). *Politico*.

¹³¹ U.S. Department of Education. (2023, May 19). [U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights Resolves Investigation of the Removal of Library Books in Forsyth County Schools in Georgia](#).

GLSEN Recommendations to Governors and Chief State School Officers

- Adopt Inclusive Curricular Standards, that address the experiences, perspectives, and contributions of LGBTQI+ people, Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC), people with disabilities, and from all communities that experience marginalization. History or social studies (including ethnic studies and civics), English, science, art, and mathematics are important priorities, but all subjects benefit from an inclusive standard.
- Adopt and implement Inclusive Sex Education standards. Sex education must be medically accurate, evidence-based, age and developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive, and inclusive of all identities. States should develop sex education policies that align with the [National Sexuality Education Standards](#).
- Provide technical assistance and resources to support LEAs in reviewing, developing, and implementing inclusive curriculum and other inclusive learning policies, such as school library selection and collection development policies. Examples include:
 - Oregon Department of Education technical assistance and resources on implementing [Oregon S.B. 13 \(2017\) Tribal History/Shared History](#).
 - Illinois’s [Inclusive Curriculum Implementation Guidance](#) was created through a collaboration between the Illinois Inclusive Curriculum Advisory Council, the Illinois State Board of Education, the Illinois Education Association, and the Illinois Federation of Teachers.
- Provide funding and guidance on authorized uses of state and federal funds to support the review and implementation of inclusive curriculum locally.

Related Resources

The [State Education Agency \(SEA\) Responsibilities Section](#) of GLSEN’s Model Inclusive Curricular Standards Legislation may be adopted in support of these recommendations.

GLSEN’s report, [States’ Use of ESSA to Advance LGBTQ+ Equity](#), discusses how SEAs can leverage federal funds in support of inclusive learning policies and programming.

GLSEN Recommendations to State Legislators

- Pass [inclusive curricular standards legislation](#) that includes the experiences, perspectives, and contributions of LGBTQI+ people, Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC), people with disabilities, and from all communities that experience marginalization.
 - GLSEN endorses the Nevada [Assembly Bill 261 \(2021\)](#) as a model for comprehensive inclusive curricular standards legislation that addresses multiple marginalized identities (including LGBTQI+, racial/ethnic minorities, Native American/Tribes, persons with disabilities, people of various socioeconomic statuses, religious

backgrounds, immigrants and refugees, and other marginalized identities) and core academic subjects, including social science, arts and humanities, and STEM subjects.

- GLSEN endorses Oregon’s LGBTQI+ inclusive curricular standards legislation (**H.B. 2023, 2019**) and its Tribal History/Shared History Act (**S.B. 13, 2017**), as a model for supporting the implementation of inclusive curricular standards laws.
- Pass comprehensive sex and personal health and safety education legislation that is medically accurate and inclusive of young people who are LGBTQ+, intersex, BIPOC, and people with disabilities. Sex education must be medically accurate, evidence-based, age and developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive, and inclusive of all identities. States should adopt sex education policies that align with the **National Sexuality Education Standards**.
- Pass inclusive learning legislation that affirms the importance of access to inclusive materials and educators, including through the creation of a youth-led task force on LGBTQI+ pupil education, beyond classroom instruction. See, for example:
 - **Protect access to inclusive instructional materials: CA AB 1078 (2023)** strengthens protections in existing law to ensure that local school districts provide accurate and inclusive instructional materials for students, including by prohibiting a local school board from refusing to adopt a textbook or other instructional material on the basis that it accurately portrays the cultural and racial diversity of our society.
 - **Prohibit censorship of library materials: IL HB 2789 (2023)** requires each Illinois library that receives State grants to establish an anti-censorship policy. Specifically, it says that those libraries will only be eligible for State grants if they either “adopt the American Library Association’s Library Bill of Rights”¹³² or “develop a written statement prohibiting the practice of banning books or other materials within the library or library system.”

Related Resources

GLSEN’s **Model Inclusive Curricular Standards Legislation** can support legislators in drafting inclusive curricular standards legislation that addresses their unique state context. Contact policy@glsen.org for further resources on legislative efforts to combat book banning and other restrictions on inclusive learning.

SIECUS State Profiles provide an overview of sex education standards.

GLSEN’s report, **States’ Use of ESSA to Advance LGBTQ+ Equity**, discusses how SEAs can leverage Title II-A to fund inclusive learning policies and programming.

¹³² American Library Association. (2006, June 30). **Library Bill of Rights**.

GLSEN Recommendations to Local Education Agencies

- Implement inclusive curricula that affirm the experiences, perspectives, and contributions of LGBTQI+ people, Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC), people with disabilities, and from all communities that experience marginalization.
- Implement an inclusive Selection or Collection Development Policy for school libraries.
- Use committees or work groups to support meaningful engagement with youth and families who are LGBTQI+, BIPOC, and otherwise experience marginalization in the review and development of curriculum standards and other policies impacting inclusive learning.
- Provide culturally and linguistically responsive professional development to support educators in implementing inclusive learning policies and programs.
- Leverage federal funding to support the implementation of inclusive learning policies and programs.

Related Resources

GLSEN Professional Development (provides role-specific best-practices and resources for school staff implementing inclusive learning policies or programs).

Through GLSEN's **Rainbow Library** program school staff can request a free set of grade-aligned LGBTQI+ inclusive books and resources.

GLSEN's report, **States' Use of ESSA to Advance LGBTQ+ Equity**, discusses how LEAs can leverage Title II-A to fund inclusive learning policies and programming.

Recommendations for Federal Policymakers

The federal government provides sustaining funds to K-12 schools through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), and supports innovation and improvement through competitive grant programs. Federal laws prohibit discrimination based on sex (including sexual orientation, gender identity, and variations in sex characteristics), race and ethnicity, and disability in federally funded education programs. State and local policies or practices that targeted inclusive learning have been found to violate federal law.¹³³

¹³³ Stephenson, H. **What Arizona's 2010 Ban on Ethnic Studies Could Mean for the Fight Over Critical Race Theory**. U.S. Department of Education. **U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights Resolves Investigation of the Removal of Library Books in Forsyth County Schools in Georgia**.

GLSEN Recommendations to Congress

- Pass the **LGBTQI+ and Women’s History Education Act**, which would authorize new funding to create and disseminate resources to local education agencies to support inclusive instruction of LGBTQI+ history.
- Provide truly adequate funding for public schools and for the Department of Education to carry out its mission of promoting student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access.

GLSEN Recommendations to the U.S. Department of Education

- Ensure robust enforcement of federal civil rights statutes, including Title IX, when there is an alleged hostile learning environment due to the suppression or censorship of LGBTQI+ topics in classroom instruction or LGBTQI+ resources in school libraries or school-based internet.
- Enumerate, reinforce, and raise awareness that federal funding streams may be utilized by SEAs and LEAs to improve access to LGBTQI+ inclusive learning, especially under ESSA Title I, Title II-A (supporting effective instruction), Title II-B-2 (literacy education), Title II-B-3 (history and civics education), and Title IV-A (student support and academic enrichment).
- Prioritize the use of an intersectional, LGBTQI+ inclusive framework in competitive grant programs that impact the availability of inclusive learning.¹³⁴

Recommendations for Stakeholders

Through their work and civil engagement, youth, educators, and advocates play a critical role in shaping school policies and practices, as well as the policies adopted at all levels of governance.

GLSEN Recommendations to Students and Youth

- Join **GLSEN’s Youth Membership Program**.
- Check out the **National Student Council**, a youth leadership and engagement program for LGBTQI+ high school students, and consider applying to join a future cohort.
- Youth aged 18-25 can apply to advocate for safe, affirming schools for LGBTQI+ youth through the **Freedom Fellowship** program.

¹³⁴ For example, see GLSEN et al., “Public Comment on Proposed Priorities-American History and Civics Education. 86 Fed. Reg. §73 (April 19, 2021), on American History and Civics Education Grants,” May 19, 2021, available at <https://www.glsen.org/US-history-civics-federal-grants-2021>.

Related Resources

[Know Your Rights Factsheet: LGBTQI+ Students](#)

[GLSEN Student and GSA Resources](#)

GLSEN Recommendations to Educators

- [Join GLSEN's Educators Network](#) to stay informed of new resources and opportunities to connect with other educators committed to inclusive learning.
- Participate on a curriculum review and development committee for subjects you teach.
- Attend your local school board (LEA) meeting and share your expertise and experiences with implementing inclusive learning.
- Ask your school or district for LGBTQI+ inclusive and culturally and linguistically responsive professional development.

Related Resources

[Know Your Rights Factsheet: LGBTQI+ Educators](#)

[GLSEN Professional Development](#) (provides role-specific best-practices and resources for school staff implementing inclusive learning policies or programs).

[Rainbow Library](#) (school staff can request request a free set of grade-aligned LGBTQI+ inclusive books and resources)

GLSEN Recommendations to Families and Community Members

- Connect with your local [GLSEN Chapter](#) or [PFLAG Chapter](#) serving your community.
- Attend your local school board (LEA) meeting and speak out in support of inclusive learning.
- Contact your representatives to voice support for inclusive learning policies.

Related Resources

[GLSEN Navigator](#) has interactive maps to deepen your understanding of inclusive learning conditions in your state.

[Action Alert: Tell your U.S. Representative to Support the LGBTQI+ and Women's History Education Act!](#)

Appendix

Process Design

To synthesize GLSEN's research on LGBTQI+ inclusive learning, we reviewed over 20 years of research, beginning with the first comprehensive National School Climate Survey (NSCS) administered in 2001. In addition to reviewing NSCS reports published biennially from 2001 to 2021, we reviewed findings from GLSEN's surveys of K-12 students and teachers, conducted in partnership with Harris Interactive in 2005 and 2015; surveys of LGBTQI+ students and families conducted in Summer 2022, in partnership with Family Equality and COLAGE; and a survey of teacher educators, conducted in 2016 in partnership with AACTE.

New analyses of 2021 NSCS data were completed by GLSEN's School Climate Research Manager. Logistic regression (or multiple logistic regression when including covariates) was conducted, and any applicable subsequent pairwise comparisons were adjusted using Tukey correction. Significance was evaluated at the $p < .05$ level. See footnotes in the body of this document for specifics, including odds ratios (or adjusted odds ratios) and 95% confidence intervals. A complete description of the 2021 NSCS collection and sample are available in the original report, [The 2021 National School Climate Survey: The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Youth in Our Nation's Schools](#).

GLSEN Research values participatory research practices of involving people closest to the ground as a strategy of education justice. We invited GLSEN stakeholders, including youth serving as Freedom Fellows, members of GLSEN's Educator Advisory Council, GLSEN Chapter Leaders, and GLSEN State Policy Fellows to engage in the development of this issue brief as reviewers of a first draft. Additionally, we invited key external partners, including organizations leading work to advance equal educational opportunity for BIPOC students and students with disabilities to review and provide feedback on a second draft. All reviewers were asked how they are comfortable being acknowledged for their work and contributions and are acknowledged accordingly.

Figure 2: LGBTQI+ Secondary Students Taught any Postive Representations of LGBTQI+ People, History, or Topics by State; % increase/decrease between 2011 and 2021 NSCS

	2020-2021	2010-2011	Change over 10 years
Alabama	8%	8%	0%
Arizona	14%	11%	3%
California	27%	22%	5%
Colorado	15%	20%	-5%
Connecticut	22%	34%	-12%
Florida	12%	12%	0%
Georgia	10%	9%	1%
Indiana	11%	10%	1%
Iowa	15%	11%	4%
Kentucky	10%	9%	1%
Louisiana	8%	14%	-6%
Maine	25%	22%	3%
Maryland	27%	21%	6%
Massachusetts	31%	34%	-3%
Michigan	13%	11%	2%
Minnesota	19%	25%	-6%
Missouri	12%	11%	1%
New Jersey	24%	27%	-3%
New York	25%	23%	2%
North Carolina	12%	10%	2%
Ohio	13%	21%	-8%
Oregon	32%	23%	9%
Pennsylvania	17%	18%	-1%
South Carolina	9%	6%	3%
Tennessee	8%	9%	-1%
Texas	11%	11%	0%
Utah	13%	16%	-3%
Virginia	16%	10%	6%
Washington	25%	18%	7%
Wisconsin	21%	25%	-4%

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