

G

**IMPROVING SCHOOL
CLIMATE FOR
TRANSGENDER AND
NONBINARY YOUTH**

RESEARCH BRIEF

Over 20 years of GLSEN's Research has established that schools are not safe or welcoming spaces for LGBTQ youth, who face hostile school climates due to their sexual orientation, gender, and gender expression. Further, our research has historically shown that transgender and nonbinary students (i.e., students whose genders do not align with the sex they were assigned at birth) experience especially hostile climates compared to their cisgender lesbian, gay, bisexual, and

Supportive Clubs

GSA's can provide LGBTQ students with a safe and affirming space within a school that may otherwise be unwelcoming or hostile, and may signal to all students that LGBTQ people are valued at school. These clubs may provide space for social support between LGBTQ students and allies or a space for activism to create positive change in their school.

- Six in ten transgender and nonbinary students (61.1%) reported that they had access to a GSA at their school; and
- Of transgender and nonbinary students who had a GSA, 45.2% attended often or frequently, and 38.9% reported that they served as a leader or officer of their GSA.¹¹

Supportive Personnel

Teachers, principals, and other school staff who are supportive of LGBTQ people serve as another supportive resource for transgender and nonbinary students, as they provide a caring and affirming adult for youth who may be struggling with marginalization and an unsafe and unwelcoming school climate. Given that transgender and nonbinary students experience especially hostile school climates, having access to such supportive educators may be especially important for these students.

- Nearly all transgender and nonbinary students (98.1%) could identify at least one school staff member whom they believed was supportive of LGBTQ students, and 63.2% could identify six or more; and
- A little over 4 in 10 transgender and nonbinary students (41.6%) reported that their school administration was somewhat or very supportive of LGBTQ students.

Inclusive Curricular Resources

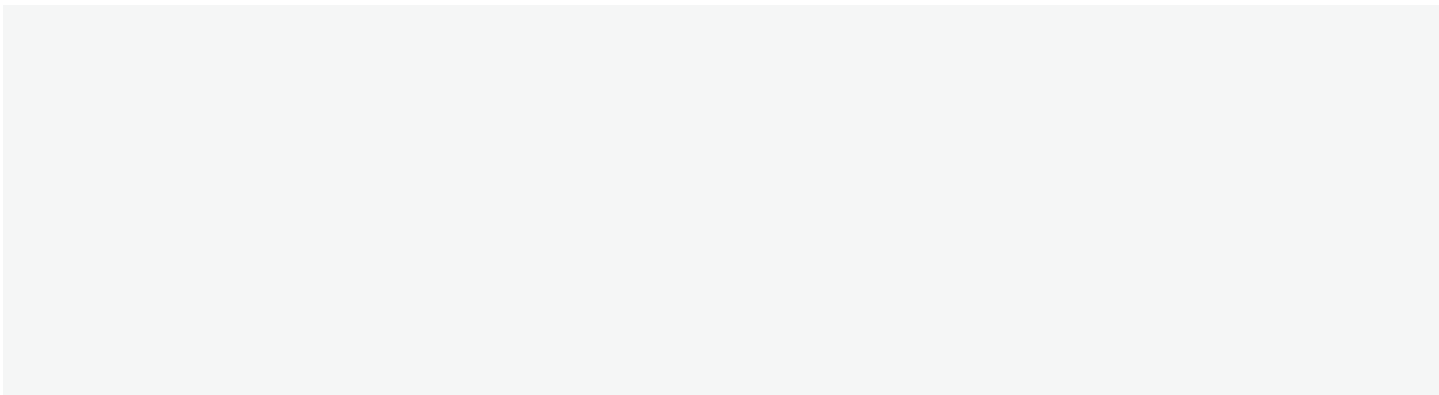
Positive representations of LGBTQ people and topics may improve transgender and nonbinary students' school experiences by exposing them to positive representations of people who share their identity and by messaging to these students that their identities and experiences are important and valuable. Additionally, such representation

exposes *all* students to positive information about LGBTQ people and topics, which may lead to a more affirming student body and a more positive school climate.

- Only 17.2% of transgender and nonbinary students reported that they had been taught positive things about LGBTQ people, history, events or topics in any of their classes.

Inclusive School Policies

Comprehensive anti-bullying policies explicitly state protections from victimization based on sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, and may provide



Senior School Climate: Presence of a GSA

Having a GSA at school may contribute to a less hostile climate for transgender and nonbinary students. Those transgender and nonbinary students who went to schools with a GSA reported:

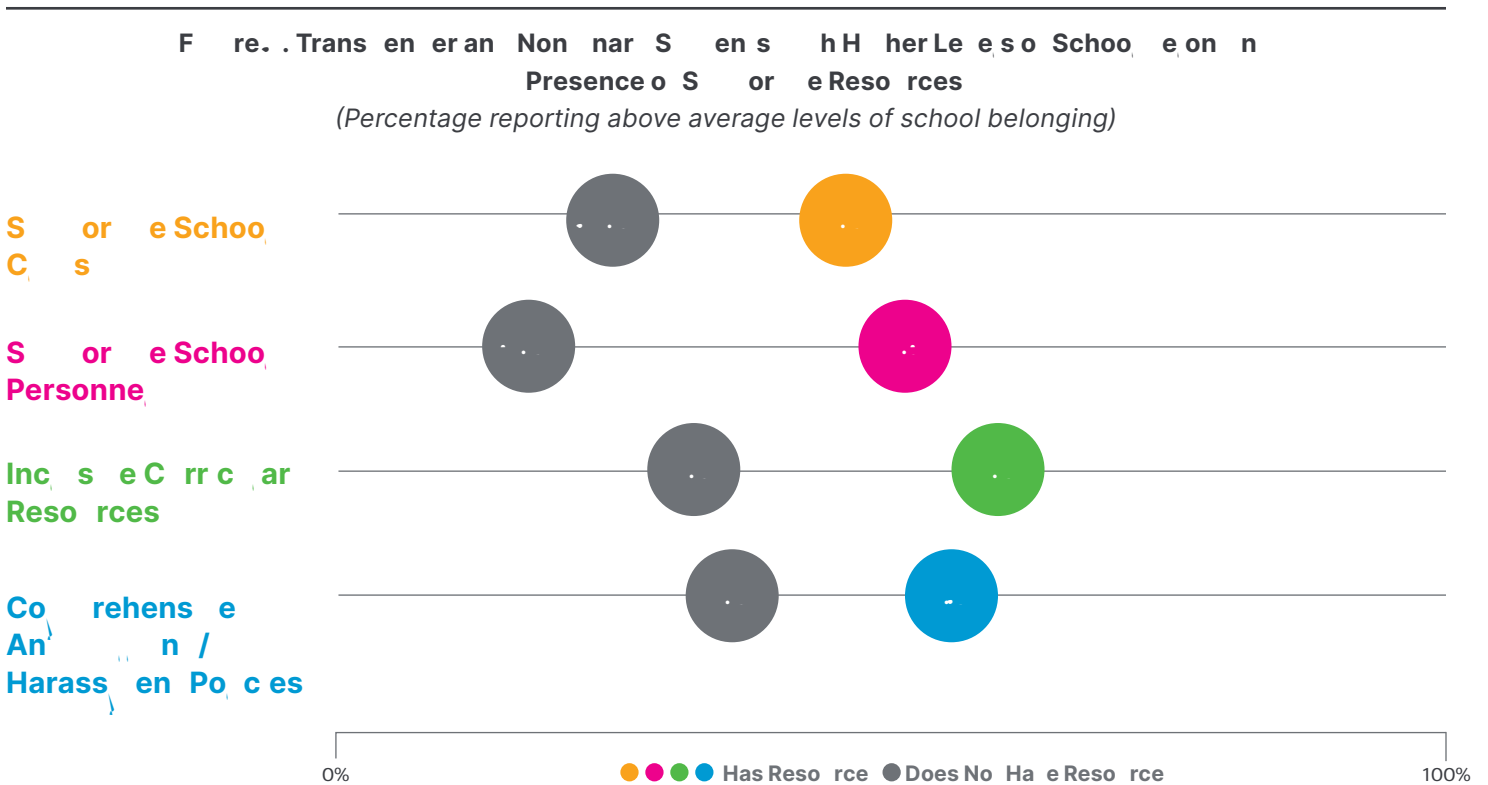
-

Supportive School Personnel

LGBTQ-supportive staff may have a positive impact on school climate for transgender and nonbinary students. Students with more supportive staff at school were less likely to feel unsafe at school because of their gender and gender expression and less likely to miss school because they felt unsafe (See Figures 3, 4 & 5).²⁴

Supportive educators can also enhance transgender and nonbinary students' connection to school and their educational aspirations. Students who could identify more supportive staff reported:

- Greater levels of school belonging (see Figure 2).²⁵



Inclusive Curriculum Resources

Positive representations of LGBTQ people and topics in the curriculum can also have a positive impact on school climate for transgender and nonbinary students. Among the transgender and nonbinary students in our survey, attending a school that included positive representations of LGBTQ people and topics in the curriculum was related to:

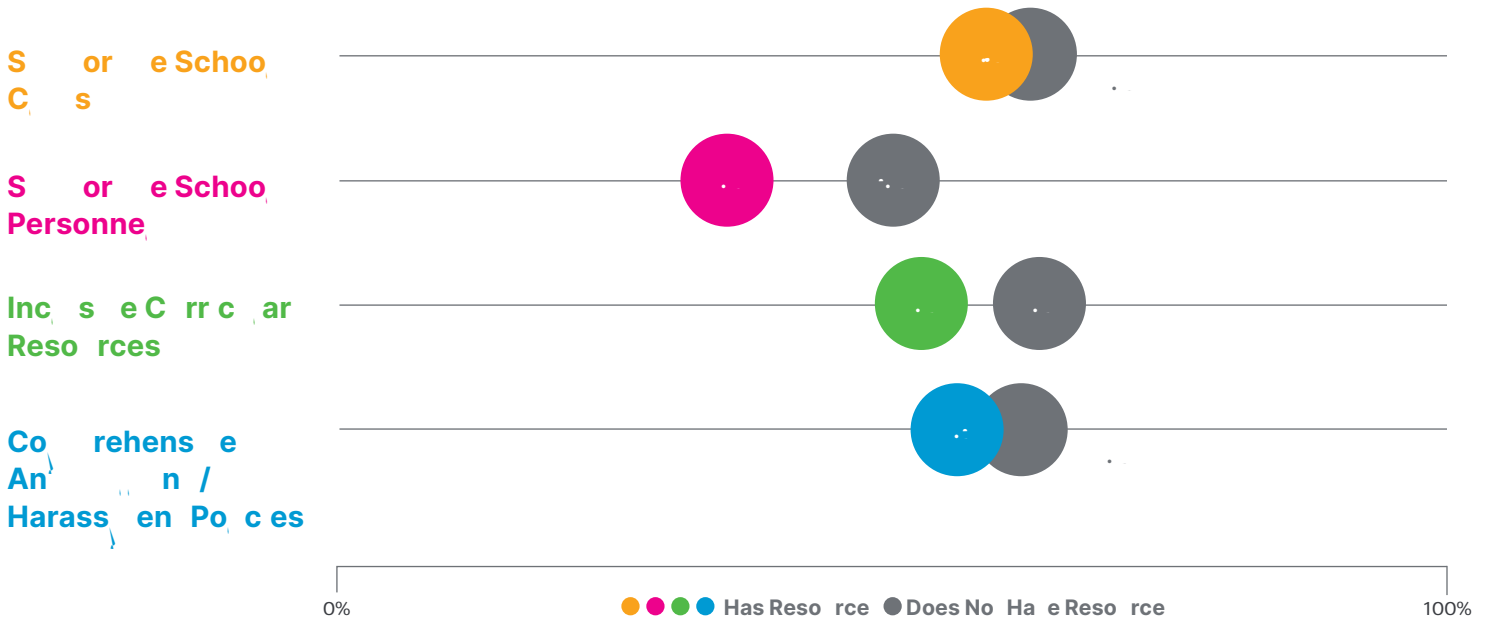
- Lower likelihood of feeling unsafe at school because of gender and gender expression, and missing fewer days of school because of feeling unsafe (see Figures 3, 4 & 5).³¹
- Fewer negative remarks about gender expression at school (61.4% of students with inclusive curriculum) vs. 61.4% of students without inclusive curriculum).³²
- Fewer negative remarks about transgender people at school (57.5% of students with inclusive curriculum) vs. 57.5% of students without inclusive curriculum).³³
- More frequent peer intervention on biased remarks about gender (67.5% of students with inclusive curriculum) vs. 67.5% of students without inclusive curriculum).³⁴

Score School
Climate

Score School
Personnel

Incidence Career
Resources

Comprehensive
Anti-Harassment /
Harassment Policies



Do the needs of transgender and nonbinary students differ from those of cisgender students? How do school resources and policies affect transgender and nonbinary students?

GSA Participation

GSA participation is related to higher self-esteem for all LGBTQ students,⁵⁰ and the relationship is slightly stronger for transgender and nonbinary students.⁵¹

LGBTQ students who attend GSA meetings more frequently are less likely to feel unsafe regarding their gender,⁵² and the relationship is stronger for transgender and nonbinary students.⁵³

Supportive School Personnel

CONCLUSION

Supportive school resources help create safer and more affirming school climates and improve school experiences for transgender and nonbinary students, as they do for LGBTQ youth as a whole. In fact, our results show that in some instances, the positive benefits of these resources are even stronger for transgender and nonbinary students than they are for cisgender LGBQ youth. Considering that transgender and nonbinary students by and large face more hostile school climates in the U.S., educators, administrators, and policy makers must work perhaps even more diligently to ensure that these students have access to GSAs, LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum, comprehensive anti-bullying policies, and supportive school personnel at their schools.

A OUT THE RESEARCH

Data for this brief comes from the *2019 National School Climate Survey* (NSCS). The 2019 NSCS was conducted online from April through August 2019. To obtain a representative national sample of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) youth, we conducted outreach through national, regional, and local organizations that provide services to or advocate on behalf of LGBTQ youth, and advertised and promoted on social media sites, such as Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat.

The final sample consisted of a total of 16,713 LGBTQ secondary school students between the ages of 13 and 21. Of this full sample, 7,203 students identified as transgender or nonbinary.⁶⁴ Students were from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, American Samoa, and Guam. Just over two-thirds of the full sample (69.2%) was White, 16.1% was Black, 10.1% was Hispanic, 4.0% was Asian, and 1.5% was American Indian or Alaska Native. The remaining 1.0% of the sample was categorized as "Other."

Endnotes

1.

with GSA attendance [high attendance (often or frequently) vs. low attendance (never, rarely, sometimes)] as the independent variable, and school belonging, self-esteem, and depression as the dependent variables. The multivariate effect was significant: Pillai's trace = .002, $F(3, 4303) = 3.37, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .002$. The univariate effect for school belonging was significant: $F(1, 4305) = 6.74, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .002$. The univariate effect for self-esteem was significant: $F(1, 4305) = 7.53, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .002$. The univariate effect for depression was not significant.

23. The relationships between number of supportive staff, and feeling unsafe at school and missing school due to feeling unsafe were examined through Pearson correlations using data from the *2019 National School Climate Survey – Feeling unsafe regarding gender*: $r(7112) = -.10, p < .001$; *Feeling unsafe because of gender expression*: $r(7112) = -.14, p < .001$; *Missing school because of feeling unsafe* $r(7131) = -.25, p < .001$.
24. The relationships between number of supportive staff school belonging and psychological well-being were examined through Pearson correlations using data from the *2019 National School Climate Survey – School belonging*: $r(7138) = .49, p < .001$; *Self-esteem*: $r(7078) = .21, p < .001$; *Depression*: $r(7065) = -.26, p < .001$.
25. The relationships between number of supportive staff school belonging and psychological well-being were examined through Pearson correlations using data from the *2019 National School Climate Survey – School belonging*: $r(7138) = .49, p < .001$; *Self-esteem*: $r(7078) = .21, p < .001$; *Depression*: $r(7065) = -.26, p < .001$.

significant: Pillai's trace = .03, $F(2, 7172) = 109.01$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$. The univariate effect for negative remarks about gender expression was significant: $F(1, 7173) = 119.26$, $p < .001$,

54. Kosciw, J. G., Clark, C. M., Truong, N. L., & Zongrone, A. D. (2020). *The 2019 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth in our nation's school*. New York: GLSEN.
55. To test the differential effects of supportive school personnel on feelings of safety, a two-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was performed, controlling for age and race/ethnicity, with number of supportive educators and gender identity as independent variables, missing school because of feeling unsafe as the dependent variable, and the interaction supportive personnel X gender identity. The interaction term was significant:
F

GLSEN[®] | RESEARCH
INSTITUTE

[,sen.or /Research](https://www.glsen.org/Research)