



# The 2007 National School Climate Survey

The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay,  
Bisexual and Transgender Youth  
in Our Nation's Schools



A Report from the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network  
[www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org)



# The 2007 National School Climate Survey

**The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay,  
Bisexual and Transgender Youth  
in Our Nation's Schools**

by Joseph G. Kosciw, Ph.D.  
Elizabeth M. Diaz  
Emily A. Greytak, M.S.Ed.

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**National Headquarters**

90 Broad Street, 2nd floor  
New York, NY 10004  
Ph: 212-727-0135 Fax: 212-727-0254

**DC Policy Office**

1012 14th Street, NW, Suite 1105  
Washington, DC 20005  
Ph: 202-347-7780 Fax: 202-347-7781

[glsen@glsen.org](mailto:glsen@glsen.org)

[www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org)

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The **Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network** is the leading national education organization focused on ensuring safe schools for all lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students. Established nationally in 1995, GLSEN envisions a world in which every child learns to respect and accept all people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression.

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## PREFACE

As the 2007 National School Climate Survey goes to press, the wedding of Ellen DeGeneres and Portia de Rossi graces the cover of *People* magazine. Some commentators have dubbed today's adolescents the "Will and Grace" generation, arguing that issues like sexual orientation and gender identity are, in fact, "non-issues" for them as they live in a brave new world where LGBT people are seen as just another group. One went so far in *Time* magazine as to say "only 18% of gay and transgender students said they had been assaulted in 2005 because of their sexual orientation" — as if nearly one in five students being punched, kicked or injured with a weapon while at school was not a lot.

Try telling the students at E.O. Green Junior High in Oxnard, California that LGBT concerns are "not a big issue."

On Tuesday, Feb. 12, 2008, an openly gay 8th grader named Lawrence King was shot to death by a classmate named Brandon McInerney at E.O. Green Junior High. Brandon was threatened by Lawrence's self-acceptance of his sexual orientation and by his nontraditional gender expression, so threatened that he brought a gun to school and murdered Lawrence while he was working on an English paper in the school's computer lab (a final and most extreme act in a pattern of bullying in which Brandon had engaged towards Lawrence for an extended period of time, a pattern which school officials seem to have done little to interrupt). Oxnard's just up the 101 from Hollywood, less than an hour away from where *Will & Grace* and *Ellen* are filmed.

I guess the students at E.O. Green Junior High just hadn't gotten the message that being LGBT is no big deal.

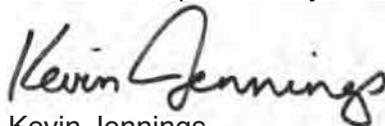
The results of GLSEN's fifth biennial National School Climate Survey (NSCS), the only national survey concerning the school experiences of students who identify as LGBT, show that issues of sexual orientation and gender identity remain a very big deal in our schools

and that every legislator, educator, school board, and community leader concerned with ensuring safe and effective schools for ALL students needs to take urgent action to address them.

The 2007 NSCS contains important results that are distressing and, at the same time, reveal seeds of hope. On the positive front, these data show that schools can and are taking actions that are measurably improving the climate so that LGBT students can better access educational opportunities. But such positive action is far too rare an occurrence.

As Andy Warhol once said, “They say that time changes things, but actually you have to change them yourself.” Nothing in history is inevitable. The changes we need to see in our schools will only happen if we all work for them. Improvements come because of the intentional acts by state legislators who enact comprehensive, LGBT-inclusive anti-bullying policies, by administrators who institute training for school staff, by teachers who include LGBT issues in their curriculum, by students who establish student clubs dealing with LGBT issues—all of which are shown in this survey to have a significant positive impact on the experience of LGBT students. This report shows the benefits of these actions for LGBT students — lowered rates of name-calling and harassment, decreased absenteeism, an increased sense of school safety and school belonging, and higher grade point averages. It also reveals the fact that the vast majority of schools haven’t taken action and the negative consequences that occur when they don’t.

As we release our fifth NSCS, I quite honestly feel a little depressed by how little things have improved from when we published our first report almost a decade ago. Why is it — when research shows so clearly that there are specific policy and programmatic interventions that will make our schools safer — that so many states and districts continue to do nothing, allowing school to remain an unsafe place for so many LGBT students? Maybe those passive policymakers, administrators, and teachers who sit by and do nothing think Ellen DeGeneres and Will Truman will solve this problem. Unfortunately, Ellen and Will don’t run our schools (although I suspect school would be a lot more fun if they did), and they can’t solve the problems we face with school climate. That’s our job, and the job of anyone who cares about education. So let’s make sure that the 39 state legislatures that have yet to enact protective legislation, the more than 20,000 high schools that have yet to establish GSAs, the innumerable districts where there has not been one moment of training offered to teachers on these issues, do **their** job. The 2007 NSCS gives them a clear roadmap, and they need to use it.



Kevin Jennings  
Executive Director  
GLSEN



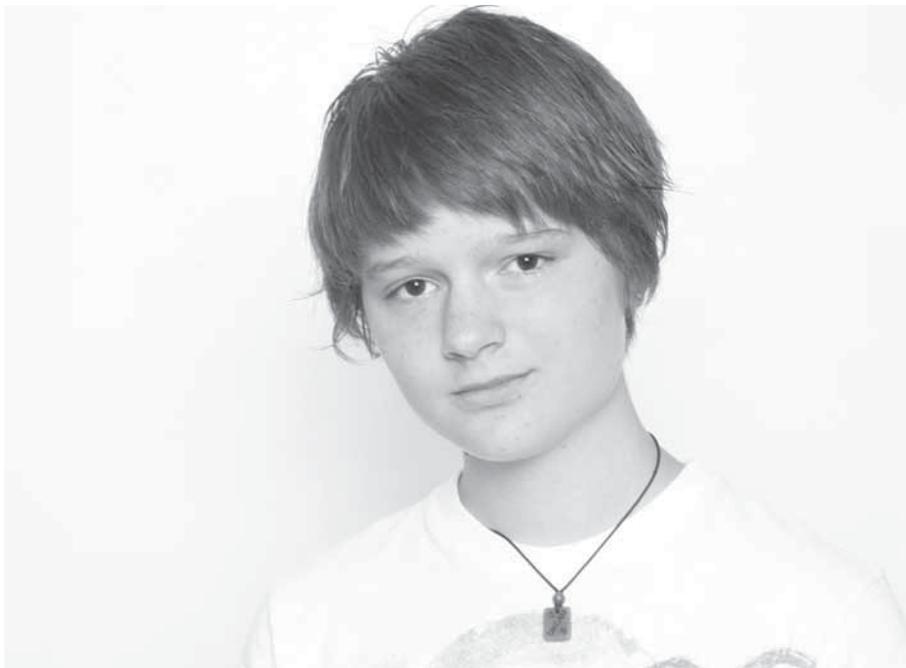
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The authors also wish to thank the youth who participated in our survey for enlightening us about their experiences in school. We also wish to acknowledge the LGBT youth services and programs that had their constituents participate in the survey, as well as those organizations that assisted with disseminating information about the online version of the survey. We are grateful to Justin Rosado, GLSEN's Program Assistant, for his all-around work on the project, including data entry and management and keen input on the report's graphic design and layout; Shameka White for data entry, and GLSEN's Communications Department for their assistance in proofreading and production

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Given the limited attention paid by federal, state, and local policymakers to the issues facing many LGBT students, and because our work at GLSEN to make schools safe for all students is an ongoing one, it is important for us to keep informed about the experiences of LGBT students in their schools. Since 1999, GLSEN has conducted the National School Climate Survey (NSCS) every two years to document the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students in America's schools. The NSCS remains one of the few studies to examine the school experiences of LGB students nationally, and is the only one to include transgender students.

In our 2007 survey, we examine the experiences of LGBT students with regard to indicators of negative school climate: hearing biased remarks, including homophobic remarks, in school; feeling unsafe in school because of personal characteristics, such as sexual orientation or race/ethnicity; missing classes or days of school because of safety reasons, and experiences of harassment and assault in school. We also examine the possible negative effects of a hostile school climate on LGBT students' achievement and educational aspirations. We explore the diverse nature of LGBT students' experiences and report how these differ by students' personal and community characteristics. We also examine whether or not students report experiences of victimization to school officials or to family members and how these adults address the problem. In addition, we demonstrate the degree to which LGBT students have access to supportive resources in school, such as Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs), safe school laws and policies, supportive school staff, inclusive curricula, and library resources on LGBT-related topics and explore the possible benefits of these resources.

## **METHODS**

We used two methods to locate survey participants in an effort to obtain a representative national sample of LGBT youth: outreach through community-based groups serving LGBT youth and outreach via the Internet.

With our first method, we randomly selected 50 community-based groups from a list of over 300 groups nationwide, which asked their youth participants to complete a paper version of the survey. Our second method utilized GLSEN's web presence, e-communications and online advertising to obtain participants. We posted notices of the survey on LGBT-youth oriented listservs and websites and emailed notices to GLSEN chapters and youth advocacy organizations. To ensure representation of transgender youth and youth of color, we made special efforts to reach out to organizations that serve these populations. We also conducted targeted advertising on the MySpace social networking site. The advertisements targeted users between 13 and 18 years of age who identified in their user profile as gay, lesbian or bisexual.

The sample consisted of a total of 6,209 LGBT K-12 students, from all 50 states and the District of Columbia, between the ages of 13 and 21. About two-thirds of the sample (64.4%) was white, over half (57.7%) was female and over half identified as gay or lesbian (53.6%). Students were in grades 6 to 12, with the largest numbers being in 10th or 11th grade.

## **KEY FINDINGS**

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### **Problem: Hostile School Climate**

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Keeping classrooms and hallways free of homophobic, sexist and other types of biased language is a crucial aspect of creating a safe school climate for students. Yet 9 out of 10 students heard these types of biased language in their schools, most commonly anti-LGBT remarks:

- Nearly three-fourths of students heard homophobic (73.6%) remarks often or frequently at school.
- Nine out of ten (90.2%) students heard “gay” used in a negative way often or frequently at school, and the vast majority reported that this caused them to feel bothered or distressed to some degree.

Additionally, more than half (60.8%) of students reported that they felt unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation, and more than a third (38.4%) felt unsafe because of their gender expression.

Nearly nine-tenths of students (86.2%) reported being verbally harassed (e.g., called names or threatened) at school because of their sexual orientation. And two-thirds (66.5%) of students were verbally harassed because of their gender expression.

Almost half (44.1%) of students had been physically harassed (e.g., pushed or shoved) at school in the past year because of their sexual orientation and three in ten students (30.4%) because of their gender expression.

For some students, victimization was even more severe – 22.1% reported being physically assaulted (e.g., punched, kicked, injured with a weapon) because of their sexual orientation and 14.2% because of their gender expression.

The majority (60.8%) of students who were harassed or assaulted in school did not report the incident to school staff, believing little to no action would be taken or the situation could become worse if reported. In fact, nearly a third (31.1%) of the students who did report an incident said that school staff did nothing in response.

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### **Problem: Absenteeism**

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For all students, feeling unsafe or uncomfortable in school may negatively affect their academic success, particularly if it results in avoiding classes or missing entire days of school. Because LGBT students often face a hostile school climate due to their sexual orientation or gender identity/expression, they may be at greater risk for missing school. Nearly one-third of students reported skipping a class at least once in the past month and missing at least one day of school in the past month because they felt uncomfortable or unsafe. These rates are more than five times higher than those from a national survey of secondary school students in general:

- 31.7% of LGBT students missed a class because of feeling unsafe, compared to only 5.5% of a national sample of secondary school students.
- 32.7% of LGBT students missed a day of school because of feeling unsafe, compared to only 4.5% of a national sample of secondary school students.

We found that experiences with harassment were, in fact, related to missing days of school for the LGBT students in our survey. Students were twice as likely to have missed school in the past month if they had experienced high frequencies of verbal harassment related to their sexual orientation (48.3% versus 20.1%) or how they express their gender (51.7% versus 25.5%). Furthermore, students who had experienced high frequencies of physical harassment because of these characteristics were almost three times more likely than other students to have missed school in the past month due to safety concerns (physical harassment based on sexual orientation: 68.9% versus 25.4%, based on gender expression: 70.8% versus 28.4%).

Given that LGBT students are likelier to miss school because of the high levels of harassment and assault they experience in school, they are being denied their right to an education and are limited in their future opportunities.

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## **Problem: Lowered Academic Achievement and Educational Aspirations**

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A lack of safety undermines school's central promise – the opportunity to learn and achieve – as fear leads many LGBT students to skip class, miss school and, ultimately, receive lower grades and disengage from school altogether. The percentage of LGBT students who did not plan to pursue any type of post-secondary education (obtaining a high school diploma only or not finishing high school) was almost twice that of a national sample of students (12.4% versus 6.6%).

Increased harassment was, in fact, related to students' future education plans. LGBT students who reported that they were often or frequently harassed in school because of their sexual orientation or gender expression were more likely than other students to report that they did not plan to pursue a college education – 41.5% of students who experienced high frequencies of physical harassment did not plan to go to college, for example, compared to 30.1% of those who had not experienced high frequencies of physical harassment.

The differences in educational aspirations between our sample of LGBT students and a general population sample of high school students appears to be related to the higher incidence of in-school victimization reported by LGBT students. A higher frequency of harassment was also related to lower academic achievement among LGBT students. The reported grade point average of students who were more frequently harassed because of their sexual orientation or gender expression was almost half a grade lower than for students who were less often harassed (2.8 versus 2.4).

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## **Solution: Gay-Straight Alliances**

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Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) or similar student clubs can promote respect for all members of the school community and provide critical support to LGBT students and their allies. The existence of these clubs can make schools safer and more welcoming for LGBT students.

Students in schools with a Gay-Straight Alliance:

- Reported hearing fewer homophobic remarks;
- Experienced less harassment and assault because of their sexual orientation and gender expression;
- Were more likely to report incidents of harassment and assault;
- Were less likely to feel unsafe because of their sexual orientation or gender expression;
- Were less likely to miss school because of safety concerns, and
- Reported a greater sense of belonging to their school community.

Given that GSAs, like all student clubs, have a faculty advisor, having a GSA at school may help LGBT students identify supportive school

staff. Almost all students (97.4%) in schools with a GSA said that they could identify one or more supportive staff, compared to only three quarters (73.8%) of students in schools without a GSA.

While the benefits of a GSA are apparent, only slightly more than a third (36.3%) of LGBT students reported having one at school.

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### **Solution: Supportive Educators**

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Educators supportive of LGBT students provide critical support for students who may feel marginalized or experience harassment. Knowing that there is a caring adult in school may have a significant positive impact on the school experiences for these students. Most (82.5%) students could identify at least one school staff member whom they believed was supportive of LGBT students, yet less than half (36.3%) said that they knew six or more supportive educators. Access to a number of school staff who can provide support to LGBT students may be critical for creating safer learning environments:

- Students with supportive educators (six or more) were less likely to miss at least one day of school in the past month because of safety reasons (20.4%) than students with no supportive educators (39.8%).
- Students with supportive educators had higher grade point averages than students without supportive educators (2.9 versus 2.5).
- Students with supportive educators reported higher educational aspirations than those without supportive educators.
- Students with supportive educators reported a greater sense of belonging to their school community than those without supportive educators.

Having educators intervene when they hear and see anti-LGBT harassment is crucial for improving school climate. Students who reported that educators effectively intervened when witnessing harassment or assault experienced less victimization based on sexual orientation or gender expression. They also reported decreased absenteeism related to safety concerns.

LGBT-related resources, such as an inclusive curriculum that provides positive representations of LGBT history, people, and events, may help to create a tone of acceptance of LGBT people, leading to a more supportive environment for LGBT students. Inclusive curriculum has been shown to enhance the school experience for LGBT students. Compared to other students, students in schools with an inclusive curriculum:

- Heard fewer homophobic remarks;
- Were less likely to be victimized or feel unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation or gender identity/expression;

- Had a greater sense of belonging to their school community, and
- Talked about LGBT issues with their teachers more often and rated these conversations more positively.

Although an inclusive curriculum is related to more positive school experiences for LGBT students, only one-tenth (10.5%) of students were exposed to positive representations of LGBT people, history or events in their classes. Additionally, less than a fifth of students (14.5%) reported that LGBT-related topics were included in their textbooks or other assigned readings.

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### **Solution: Comprehensive Safe School Laws and Policies**

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One major step that schools can take to affirm their support for all students' safety is the implementation and enforcement of safe school policies. Safe school policies and laws can promote a better school climate for LGBT students when sexual orientation and/or gender identity/expression are explicitly addressed. GLSEN believes that the most effective policies are these types of comprehensive policies, those that explicitly provide protection by enumerating personal characteristics including sexual orientation and gender identity/expression.

Students from schools with a comprehensive school or school district policy that included sexual orientation and/or gender identity/expression reported a less hostile and more supportive school climate. Students in schools with comprehensive safe school policies:

- Heard fewer homophobic remarks (68.8% frequently or often) compared to students in schools with generic policies (74.3%) or no policy whatsoever (75.0%);
- Experienced lower levels of victimization related to their sexual orientation than students with generic policies or no policies at all;
- Were more likely to report that school staff intervened most of the time or always when hearing homophobic language in school (29.1%) compared to students in schools with generic policies (17.5%) or no policy (13.1%), and
- Were more likely to report incidents of harassment and assault to school staff (18.7% reported "most of the time" or "always") compared to students in schools with generic policies (13.7%) or no policies at all (11.0%).

Some argue that generic policies without enumerated categories are just as effective as comprehensive ones. Students' experiences indicate otherwise. Students from schools with a generic policy, as in past surveys, experienced similar harassment levels as students from schools with no policies at all. Yet, less than one in five students (18.7%) reported that their school had a comprehensive policy, whereas 37.6% reported that their school had a generic policy. Thus, almost half (43.8%) of all students report that they attend schools without any type of safe school policy.

Whereas many schools and school districts have such policies, only 11 states and the District of Columbia prohibit discrimination or harassment on the basis of sexual orientation in schools, and seven of these states and the District of Columbia also include protections on the basis of gender identity/expression.

Regarding state-level safe school laws, results from the NSCS provide further evidence that students in states that had comprehensive legislation (prior to the survey) experience less victimization based on their sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. On these indicators of school climate, states with generic safe school laws appeared to offer no greater protection than states with no safe school legislation whatsoever.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

As in previous reports, the results of the 2007 National School Climate Survey show that schools can be unsafe learning environments for LGBT students. Hearing biased or derogatory language at school, especially homophobic and sexist remarks, was a common occurrence. Intervention on the part of school staff, however, was not. Teachers and other school authorities did not often intervene when homophobic or negative remarks about gender expression were made in their presence, and students' use of such language remained largely unchallenged. Even when informed of actual incidents of harassment and assault, school staff did not respond effectively – and many did not respond at all. Three-quarters of the students in our survey reported being made to feel unsafe at school because of at least one personal characteristic, with sexual orientation and gender expression being the characteristics most commonly reported. Almost 90% of the students reported that they had been verbally harassed at school because of their sexual orientation, and two-thirds had been harassed because of how they expressed their gender. In addition, many students reported experiencing incidents of physical harassment and assault related to their sexual orientation or gender expression, as well as sexual harassment, deliberate property damage and cyberbullying.

School climate is not just about safety, but also about a student's ability to learn and right to an education. LGBT students who experienced frequent harassment based on their sexual orientation were more likely to report missing school and had lower GPAs than students who were not as frequently harassed. Therefore, improving school climate not only facilitates student safety, but also enhances a student's ability to learn and educational outcomes.

Although the results of this report illustrate the dire experience in school for many LGBT students, it also highlights the important role that educators and institutional supports can play in remedying the situation. GLSEN's work is devoted to addressing the urgent need to create safer schools for all students, regardless of sexual orientation

or gender identity/expression. To this end, we recommend the following measures:

- **Advocate** for comprehensive safe school and anti-discrimination legislation at the state and federal level that specifically enumerates sexual orientation and gender identity/expression as protected categories;
- **Implement** comprehensive safe school policies in individual schools and districts, with clear and effective systems for reporting and addressing incidents that students experience;
- **Support** GSAs or similar student clubs that address LGBT issues and work to improve school climate;
- **Provide** training for school staff to improve rates of intervention and increase the number of supportive faculty and staff available to students, and
- **Increase** student access to appropriate and accurate information regarding LGBT people, history and events through inclusive curriculum, library resources, and access to Internet resources through school computers.

Taken together, such measures can move us towards a future in which every child learns to respect and accept all people, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.







# INTRODUCTION



In 1999, GLSEN's founder Kevin Jennings understood the need for national data on the experiences of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender<sup>1</sup> (LGBT) students in schools and launched the first National School Climate Survey (NSCS). At that time, the experiences of LGBT students were under-documented and nearly absent from national studies on adolescents. Such data were vital for demonstrating the crucial need to improve school climate for this population of students. Since that first survey, the need to understand and document the experiences of LGBT students nationwide has continued and GLSEN is committed to conducting the NSCS on a biennial basis.

GLSEN's National School Climate Survey remains one of the few studies to examine the school experiences of lesbian, gay and bisexual students nationally, and is the only national study to include transgender students. The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), a biennial national survey of adolescent risk behaviors by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which includes questions about school-based victimization, does not include questions about LGBT identity or same-sex attraction or same-sex sexual behavior. However, certain states (e.g., Massachusetts, California) and localities (e.g., Seattle, Chicago) have added questions to the YRBS that allow leaders in the field of education and public health to understand how the experiences of LGB students in school might differ from other students. For example, the 2005 Massachusetts YRBS found that sexual minority youth<sup>2</sup> were more than four times as likely as other youth to have attempted suicide in the past year (21% versus 5%).<sup>3</sup> In addition, results from the California Healthy Kids Survey, a biennial survey similar to the YRBS, found that students who were victimized in school because they were, or people thought they were, gay or lesbian were more than three times as likely as students who were not harassed for this reason to have missed school because they felt unsafe (27% versus 7%).<sup>4</sup>

The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health Survey (commonly referred to as "Add Health") is one of the few datasets that is both national in scope and allows researchers to examine the experiences of sexual minority youth in and out of school. One recent study using this data found that sexual minority youth felt less connected and engaged with their school community than their heterosexual peers, and that these youth, particularly sexual minority boys, fared worse academically and were less prepared for postsecondary education.<sup>5</sup>

Although the above mentioned studies include questions about school-based victimization, they do not include questions that allow education leaders and researchers to examine what mechanisms help LGBT students to succeed in school, such as in-school resources and supports. In addition, these studies do not include questions that allow researchers to examine school experiences that may be specific to transgender-identified youth. Since the release of our

2005 report more research about transgender youth has emerged, some of which explores their school experiences.<sup>6</sup> For example, a study of transgender youth in Philadelphia found that three-quarters of the youth interviewed reported that their schools failed to provide them with a safe environment.<sup>7</sup> A study based on focus groups with transgender youth in New York City also found that these youth lacked access to safe and supportive school environments.<sup>8</sup> Recent research on the experiences of transgender youth is somewhat limited, however, as it is neither national nor state-level in scope.

In the subsequent surveys since the 1999 National School Climate Survey, we have seen very few changes in school safety for our nation's LGBT students — for many of these students, school continues to be an unsafe and even dangerous place. The majority of the students in our surveys reported being verbally harassed because of their sexual orientation or their gender expression, and a large number of students reported experiencing incidents of physical harassment, physical assault, and sexual harassment. Further, the results revealed that students who identified as transgender were at particular risk for victimization in school. Our previous reports have shown how experiences of harassment and assault in school can have a direct, negative bearing on student learning and academic success.

While it is important to document experiences of victimization in school and their negative impacts on learning, it is also important to understand what factors can lead to safer and healthier learning environments for LGBT students. In our National School Climate Surveys, we have asked students about the availability of resources and supports in their schools, such as having Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs), curricula that are inclusive of LGBT people, history and events, and supportive teachers or other school staff. Although students historically have reported few supportive resources, such as a GSA or inclusive materials in the curriculum or the library, most have reported having at least one school staff member supportive of LGBT students. Furthermore, information about supportive resources from our surveys have helped us to understand how school-based resources and supports can improve the quality of school life for LGBT students — institutional supports for LGBT students, such as school policies that address harassment based on sexual orientation or gender identity/expression, and supportive staff, are positively related to students' educational outcomes, such as academic achievement and educational aspirations.

Given the limited attention paid by federal, state, and local policymakers to the issues facing many LGBT students, and because our work at GLSEN to make schools safe for all students is an ongoing one, it is important for us to keep informed about the experiences of LGBT students in their schools. In recent years, some journalists and academics have reported that the experiences of LGBT students has improved significantly and portray a picture of LGBT adolescents as typically welcomed by their peers and their

school community.<sup>9</sup> For example, one journalist from *Time* magazine recently commented that “most gay teenagers are thriving and happy most of the time” and that their troubles are typical of adolescents, stating: “they are periodically confused and depressed, but what teen isn’t?”<sup>10</sup> These views highlight the need for continuing to examine the school experiences of LGBT students across the United States and for examining trends over time. In addition, it highlights the importance of understanding that LGBT students are not a monolithic group and that they may vary in the quality of their school-related experiences. For example, there may be differences in students’ experiences depending on such factors as their race, gender or other personal characteristics, and the characteristics of their school communities (e.g., region of the country). Furthermore, we also strive to show how school-, school district- and even state-level supports can make a difference in the educational experiences of LGBT students.

In our 2007 survey, we examine the experiences of LGBT students with regard to indicators of negative school climate: hearing biased remarks, including homophobic remarks, in school; feeling unsafe in school for any reason; missing classes or days of school because of safety reasons, and experiences of harassment and assault in school. We explore the diverse nature of LGBT students’ experiences and report how these differ by students’ personal and community characteristics. We also examine whether or not students report experiences of victimization to school officials or to family members and how these adults address the problem. Lastly, we demonstrate the degree to which LGBT students have access to supportive resources in school, such as GSAs, supportive school staff, inclusive curricula, and library resources on LGBT-related topics and explore the possible benefits of these resources.

## Notes

- 1 "Transgender" loosely refers to people who do not identify with the gender identity assigned to them by society based on their biological sex. Transgender is also used as an umbrella term for all those who do not conform to "traditional" notions of gender expression, including people who identify as transsexual, cross-dresser or drag king/queen.
- 2 The term "sexual minority youth" refers to youth who identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) and youth who reported experiencing same-sex attraction but did not identify as LGB.
- 3 Massachusetts Department of Education (2006). *2005 Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey Results*. Available at: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/cnp/hprograms/yrbs/05/default.html>.
- 4 Russell, S.T., McGuire, J.K., Laub, C., Manke, E., O'Shaughnessy, M., Heck, K., & Calhoun, C. (2006). Harassment in school based on actual or perceived sexual orientation: Prevalence and consequences. *California Safe Schools Coalition Research Brief No. 2*. San Francisco, CA: California Safe Schools Coalition.
- 5 Pearson, J., Muller, C., & Wilkinson, L. (2007). Adolescent same-sex attraction and academic outcomes: The role of school attachment and engagement. *Social Problems*, 54(4), 523–542.
- 6 Sausa, L. (2005). Translating research into practice: Trans youth recommendations for improving school systems. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Issues in Education*, 3(1), 15–28.  
Grossman, A. & D'Augelli, A. (2006). Transgender youth: Invisible and vulnerable. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 51(1), 111–128.
- 7 Sausa, L. (2005). See full citation above.
- 8 Grossman, A. & D'Augelli, A. (2006). See full citation above.
- 9 Cloud, J. (February 18, 2008). Prosecuting the gay teen murder. *Time Online*, retrieved from <http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1714214,00.html>.  
Savin-Williams, R. C. (2005). *The New Gay Teenager*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- 10 Cloud, J. (2008). See full citation above.



# METHODS



In order to obtain a more representative sample of LGBT youth, we used two methods to locate possible participants. First, participants were obtained through community-based groups or service organizations serving LGBT youth. Fifty randomly selected groups/organizations agreed to participate in the survey and paper surveys were then sent for the youth to complete. The groups were randomly selected from a list of over 300 groups nationwide and 108 groups were contacted in order to obtain 50 groups/organizations who agreed to participate. Of these groups, 38 were able to have youth complete the survey and a total of 288 surveys were obtained through this method. Our second method was to make the National School Climate Survey available online through GLSEN's website. Notices about the survey were posted on LGBT-youth oriented listservs and websites. Notices were also emailed to GLSEN chapters and to youth advocacy organizations such as Advocates for Youth and Youth Guardian Services. To ensure representation of transgender youth and youth of color, special efforts were made to notify groups and organizations that work predominantly with these populations about the online survey. In 2007, we also conducted targeted advertising on the social networking site MySpace. Notices about the survey were shown to MySpace users who were between 13 and 18 years old and who indicated on their user profile that they were gay, lesbian or bisexual. A total of 5,921 surveys were completed online. Participants of the online survey were asked how they heard about the survey — 4,466 reported MySpace and 1,455 reported another source. Data collection occurred from April to August 2007.

The sample consisted of a total of 6,209 lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students between the ages of 13 and 21. Students were from all 50 states and the District of Columbia and from 2,651 unique school districts. Excluded from the final total were youth who were not in a K–12 school during the 2006–2007 school year, youth who were not in school in the United States, and heterosexual youth (except for those who were also transgender). Table 1 presents the sample's demographics and Table 2 shows the characteristics of the schools attended. About two-thirds of the sample (64.4%) was white, over half (57.7%) was female and over half identified as gay or lesbian (53.6%). Students were in grades 6 to 12, with the largest numbers being in 10th or 11th grade.

One limitation to our previous sampling methods was that we were unable to reach LGBT secondary students who did not have any connection to the LGBT community, a school Gay-Straight Alliance or other organizations working toward safer schools for all students. In the paper method, students were participants in a community-based program. Given that our email announcements were sent via youth advocacy organizations and other community groups, students who had no contact, direct or indirect, with these organizations would be unlikely to learn about the survey. However, by using advertisements on MySpace, we would theoretically have a much wider reach and a more representative sample. In fact, when we examined demographic

differences by entry method into the survey, we found that we had a higher percentage of previously hard-to-reach populations in our MySpace subsample than in the other two subsamples (paper survey and other Internet surveys) — students from the South and from small town or rural areas, students of color and middle school students.<sup>11</sup> Although female students were more likely to be in the online sample (MySpace and other Internet combined) than male students and male students were more likely to come from community groups (the paper survey sample), there were no gender differences as a result of MySpace.

**Table 1. Demographics of Survey Participants**

<b>Race and Ethnicity</b>			<b>Sexual Orientation</b>		
White	64.4%	n=3976	Gay or Lesbian	53.6%	n=3327
African American/Black	5.8%	n=356	Bisexual	41.8%	n=2590
Hispanic or Latino/a	13.0%	n=805	Other Sexual Orientation (e.g., queer, asexual)	4.6%	n=285
Asian or Pacific Islander	4.1%	n=253			
Native American, American Indian or Alaska Native	6.2%	n=385			
Multiracial	5.4%	n=331	<b>Grade</b>		
			6th	0.2%	n=15
<b>Gender</b>			7th	4.1%	n=252
Female	57.7%	n=3572	8th	9.3%	n=571
Male	33.4%	n=2069	9th	20.6%	n=1269
Transgender	4.8%	n=297	10th	26.0%	n=1604
Other Gender Identity (e.g., genderqueer, androgynous)	4.0%	n=248	11th	25.0%	n=1543
			12th	14.7%	n=906
Average Age = 15.9 years					

**Table 2. School Characteristics**

<b>Grade Levels</b>			<b>School Type</b>		
K through 12 School	4.9%	n=302	Public School	92.5%	n=5720
Elementary School	0.1%	n=7	Charter	3.8%	n=219
Lower School	0.7%	n=42	Magnet	7.7%	n=441
Middle School	10.1%	n=626	Religious-Affiliated	3.0%	n=186
Upper School	7.1%	n=438	Other Independent or Private School	4.5%	n=280
High School	77.2%	n=6198			
<b>Community Types</b>			<b>District-Level Poverty*</b>		
Urban	32.4%	n=1972	Very High (> 75%)	4.5%	n=266
Suburban	42.0%	n=2554	Somewhat High (51–75%)	22.1%	n=1305
Small Town/Rural	25.6%	n=1560	Somewhat Low (26–50%)	44.3%	n=2618
			Very Low (≤ 25%)	29.1%	n=1722
			*Based on data from the National Center for Education Statistics regarding the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced lunch.		
<b>Region</b>					
Northeast	22.2%	n=1369			
South	30.1%	n=1857			
Midwest	22.6%	n=1399			
West	25.1%	n=1554			

## Notes

- 11 Overall, 71.9% of the total sample reported that they learned of the National School Climate Survey from MySpace and an additional 23.4% were also from the online survey but did not learn of the survey from MySpace. A relatively small percentage of students completed paper versions of the survey (4.6%).
- Age: Students who learned about the survey from MySpace were, on average, a half year younger than other students who participated in the Internet survey and a year younger than students who participated through a community group: 15.7 vs. 16.2 vs. 16.7, respectively. ( $F(2,6206)=151.64$ ,  $p<.001$ .)
- School Level: Students in middle school grades (6th to 8th grades) were more likely to have come from MySpace than students in high school grades (9th to 12th grades): 83.3% vs. 70.3%. ( $\chi^2=65.66$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $\Phi=.10$ .)
- Region: More students from the South and fewer students from the Northeast came from the MySpace subsample: 60.8% from the Northeast; 81.0% from the South; 71.8% from the Midwest and 72.2% from the West. ( $\chi^2=240.91$ ,  $p<.001$ , Cramer's  $V=.14$ .)
- Locale: More students from small town or rural areas came from MySpace (78.7%) compared to those from suburban (70.2%) or urban (69.8%) areas. ( $\chi^2=91.84$ ,  $p<.001$ , Cramer's  $V=.13$ .)
- Race/Ethnicity: Overall, a larger percentage of students of color came from the MySpace subsample than did white students: 75.0% vs. 70.3% ( $\chi^2=66.96$ ,  $p<.001$ , Cramer's  $V=.10$ .) In particular, a smaller percentage of Asian or Pacific Islander students came from MySpace, whereas a higher percentage of Latino/a, Native American and multiracial students came from MySpace: 60.9% for Asian/Pacific Islander students; 76.1%, for Latino/a students, 79.2% for Native American students, and 80.7% for multiracial students. ( $\chi^2=141.35$ ,  $p<.001$ , Cramer's  $V=.15$ .)



# RESULTS





## Biased Language

### Key Findings

- Three-fourths of students heard homophobic or sexist remarks often or frequently at school.
- 9 out of 10 students heard the word “gay” used in a negative way often or frequently at school.
- 4 out of 10 students heard students make racist remarks often or frequently at school.
- Remarks about students not acting “masculine” enough were more common than remarks about students not acting “feminine” enough.
- Nearly two-thirds of students heard homophobic remarks from school personnel.
- Less than a fifth of students reported that school personnel frequently intervened when hearing homophobic remarks or negative remarks about gender expression.

GLSEN strives to make schools safe for all students, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, race or ethnicity or any other characteristic that may be the basis for harassment. Keeping classrooms and hallways free of homophobic, sexist and other types of biased language is one aspect of creating a safe school climate for students. The 2007 survey, like our previous surveys,

asked students about the frequency of hearing homophobic remarks (such as “faggot,” “dyke” and “queer”), racist remarks (such as “nigger” or “spic”) and sexist remarks (such as someone being called “bitch” in a derogatory way or talk about girls being inferior to boys) while at school. As in the 2003 and 2005 surveys, students were also asked about the frequency of hearing negative remarks about the way in which someone expressed their gender at school (such as a student being told that she does not act “feminine enough”). Students were also asked about the frequency of hearing biased remarks from school staff. In addition to asking about the frequency of hearing remarks, students were asked whether anyone intervened when hearing this type of language used in school.

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### ***Homophobic Remarks***

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Homophobic remarks were one of the most commonly heard types of biased language in school.<sup>12</sup> As shown in Figure 1, nearly three-quarters (73.6%) of students reported hearing students make derogatory remarks, such as “dyke” or “faggot,” often or frequently in school. Almost half of students (44.1%) reported that most of their peers made these types of remarks (see Figure 2). Nearly two-thirds (63.0%) of students reported ever hearing homophobic remarks from their teachers or other school staff (see Figure 4).

We also asked students about the frequency of hearing the word “gay” used in a negative way in school, such as in the expression “that’s so gay” or “you’re so gay.” Use of these expressions was very common, as 90.2% of students heard “gay” used in a negative way often or frequently at school (see also Figure 1). These expressions are often used to mean that something or someone is stupid or worthless and, thus, may be dismissed as innocuous by school authorities and students in comparison to overtly derogatory remarks such as “faggot.” However, many LGBT students did not view these expressions as innocuous — 83.1% reported that hearing “gay” or “queer” used in a negative manner at school this caused them to feel bothered or distressed to some degree (see Figure 3).

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### ***Sexist Remarks***

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Sexist remarks, such as calling someone a “bitch” in a derogatory manner, comments about girls being inferior to boys, or comments about girls’ bodies were also commonly heard in school. Three-quarters (74.7%) of students heard sexist remarks from other students frequently or often (see Figure 1). In addition, more than a third (42.6%) said they heard such comments from most of their peers (see Figure 2). Over half (60.0%) of students also reported that school personnel made sexist remarks while in school (see Figure 4).

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### ***Racist Remarks***

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Hearing racist remarks, such as “spic” or “nigger,” in school was not uncommon. As shown in Figure 1, more than a third (43.6%) reported hearing racist remarks from other students often or frequently in school. Nearly a quarter (24.0%) of students reported that these types of remarks were made by most of their peers (see Figure 2). In addition, more than a third (35.2%) of students reported hearing racist remarks from faculty or other school personnel while in school (see Figure 4).

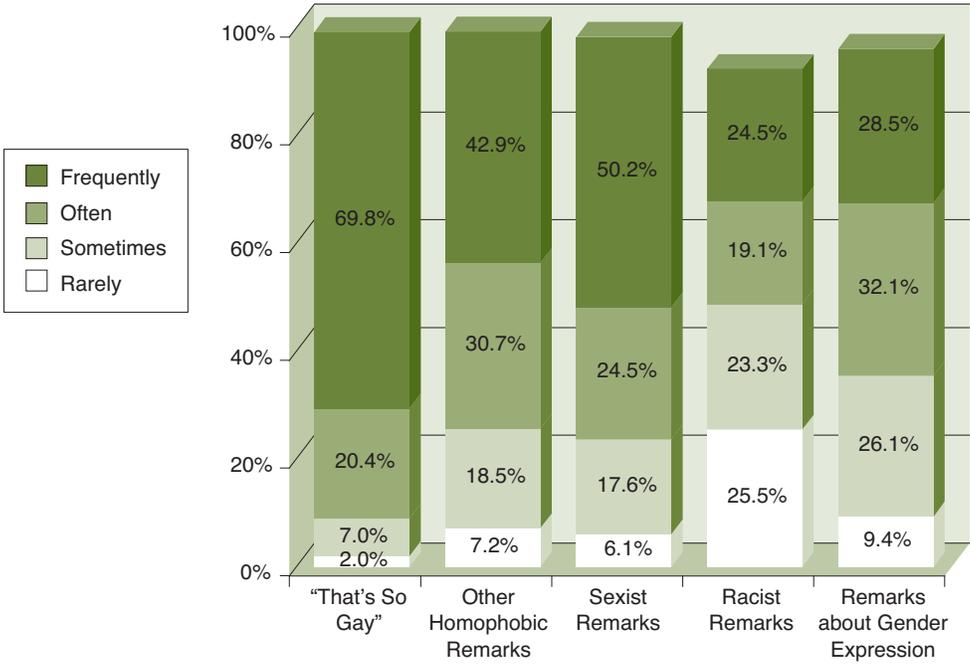
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### ***Negative Remarks about Gender Expression***

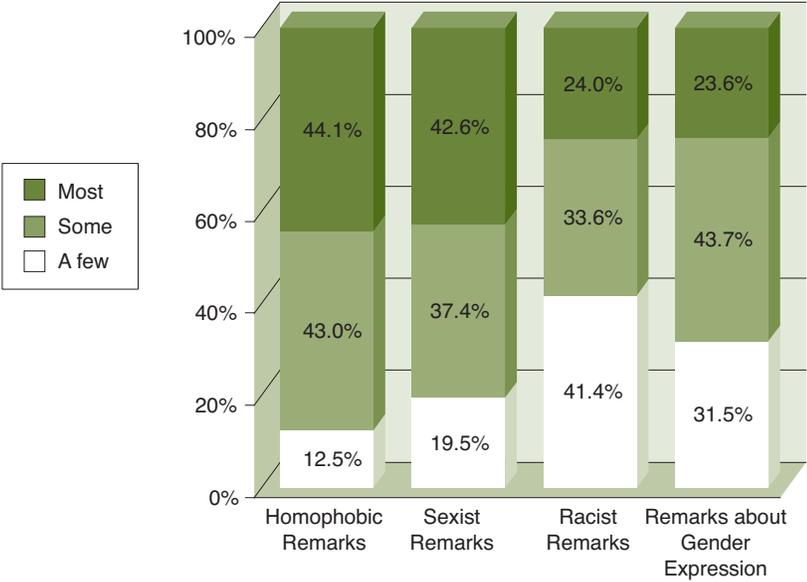
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Our society upholds norms for what is considered an appropriate expression of one’s gender. Those who express themselves in a manner considered to be atypical may experience criticism, harassment, and sometimes violence. Findings from this survey demonstrate that negative remarks about the way in which someone expressed their gender were pervasive in our nation’s schools. We asked students two separate questions about hearing comments related to a student’s gender expression — one question asked how often they heard remarks about someone not acting “masculine” enough, and another question asked how often they heard comments about someone not acting “feminine” enough. Remarks about students not acting “masculine” enough were more common than remarks about students not acting “feminine” enough.<sup>13</sup> Over half of students (53.8%) had often or frequently heard negative comments about students’ “masculinity,” compared to more than a third (39.4%) who heard comments as often about students’ “femininity” (see Figure 5). Almost a quarter (23.6%) of students reported that most of their peers made negative remarks about someone’s gender expression (see Figure 2). Over half (60.2%) of students heard teachers or other staff make negative comments about a student’s gender expression at least sometimes (see Figure 4).

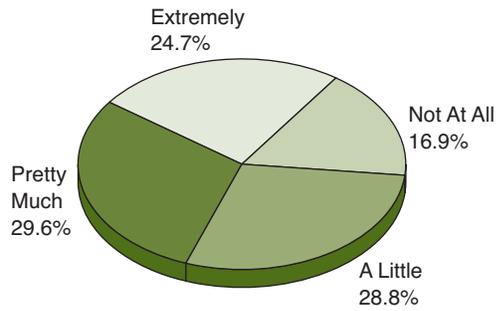
**Figure 1. Frequency of Hearing Biased Language from Students**



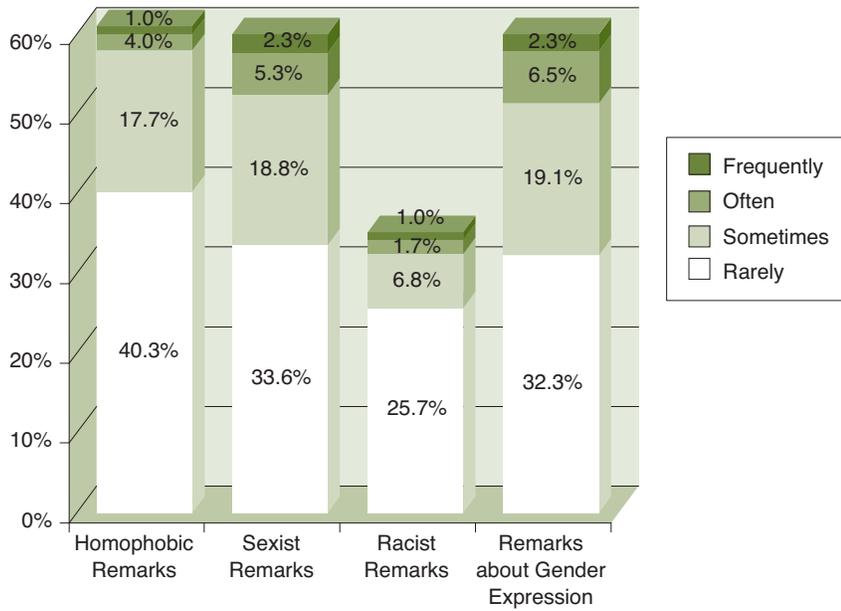
**Figure 2. Number of Students Making Biased Remarks**



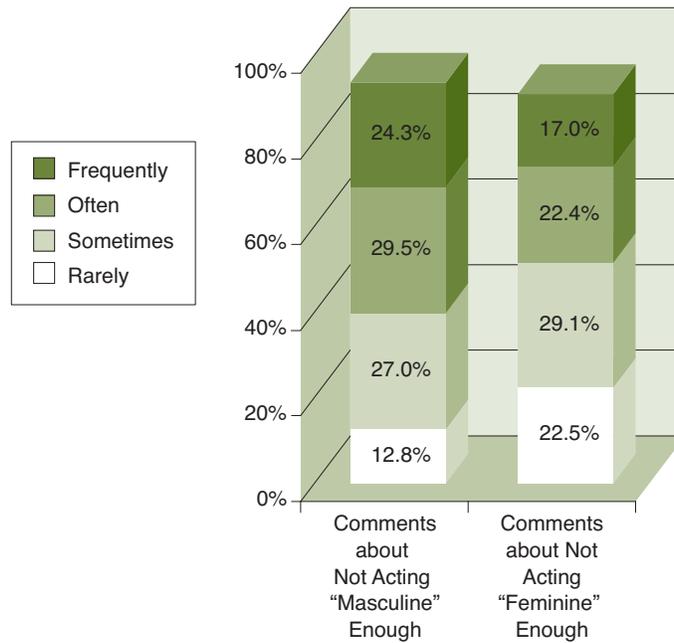
**Figure 3. Degree that Students Were Bothered or Distressed as a Result of Hearing Words Like “Gay” or “Queer” Used in a Derogatory Way**



**Figure 4. Frequency of Hearing Biased Language from Teachers or Other School Staff**



**Figure 5. Frequency of Hearing Remarks About Students' Gender Expression**



### ***Biased Language and Intervention by School Staff and Students***

**Intervention by School Staff.** In addition to the frequency of hearing biased language in school, students were asked how often such remarks were made in the presence of teachers or other school staff. Students in our survey reported that their peers were more likely to make homophobic remarks when school personnel were present than they were to make other types of biased remarks.<sup>14</sup> As shown in Figure 6, more students said that school staff were present all or most of the time when homophobic remarks were made (42.9%) than when sexist remarks, racist remarks or remarks about someone's gender expression were made (32.0%, 27.2% and 25.8%, respectively).

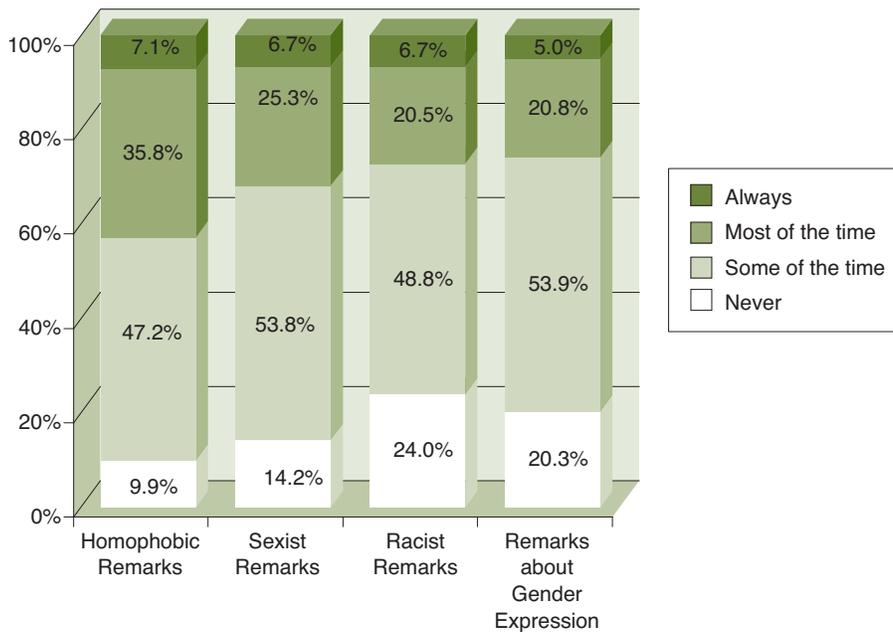
When school staff were present, the use of biased and derogatory language by students remained largely unchallenged. As shown in Figure 7, less than a fifth of the students reported that school personnel frequently intervened ("most of the time" or "always") when homophobic remarks and negative remarks about gender expression were made in their presence (17.6% and 14.6%, respectively). School staff were much more likely to intervene when students used sexist and racist language — 42.3% said that staff frequently intervened when hearing sexist language and 57.6% intervened as often when hearing racist remarks.<sup>15</sup>

Infrequent intervention by school authorities when hearing biased language in school may send a message to students that such language is tolerated. Although the use of biased language among

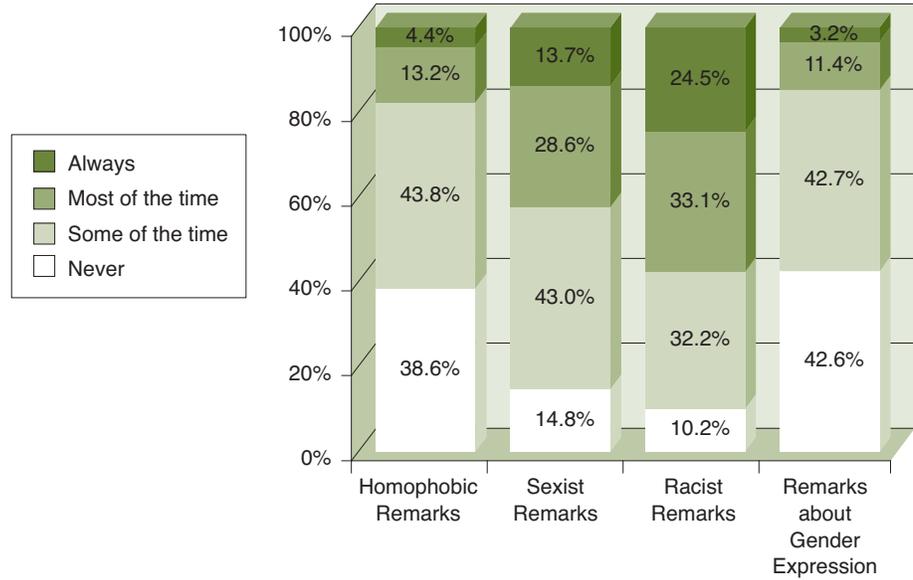
teachers and other school staff was not as commonplace as it was among students, the fact that, for example, nearly two-thirds of students reported hearing school staff make homophobic remarks is concerning. When using biased language in school, school staff set an example that homophobic, sexist and other types of biased remarks are acceptable. The fact that so many students reported biased remarks being made in the presence of school personnel seems to support this point.

**Intervention by Students.** One would expect teachers and school staff to bear the responsibility for addressing problems of biased language in school. However, students may at times intervene when hearing biased language as well, particularly given that school personnel are often not present during such times. The willingness of students to intervene may be another indicator of school climate. As shown in Figure 8, few students reported that their peers frequently (“always” or “most of the time”) intervened when hearing homophobic remarks (7.7%) or negative comments about someone’s gender expression (10.6%). Although intervention by students when hearing racist or sexist remarks was not common, similar to school staff, students were most likely to report that their peers intervened when hearing these types of remarks.<sup>16</sup> Almost a quarter of students (24.4%) reported that other students intervened most of the time or always when hearing racist remarks, and about a fifth (21.6%) reported that their peers intervened as frequently when hearing sexist remarks.

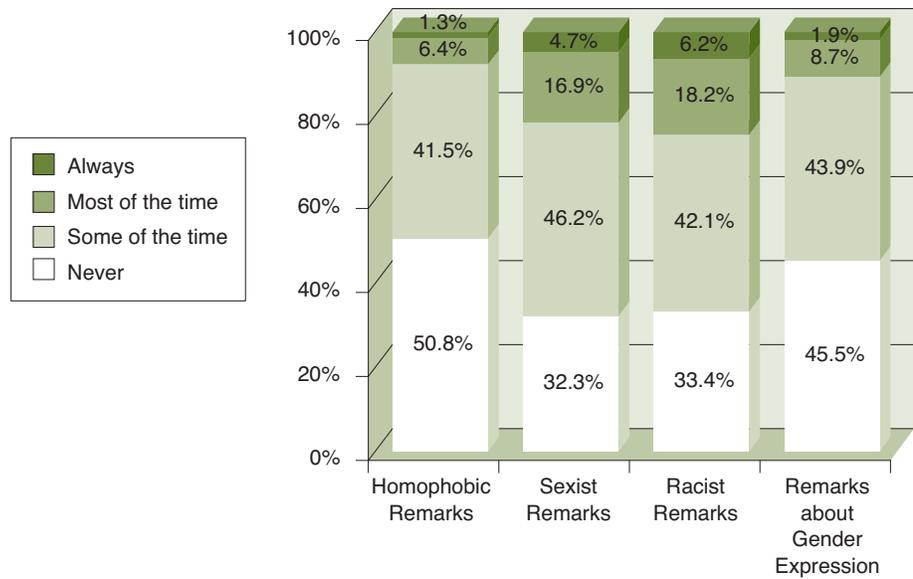
**Figure 6. Presence of School Staff When Biased Remarks Were Made**



**Figure 7. Frequency of Intervention by Teachers or Other School Staff When Biased Remarks Were Made**



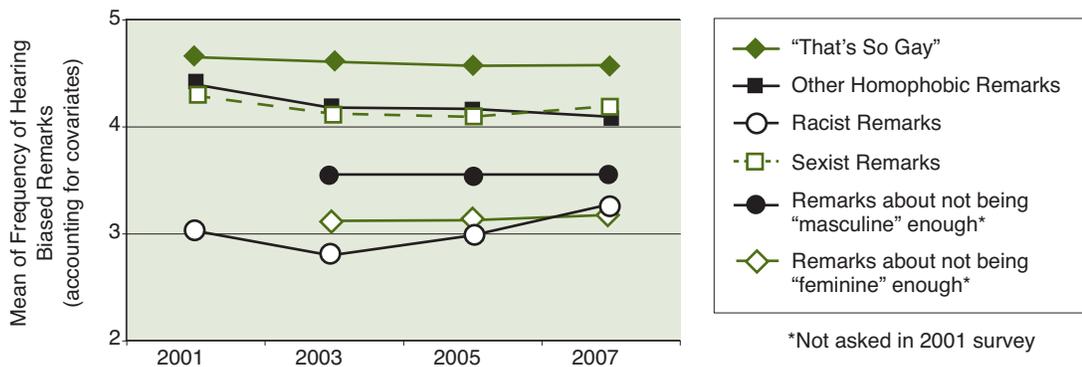
**Figure 8. Frequency of Intervention by Students When Biased Remarks Were Made**



## Comparison of Biased Language Use in School among GLSEN’s 2001, 2003, 2005 and 2007 Surveys

As shown in Figure 9, homophobic remarks, including comments such as “that’s so gay,” were the most commonly heard type of biased remarks across all four reports, with little variation over time. The frequency of hearing expressions such as “that’s so gay” has remained relatively stable over time. With regard to the frequency of explicitly derogatory homophobic remarks (e.g., “dyke” or “faggot”), there has been a decrease since 2001.<sup>17</sup> The frequency of sexist remarks remains lower than in 2001, but has increased since 2005. The frequency of negative remarks about students’ gender expression, i.e., not being “masculine” or “feminine” enough, has not changed over time and has remained less common than homophobic and sexist remarks.<sup>18</sup> Overall, racist remarks were the least frequently heard type of remarks, yet unlike all other types of biased remarks asked about in our survey, the frequency of racist remarks has continually increased since 2003.

**Figure 9. Average Frequency of Hearing Biased Remarks in School by Year**



## Notes

- 12 Because of the large sample size and the multiple analyses conducted for this report, we use the more restrictive  $p > .01$  in determinations of statistical significance for our analyses, unless otherwise indicated. Mean differences in the frequencies across types of biased remarks were examined using repeated measures multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) and percentages are shown for illustrative purposes. The multivariate effect was significant, Pillai's Trace=.36,  $F(3, 6174)=1158.05$ ,  $p < .001$ .
- 13 Mean differences in the frequencies between types of biased remarks based on gender expression were examined using a repeated measures t-test and percentages are shown for illustrative purposes. The effect was significant,  $t(6184)=25.14$ ,  $p < .001$ .
- 14 Mean differences in the frequencies between types of biased remarks made in the presence of school staff were examined using repeated measures multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) and percentages are shown for illustrative purposes. The multivariate effect was significant, Pillai's Trace=.16,  $F(3, 5474)=352.75$ ,  $p < .001$ .
- 15 Mean differences in the frequencies of teacher intervention across types of remarks were examined using repeated measures repeated measures multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) and percentages are shown for illustrative purposes. The multivariate effect was significant, Pillai's Trace=.54,  $F(3, 3206)=1230.96$ ,  $p < .001$ .
- 16 Mean differences in the frequencies of student intervention across types of remarks were examined using repeated measures repeated measures multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) and percentages are shown for illustrative purposes. The multivariate effect was significant, Pillai's Trace=.21,  $F(3, 5438)=472.60$ ,  $p < .01$ .
- 17 To test differences across the four time points, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with biased remarks as the dependent variables (with the exception of the gender expression variables because those questions were not asked in 2001). Given certain demographic differences in the 2007 sample based on the expansion of the Internet sampling method, we controlled for participation in a community group or program for LGBT youth ("youth group") and age. These two individual-level covariates were chosen based on preliminary analysis that examined what locational and school characteristics and personal demographics were most predictive of subsample membership (MySpace, other Internet, and community group). The multivariate results were significant: Pillai's Trace=.30  $F(12, 28818)=24.46$ ,  $p < .001$ . Resulting univariate analyses were considered significant at a 99% significance level. The specific significant differences between years were: "that's so gay" — 2001 < 2001; homophobic remarks — 2001 > all other years (2007, 2005, and 2003) and 2007 < all other years (2005, 2003, and 2001); racist remarks — 2007 > all other years (2005, 2003, and 2001) and 2003 < all other years (2007, 2005, and 2001); sexist remarks — 2001 > all other years (2007, 2005, and 2003) and 2007 > 2005.
- 18 To test differences across the three time points, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with the two negative remarks about gender expression as the dependent variables. In order to account for differences in sampling method across year, youth group participation and age of student were used as covariates. The multivariate results were not significant.



## Overall Safety in School

### Key Findings

- More than two-thirds of students reported feeling unsafe in school because of at least one personal characteristic (e.g., sexual orientation, actual or perceived race/ethnicity).
- Nearly a third of students missed school in the past month because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable.

LGBT students may feel unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation and/or their gender identity or expression, and they may also feel unsafe because of other personal characteristics, such as their race or a disability. Thus, to assess overall feelings of safety in school, students were asked if they felt unsafe due to certain personal characteristics: their sexual orientation, gender, gender expression, actual or perceived race or ethnicity, an actual or perceived disability, or actual or perceived religion. More than two-thirds (68.5%) of the students reported feeling unsafe because of at least one of these characteristics.

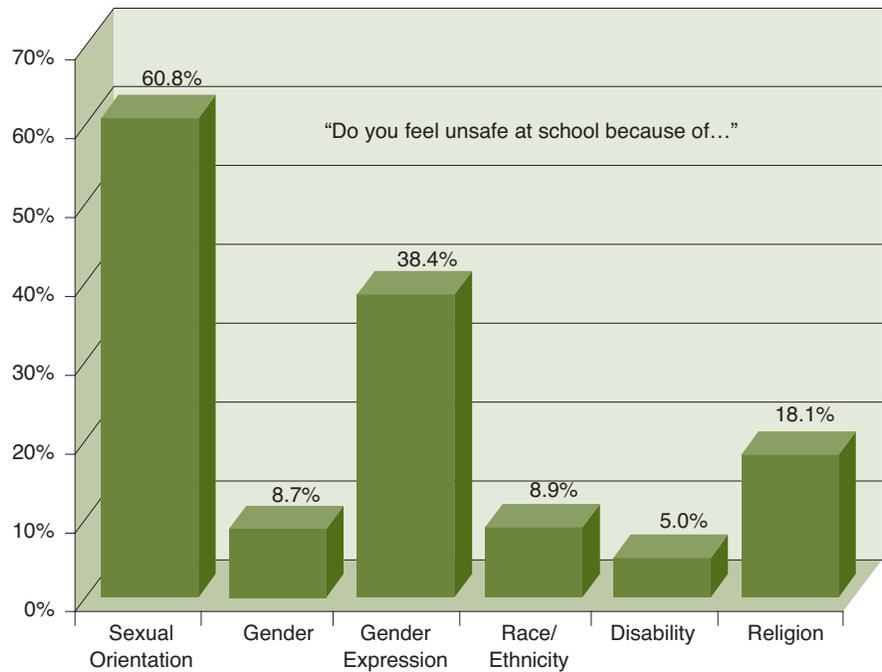
- More than half (60.8%) of students reported that they felt unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation (see Figure 10).
- More than a third (38.4%) reported feeling unsafe in school because of how they express their gender (e.g., a male student who does not act traditionally “masculine”).

- Nearly a fifth (18.1%) of students felt unsafe because of their religion (or the religion that others thought they were).
- Less than a tenth of students felt unsafe because of their gender (8.7%), or actual or perceived race or ethnicity (8.9%) or disability (5.0%).

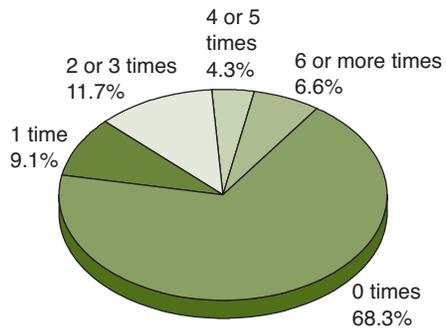
In addition to the personal characteristics listed in the survey, students were given the opportunity to provide other explanations for why they feel unsafe at school. More than a tenth of students (16.1%) indicated that they felt unsafe at school because of another reason. The most common reasons given were related to students’ physical appearance, such as their weight or body size, or being seen as “goth” or “emo.”

For all students, feeling unsafe or uncomfortable in school may negatively affect their academic success, particularly if it results in avoiding classes or missing entire days of school. We asked students how many times they had missed classes or an entire day of school in the past month because they felt uncomfortable or unsafe in school. As shown in Figures 11 and 12, nearly a third of students reported skipping a class at least once in the past month (31.7%) and missing at least one day of school in the past month (32.8%) because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable.

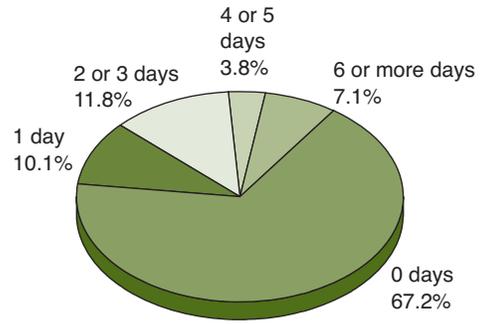
**Figure 10. Percentage of Students Who Felt Unsafe at School**



**Figure 11. Frequency of Missing Classes in the Past Month Because of Feeling Unsafe or Uncomfortable**



**Figure 12. Frequency of Missing Days of School in the Past Month Because of Feeling Unsafe or Uncomfortable**







## Experiences of Harassment and Assault in School

### Key Findings

- Sexual orientation and gender expression were the most common reasons students were harassed at school.
- Almost 90% of students reported being verbally harassed (e.g., called names or threatened) at school because of their sexual orientation; two-thirds were verbally harassed because of how they expressed their gender.
- Almost half of students were physically harassed (e.g., pushed or shoved) at school because of their sexual orientation.
- Almost a quarter of students reported being physically assaulted (e.g., punched, kicked or injured with a weapon) at school in the past year because of their sexual orientation.
- Sexual harassment and relational aggression (e.g., mean rumors being spread or being excluded by peers) were reported by the vast majority of students.
- More than half of the students reported experiencing some form of electronic harassment (“cyberbullying”) in the past year.

Given that the majority of LGBT students in our national survey feel unsafe in school, it is important to document their experiences related to in-school harassment and violence. In order to better understand and document students’ experiences, we asked students how often (“never,” “rarely,” “sometimes,” “often,” or “frequently”) they had been verbally harassed, physically harassed or physically assaulted during the past school year because of their sexual orientation, gender, gender expression, or actual or perceived race or ethnicity, disability, or religion.

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### ***Verbal Harassment***

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With regard to verbal harassment (e.g., being called names or threatened) in school, students' sexual orientation and gender expression were the most commonly targeted characteristics.<sup>19</sup> The vast majority (86.2%) of students reported being verbally harassed at school because of their sexual orientation, and almost half (45.1%) experienced this form of harassment often or frequently (see Figure 13). Gender expression was the second most common reason that students were verbally harassed in school — 66.5% had been verbally harassed in the past school year because of the way in which they expressed their gender, and more than a quarter (27.6%) experienced this victimization often or frequently. In addition, sizable percentages of students reported being verbally harassed in the past year because of their gender (48.4%), actual or perceived religion (42.1%), or race/ethnicity (36.5%).

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### ***Physical Harassment***

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Similar to the reported experiences of verbal harassment, physical harassment (e.g., being pushed or shoved) was most commonly related to students' sexual orientation or how they expressed their gender.<sup>20</sup> As illustrated in Figure 14, almost half (44.1%) had been physically harassed at school in the past year because of their sexual orientation, and almost a fifth (16.7%) had experienced this type of victimization often or frequently. Almost a third (30.4%) of students reported being physically harassed because of their gender expression; a tenth (10.1%) often or frequently. More than a fifth (22.4%) of students had been physically harassed at school based on their gender, and more than a tenth (14.9%) experienced physical harassment because of their actual or perceived religion. Fewer students reported experiencing physical harassment at school because of their actual or perceived race/ethnicity (13.4%), or disability (8.0%).

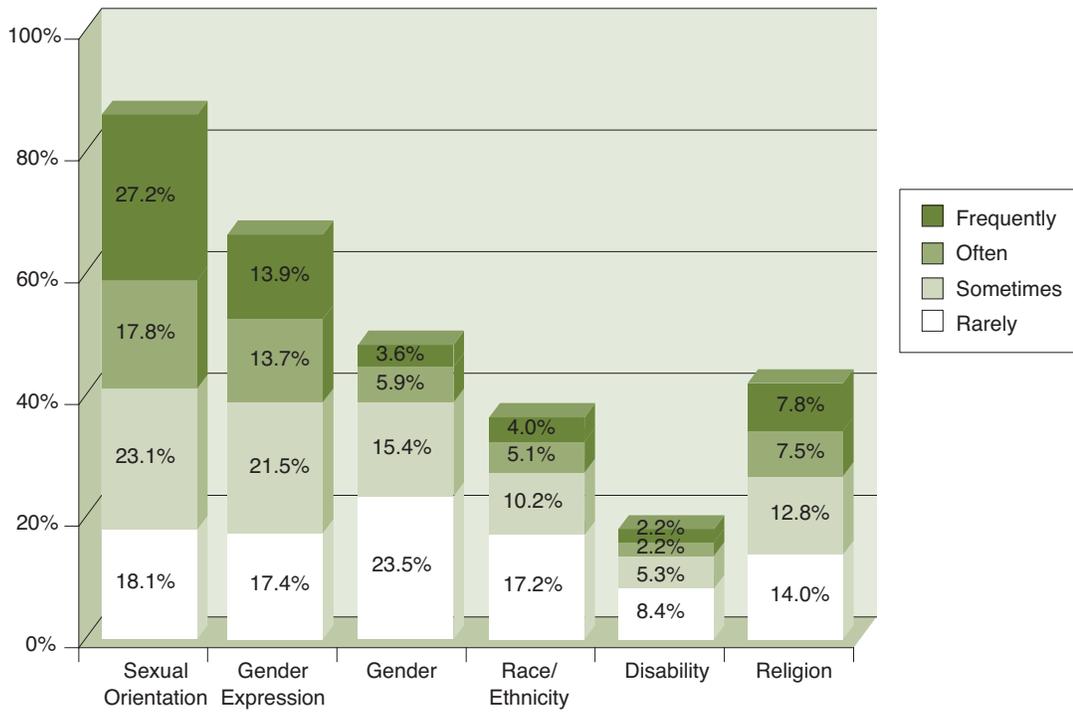
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### ***Physical Assault***

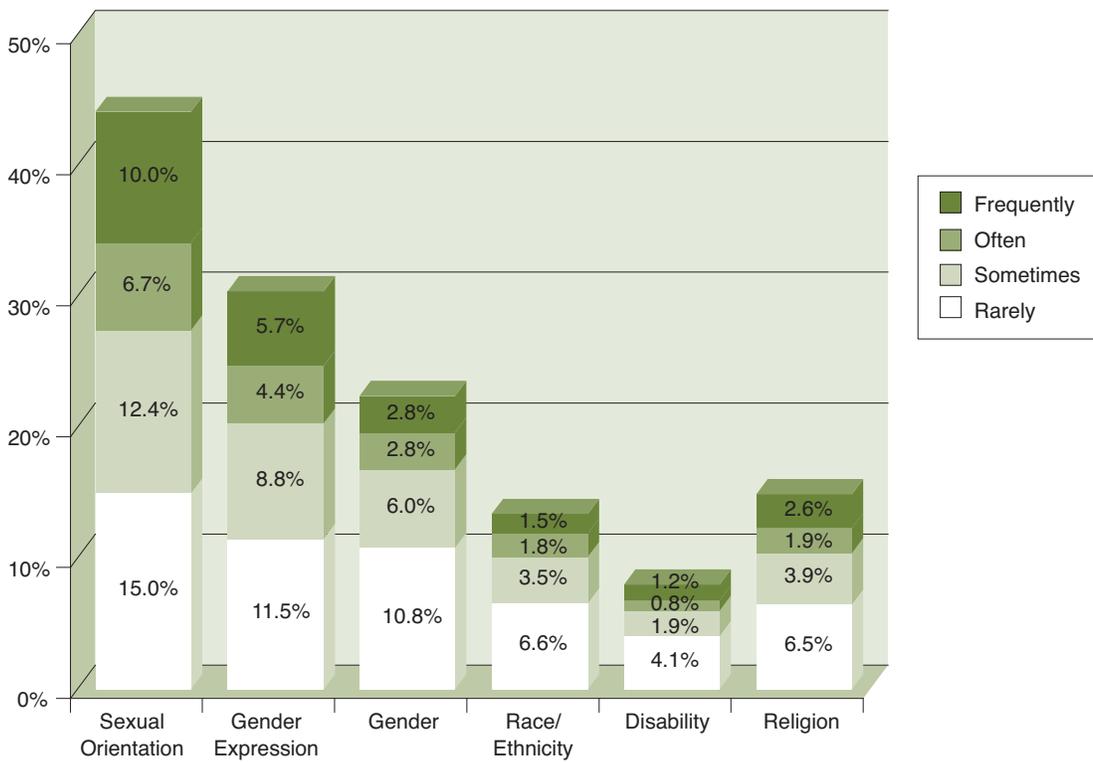
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Students were also asked whether they had been physically assaulted (e.g., being punched, kicked or injured with a weapon) while in school. Given the more severe nature of physical assault, it is not surprising that students were less likely to report this type of victimization than to report verbal or physical harassment. Nonetheless, a quarter (25.1%) of all students reported that they had been physically assaulted at some point at school in the past year. As shown in Figure 15, sexual orientation and gender expression were, again, the most commonly targeted characteristics — 22.1% of students reported that they had been physically assaulted at school in the past year because of their sexual orientation and 14.2% because of how they expressed their gender.<sup>21</sup> Nearly a tenth of students had been physically assaulted based on their gender or their actual or perceived religion. Physical assault based on race/ethnicity (6.1%) or a disability (4.5%) was less commonly reported.

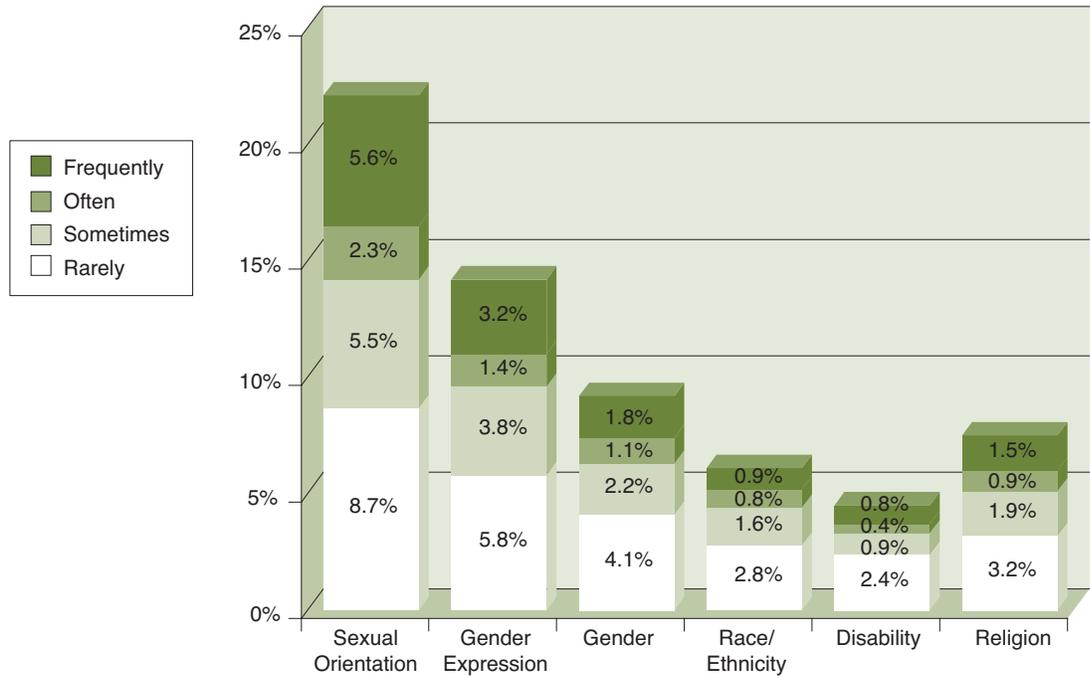
**Figure 13. Frequency of Verbal Harassment in the Past School Year**



**Figure 14. Frequency of Physical Harassment in the Past School Year**



**Figure 15. Frequency of Physical Assault in the Past School Year**



### **Other Types of Victimization Events in School**

In addition to experiences of harassment and assault that are related to specific personal characteristics, LGBT students may be harassed or experience other victimization at school that is not clearly related to a personal characteristic. Thus, we asked students in our study about other negative events they may have experienced in school, such as being sexually harassed or having their property stolen or deliberately damaged. As shown in Figure 16, sizable percentages of students reported experiencing other types of victimization at school in the past year.

**Sexual Harassment.** Previous research has shown that the harassment experienced by LGBT students in school is often sexual in nature, particularly harassment experienced by lesbian and bisexual young women and by transgender youth.<sup>22</sup> Students in our survey were asked how often they had been sexually harassed in school, such as receiving unwanted sexual remarks or being touched inappropriately. As shown in Figure 16, almost half three-quarters (71.6%) of all students reported being sexually harassed during the past school year. About a quarter (25.6%) reported that such events occurred often or frequently in school.

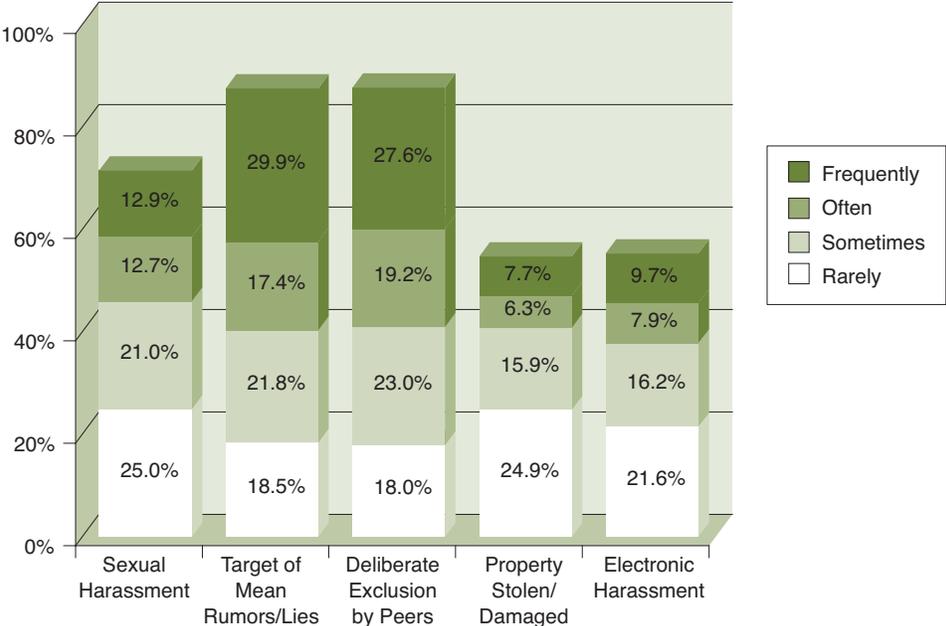
**Relational Aggression.** Research on school-based bullying and harassment often focuses on physical or overt acts of aggressive behavior, however it is also important to examine relational forms of aggression — harm caused by damage to peer relationships. For example, students may start negative rumors about another student in order to damage his or her reputation. Students may also deliberately

exclude another student from peer groups or activities. We asked students in our survey how often they experienced two of the most common forms of relational aggression: being the target of mean rumors and lies and being purposefully excluded by peers. The vast majority of students reported that they had been the target of mean rumors and lies at school (87.6%) or had felt deliberately excluded or “left out” by other students (87.8%). Furthermore, almost half had experienced these events often or frequently in the past school year (see also Figure 16).

**Property Damaged or Stolen in School.** Having one’s personal property damaged or stolen is yet another dimension of a hostile school climate. When asked how often they had had their property (e.g., car, clothing or books) stolen or deliberately damaged at school, more than half (54.8%) of students reported that this had happened to them in the past year, and more than a tenth (14.0%) said it had occurred often or frequently (see Figure 16).

**Electronic Harassment.** Electronic harassment (often called “cyberbullying”) is using an electronic medium, such as a cell phone or Internet communications, to threaten or harm others. In recent years there has been much attention given to this type of harassment, as access to the Internet, cellular phones and other electronic forms of communication has increased for many youth. We asked students how often they had been harassed or threatened by students at their school via electronic mediums (e.g., text messages, emails, or postings on Internet sites such as MySpace). More than half (55.4%) reported experiencing some form of electronic harassment in the past year, and almost a fifth experienced it often or frequently (see Figure 16).

**Figure 16. Frequency of Other Types of Harassment in the Past School Year**



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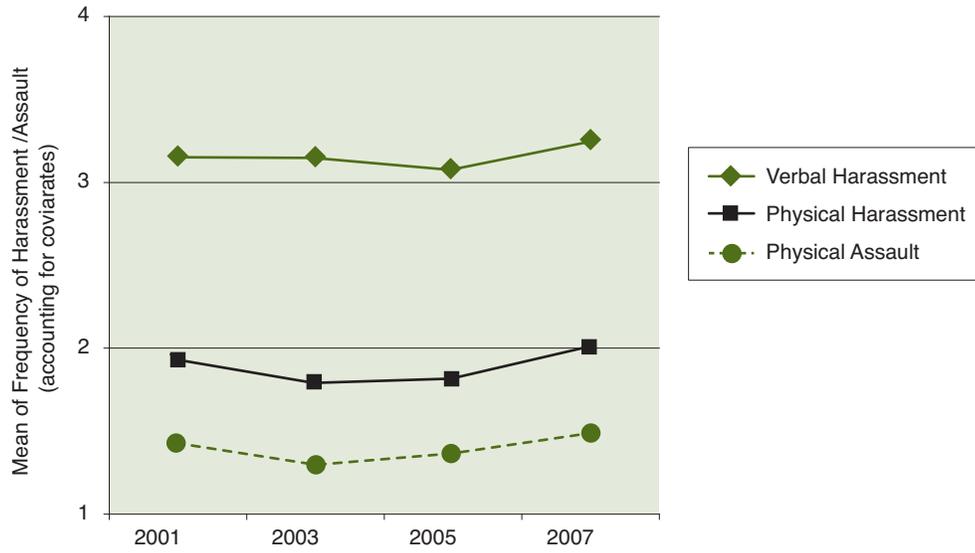
### ***Comparison of Victimization among GLSEN's 2001, 2003, 2005 and 2007 Surveys***

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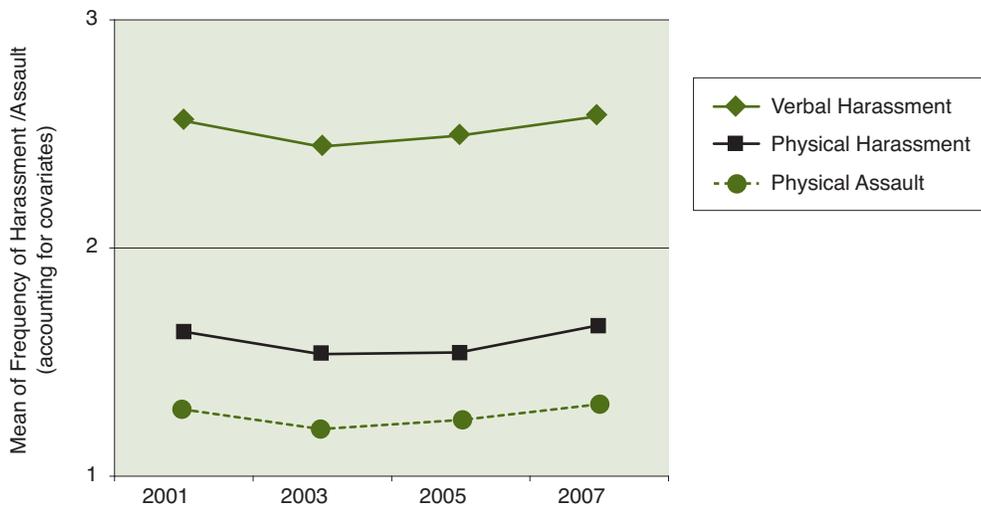
GLSEN's mission is to ensure that the nation's schools are safe environments for all students. Since our 2005 survey, there have been positive changes that could improve school climate for LGBT students: Iowa, Maryland, and Maine have passed state safe school laws that provide specific protections based on sexual orientation and gender identity. As more schools develop and implement inclusionary anti-harassment/bullying policies and educator training programs, we would hope to see a decrease in reports of harassment and victimization. However, other changes may promote a more hostile climate for LGBT students: restrictions on curricular discussions of homosexuality, battles over efforts to eliminate or restrict student access to Gay-Straight Alliances, and efforts to counter the Day of Silence<sup>23</sup> and other forms of student activism.

To gain some understanding of whether there have been changes in school climate for LGBT students in middle and high schools, we examined the incidence of reported harassment and assault from 2001 to 2007. LGBT students' experiences of harassment and assault continue to remain relatively constant over time. Although in 2005 we found a few small, but statistically significant decreases in levels of victimization on the basis of sexual orientation, these decreases were not maintained over time. In 2007 we found negligible increases in victimization based on sexual orientation (See Figure 17).<sup>24</sup> With regard to incidences of harassment and assault related to gender expression, there were no significant changes over time in the frequency of verbal harassment. However, compared to previous years, the frequency of physical harassment and assault based on gender expression was slightly higher in 2007 (see Figure 18).<sup>25</sup>

**Figure 17. Harassment and Assault Based on Sexual Orientation by Year**



**Figure 18. Harassment and Assault Based on Gender Expression by Year**



## Notes

- 19 Mean differences in the frequencies of verbal harassment across types were examined using repeated measures multiple analysis of variance: Pillai's Trace=.63,  $F(5, 5925)=2044.93$ ,  $p<.001$ .
- 20 Mean differences in the frequencies of physical harassment across types were examined using repeated measures multiple analysis of variance: Pillai's Trace=.30,  $F(5, 5993)=513.30$ ,  $p<.001$ .
- 21 Mean differences in the frequencies of physical assault across types were examined using repeated measures multiple analysis of variance: Pillai's Trace=.14,  $F(5, 6004)=199.22$ ,  $p<.001$ .
- 22 Bochenek, M. & Brown, W. (2001). *Hatred in the hallways: Violence and discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students in U.S. schools*. New York, NY: Human Rights Watch.
- 23 The Day of Silence is a national student-led day of action started in 1996. During the Day of Silence, participating students take a vow of silence in order to bring attention to anti-lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) name-calling, bullying and harassment. As the popularity and exposure of the Day of Silence have increased, so have attempts to oppose student activism against anti-LGBT bias. GLSEN serves as the organizational sponsor for the Day of Silence. For more information about the Day of Silence, see [www.dayofsilence.org](http://www.dayofsilence.org).
- 24 To test differences across years, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with the three harassment/assault variables (verbal harassment, physical harassment and physical assault) as dependent variables. Given certain demographic differences in the 2007 sample based on the expansion of the Internet sampling method, we controlled for participation in a community group or program for LGBT youth ("youth group") and age. These two individual-level covariates were chosen based on preliminary analysis that examined what locational and school characteristics and personal demographics were most predictive of subsample membership (MySpace, other Internet, and community group). The multivariate results were significant: Pillai's Trace=.01,  $F(9, 28644)=5.34$ ,  $p<.001$ . Univariate effects were considered at  $p<.01$ .
- 25 To test differences across years, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with the three harassment/assault variables as dependent variables. In order to account for differences in sampling methods across years, youth group participation and age of student were used as covariates. The multivariate results were significant: Pillai's Trace=.00,  $F(9, 28143)=2.46$ ,  $p>.01$ . Univariate effects were considered at  $p<.01$ .



## Comparisons with Population-Based Studies

### Key Findings

- LGBT students were much more likely to report feeling unsafe in school because of a personal characteristic than a national sample of the general population of students — more than two-thirds of LGBT students felt unsafe at school compared to less than a fifth of the general population of students.
- LGBT students were much more likely to report missing school because they felt unsafe — over 30% of LGBT students missed school for this reason compared to 5% of the general population of students.

The National School Climate Survey is focused solely on the experiences of LGBT students and does not provide any inherent relative comparison with the experiences of non-LGBT students nationally. In 2005, GLSEN and Harris Interactive conducted a national study with a population-based survey which contained a small sample of students who identified as LGBT.<sup>26</sup> In that study, we found that LGBT students were three times as likely as non-LGBT students to report feeling unsafe in school (22% versus 7%). We also found that LGBT students were more likely than non-LGBT students to have been verbally or physically harassed or assaulted during the school year because of their appearance, gender, sexual orientation, gender expression, race or ethnicity, a disability, or religion, with 90% of LGBT students having been victimized compared to 62% of non-

LGBT students. These comparisons, while valid, are limited because of the small percentage of LGBT students in the sample. For this report, we compared some of the findings from the 2007 National School Climate Survey (NSCS) with the national sample of secondary school students from the GLSEN/Harris Interactive study in order to further examine the degree of school-based harassment and other experiences for LGBT students relative to their peers.

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### ***Hearing Biased Language in School***

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As shown in Table 3, LGBT students from our current study were more likely to report hearing biased remarks in school than the national sample of the general population of students.<sup>27</sup> For example, 92.1% of LGBT students heard homophobic remarks at least sometimes in school, compared to 75.7% of the general population of students. With regard to hearing remarks from school personnel, significantly more LGBT students reported hearing school staff make homophobic, racist and sexist remarks in school.<sup>28</sup> For example, students in the National School Climate Survey were almost four times as likely as the general student population to report hearing school staff make homophobic remarks. In addition, LGBT students were less likely to report that teachers or other school personnel intervened when hearing homophobic and sexist remarks in school (see also Table 3).<sup>29</sup>

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### ***Sense of Safety***

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LGBT students in our current study were much more likely to report feeling unsafe in school because of a personal characteristic than the national sample of students — more than two-thirds (68.5%) of LGBT students said that they felt unsafe in school because of a personal characteristic, such as their sexual orientation or gender expression, compared to about a fifth (19.6%) of students nationally.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, LGBT students were more than five times as likely as the general population of students to have missed class at least once (31.7%) or missed at least one day of school (32.7%) in the past month because they felt unsafe (see Figure 19).<sup>31</sup>

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### ***Experiences of Harassment***

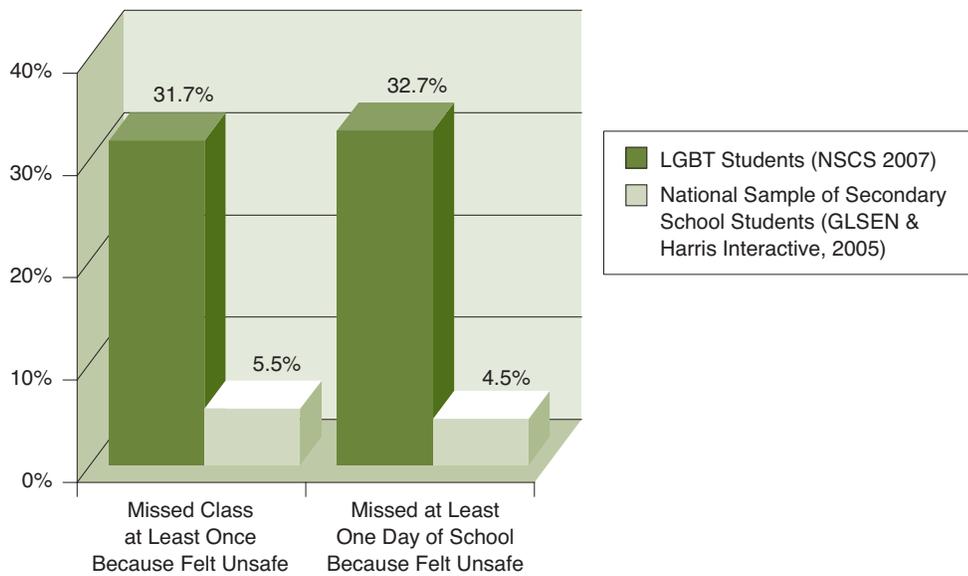
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Results from the general population-based GLSEN/Harris Interactive survey also provided confirmation that school can be a hostile environment for many LGBT students. Students in the general population-based survey were asked how often students in their school were harassed, called names or bullied because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation. About two-thirds (62.5%) of students in that survey reported that other students were victimized at least sometimes in school because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation, which is similar to the percentage of LGBT students in the 2007 National School Climate Survey who reported that they had been verbally harassed at least sometimes in the past year because of their sexual orientation (68.1%).

**Table 3. LGBT Students Versus a National Sample of Secondary School Students: Biased Language in School**

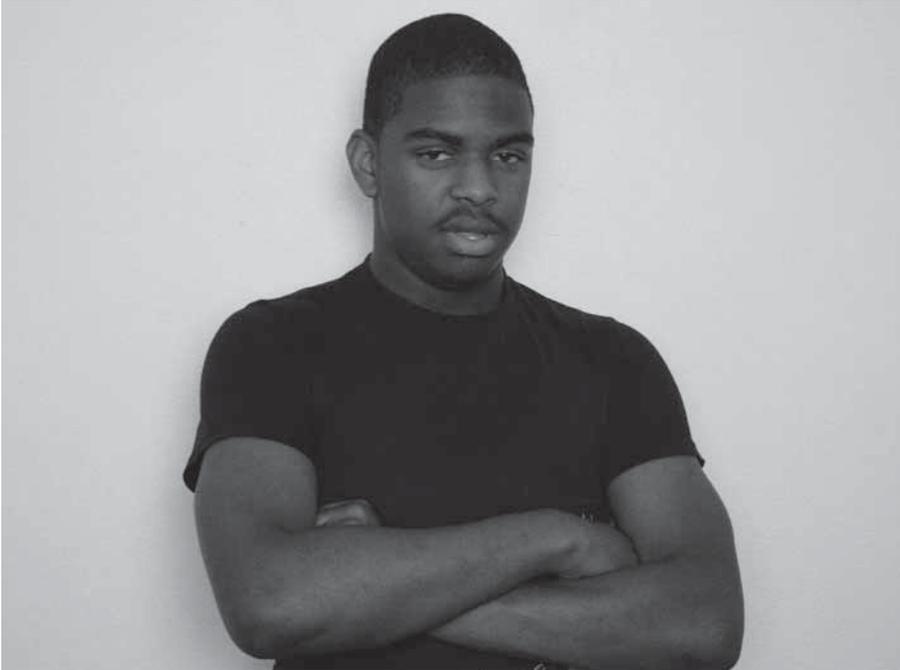
		LGBT Students: 2007 NSCS	National Sample of Students: GLSEN & Harris Interactive, 2005
Biased language from students (heard at least sometimes)	Homophobic remarks	92.1%	75.7%
	Racist remarks	66.9%	46.9%
	Sexist remarks	92.3%	78.1%
Biased language from teachers (heard at least sometimes)	Homophobic remarks	22.7%	6.0%
	Racist remarks	9.5%	4.0%
	Sexist remarks	26.4%	9.0%
Teacher intervention with biased remarks (staff ever intervened)	Homophobic remarks	61.4%	85.2%
	Racist remarks	89.8%	88.4%
	Sexist remarks	85.3%	90.7%

**Figure 19. LGBT Students Versus National Sample of Secondary School Students: Missing Classes and Days of School in the Past Month for Safety Reasons**



## Notes

- 26 Harris Interactive & GLSEN. (2005). *From teasing to torment: School climate in America, A survey of teachers and students*. New York: Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network.
- 27 Chi-square tests were conducted to compare percentages of students reporting hearing biased remarks in schools. Homophobic remarks:  $\chi^2=501.90$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $\Phi=-.23$ . Racist remarks:  $\chi^2=364.80$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $\Phi=-.20$ . Sexist remarks:  $\chi^2=400.60$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $\Phi=-.20$ .
- 28 Chi-square tests were conducted to compare percentages of students reporting hearing biased remarks from school staff. Homophobic remarks from staff:  $\chi^2=441.50$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $\Phi=-.21$ . Racist remarks from staff:  $\chi^2=96.06$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $\Phi=-.10$ . Sexist remarks from staff:  $\chi^2=413.47$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $\Phi=-.21$ .
- 29 Chi-square tests were conducted to compare percentages of students reporting that school staff intervened when hearing biased remarks. Intervention with homophobic remarks:  $\chi^2=498.99$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $\Phi=.24$ . Intervention with sexist remarks:  $\chi^2=50.37$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $\Phi=.08$ . The difference between students' reports of staff intervention with racist remarks was not statistically significant ( $p>.01$ ).
- 30 A Chi-square test was conducted to compare percentages of students who reported feeling unsafe in school because of a personal characteristic:  $\chi^2=2130.57$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $\Phi=.47$ .
- 31 Chi-square tests were conducted to compare percentages of students who reported missing classes or days of school because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable. Missing class:  $\chi^2=869.96$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $\Phi=-.30$ . Missing days of school:  $\chi^2=997.37$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $\Phi=-.32$ .



## Reporting of School-Based Harassment and Assault

### Key Findings

- The majority of students who were harassed or assaulted in school did not report the incident to either school staff or a family member.
- Among students who did not report being harassed or assaulted to school staff, the most common reasons given for not reporting were the belief that staff would not effectively address the situation or that reporting would make the situation worse in some way.
- Only about a third of students who reported incidents of victimization to school personnel said that staff effectively addressed the problem. In fact, when asked to describe how staff responded to reported incidents of victimization, students most commonly said that no action was taken.

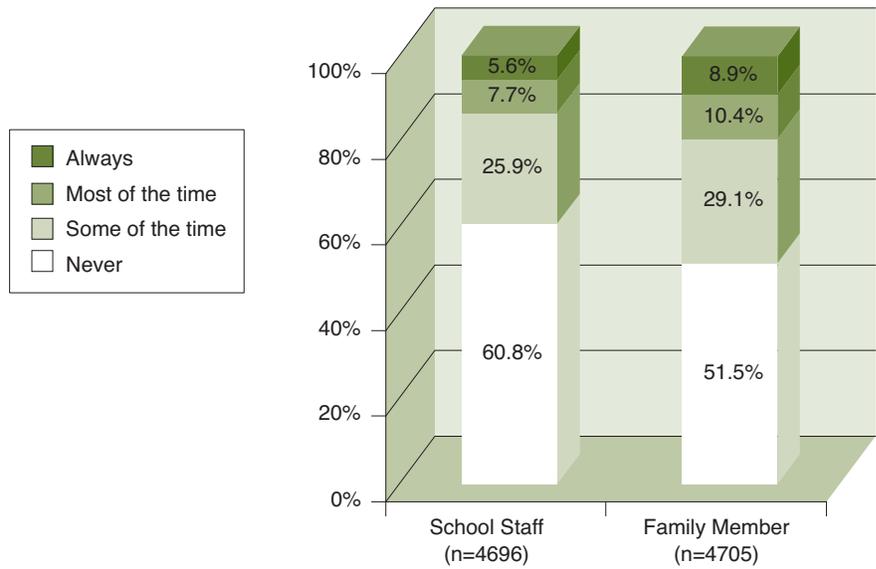
In the current survey, we asked those students who had experienced harassment or assault in the past school year how often they had reported the incidents to school staff or to a family member (i.e., to their parent or guardian or to another family member). As shown in Figure 20, the majority of students responded that they did not report incidents to either school staff (60.8%) or to a family member (51.5%).

Few students indicated that they reported incidents of harassment or assault “most of the time” or “always” to staff (13.3%). Reporting incidents of harassment and assault to school staff may be an

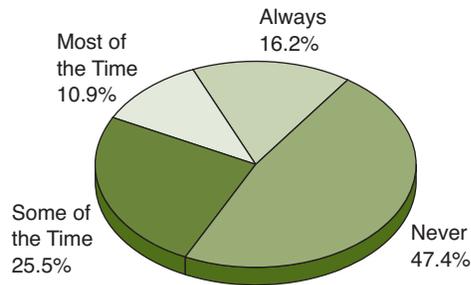
intimidating task for students. There is also no guarantee that reporting incidents to school staff would result in effective intervention.

Family members may represent an additional resource for students who are harassed or assaulted in school, and may be able to advocate for the student with school personnel. For those students who had reported incidents to a family member, we asked how often a family member had talked to school staff about the incident — a little more than half (53%) said that the family member addressed the issue with school staff at least some of the time (see Figure 21).

**Figure 20. Frequency of Reporting Incidents of Harassment and Assault**



**Figure 21. Frequency of Intervention by Students' Family Members (n=2285)**



## ***Reasons for Not Reporting Harassment or Assault***

Students who did not tell school personnel about their experiences with harassment or assault were asked why they did not do so (see Table 4). The most common themes among these responses were: 1) they doubted that staff would effectively address the situation, 2) they feared retaliation from students or teachers, 3) they thought that they would not be believed, 4) they viewed their experience as not severe enough to be reported, and 5) they chose to deal with the situation on their own.

**Table 4. Reasons Students Did Not Report Incidents of Harassment or Assault to School Staff (n=3959)**

	<b>% of students (number) reporting specific response</b>	
<b>Doubts that Effective Intervention Would Occur</b>		
Believed nothing would be done to address the situation	17.2%	(n=682)
Reporting is not worth it (e.g., pointless, reporting hasn't been effective in the past)	15.6%	(n=616)
<b>Fears Related to Making the Situation Worse</b>		
Safety concerns (e.g., fear of retaliation, physical violence)	13.5%	(n=536)
Afraid of the situation getting worse/making it worse	7.9%	(n=311)
Did not want to be a "snitch" or "tattle-tale"	3.8%	(n=152)
<b>Confidentiality Issues (e.g., fear of being "outed")</b>	3.1%	(n=124)
<b>Concerns About Staffs' Reactions</b>		
Doubted they would be taken seriously or believed	4.3%	(n=169)
Teachers or other school staff are homophobic	1.8%	(n=71)
Teachers participate in harassment	<1%	(n=31)
Fear of being judged or treated differently	<1%	(n=38)
<b>Severity of Harassment and Other Influences on Reporting</b>		
Not a big deal/Not serious enough	16.1%	(n=637)
Used to it (e.g., harassment is part of life)	2.1%	(n=85)
<b>Additional Ways Students Dealt With Being Victimized in School</b>	16.3%	(n=646)
<b>Obstacles to Reporting Harassment</b>		
Barriers to reporting exist	6.8%	(n=269)
Too embarrassed/uncomfortable/ashamed	2.3%	(n=90)
<b>Other Reasons for Not Reporting</b>		
Scared or afraid	3.4%	(n=134)
Other reasons	3.3%	(n=129)

**Doubts that Effective Intervention Would Occur.** Almost a third (32.8%) of all responses reflected some degree of hopelessness with regard to reporting harassment. Many of these students commented that it was “not worth reporting” or that “nothing would be done” by school staff to address the incident. About a fifth (17.2%) of respondents believed that nothing would be done by school staff to address the incident, even if they were to report being harassed:

*I knew that they wouldn't do anything about it, so I thought, "Why bother?" (Male student, 9th grade, TX)*

*I feel nothing will be done about it. Most just don't care... (Male student, 12th grade, SD)*

Many students felt that it was pointless to report incidents of victimization to school personnel. The majority of these students specifically mentioned that these feelings were a result of previous, unsuccessful experiences of reporting harassment (15.6%):

*When I do report it, nothing happens. (Female student, 9th grade, WA)*

*Because most of them wouldn't do anything about it...the person would just get a slap on the wrist. I've seen it happen before. (Female student, 9th grade, FL)*

*Because I'm not sure if they will do anything about it. I don't know if I can trust them. I've heard that other people have gone to administrators, and all they do is ask if the reason they were harassed was true. I don't trust very easily, not anymore. (Female student, 10th grade, NY)*

*It's not like they'd do anything too effective about it, like last time. (Transgender student, 8th grade, CA)*

**Fears Related to Making the Situation Worse.** Many students (28.3%) expressed fears that reporting harassment and assault would make the situation worse in some way. Most of these students believed that reporting incidents to school personnel would aggravate the situation. Several also mentioned that they did not report the events because they feared retaliation, often in the form of physical violence:

*Because of what the people who harassed me might do to me if I told. (Male student, 8th grade, TX)*

*Afraid of the people being mean to me would find out that I told and they would get even more people to hate me or go against me. Also I was very afraid that I would get severely hurt. (Female student, 9th grade, IL)*

*Because I felt like they'd do it again, maybe a bit worse the next time. (Female student, 10th grade, TN)*

*Because I was scared they would get me if I ratted them out. (Student with "other" gender identity, 9th grade, LA)*

In addition to fears about retaliation, a few students were afraid that the reporting process itself made them vulnerable to further attack because staff did not know how to deal with the situation appropriately.

*[Reporting] causes more problems. Teachers and staff do not know how to handle the problem anonymously. (Female student, grade not reported, TX)*

*Because my name would have been mentioned, and that would have made it worse. (Student with "other" gender identity, 9th grade, AK)*

Some students (3.8%) wanted to avoid being branded a "snitch" or "tattle-tale" because the accompanying peer disapproval and added harassment would make the situation worse. For example, a female student, a 9th grader from Pennsylvania, remarked that she did not report harassment to school personnel because "I didn't want to be a tattle-tale, that just leads to more harassment when they find out you told!"

Further analysis of this subset of students who feared making the situation worse revealed that these students reported significantly higher levels of victimization than other respondents.<sup>32</sup> Although it is difficult to know for certain, in the absence of longitudinal data, it is possible that students who were more frequently victimized also had more experience with the reporting process and, based on their prior experiences, knew that reporting would create further problems for them in school.

**Concerns about Confidentiality.** A number of students (3.1%) expressed concerns about confidentiality. In particular, the possibility of being "outed" by school staff to family or the school community was mentioned most often:

*If I had told someone my parents would find out I am a lesbian, and I am not ready for them to know. (Female student, 9th grade, IN)*

*Because I don't want the staff to know my orientation because they'd tell my parents and I would be kicked out of the house. (Student with "other" gender identity, 7th grade, CT)*

*I wasn't out to my parents at the time, and feared that the school would out me if I reported anything. (Male student, 10th grade, TX)*

**Concerns about Negative Reactions from Staff.** Some students expressed concerns about how teachers would react to them because of their sexual orientation if they reported the harassment or assault. For example, a male 8th grader from New York said; "I was afraid of what my teachers would think of me, and if they would judge me too." A number of students (4.3%) also expressed doubt that they would be taken seriously or believed by teachers or other school staff if they were to report incidents of victimization:

*I was afraid they wouldn't believe me. I was afraid they would laugh. I thought I could go without someone laughing at me for one day, because it really hurts more than anyone can know. (Female student, 9th grade, NY)*

Several of the students who thought they would not be believed or taken seriously were also afraid that school staff would blame them for the incident because of their sexual orientation or how they expressed themselves:

*Because when this did happen to me which it did on a regular basis they always said it was my fault because I'm a lesbian. (Female student, 8th grade, LA)*

*At times they turned it around on me, saying I brought it on. If I didn't have such a flamboyant attitude, students wouldn't find the means to pick on me. (Male student, 11th grade, AR)*

Some students (1.8%) were deterred from reporting victimization because they thought their teachers were homophobic and would therefore not be helpful:

*Because I knew that the staff wouldn't do anything about it because they all look down on gay/lesbians. Being gay isn't approved of. (Female student, 10th grade, CA)*

*Because it's not like the teachers would have done anything anyways. My school doesn't care about students who are gay, bi, or lesbian. (Male student, 11th grade, MD)*

A small number of students reported that they were not comfortable reporting victimization because the perpetrator was a teacher or school staff person. For example, a 10th grade female student from Oregon reported that "... it was a teacher, or staff member [who was the perpetrator] and I felt as if no one would believe me." A transgender student in the 10th grade from New York expressed a similar problem with reporting staff for perpetrating harassment, noting that "they don't believe a staff [person] would do a thing like that." Although these students made up less than one percent of the sample, their experiences are important to note as being harassed by school personnel, who are charged with maintaining a safe school environment for all students, is a powerful indicator of school climate. Victimization by teachers, especially when witnessed by other students, may cause additional harm by sending a message in the classroom or school community that harassment is acceptable. Harassment of students by teachers also serves as a reminder that safer schools efforts must address all members of the school community.

**Students' Perceptions of the Severity of Harassment and Other Deterrents to Reporting.** Many students explained that they did not report incidents to school staff because the harassment was "not a big deal" (16.1%). Within these responses students often described the harassment as "not serious enough" or "not severe enough" to be reported:

*I just figured that it wasn't important. Remarks about my orientation and my gender presentation as well as people inappropriately touching or assaulting me weren't important enough for me to report. (Male student, 10th grade, TX)*

*I've only been verbally harassed and it probably wouldn't seem like that big of a deal to others. (Female student, 10th grade, IL)*

*I usually saw no need in reporting it because the acts of harassment were minor. I was never physically assaulted. (Male student, 12th grade, OK)*

Some students had been given the message that teachers and staff would not support them unless they had been physically assaulted:

*Sometimes, it was just a person saying a rude comment. Mainly, verbal harassment and I didn't feel as if the principal or any of the teachers would actually care. They made it seem that if you weren't physically injured it wasn't of much importance. (Female student, 9th grade, LA)*

Because we lack information about the specific nature of students' actual victimization, we cannot examine the significance of these events for students who said it was not serious or "not a big deal." It may be that the events were truly minor. Students who reported that the harassment they experienced was "not a big deal" did have lower levels of victimization than other students.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, these students had, in fact, experienced victimization in school. And for some, the victimization included physical assault (being kicked, punched, threatened, or injured with a weapon), which is arguably a "big deal" under any circumstances.<sup>34</sup>

It may also be that some students have a high tolerance for victimization or have become so accustomed to such experiences that they do not expect intervention to have a meaningful impact on the situation and have therefore concluded that their experiences are "not a big deal." In fact, for some students (2.1%), in-school victimization had become so frequent that they had become accustomed to it and, therefore, did not feel it was important to report to school authorities:

*Because I feel like it is a part of life to be harassed and insulted. (Male student, 10th grade, WI)*

*Because I am so used to the verbal attacks it has become second nature to ignore them rather than dwell on them, and the attacks were so frequent and from random people I would not know which names to report to the administration. (Male student, 12th grade, AL)*

Another disturbing theme among students who said that the incident was "not a big deal" was that some students understood that the harassment was egregious, but would not report the incident because they knew or were even friends with the perpetrator:

*It wasn't important enough. And most of the physical touching was by my friends, so it wasn't really harassment, except that I wish they hadn't done it. (Male student, 10th grade, GA)*

*I didn't always report the harassment because usually it was made by people in my "group" and I was afraid that if I reported them, I would lose my standings. (Female student, 8th grade, CO)*

Friends who are also perpetrators of harassment represent a perplexing and complicated problem. The nature of friendships and the complexity of social pressures must be examined to better understand why a student would harass someone they consider a friend and under what circumstances harassment would be tolerated. In situations where the perpetrator of harassment is a friend, the risk of reporting may be different for the targeted student than when the harassment is perpetrated by unfamiliar peers. It is also possible that students who are harassed by someone they consider a friend interpret the meaning of these experiences differently than when the perpetrator is not a friend. Differences in the willingness to tolerate harassment, by those targeted for harassment as well as witnesses or bystanders, and the reluctance to report a friend for harassment are issues that deserve further consideration.

#### **Additional Ways Students Dealt With Being Victimized in School.**

In response to the question "why did you not always report being harassed or assaulted to a teacher or staff person?" some students (16.3%) described alternative methods of handling the problem rather than reasons for not reporting harassment. Students who reported dealing with the situation themselves instead of reporting it to school personnel made up more than half of these replies. Many respondents were not specific or simply stated that they "took care of it" without further explanation. More detailed statements often reflected a belief that self-reliance was necessary because no other help was available:

*I took care of it myself. Staff makes it worse, you can only solve your own problems, bringing adults in intensifies the situation. (Female student, 12th grade, NJ)*

*Because I end up standing up for myself. I feel that I don't need help, but I probably really do. (Male student, 11th grade, NY)*

A few students specifically mentioned physical retaliation. Because the majority of these particular comments indicated only that they dealt with the situation, it is impossible to know what verbal or physical means students employed and it is possible that fighting back was more common than could be determined from our data. Nonetheless, several responses presented fighting back as a more effective method of dealing with the problem than reporting the incident to teachers or staff:

*Because sometimes I'd rather handle things myself. It seems more effective to just stand up for yourself and not back down than tell someone, even if it leads to a fight, it's better to just fight than to drag it out with staff. (Female student, 11th grade, IA)*

*[Be]cause... they won't do anything about it... it's how the school system works... you report and you get harassed more... you have to take care of the problem yourself... that's what I do... that's why people don't mess with me... (Male student, 11th grade, KS)*

Another theme among respondents who had alternative methods of dealing with being harassed was the ability of students to ignore the incident or not allow it to bother them. Some students were no more descriptive than claiming not to care about being harassed; e.g., “it doesn't really bother me...” or “I just ignore it and I don't care.” A few students provided further insight into how they were able to ignore the harassment:

*I'm not really bothered about being harassed because I know a lot of the things people say aren't true or that they are only immature by saying them to me. (Female student, 9th grade, MI)*

*They don't know me and I don't care for them. I ignored them and they stop making their opinions so loud. It's my life and if people who don't know me judge me, they're missing out on a friend just because of my sexual orientation. (Female student, 9th grade, CA)*

It is possible that some students are truly not bothered by the harassment they experienced. It is also possible that keeping up the appearance of not caring is a defense mechanism used by students to protect themselves from feeling victimized. Further research is needed to explore the reasons why some students are able to ignore harassment as well as why this response may be more appealing than reporting the harassment.

**Difficulties Encountered in Reporting Harassment.** Some students (6.8%) mentioned obstacles that prevented them from reporting incidents of harassment and assault, such as not knowing what the correct course of action was for reporting. One student, a female 10th grade student from Florida, simply wrote “I didn't know what I was supposed to do.” Another student, a 12th grade female student from California, replied; “I did not know what to say or who to say it to anyway.” A female 9th grader from Oregon said she did not tell school personnel “because the school's harassment policy [did] not cover sexual orientation.”

Several students did not report being harassed because they did not know their harasser's name or did not have the proof of being victimized required by their school:

*Because I know that no one in the school will do anything about it unless I have proof and I never had proof. (Male student, 11th grade, NV)*

*They probably wouldn't have done anything about it; it seems when it comes down to reporting acts of violence because of a “touchy” subject, they somehow need more proof than they would ordinarily need. (Female student, 12th grade, NY)*

A smaller number of students (2.3%) expressed feeling too uncomfortable or embarrassed to report the incident. The majority of these responses were brief; “it is embarrassing” and “too uncomfortable” were common replies. A few students provided lengthier answers, describing discomfort discussing issues related to sexual orientation, and a lack of trustworthy adults as other challenges that hindered their ability to report harassment and assault:

*Because it's an extremely uncomfortable situation telling a person of authority about being harassed because of your sexual orientation especially when you aren't for sure if they will sympathize. (Male student, 12th grade, SC)*

*I was uncomfortable talking about being gay to a teacher. (Male student, 9th grade, IL)*

In order to create a safe learning environment for all students regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity or expression, schools should work toward appropriately and effectively responding to incidents of victimization. Nearly all of the reasons given by students for not reporting victimization that they experienced in school could be addressed by school personnel. Adopting and enforcing school anti-harassment policies that are inclusive of sexual orientation and gender identity and expression could reduce the institutional barriers that some students reported, such as not knowing the reporting procedure or not knowing if they could report incidents related to their sexual orientation. In order to counter the perception that school staff will do nothing to address incidents of victimization, school personnel should always respond to and address each incident brought to their attention, as well as inform the victim of the action that was taken. Training all members of the school community to recognize harassment and provide adequate support could increase the likelihood of reporting by assuaging students' concerns about making the situation worse and lessening their fears about staff's reaction to reporting harassment. Such efforts could, in turn, improve school climate for all students.

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### ***Students' Reports on the Nature of Intervention by School Personnel***

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Although, for the various reasons described in the previous section, most students did not report incidents of harassment and assault to school personnel, slightly more than a third (39.2%) of the students in the survey did choose to tell a staff member when they were victimized at school (see Figure 20). In order to examine staff's responses to incidents of harassment and assault, we asked the students who had reported these incidents to a teacher or other school staff to describe what the staff person did when notified about the incident (see Table 5). The most common responses were: 1) staff did nothing in response; 2) staff talked to the perpetrator about the incident, and 3) the perpetrator was disciplined.

**Table 5. School Staff's Responses to Students' Reports of Harassment or Assault (n=1774)**

	% of students (number) reporting specific response	
Nothing/ no action was taken	31.1%	(n=552)
Staff talked to perpetrator/ told perpetrator to stop	21.7%	(n=385)
Perpetrator was disciplined (e.g., detention, suspension)	20.9%	(n=370)
Staff promised that they would look into or address the situation	9.8%	(n=174)
Staff or victim made a report of the incident, or it was referred to another staff person	9.5%	(n=169)
Other type of action was taken (e.g., parents were contacted, non-specific action - "took care of the situation")	7.8%	(n=138)
The incident was investigated	4.1%	(n=72)
Staff provided some form of support to the victim	3.8%	(n=68)
The victim and perpetrator were made to talk to each other (e.g., peer mediation)	2.9%	(n=52)
The victim and perpetrator were separated from each other	2.2%	(n=39)
The victim was disciplined	1.6%	(n=29)
Staff attempted to educate student(s)	<1.0%	(n=10)
Other responses	3.6%	(n=63)

**Staff Did Nothing in Response.** The most common response from students was that staff did nothing to address incidents of harassment or assault (31.1%). Among these comments, many indicated that staff simply ignored their complaint:

*They ignored the problem and went on with other things. (Male student, 10th grade, NJ)*

*Every time I reported being harassed or assaulted, the teacher or staff person did not even acknowledge the issue. (Female student, 11th grade, OH)*

*Told me there was nothing they could do for me and sent me back to class. (Male student, 12th grade, NV)*

Other students reported that nothing was done because a staff person did not witness the incident. For example, an 11th grade transgender student from Virginia said; "The one time I reported it, they claimed that it could not be proven, so there was nothing they could do."

From student reports on why they did not report harassment, we learned that one of the reasons for not reporting was concern about negative reactions from staff, specifically the fear that they would be blamed for the incident because of their sexual orientation. Indeed, this concern was realized in the responses of some students about the nature of staff intervention. Of the students who indicated that school staff did nothing when they were told about harassment or assault, some were in fact blamed for the victimization that they experienced. Several respondents explicitly stated that they were blamed because of their sexual orientation or gender identity or expression:

*I went to the principal and he did nothing at all except say “then don’t act so out about your sexuality.” (Male student, 10th grade, NY)*

*I have been harassed multiple times, but the counselor never helped, in fact she made it worse by telling me that I chose to be gay, so therefore I should “suck it up.” (Transgender student, 8th grade, NM)*

*When I spoke with the principal he tried to tell me that I was “just asking to be harassed” for my gender expression and did not try to help me. (Transgender student, 12th grade, GA)*

*They said I shouldn’t act gay. (Male student, 9th grade, TX)*

**Staff Spoke to the Perpetrator.** Many students (21.7%) reported that staff responded to reports of harassment by talking to the perpetrator and, in some cases, ordering the perpetrator to stop what he or she was doing. Some of these students also commented on the outcome of the intervention. Although there were students who reported that this intervention put a stop to the harassment, others said that the intervention was not sufficient because the harassment either continued or became worse:

*When I reported it, they talked to the student and the kid knocked it off for a while, but it started up again. It will never stop, never. (Female student, 9th grade, WA)*

*They don’t do anything but some of the new teachers will talk to the ones picking on you but that only makes it worse. (Female student, 8th grade, GA)*

**Disciplinary Action.** Although some students reported that staff members just spoke to the perpetrator when notified of the incident of harassment or assault, a fifth of the students (20.9%) reported that the perpetrator was officially disciplined. The most common types of discipline were detentions, suspensions, and forced apologies (i.e., making the perpetrator apologize to the victim). Other forms of discipline mentioned were formal warnings, threats of more serious punishment, sending the perpetrator to the principal’s office, police involvement, and, in several cases, expulsion:

*Called in the student who was harassing me and gave them a warning. (Male student, 12th grade, TX)*

*Police investigation. Harassers were caught and forced to apologize to me and were sternly warned by the police and administration. (Male student, 11th grade, MA)*

*They expelled the students for discriminating and beating me up. (Female student, 9th grade, CA)*

The effectiveness of this type of disciplinary action varied across students' report. A number of students explicitly stated that disciplinary actions were ineffective, such as a 7th grade male student from Virginia, who commented that "the student was punished but he kept on doing the same things." This type of response points to the need for further investigation into the factors that contribute to positive outcomes for the victimized student when disciplinary actions, as well as other forms of intervention, are taken.

**Victim was Punished.** Whereas in some cases the perpetrators of harassment or assault were disciplined, when some students (1.6%) reported being victimized, they themselves were actually punished by school staff:

*They told me that I was a lying tattletale and that I was making everything up, then gave me a two hour after school detention. (Female student, 8th grade, MI)*

*He didn't do anything and didn't care about my side, just suspended me. (Male student, 8th grade, TN)*

*Suspended me and the other person, me for two days and the other person for five. (Male student, 9th grade, NY)*

**Promised to Look Into Situation.** Some students (9.8%) indicated that staff said they would investigate or handle the matter. Several of these students said that the staff person failed to follow through with these promises, such as an 8th grade transgender student from Arizona; "All they said was they'd watch to see what was happening. They never did, no one ever did anything to prevent me being bashed." This failure to follow through with action after making a commitment to the student to address the issue is perhaps even worse than doing nothing at all, as failing to follow through may violate or erode a student's trust in school staff.

Failing to intervene when harassment is reported, blaming students for their own victimization, and failing to appropriately address the situation are unacceptable and potentially harmful outcomes. As discussed above, many of the students who did not report incidents of harassment or assault to school authorities feared exactly these negative outcomes. Thus, staff who do not address reports of student victimization may not only be failing that student, but also sending a message that prevents other students from reporting when they are victimized. In order to improve school climate for all students, school staff must take appropriate action to address reports of victimization.

**Attempted Education.** In some cases, educators used reports of harassment as a learning opportunity, choosing to educate the perpetrators or the broader student body about bullying or prejudice. Although, according to student's reports, this was rare, a few students (<1.0%) did report that school personnel attempted to provide education about issues such as homophobia:

*When I was out of the classroom, he gave a long powerful speech about how everyone should be treated equally not based on his or her race, creed, or sexual orientation. (Female student, 10th grade, FL)*

*Brought the person to the office after class and announced to the class that remarks such as "this is gay" are inappropriate in school. This took care of the problem it didn't attract too much attention just enough to get rid of it. (Student with "other" gender identity, 12th grade, WI)*

When harassment and assault are motivated by bias or prejudice, education may be a particularly important factor in addressing the issue. When school staff address these issues in an open forum such as a classroom or assembly, they may be sending a message to students that behavior motivated by prejudice is unacceptable.

A few students, however, reported that the attempt to educate students was poorly executed and, therefore, ineffective:

*Made an announcement to the class that...was vague and misunderstood when she should have said actions were homophobic. (Male student, 11th grade, MT)*

*Principal attempted to institute an assembly on sensitivity to different cultures. Student body was indifferent to presentation. (Female student, 9th grade, IL)*

**Filed a Report or Referred Student.** Several students (9.5%) indicated that a report was made (e.g., filed an incident report) or that the incident was referred to someone else, usually a guidance counselor or a higher authority (administrator, principal, or, in a few cases, the police). Although most students did not report whether there were further actions as a result of a report or a referral being made, several specifically commented that staff did not follow-up:

*They took my incident report and never got back to me on the matter. (Female student, 9th grade, AZ)*

*They let me file a complaint and then talked to the other people involved once and then never bothered to follow up on anything. (Female student, 11th grade, NY)*

**Offered Support.** A small number of students (3.8%) indicated that when notified of student's victimization, staff provided some form of support. Some staff offered advice on how to handle incidents of harassment, while others talked to the victim and provided comfort:

*Gave me advice, offered to speak to the students. (Female student, 11th grade, IL)*

*She talked to me about the subject, and understood my feelings. She knew that I really just needed to talk about it. (Male student, 10th grade, GA)*

*My teachers help and comfort me when I'm being harassed. (Student with "other" gender identity, 8th grade, MA)*

A few students commented that, although staff offered comfort, they did not attempt to take action against the perpetrator or address the specific incident of harassment or assault:

*Tried to comfort me but did nothing about the situation. (Male student, 12th grade, NY)*

*Tried counseling, didn't do anything about the offenders. (Female student, 9th grade, NJ)*

As the above comments illustrate, when students reported incidents of harassment or assault to staff members, the interventions had varying degrees of effectiveness.

In that we do not know the circumstances of the harassment or assault, we cannot know why certain staff responses (e.g., talking to a perpetrator) work in one instance and not in another. Yet it is important to note that systemic interventions at the school-wide level may need to happen before a verbal reprimand can have a significant effect. One such intervention is the implementation of educator trainings on issues related to LGBT students. Such trainings may help educators to be more aware of the experiences of LGBT students in school and give educators some tools for effectively intervening in incidents of harassment and assault. Increasing the awareness and skills of educators can play a vital role in improving school climate for LGBT students.

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### ***Effectiveness of Interventions***

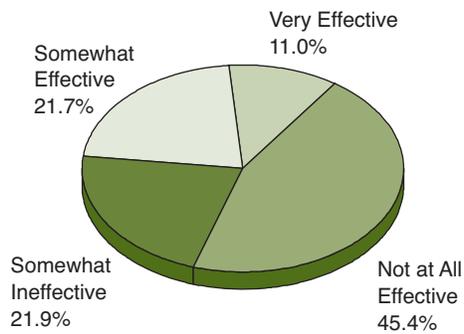
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In order to further examine the helpfulness of staff response to students' reports of harassment and assault, students who said that they had reported incidents of victimization to school staff were also asked how effective staff members were in addressing the problem. As shown in Figure 22, only a third of students who responded to the question about effectiveness (32.7%) believed that staff responded effectively to reports of victimization.

We examined students' determinations of effectiveness and the nature of the intervention.<sup>35</sup> Students were more likely to report that the intervention was effective when the perpetrator was disciplined (e.g., given detention, suspended, sent to the principal's office), a report or referral was made, or they received support from the staff person. Students were least likely to report that the intervention was effective when nothing was done, they themselves were punished, or when staff promised to look into the matter.<sup>36</sup>

For students who did not report incidents of harassment, the most common reason for not reporting was the belief that nothing would be done. And for students who had reported harassment or assault, the most common outcome was that nothing was, in fact, done in response. School personnel are charged with providing a safe learning environment for all students. By not addressing student harassment and assault, those students are denied an adequate opportunity to learn. It is particularly troubling that some students were told by school staff that, because of their sexual orientation or gender identity/expression, they deserved the mistreatment that they experienced or somehow brought it upon themselves. This type of response may exacerbate the problem of an already hostile school climate for LGBT students and may deter these students from reporting future incidents of harassment or assault.

**Figure 22. Effectiveness of Reporting Incidents of Victimization to a Teacher or Other School Staff Person (n=1842)**



## Notes

- 32 For the purpose of analysis, weighted variables measuring “victimization” were created based on each personal characteristic. For each type of victimization (sexual orientation, gender, gender expression, race/ethnicity, disability, religion), a weighted variable measuring the frequency of victimization across the three severity levels (verbal harassment, physical harassment, physical assault) was created, giving more weight to physical harassment and, in turn, physical assault because of the increased severity of the event. Six “victimization” variables were created. Scores on the “victimization” variables ranged from a minimum of 0 to a maximum of 22. The independent variable was created as a binary variable with responses categorized as making the situation worse coded as 1 and other responses coded as 0. To test differences across groups, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with all the victimization variables as dependent variables. Multivariate results were significant: Pillai's Trace=.045,  $F(6, 5695)=44.605$ ,  $p<.001$ . Univariate effects were considered at  $p<.01$ . Group differences for all victimization variables were significant at the univariate level.
- 33 To test differences across groups, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with all the harassment and assault variables as dependent variables. The independent variable was created as a binary variable with responses categorized as not a big deal coded as 1 and other responses coded as 0. Multivariate results were significant: Pillai's Trace=.014,  $F(6, 5695)=13.762$ ,  $p<.001$ . Univariate effects were considered at  $p<.01$ .
- 34 A small percentage (12.4%) of students who reported that the victimization they experienced was “not a big deal” also reported that they had been physically assaulted.
- 35 To compare differences between groups, Chi-square tests were performed: support -  $\chi^2=25.02$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $\Phi=.12$ ; disciplined -  $\chi^2=98.36$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $\Phi=.24$ ; other action -  $\chi^2=51.59$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $\Phi=.17$ ; report/referral -  $\chi^2=39.12$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $\Phi=.15$ .
- 36 To compare differences between groups, Chi-square tests were performed: nothing -  $\chi^2=198.23$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $\Phi=.34$ ; victim disciplined -  $\chi^2=4.24$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $\Phi=.05$ ; 'look into it' -  $\chi^2=23.73$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $\Phi=.12$ .





## **Demographic Comparisons of Experiences of Victimization**

### **Key Findings**

- Transgender students reported experiencing higher levels of victimization than all other students.
- Gay and lesbian students experienced higher levels of victimization than other students (bisexual or “other” sexual orientation).
- Multiracial students reported experiencing the highest levels of victimization related to race/ethnicity.

GLSEN’s mission is to make schools safe for all students. In order to achieve this mission, it is important to understand the diverse experiences of LGBT students and how these experiences may vary according to students’ personal characteristics, such as their race or sexual orientation. Thus, we examined whether there were demographic differences in students’ school experiences, specifically differences by race or ethnicity, gender identity, and sexual orientation.

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### ***Comparisons by Race and Ethnicity***

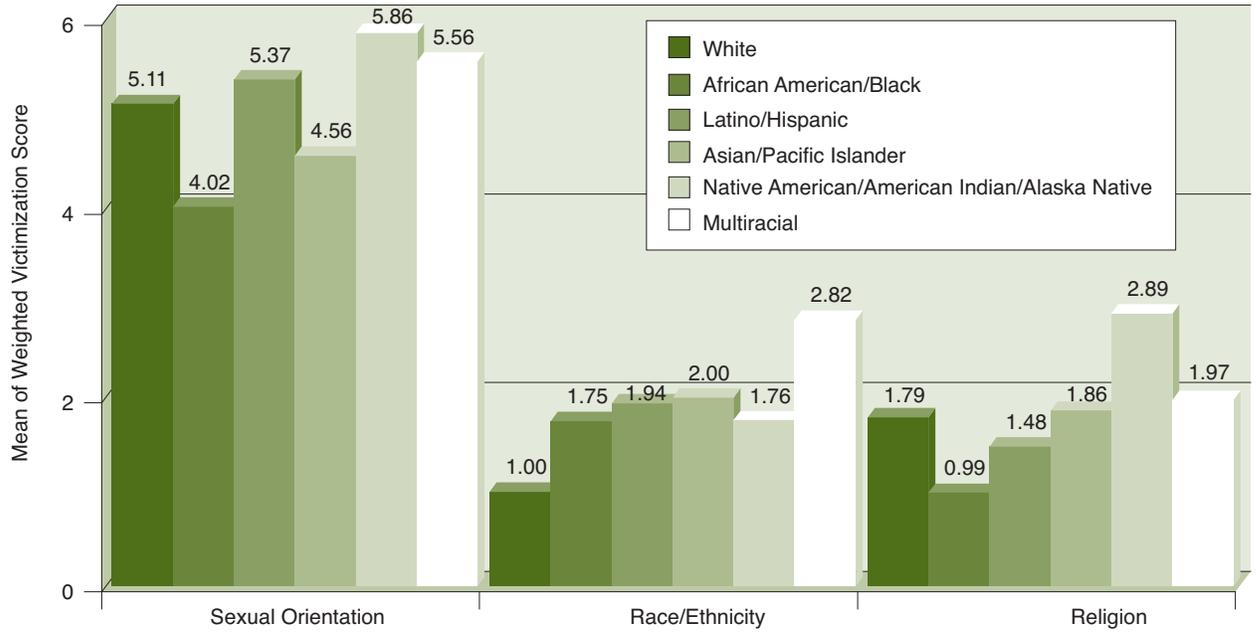
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There were significant differences in students' experiences of victimization across racial/ethnic groups.<sup>37</sup> Figure 23 shows differences in the experiences of harassment and assault related to sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, and religion by race/ethnicity:<sup>38</sup>

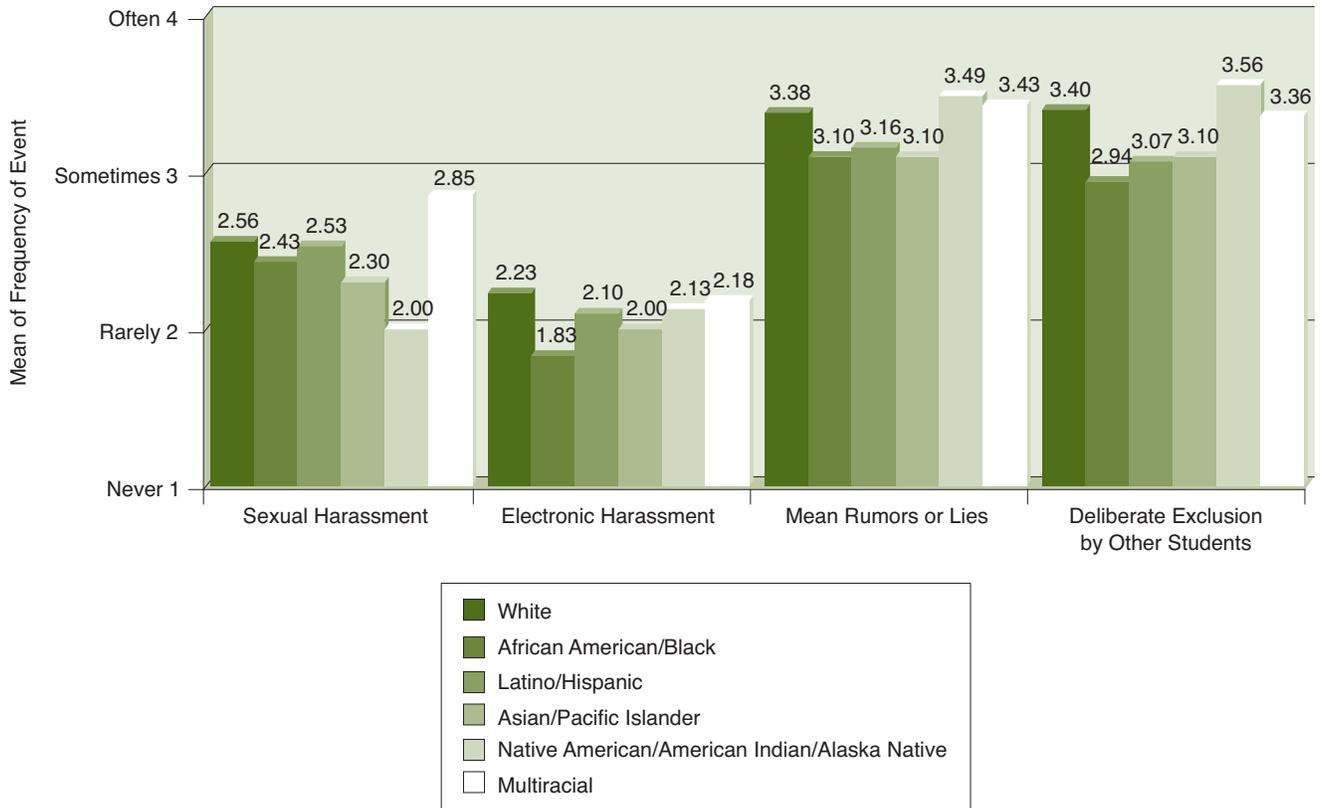
- Multiracial students reported experiencing the highest levels of victimization related to their race/ethnicity. White students experienced the lowest levels of this type of victimization in school.
- African American/Black students reported lower levels of victimization related to their sexual orientation and actual or perceived religion than other students.
- Native American students reported the highest levels of victimization because of their actual or perceived religion. This finding may, in part, be explained by differences in students' religious identification — Native American students were more likely to identify as Wiccan or Pagan than other students and students who were Wiccan or Pagan reported higher levels of religious-based victimization than all other students.<sup>39</sup>

We also examined differences across racial/ethnic groups with regard to students' experiences with other types of harassment that may not be so clearly related to personal characteristics: sexual harassment, deliberate property damage or theft, electronic harassment, and two types of relational aggression (the spreading of mean rumors or lies and deliberate exclusion by other students). Significant group differences are shown in Figure 24.<sup>40</sup> With regard to sexual harassment in school, multiracial students reported the highest frequencies and Native American students reported the lowest frequencies. With regard to the two types of relational aggression, White, Native American, and multiracial students experienced higher frequencies than other students. African American/Black students experienced lower frequencies of electronic harassment (e.g., threatening text messages or emails) than all other students.

**Figure 23. Experiences of Victimization Based on Personal Characteristics by Race/Ethnicity**



**Figure 24. Experiences of Other Types of Harassment by Race/Ethnicity**



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### ***Comparisons by Gender Identity***

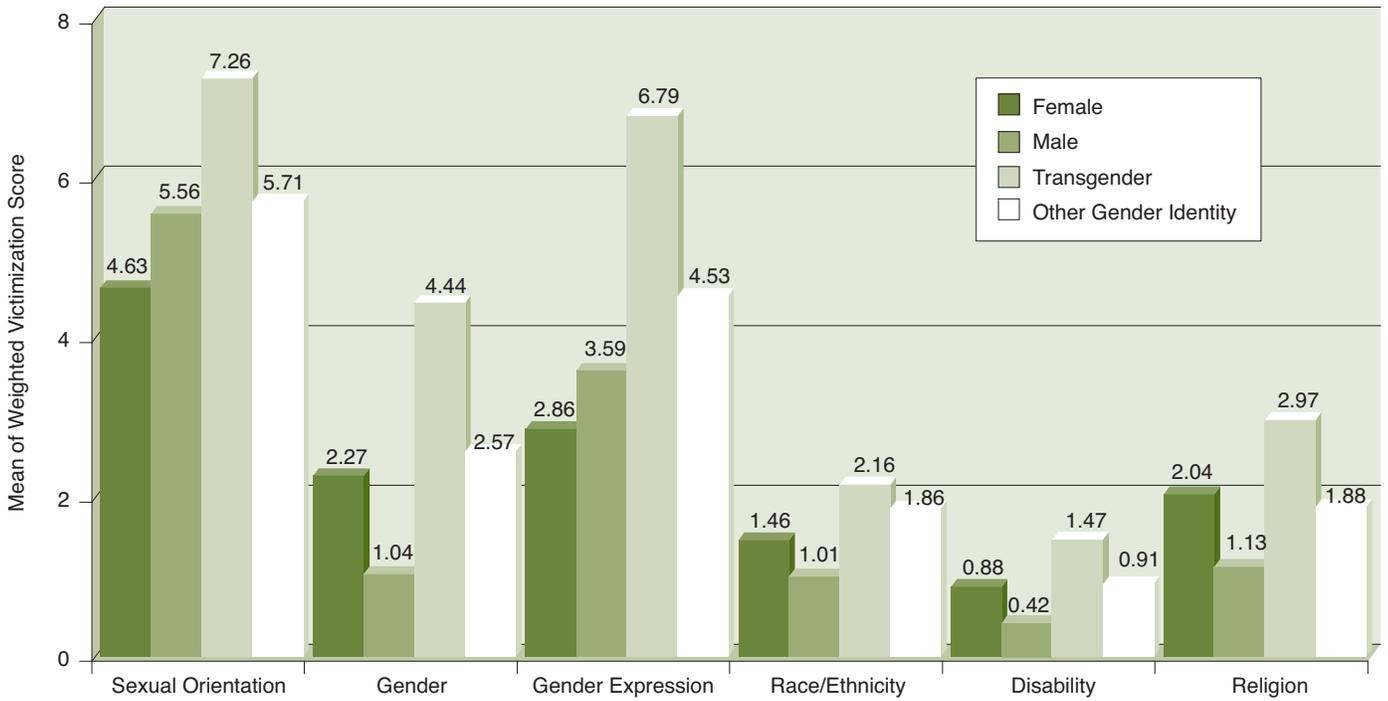
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Overall, transgender students reported experiencing higher levels of harassment and assault related to various personal characteristics than other students. Significant differences are shown in Figure 25:<sup>41</sup>

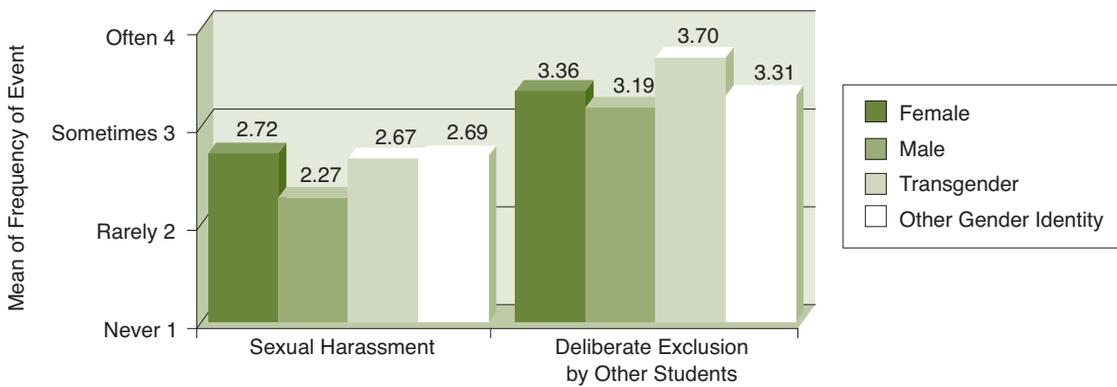
- Transgender students reported experiencing higher levels of victimization than all other students, and these differences were especially profound with regard to sexual orientation, gender expression, and gender.
- Students with gender identities other than male, female, or transgender (e.g., “genderqueer”) experienced higher levels of victimization related to their gender expression than male and female students.
- Male students reported higher levels of victimization related to their sexual orientation and gender expression than female students. With regard to the other types of victimization, male students reported lower levels than all other students.
- Female students reported experiencing lower levels of victimization because of their sexual orientation and gender expression than all other students.

With regard to other types of harassment, as shown in Figure 26, transgender students also reported experiencing higher frequencies of deliberate exclusion by other students. Male students reported experiencing lower frequencies of being sexually harassed than other students.<sup>42</sup>

**Figure 25. Experiences of Victimization Based on Personal Characteristics by Gender Identity**



**Figure 26. Experiences of Other Types of Harassment by Gender Identity**



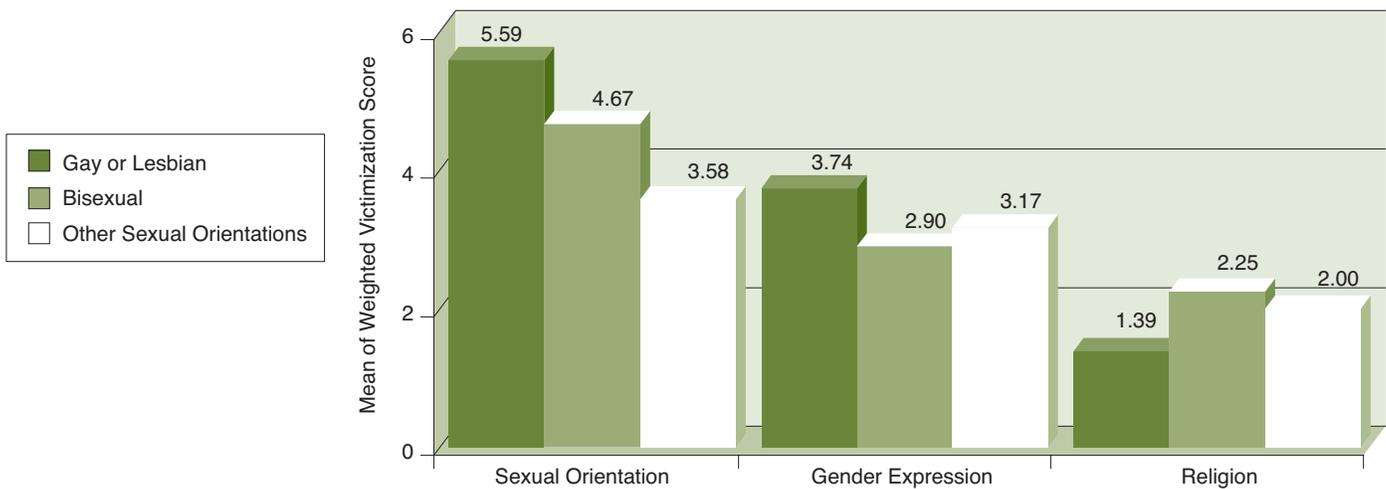
## Comparisons by Sexual Orientation

As shown in Figure 27, we found significant differences among LGBT students in their experiences of harassment and assault by sexual orientation:<sup>43</sup>

- Gay and lesbian students reported higher levels of victimization related to their sexual orientation than bisexual students and students who identified their sexual orientation as something other than LGB (e.g., “pansexual”).
- Gay and lesbian students experienced higher levels of victimization related to how they expressed their gender than bisexual students.
- Gay and lesbian students reported experiencing less victimization related to an actual or perceived religion than bisexual students and students with other sexual orientations.

With regard to other types of harassment, bisexual students reported experiencing higher frequencies of sexual harassment in school than all other students in our study.<sup>44</sup> This finding may, in part, be explained by differences in students’ gender identity. As discussed above, there was a significant relationship between gender identity and sexual harassment. Further analysis revealed that the difference in students’ reports of sexual harassment by sexual orientation was significant for female students only — bisexual female students reported higher frequencies of sexual harassment than those who were lesbian or a sexual orientation other than lesbian or bisexual. In contrast, there were no significant differences in sexual harassment by sexual orientation among non-female students in our study.

**Figure 27. Experiences of Victimization Based on Personal Characteristics by Sexual Orientation**



## Notes

- 37 For the purposes of demographic analyses, we created weighted variables measuring “victimization” based on each personal characteristic. For each type of victimization (sexual orientation, gender, gender expression, race/ethnicity, disability, religion), a weighted variable measuring the frequency of victimization across the three severity levels (verbal harassment, physical harassment, physical assault) was created, giving more weight to physical harassment and, in turn, physical assault because of the increased severity of the event. Six “victimization” variables were created. Scores on the “victimization” variables ranged from a minimum of 0 to a maximum of 22.
- 38 To test differences across racial/ethnic groups, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with all the “victimization” variables as dependent variables. Multivariate results were significant: Pillai’s Trace=.06,  $F(30, 28000)=10.97$ ,  $p<.001$ . Univariate effects were considered at  $p<.01$ .
- 39 Differences in victimization because of actual or perceived religion across students’ religious identification were tested:  $F(5, 5976)=82.76$ ,  $p<.001$ . With regard to students’ religious identification, 16.7% of Native American students were Wiccan/Pagan compared to 10.0% of white students and less than 10% of African American/Black, Latino, Asian/Pacific Islander, or multiracial students:  $\chi^2=255.33$ ,  $df=25$ ,  $p<.001$ , Cramer’s  $V=.09$ .
- 40 A multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with all the harassment (sexual harassment, property stolen/damaged, electronic harassment, rumors/lies and deliberate exclusion) variables as dependent variables. Multivariate results were significant: Pillai’s Trace=.02,  $F(25, 30030)=5.90$ ,  $p<.001$ . Univariate effects were considered at  $p<.01$ .
- 41 To test differences across gender identity groups, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with all the victimization variables as dependent variables. Multivariate results were significant: Pillai’s Trace=.13,  $F(18, 17019)=43.88$ ,  $p<.001$ . Univariate effects were considered at  $p<.01$ .
- 42 A multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with all the harassment variables (sexual harassment, property stolen/damaged, electronic harassment, rumors/lies and deliberate exclusion) as dependent variables. Multivariate results were significant: Pillai’s Trace=.03,  $F(15, 18246)=13.72$ ,  $p<.001$ . Univariate effects were considered at  $p<.01$ .
- 43 To test differences across sexual orientation, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with all the victimization variables as dependent variables. Multivariate results were significant: Pillai’s Trace=.06,  $F(12, 11378)=31.46$ ,  $p<.001$ . Univariate effects were considered at  $p<.01$ .
- 44 To test differences across sexual orientation, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with all the harassment variables (sexual harassment, property stolen/damaged, electronic harassment, rumors/lies and deliberate exclusion) as dependent variables. Multivariate results were significant: Pillai’s Trace=.02,  $F(10, 12196)=9.23$ ,  $p<.001$ . Univariate effects were considered at  $p<.01$ . The overall average on frequency of sexual harassment was 2.73 for bisexual students compared to 2.45 for gay and lesbian students and 2.48 for students with a sexual orientation other than lesbian, gay, or bisexual.





## Comparisons by School Characteristics of Biased Language and Experiences of Victimization

### Key Findings

- Students in the South heard biased remarks more frequently and experienced higher levels of victimization related to sexual orientation than students in other regions.
- Students in schools in small towns or rural areas experienced higher levels of victimization related to their sexual orientation.
- Students in school districts with high poverty levels reported higher levels of victimization related to their sexual orientation, gender expression and race/ethnicity than students in low poverty districts.

The experiences of LGBT students may also vary based on the characteristics of their schools. Therefore, in our 2007 study, we examined students' reports of hearing biased language and experiences of victimization by region, locale, and district-level poverty.

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### **Comparisons by Region**

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**Biased Language in School.** On average, LGBT students attending schools in the West reported lower frequencies of hearing homophobic, racist, and sexist remarks in school than students in other regions of the country (see Figure 28).<sup>45</sup> Students in the South

reported higher frequencies of hearing racist and sexist remarks than students in the Northeast and West.

We also found significant regional differences in students' reports of staff intervention with some types of biased language. Overall, a pattern emerged showing that students in the West were most likely to report that school staff intervened regarding biased language and students in the South were least likely to report such intervention.<sup>46</sup> Specifically, students in the West were more likely than students in other parts of the country to report that school staff frequently (i.e., "most of the time" or "always") intervened when hearing homophobic remarks and negative remarks about someone's gender expression (see Figure 29). In addition, compared to students in the Northeast and South, students in the West were more likely to report frequent staff intervention when hearing racist remarks. Students in the South were less likely than all other students to report that staff frequently intervened when hearing homophobic remarks.

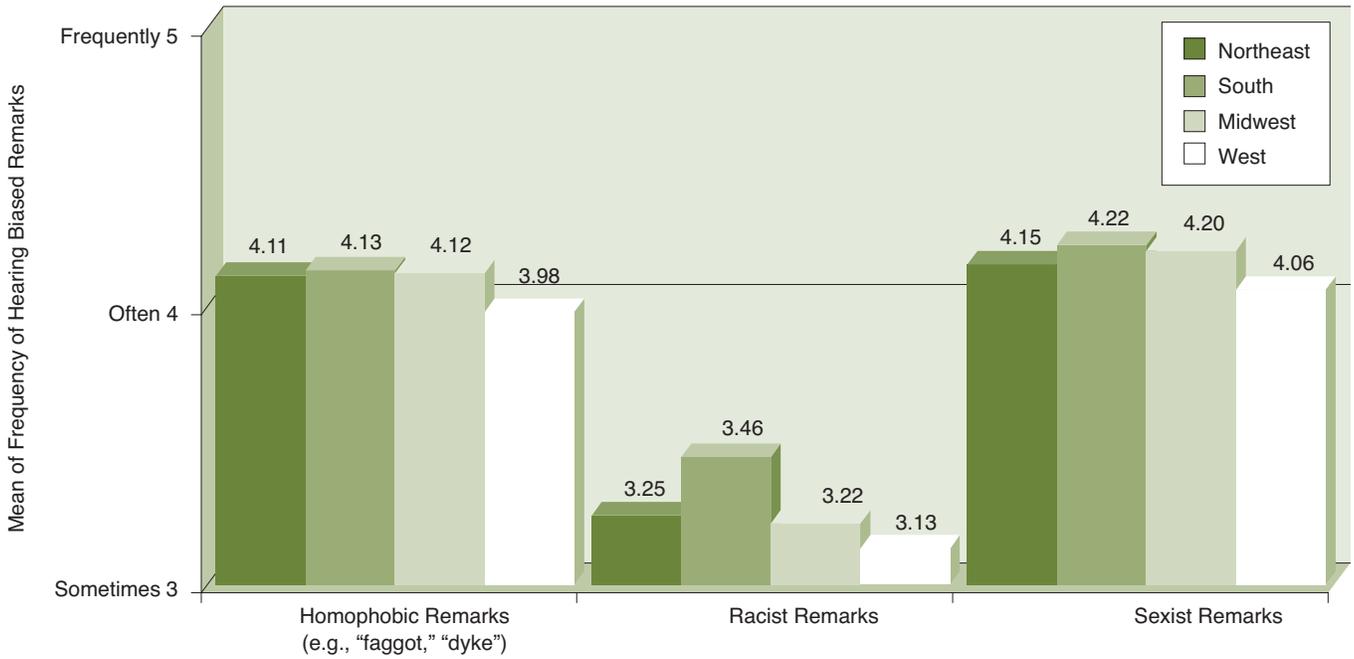
**Experiences of Victimization.** There were also significant regional differences in students' experiences of various types of victimization.<sup>47,48</sup> Overall, LGBT students in schools in the South reported significantly higher levels of victimization (verbal harassment, physical harassment, and physical assault) than other students in the study:

- With regard to victimization related to sexual orientation, students in the South reported the highest levels, followed by students in the Midwest (see Figure 30).
- With regard to victimization related to race/ethnicity, students in the South and West reported higher levels than students in the Northeast and Midwest (see also Figure 30).
- With regard to victimization related to religion, students in the South reported the highest levels and students in the Northeast reported the lowest levels of this type of victimization (see also Figure 30).

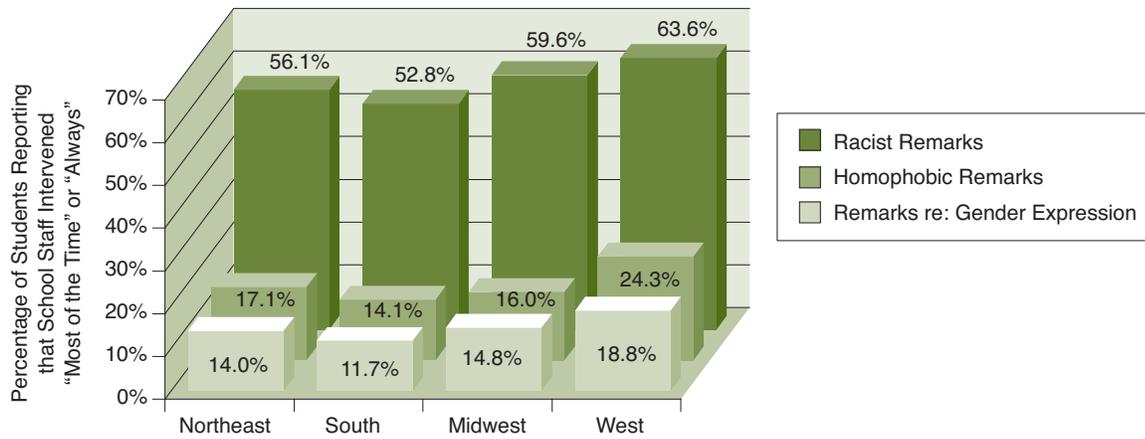
With regard to other types of harassment:

- Students in the South reported experiencing higher frequencies of sexual harassment than students in all other regions (see Figure 31).
- Students in the South and Midwest experienced higher frequencies of relational aggression — having rumors or lies told about them and being deliberately excluded by peers — than students in the Northeast and West (see also Figure 31).

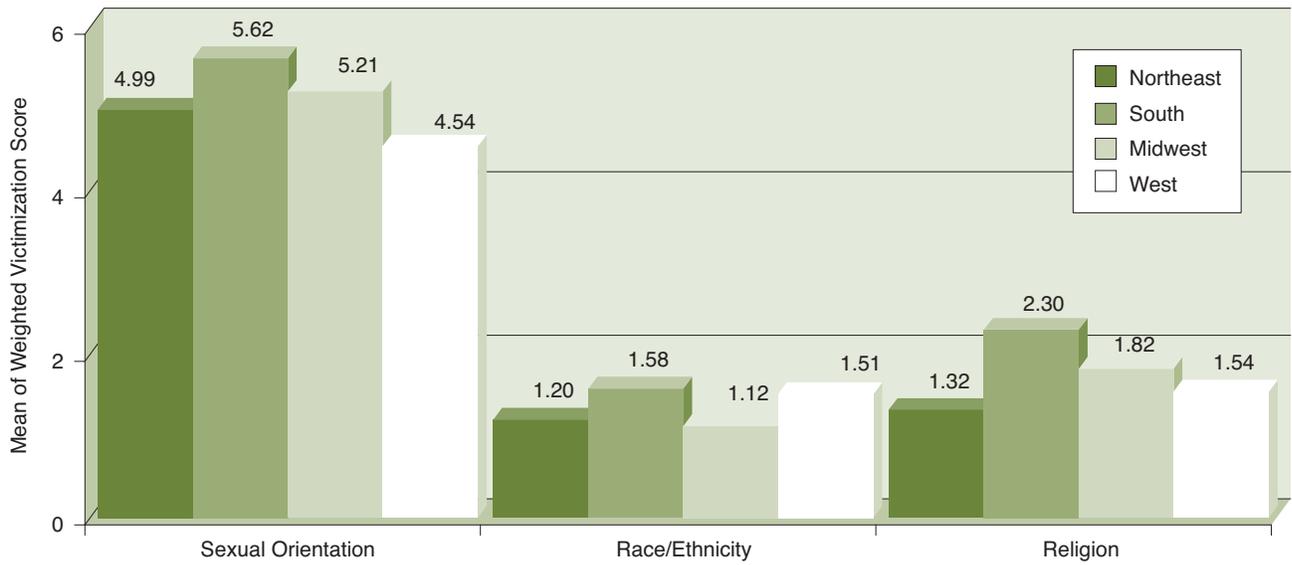
**Figure 28. Regional Differences in Frequency of Hearing Biased Language in School**



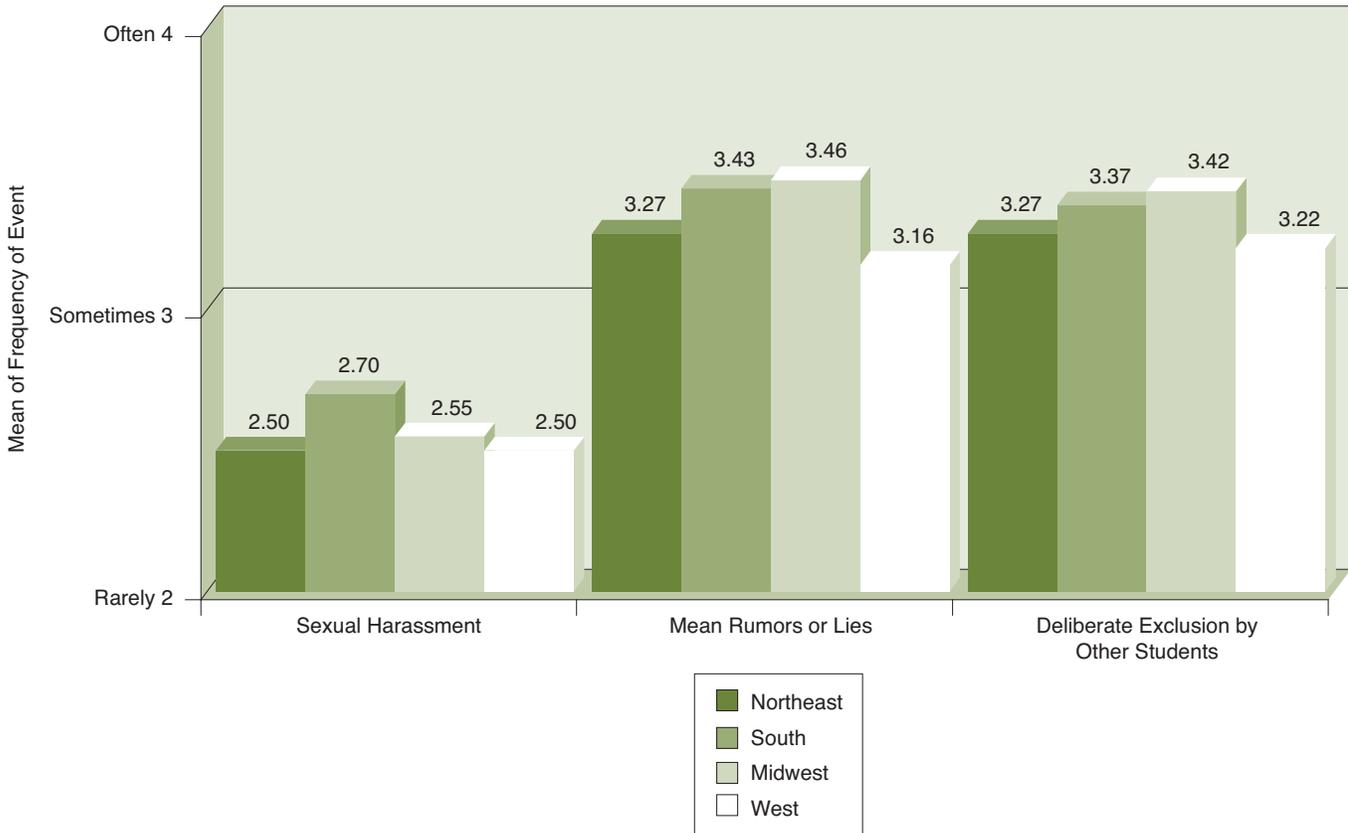
**Figure 29. Regional Differences in School Staff's Intervention with Biased Remarks**



**Figure 30. Regional Differences in Experiences of Victimization Based on Personal Characteristics**



**Figure 31. Regional Differences in Other Types of Harassment**



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## ***Comparisons by Locale***

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We were interested in whether students in our study reported different experiences based on the type of community in which their schools were located — urban areas, suburban areas, and small towns or rural areas.

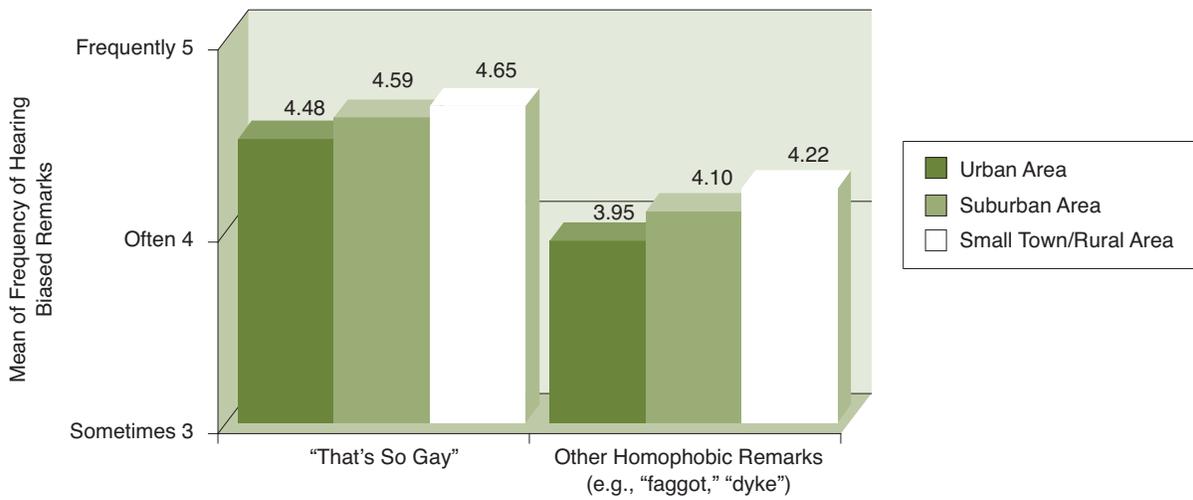
**Biased Language In School.** With regard to biased language in school, there were significant differences across locales in students' reports of hearing homophobic remarks.<sup>49</sup> As shown in Figure 32, LGBT students attending schools in urban areas were less likely to hear both types of homophobic remarks (“that’s so gay” and other types of homophobic remarks) than students from other areas. In addition, students in small town/rural schools reported the highest frequency of other types of homophobic remarks (e.g., “fag” or “dyke”). Furthermore, students in urban areas were more likely to report staff intervention with homophobic remarks — 21.7% of students in urban areas said that school staff intervened most of the time or always when hearing homophobic remarks, compared to 15.2% of students in small towns or rural areas and 16.3% of students in suburban areas.<sup>50</sup>

**Experiences of Victimization.** There were differences in students' experiences of actual victimization across community types:<sup>51</sup>

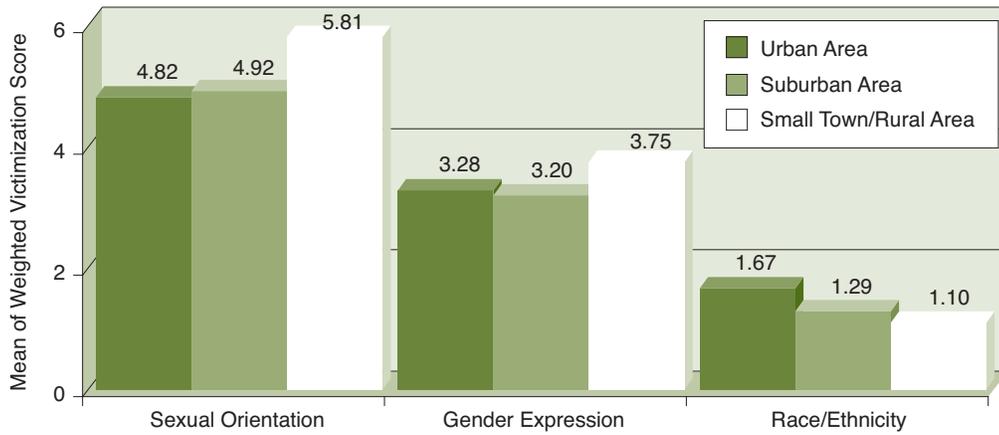
- As shown in Figure 33, LGBT students in schools in small towns and rural areas experienced higher levels of victimization related to their sexual orientation than students in other types of communities.
- With regard to victimization related to gender expression, students in small towns and rural areas reported the highest levels (see also Figure 33).
- LGBT students in urban schools reported higher levels of racially or ethnically motivated victimization than other students (see also Figure 33).

In addition to victimization that was based on specific personal characteristics, students attending schools in small towns and rural areas reported higher levels of other types of harassment.<sup>52</sup> As shown in Figure 34, LGBT students in schools in small towns or rural areas reported higher frequencies of sexual harassment and relational aggression (both having rumors or lies told about them and being excluded by their peers) than students in schools in other types of communities. These students also experienced higher frequencies of electronic harassment than other students.

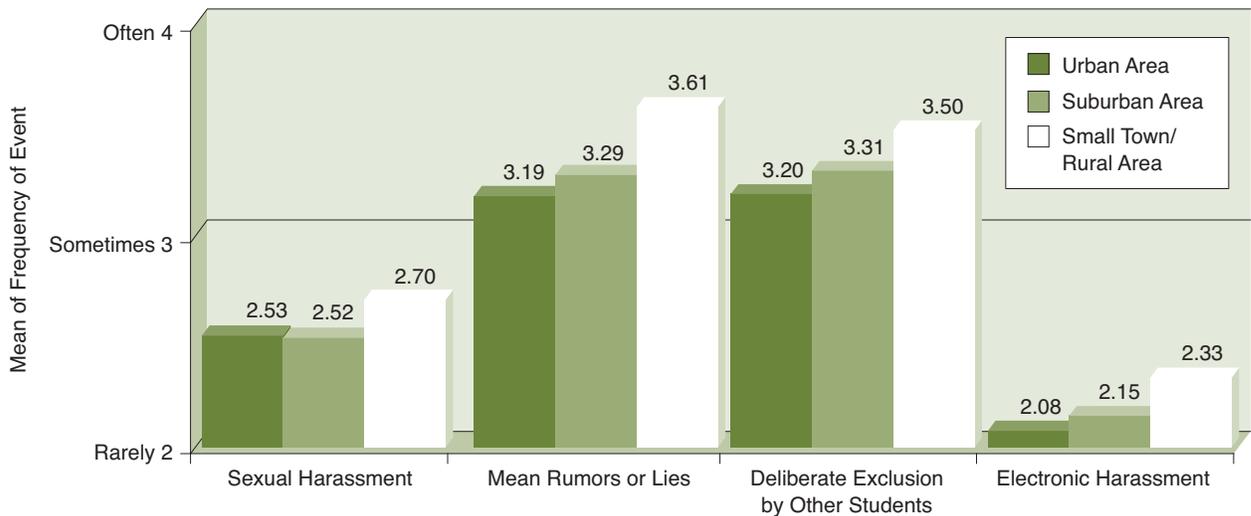
**Figure 32. Frequency of Hearing Homophobic Remarks in School by Locale**



**Figure 33. Experiences of Victimization Based on Personal Characteristics by Locale**



**Figure 34. Experiences of Other Types of Harassment by Locale**



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## ***Comparisons by School District Poverty Level***

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The economic status of a school community may also have an effect on its climate and the experiences of LGBT students. Access to resources and interventions that can help create safer schools for LGBT students may vary depending on a school community's economic status. For example, more affluent school communities or schools with a small student/teacher ratio may have resources available to offer staff professional development regarding safe schools, whereas less affluent school communities or those with a large student/teacher ratio may not. In order to obtain a fuller picture of the educational experiences of LGBT students, we examined whether there were differences in their experiences by school poverty level, using district-level data regarding the percentage of students who were eligible for free or reduced lunch as a measure of school district poverty.<sup>53</sup> Overall, there were few differences across levels of school district poverty:

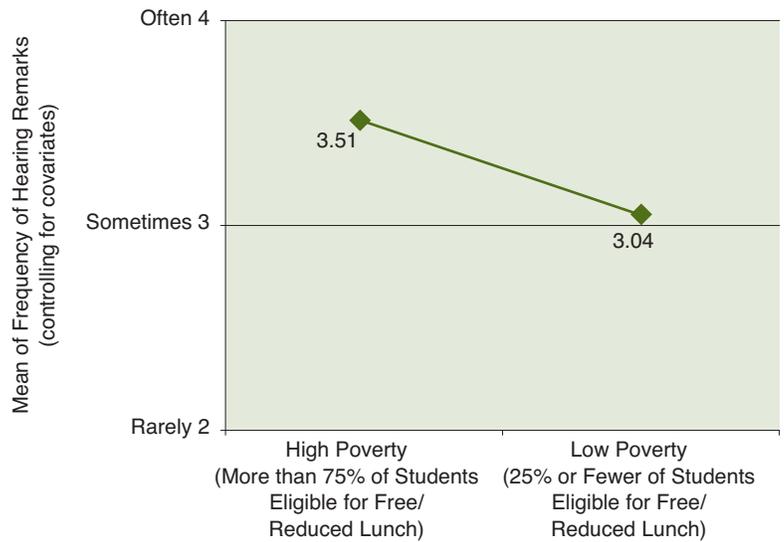
- As shown in Figure 35, there was a significant relationship between school district poverty level and students' reports of hearing racist remarks. As district level poverty decreased, the frequency with which students heard racist remarks in school also decreased.<sup>54</sup>
- Overall, levels of in-school victimization decreased as the level of district poverty decreased.<sup>55</sup> As illustrated in Figure 36, students in low poverty school districts reported lower levels of victimization related to their sexual orientation, gender expression, and race/ethnicity than students in high poverty districts.

Differences based on region, locale and district-level poverty with regard to racist remarks in school and victimization related to race/ethnicity may be related to the fact that the percentage of students of color varied by these school characteristics. There were more students of color in schools in the South and West (31.0% and 32.2%) than in the Midwest and Northeast (15.2% and 21.6%).<sup>56</sup> There were also more students of color in urban and suburban schools (41.0% and 40.7%, respectively) than schools in small towns or rural areas (18.3%).<sup>57</sup> In addition, students of color — particularly African American/Black, Latino and multiracial students — were more likely than White students to be in high poverty school districts.<sup>58</sup> Students of color may be more attuned to racist language used in school and may be more likely than White students to have been victimized in school because of their race or ethnicity. Nevertheless, further analyses demonstrated that even when accounting for students' race/ethnicity, there were still significant differences by region, locale and district-level poverty in students' experiences with racist behaviors.

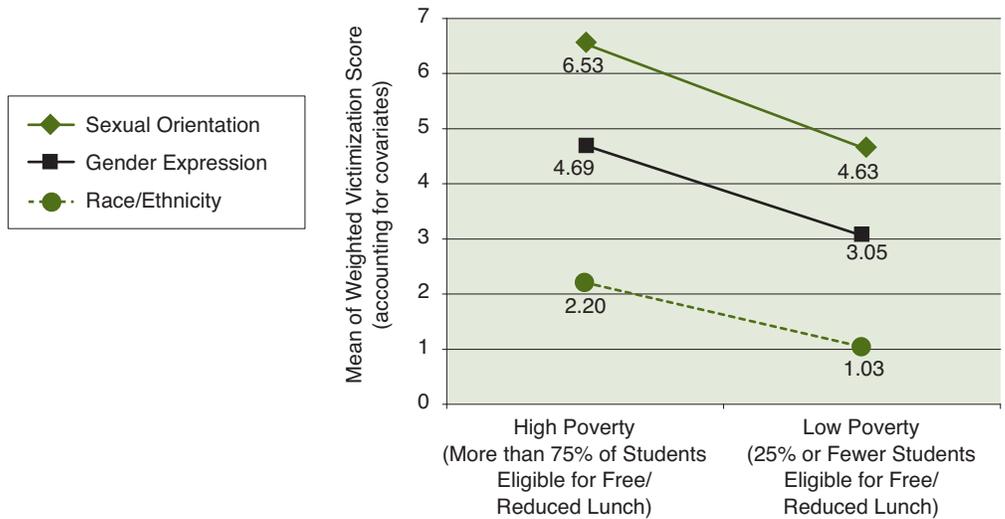
Regional differences in victimization related to actual or perceived religion may be partly explained by regional differences in students' religious identification. Students who were atheist or agnostic, or identified religiously as Wiccan or a religion other than Christian or

Jewish were more likely to be in the South than in other regions of the country.<sup>59</sup> Further analyses indicated, however, that there were significant differences by region regardless of students' own religion.

**Figure 35. Frequency of Hearing Racist Remarks by School District Poverty Level**



**Figure 36. Experiences of Victimization Based on Personal Characteristics by School District Poverty Level**



## Notes

- 45 To test differences across regions, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with all the biased remarks variables as dependent variables. Multivariate results were significant: Pillai's Trace=.01,  $F(18, 18375)=4.93$ ,  $p<.001$ . Univariate effects were considered at  $p<.01$ .
- 46 To test differences across regions, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with all the school staff intervention variables as dependent variables. Multivariate results were significant: Pillai's Trace=.04,  $F(12, 9573)=9.37$ ,  $p<.001$ . Univariate effects were considered at  $p<.01$ . Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.
- 47 To test differences across region, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with all the victimization variables as dependent variables. Multivariate results were significant: Pillai's Trace=.02,  $F(18, 17001)=7.45$ ,  $p<.001$ . Univariate effects were considered at  $p<.01$ .
- 48 To test differences across region, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with all the "other types of harassment" variables (sexual harassment, property stolen/damaged, electronic harassment, rumors/lies and deliberate exclusion) as dependent variables. Multivariate results were significant: Pillai's Trace=.01,  $F(15, 18225)=5.65$ ,  $p<.001$ . Univariate effects were considered at  $p<.01$ .
- 49 To test differences across locale, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with all the biased remarks variables as dependent variables. Multivariate results were significant: Pillai's Trace=.02,  $F(12, 12064)=7.49$ ,  $p<.001$ . Univariate effects were considered at  $p<.01$ .
- 50 To test differences across locale, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with all the school staff intervention variables as dependent variables. Multivariate results were significant: Pillai's Trace=.01,  $F(8, 6292)=3.12$ ,  $p<.01$ . Univariate effects were considered at  $p<.01$ . Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.
- 51 To test differences across locale, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with all the victimization variables as dependent variables. Multivariate results were significant: Pillai's Trace=.02,  $F(12, 11164)=8.67$ ,  $p<.001$ . Univariate effects were considered at  $p<.01$ .
- 52 To test differences across locale, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with all the harassment variables (sexual harassment, property stolen/damaged, electronic harassment, rumors/lies and deliberate exclusion) as dependent variables. Multivariate results were significant: Pillai's Trace=.02,  $F(10, 11964)=10.21$ ,  $p<.001$ . Univariate effects were considered at  $p<.01$ .
- 53 Common Core of Data, 2005–06 Data Files (2008). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Services.
- 54 To examine the relationship between district poverty level and hearing biased remarks, partial correlations were conducted, controlling for locale and region. Racist remarks:  $r=.12$ ,  $p<.001$ . Means for low poverty and high poverty are shown for illustrative purposes.
- 55 To examine the relationship between district poverty level and victimization, partial correlations were conducted, controlling for locale and region. Victimization re sexual orientation:  $r=.07$ ,  $p<.001$ . Victimization re gender expression:  $r=.06$ ,  $p<.001$ , Victimization re race/ethnicity:  $r=.10$ ,  $p<.001$ . Means for low poverty and high poverty are shown for illustrative purposes.
- 56 A Chi-square test was conducted to examine differences in the percentages of students of color between regions:  $\chi^2=146.06$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p<.001$ , Cramer's  $V=.16$ .
- 57 A Chi-square test was conducted to examine differences in the percentages of students of color between locales:  $\chi^2=143.19$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<.001$ , Cramer's  $V=.16$ .
- 58 A Chi-square test was conducted to examine differences in the percentages of students of color based on school district poverty level:  $\chi^2=293.11$ ,  $df=15$ ,  $p<.001$ , Cramer's  $V=.13$ .
- 59 A Chi-square test was conducted to examine differences in students' religion by region:  $\chi^2=84.21$ ,  $df=12$ ,  $p<.001$ , Cramer's  $V=.07$ .





## **Intersection of Race/Ethnicity, Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation**

### **Key Findings**

- Half of LGBT students of color experienced verbal harassment because of their sexual orientation and because of their race/ethnicity.
- Two-thirds of female students experienced verbal harassment because of both their sexual orientation and their gender or gender expression.
- Almost 90% of transgender students were verbally harassed because of their sexual orientation and their gender or gender expression in the past school year; half experienced physical harassment in school related to these characteristics.

LGBT students may have varying experiences of harassment, due in large part to the differing ways in which they identify and the intersectionality of multiple identities — the complex ways in which multiple dimensions of identity (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and class) all intersect to shape our life experiences. Whereas there may exist some commonalities with regard to the ways LGBT youth experience their sexual orientation and gender identity, there is, of course, no universal experience. For example, in the context of our survey, female students of color may experience harassment related to their sexual orientation, gender,

and race or ethnicity. They may experience harassment based on all or a combination of these characteristics. For these reasons, it was important to examine the intersections of sexual orientation, gender, gender expression, and race/ethnicity with regard to the experiences of LGBT students in school.

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### ***Experiences of LGBT Students of Color***

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Among the students of color in our study, almost half (48.2%) had been verbally harassed in school because of both their sexual orientation and race/ethnicity during the past year, and more than a third (36.3%) had been verbally harassed based on their sexual orientation alone (see Table 6). Although most of the students in our survey had not been physically harassed for either of these characteristics in the past school year, about a quarter (27.4%) of students of color had experienced physical harassment based on their sexual orientation alone and over a tenth (15.3%) because of both their sexual orientation and race/ethnicity. Few students of color had experienced physical assault in school in the past year because of their sexual orientation or race/ethnicity, although assault related to sexual orientation was the most commonly reported (15.0%).

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### ***Experiences of Female Students***

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For lesbian and bisexual female students,<sup>60</sup> verbal harassment based on sexual orientation or gender/gender expression was a common experience. The majority of female students (68.1%) reported harassment based on both their sexual orientation and gender and/or gender expression in the past school year (see Table 7). Although most female students in our survey had not experienced physical harassment or assault in the past school year, of those who had, the largest percentage reported being physically victimized based on both sexual orientation and gender/gender expression — more than a quarter for physical harassment (27.3%) and a tenth for physical assault (12.2%). Female students who were victimized based on only one of these characteristics were most likely to have been harassed or assaulted because of their sexual orientation.

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### ***Experiences of Female Students of Color***

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Many female students of color in our study not only experienced homophobic and sexist harassment in school, but also racially/ethnically motivated harassment as well. Almost half (43.6%) of female students of color reported being verbally harassed in the past school year because of their sexual orientation, gender and/or gender expression, and race/ethnicity (see Table 8). Almost a quarter (22.9%) experienced verbal harassment because of their sexual orientation and gender/gender expression. In addition, 14.3% of these students reported being physically harassed in school because of all three characteristics and 12.9% because of sexual orientation and gender/gender expression.

**Table 6. Harassment and Assault Experiences of LGBT Students of Color**

	Verbal Harassment (n=2090)	Physical Harassment (n=2090)	Physical Assault (n=2096)
Neither Type	10.8%	54.6%	76.7%
Sexual Orientation Only	36.3%	27.4%	15.0%
Race/Ethnicity Only	4.7%	2.6%	0.8%
Sexual Orientation and Race/Ethnicity	48.2%	15.3%	7.5%

**Table 7. Harassment and Assault Experiences of Female Students**

	Verbal Harassment (n=3543)	Physical Harassment (n=3528)	Physical Assault (n=3530)
None	10.5%	53.6%	78.1%
Sexual Orientation Only	15.3%	12.2%	7.9%
Gender/Gender Expression Only	6.1%	6.9%	1.7%
Sexual Orientation and Gender/Gender Expression	68.1%	27.3%	12.2%

**Table 8. Harassment and Assault Experiences of Female Students of Color**

	Verbal Harassment (n=1129)	Physical Harassment (n=1129)	Physical Assault (n=1133)
None	10.2%	52.4%	76.1%
Race/Ethnicity Only	2.2%	2.2%	0.5%
Gender or Gender Expression Only	2.5%	5.2%	1.7%
Sexual Orientation Only	9.1%	9.7%	6.9%
Race/Ethnicity and Gender/Gender Expression	4.1%	1.4%	0.4%
Race/Ethnicity and Sexual Orientation	5.5%	1.8%	1.2%
Sexual Orientation and Gender/Gender Expression	22.9%	12.9%	6.5%
Harassment Due To All	43.6%	14.3%	6.6%

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## *Experiences of Transgender Students*

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As shown in Table 9, the vast majority (85.1%) of transgender students reported being verbally harassed in the past school year because of their sexual orientation and gender and/or gender expression. Nearly half (49.5%) of transgender students also reported physical harassment and a third (34.1%) reported physical assault based on all of these characteristics. Transgender students who reported being harassed or assaulted in the past school year were more likely to report victimization based on gender/gender expression and sexual orientation than to report victimization based on either of these characteristics alone.

Across these groups, students most commonly reported experiencing verbal harassment based on multiple characteristics. However, sexual orientation seemed to be particularly salient for some students. Among students of color and female students, sexual orientation was the single most commonly targeted characteristic. With regard to more severe forms of victimization, physical harassment and assault, sexual orientation became particularly prominent. For example, nearly twice as many LGBT students of color reported being physically harassed or assaulted because of their sexual orientation alone than because of a combination of sexual orientation and race or ethnicity.

These results highlight the importance of understanding the diverse experiences of LGBT students. For example, when discussing the experiences of lesbian and bisexual female students, it is necessary to recognize and try to understand their experiences related not only to sexual orientation, but also gender and gender expression. For lesbian and bisexual female students of color, experiences related to their race/ethnicity must also be considered. In understanding the experiences of transgender students, experiences related to their gender and gender expression as well as sexual orientation must be considered.

In our survey, we cannot know how LGBT students make sense of the different types of harassment and assault they experience with regard to the multiple dimensions of identity. In certain circumstances, a student may make a determination about the cause of an attack by the character of the attack. For example, the words used during an incident of verbal harassment may be indicative of the perpetrator's underlying motivation — racist language used during an incident may lead the student to understand that the experience was based on race, or homophobic language may lead the student to determine that the incident was based on sexual orientation. For other individuals, their reports of victimization may be related to their own unique sense of their identities — an African American bisexual male student, for example, may attribute all incidents of harassment directed toward him to being both African American and bisexual. There is a dearth of information in the social science literature about how LGBT individuals experience the multiple facets of their identities. Further research is needed on LGBT youth that is cognizant of the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation and explores how LGBT youth understand and experience these intersections of identity.

**Table 9. Harassment and Assault Experiences of Transgender Students**

	Verbal Harassment (n=296)	Physical Harassment (n=290)	Physical Assault (n=290)
None	6.1%	37.9%	57.2%
Sexual Orientation Only	4.1%	6.1%	4.8%
Gender/Gender Expression Only	4.7%	6.5%	3.8%
Sexual Orientation and Gender/Gender Expression	85.1%	49.5%	34.1%

## Notes

60 This analysis includes all female students, those identifying their sexual orientation as “lesbian,” “bisexual,” “queer” or something other than LBQ.



## Academic Achievement and Educational Aspirations for LGBT Students

### Key Findings

- LGBT students were twice as likely not to plan to pursue any type of post-secondary education than a national sample of students, yet LGBT students were also more likely than a national sample of students to plan to pursue an advanced degree (Master's, PhD, JD).
- Students who experienced higher frequencies of physical harassment because of their sexual orientation or gender expression were less likely to say they would go on to college.
- Students who were frequently physically harassed because of their sexual orientation or gender expression reported lower grades than other students.
- Students who experienced higher frequencies of verbal harassment related to their sexual orientation were more likely to have missed school in the past month because of safety concerns.

In order to examine the relationship between school safety and achievement, we asked students about their academic achievement and their aspirations with regard to post-secondary education. Figure 37 shows the educational aspirations of LGBT high school seniors from the 2007 survey along with those of the general population of high school seniors from the National Center for Education Statistics

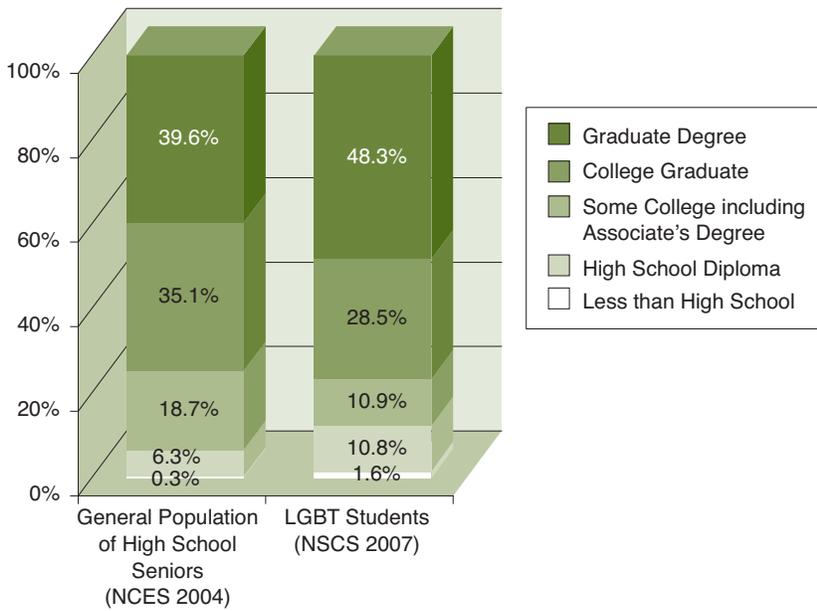
(NCES).<sup>61</sup> About half (48.3%) of LGBT students in our survey reported that they planned to pursue a postgraduate degree (e.g., Master's degree, PhD or MD), which was more than the national sample of high school seniors (39.6%).<sup>62</sup> However, the percentage of LGBT students who did not plan to pursue any type of post-secondary education (obtaining a high school diploma only or not finishing high school) was almost twice that of the national sample (12.4% versus 6.6%).<sup>63</sup> It is important to note that the GLSEN survey only included students who had been in school during the 2006–2007 school year. Thus, the percentage of LGBT students not pursuing post-secondary education would be higher with the inclusion of students who had already dropped out of high school.

These differences in educational aspirations between our sample of LGBT students and the general population of high school students may likely be related to the higher incidence of in-school victimization reported by LGBT students. In our survey, we found that increased harassment was, in fact, related to students' future education plans. As illustrated in Figure 38, LGBT students who reported that they were often or frequently verbally or physically harassed in school because of their sexual orientation or gender expression were more likely than other students to report that they did not plan to pursue a college education.<sup>64</sup> For example, 41.5% of students who experienced high frequencies of physical harassment because of their gender expression did not plan to go to college, compared to 30.1% of those who had not experienced high frequencies of physical harassment.

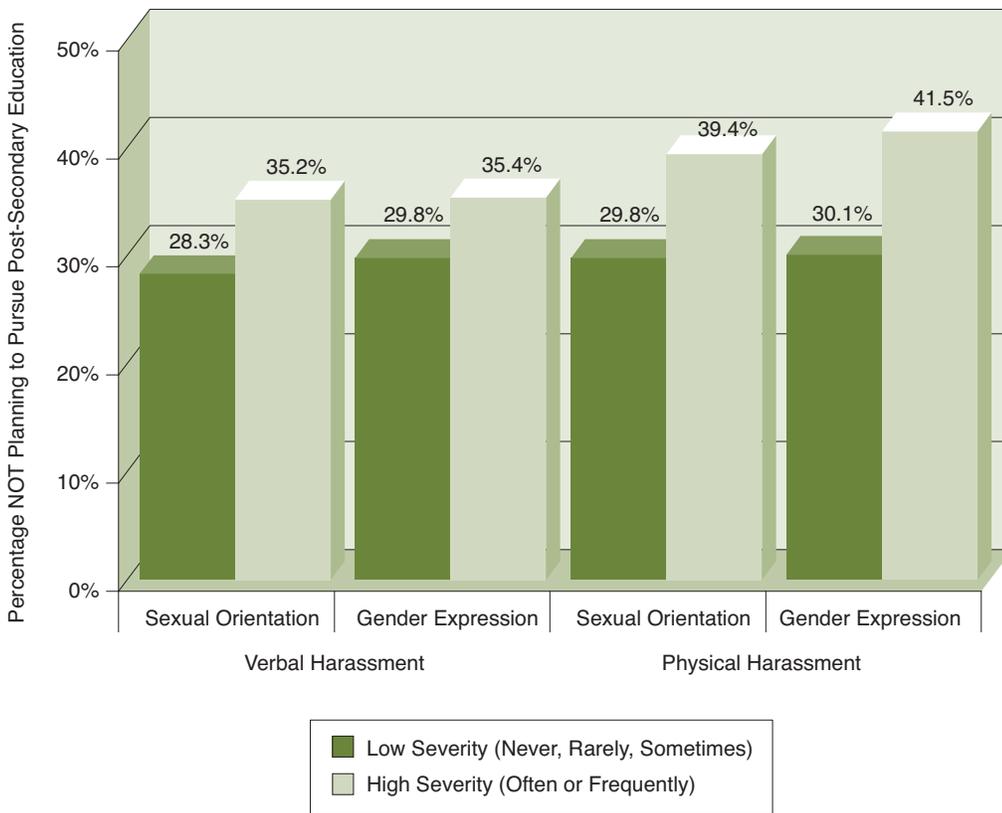
A higher frequency of harassment was also related to lower academic achievement among LGBT students. As shown in Figure 39, the reported grade point average of students who were more frequently harassed because of their sexual orientation or gender expression was significantly lower than for students who were less often harassed.<sup>65</sup> For example, the grade point average for students who were frequently physically harassed because of their sexual orientation or gender expression was almost half a grade lower than for other students (2.8 versus 2.4).

Students who are frequently harassed in school may attempt to avoid these hurtful experiences by not attending school and may be more likely to miss school than students who do not experience such victimization. In this way, school-based victimization may impinge on a student's right to an education. We found that experiences with harassment were, in fact, related to missing days of school. As shown in Figure 40, students were twice as likely to have missed school in the past month if they had experienced high frequencies of verbal harassment related to their sexual orientation (48.3% versus 20.1%) or how they express their gender (51.7% versus 25.5%).<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, students who had experienced high frequencies of physical harassment because of these characteristics were almost three times as likely as other students to have missed school in the past month due to safety concerns (see also Figure 40).<sup>67</sup>

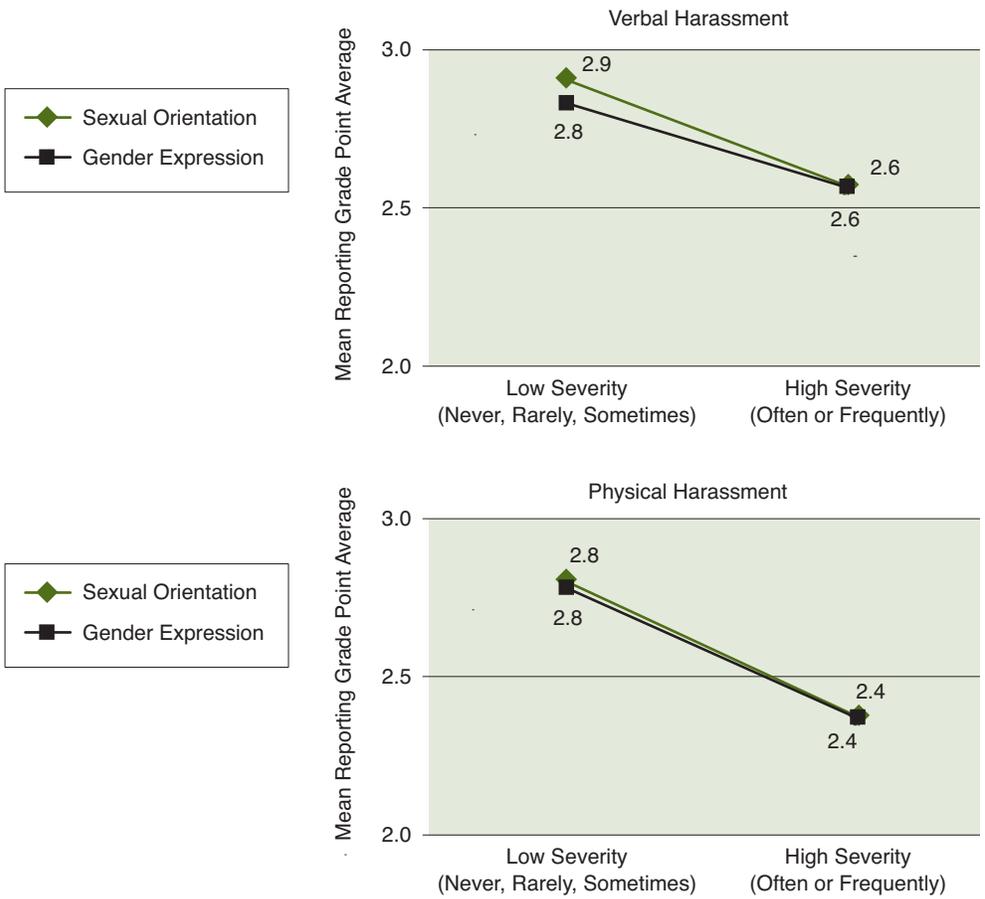
**Figure 37. Educational Aspirations: LGBT Students Versus General Population of Students** (percentage for high school seniors only)



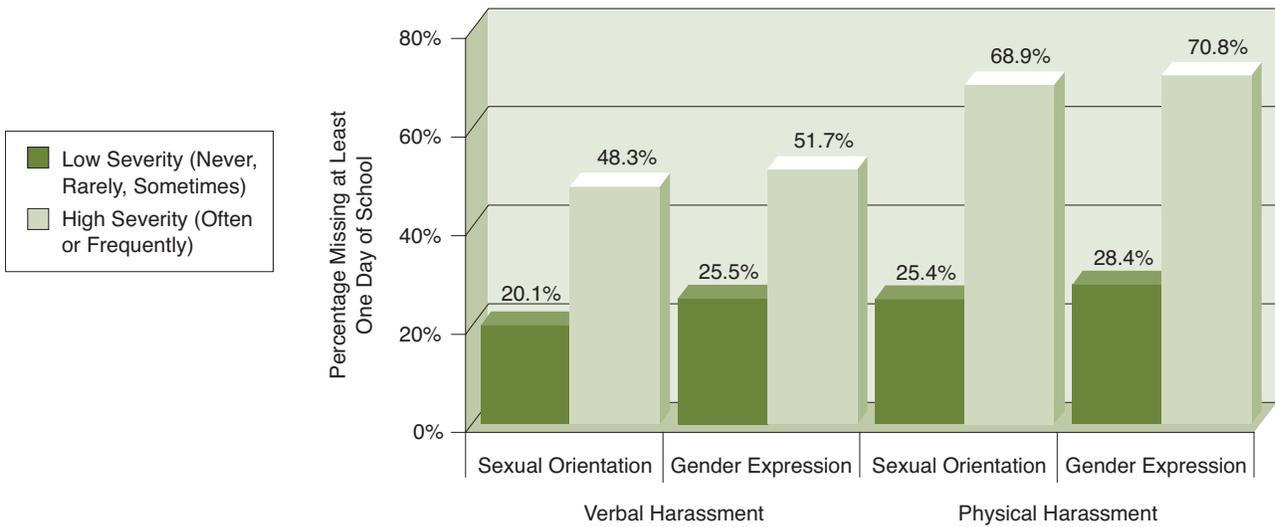
**Figure 38. Severity of In-School Harassment and Educational Aspirations**



**Figure 39. Academic Achievement and Severity of Harassment**



**Figure 40. Severity of In-School Harassment and Missing Days of School for Safety Reasons**



## Notes

- 61 Educational Longitudinal Study: 2002/04 Data Files and Electronic Codebook System. (First follow-up) [ECB/CD-ROM Public Use]. (2005). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Services [Producer and Distributor].
- 62 A one-sample Chi-square test was conducted to compare the percentage of students in the NSCS who planned to pursue a postgraduate degree with the percentage from the national population:  $\chi^2=28.79$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.001$ .
- 63 One-sample Chi-square tests were conducted to compare percentages from the NSCS students with the national population. High school diploma only:  $\chi^2=30.31$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.001$ . Less than high school diploma:  $\chi^2=47.28$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.001$ .
- 64 A series of Chi-square tests were conducted to compare percentages of students who planned to go to college based on their experiences of victimization. Verbal harassment based on sexual orientation:  $\chi^2=34.09$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $\Phi=-.08$ ; verbal harassment based on gender expression:  $\chi^2=17.36$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $\Phi=-.05$ . Physical harassment based on sexual orientation:  $\chi^2=36.56$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $\Phi=-.08$ ; physical harassment based on gender expression:  $\chi^2=33.03$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $\Phi=-.07$ .
- 65 The relationships between GPA and harassment were examined through Pearson correlations. Correlations were significant at  $p<.01$  — verbal harassment based on sexual orientation:  $r=-.17$ ; verbal harassment based on gender expression:  $r=-.13$ ; physical harassment based on sexual orientation:  $r=-.18$ ; physical harassment based on gender expression:  $r=-.16$ . Means are shown for illustrative purposes.
- 66 The relationships between missing school and verbal harassment were examined through Pearson correlations. Correlations were significant at  $p<.01$  — sexual orientation:  $r=.33$ ; gender expression:  $r=.29$ . Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.
- 67 The relationships between missing school and physical harassment were examined through Pearson correlations. Correlations were significant at  $p<.01$ . Sexual orientation:  $r=.43$ ; gender expression:  $r=.37$ . Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.





## Engagement with the School Community

### Key Findings

- Over a third of students were out to all other students at school about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity; less than a quarter were out to all school staff.
- Students who were out to all students and staff at their school reported a greater sense of belonging to their school community than those who were not out.

The degree to which students feel accepted by and a part of their school community is another important indicator of school climate. Students' sense of belonging to their school community is also related to a number of educational outcomes. For example, having a greater sense of belonging to one's school is related to greater academic motivation and effort as well as higher academic achievement.<sup>68</sup> In order to examine students' sense of belonging to their school community, survey participants were given a series of statements about feeling like a part of their school and were asked to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed with the statements.<sup>69</sup> In Table 10, each statement is presented as well as the mean (average) response for each item and the percentages of students who agreed with the statement (i.e., those reporting "agree" or "strongly agree"). Overall, LGBT students in our study were most likely to agree with statements that reflected positive feelings from teachers. For example, about three-quarters (76.1%) of students agreed that they were respected by teachers at their school. They were less likely to agree with statements that reflected feeling accepted by their peers. For example, less than half of students agreed with the statement "I feel like a real part of my school" and "I am included in lots of activities at my school" (45.9% and 40.2%, respectively).

**Table 10. School Belonging: Items from the Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale**

Item	Agree or Strongly Agree	Mean (S.D.) <sup>a</sup>
The teachers respect me.	76.1%	2.93 (0.82)
There's at least one teacher or other adult in my school that I can talk to if I have a problem.	75.8%	3.08 (1.02)
People at my school know that I can do good work.	75.6%	2.96 (0.86)
Teachers at my school are not interested in people like me. (reverse coded) <sup>b</sup>	69.8%	2.86 (0.88)
Other students at my school like me the way I am.	67.7%	2.79 (0.90)
People at my school are friendly to me.	67.2%	2.74 (0.85)
Most teachers at my school are interested in me.	65.9%	2.76 (0.89)
People at my school notice when I'm good at something.	57.4%	2.59 (0.95)
I am treated with as much respect as other students.	53.5%	2.52 (0.95)
I wish I were in a different school. (reverse coded) <sup>b</sup>	52.3%	2.47 (1.13)
Other students in my school take my opinions seriously.	52.1%	2.49 (0.88)
It is hard for people like me to be accepted at my school. (reverse coded) <sup>b</sup>	46.0%	2.36 (0.99)
I can really be myself at school.	47.9%	2.45 (1.03)
I feel like a real part of my school.	45.9%	2.37 (0.95)
I feel proud of belonging to my school.	41.2%	2.27 (1.03)
I am included in lots of activities at my school.	40.2%	2.27 (0.99)
Sometimes I feel as if I don't belong at my school. (reverse coded) <sup>b</sup>	32.5%	2.11 (1.01)
I feel very different from most other students. (reverse coded) <sup>b</sup>	28.2%	1.98 (0.95)

<sup>a</sup> S.D.= standard deviation, a statistical measure of how much variance there is on a particular variable, i.e., how much are participants similar or different in their responses.

<sup>b</sup> Reverse coded means that the statement was worded in the opposite direction of most of the other statements. In this scale, the reverse coded statements were worded in the negative. In order to compare them to the positive-worded statements and to create an average measure of school belonging, the scores associated with these items are reversed so that they reflect positive statements. For example, "Teachers at my school are not interested in people like me" can be interpreted after reverse coding as: "Teachers at my school ARE interested in people like me." Another example: "I wish I were in a different school" can be interpreted as "I DO NOT wish I were in a different school," after reverse coding.

Even when LGBT students feel safe from physical harm in school, they may not be comfortable disclosing that they are LGBT and may not be able to participate in school activities as fully as their peers. In 2007, we asked students two questions regarding how out or open they were in school about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity: how out they were to other students and how out they were to school staff. Although the majority of students were out about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity to most or all of their peers, a sizeable percentage (29.0%) reported that they were not out to any or out to only a few students at their school (see Figure 41). In contrast (and perhaps not surprisingly), students were less likely to be out to

teachers or other school staff — the majority (61.3%) were either not out to any staff or out to only a few staff (see Figure 42).

Some LGBT students may feel that they cannot publicly acknowledge their sexual orientation or gender identity because it may single them out for harassment in school. As shown in Figure 43, the more out students were to their peers at school, the higher their reported experiences of victimization related to their sexual orientation and gender expression.<sup>70</sup>

Although students experienced more victimization the more out they were at school, they also more frequently reported incidents to school staff. Most LGBT students who experienced harassment or assault did not tell a teacher or other staff about the event. However, students who were more out to their peers and to school staff were more likely to report incidents (i.e., “most of the time” or “always”) to school staff:<sup>71</sup>

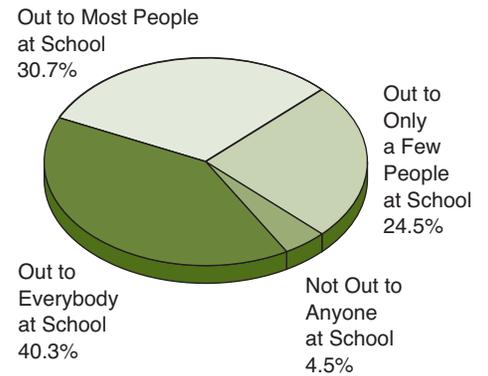
- Almost a fifth (14.8%) of students who were out to most or all of their peers reported incidents to school staff compared to about a tenth (9.4%) of those who were out to a few or none of their peers.
- Almost a fifth (18.0%) of students who were out to most or all staff at their school reported incidents of victimization to school staff compared to a tenth (10.2%) of students who were out to fewer staff.

Nearly two-thirds (61.3%) of LGBT students in our study said that they were out to at least one parent or guardian about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Students who were out to their parents/guardians more frequently talked to school staff about incidents of victimization — 15.5% of students who were out to at least one parent/guardian reported victimization to school personnel, compared to 9.6% of those who were not out.<sup>72</sup>

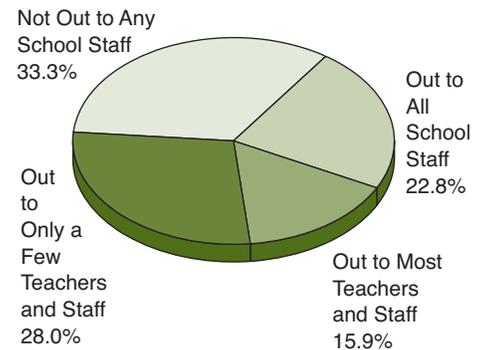
The relationship between being out to school staff and reporting incidents of victimization may be especially important. When we took into consideration students’ degree of being out to school staff, the relationships between reporting incidents of victimization and being out to peers and parents were no longer statistically significant, indicating that being out to staff is a particularly important factor with regard to students’ reporting of victimization to school authorities.<sup>73</sup> Being out may lessen students’ apprehension when it comes to reporting incidents to school authorities. For example, a student may not be afraid that telling a teacher about harassment related to sexual orientation will result in their peers or parents discovering their sexual orientation and therefore may be more comfortable reporting an incident.

Being out about one’s sexual orientation and/or gender identity may also have positive effects on LGBT students’ educational experiences. For all students, being able to participate more fully in one’s school community may be related to a greater sense of belonging in school. We examined the relationship between outness and sense of school belonging and found that being more out in school was indeed related to an increased sense of being a part of one’s school. For example, as shown in Figure

**Figure 41. Degree of Being Out to Other Students at School**



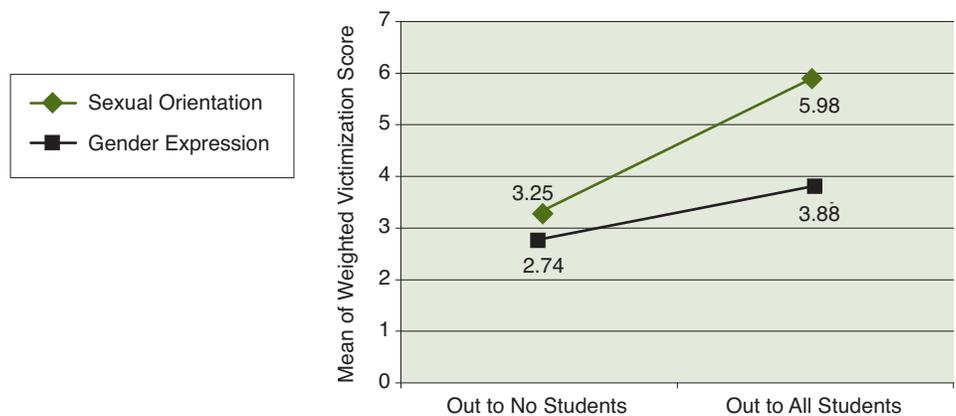
**Figure 42. Degree of Being Out to School Staff**



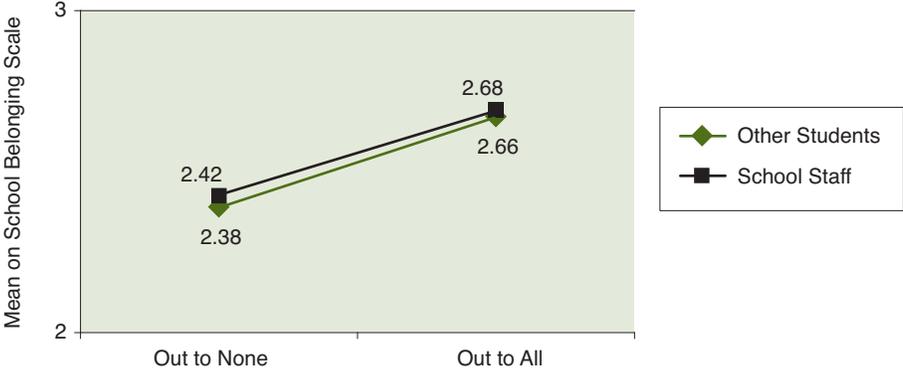
44, students who were out to all of their school (both their peers and school staff) reported a greater sense of belonging to their school community than those who were not out to students or staff.<sup>74</sup>

As part of their class participation, LGBT students may want to raise issues related to LGBT people or events, such as discussions of LGBT historical figures in a social studies class. Being able to talk about LGBT issues in class may enhance a student's educational experience and make the student feel like a greater part of the school community. We asked students how comfortable they would be raising LGBT-related issues in their classes and found that a little more than half (54.5%) would be comfortable (see Figure 45). When we examined the relationship between students' level of comfort discussing LGBT issues and their sense of school belonging, we did find that those who were more comfortable raising these issues in class had a higher sense of belonging to their school community than other students (see Figure 46).<sup>75</sup> Furthermore, as students' degree of outness increased their level of comfort raising these types of issues in class also increased. Whereas 68.7% of students who were out to all students said they would be comfortable raising LGBT issues in class, only 25.3% of students who were not out to their peers said the same.<sup>76</sup> Similarly, more students who were out to all school staff felt comfortable bringing up these issues in class than students who were not out to staff (75.2% compared to 38.3%).<sup>77</sup>

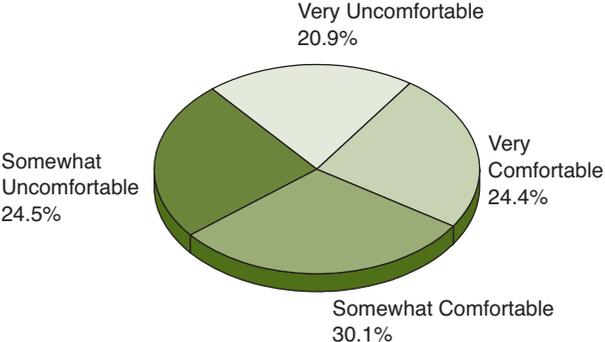
**Figure 43. Experiences of Victimization Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Expression by Degree of Outness at School**



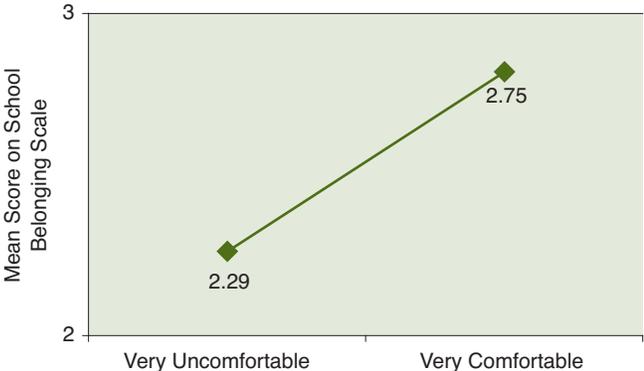
**Figure 44. Sense of Belonging by Degree of Outness at School**



**Figure 45. Comfort with Raising LGBT-Related Issues in Class**



**Figure 46. Sense of School Belonging by Level of Comfort Talking about LGBT Issues in Classes**



## Notes

- 68 Goodenow, C. & Grady, K.E. (1993). The relationship of school belonging and friends' values to academic motivation among urban adolescent students. *Journal of Experimental Education*, 62(1), 60–71.
- Murdock, T. B. & Bolch, M. B. (2005). Risk and protective factors for poor school adjustment in lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) high school youth: Variable and person-centered analyses. *Psychology in the Schools*, 42(5), 159–172.
- Roeser, R.W., Midgley, C. & Urdan, T.C. (1996). Perceptions of the school psychological environment and early adolescents' psychological and behavioral functioning in school: The mediating role of goals and belonging. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 88, 408–422.
- 69 A measure for the psychological sense of school membership was developed for use with adolescents by Carol Goodenow: Goodenow, C. (1993). The Psychological sense of school membership among adolescents: Scale development and educational correlates. *Psychology in the Schools*, 30(1), 79–90.
- 70 The relationships between being out and experiences of victimization were examined through Pearson correlations. Correlations were significant at  $p < .01$  – victimization based on sexual orientation:  $r = .14$ ; victimization based on gender expression:  $r = .08$ . Means are shown for illustrative purposes.
- 71 The relationships between reporting and being out were examined through Pearson correlations. Correlations were significant at  $p < .01$  – being out to other students and reporting:  $r = .10$ ; being out to school staff and reporting:  $r = .16$ . Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.
- 72 The relationship between reporting and being out to parents/guardians and reporting experiences of victimization to school staff was examined through a Pearson correlation:  $r = .10$ ,  $p < .01$ . Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.
- 73 The relationship between reporting and being out to other students, controlling for being out to school staff, was examined through a partial correction:  $r = -.01$ ,  $p > .05$ . Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.
- 74 The relationship between school belonging and being out was examined through a Pearson correction – being out to students:  $r = .16$ ,  $p < .01$ ; being out to school staff:  $r = .17$ ,  $p < .01$ .
- 75 The relationship between student's comfort level raising LGBT issues in class and student's sense of school belonging was examined through a Pearson correlation:  $r = .27$ ,  $p < .01$ .
- 76 The relationship between student's comfort level raising LGBT issues in class and being out to other students was examined through a Pearson correlation:  $r = .30$ ,  $p < .01$ . Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.
- 77 The relationship between student's comfort level raising LGBT issues in class and being out to school staff was examined through a Pearson correlation:  $r = .30$ ,  $p < .01$ . Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.



## **LGBT Resources and Supports in School**

### **Key Findings**

- About a third of students attended a school that had a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) or other student club that addressed LGBT issues in education.
- 8 out of 10 students could identify at least one school staff member whom they believed was supportive of LGBT students in their school.
- Most students did not have access to information about LGBT-related topics, through the Internet on their school computers or in their textbooks.
- Only 1 out of 10 students were taught positive representations of LGBT people, history or events in their classes.
- Few students in our study reported that their school had a comprehensive policy that specifically mentioned sexual orientation and/or gender identity/expression.
- Students in small town and rural schools were less likely to have access to LGBT-related resources and supports than students in urban and suburban schools.
- Students in Southern schools were less likely to have access to LGBT-related resources and supports than students in other regions.

Another dimension of school climate for LGBT students is the availability of positive resources about LGBT-related issues and of supportive faculty and other school personnel. Thus, we asked students about certain in-school supports: school policies for addressing incidences of harassment or assault; teachers and other school staff who are supportive of LGBT students; students clubs that address LGBT students issues (such as Gay-Straight Alliances), and the inclusion of LGBT people, history, or events in class curricula or discussions.

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### ***Supportive Student Clubs***

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For many LGBT students and their allies, student clubs that address LGBT students' issues (commonly called Gay-Straight Alliances or GSAs) may offer critical support. Slightly more than a third (36.3%) of students reported that they had a GSA in their school (see Figure 47). Among students with GSAs in their school, over half (51.6%) said that they attended meetings often or frequently (see Figure 48), and over a third (37.9%) participated as a leader or officer in their school's club.

It is important to note that over a third of students (35.6%) who had a GSA in their school never or rarely attended meetings. We did not ask these students why they did not attend meetings and it may be that these students did not have time in their schedules. It is also possible that these students did not feel comfortable attending GSA meetings and, thus, would be a segment of the LGBT student population that is further isolated from possible school supports. In fact, we found that GSA attendance was significantly related to how out students were about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity in school. As shown in Figure 49, less than half (47.7%) of the students who were not out to other students at all in school attended GSA meetings sometimes, often, or frequently, compared to nearly 70% of students who were out to all students.<sup>78</sup>

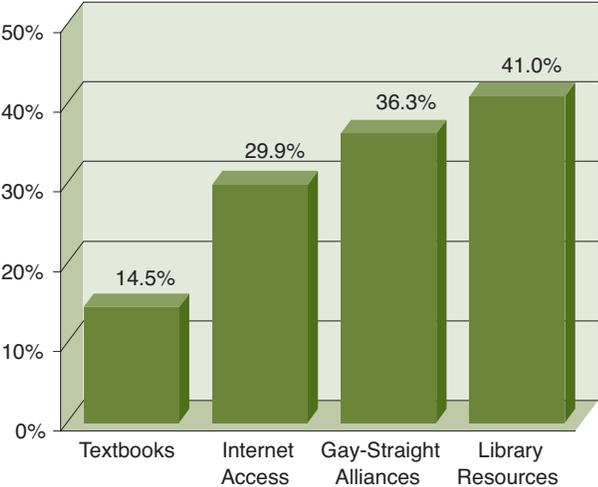
Even though the Equal Access Act<sup>79</sup> requires public schools to allow GSAs to exist alongside other non-curricular student clubs, opponents have continued attempts to restrict the existence of or access to these clubs. One tactic has been attempting to require students to have parental permission to participate in student clubs. For this reason, we were interested in whether requiring students to obtain permission to participate in a GSA would limit student access to these clubs. In the 2007 survey, we asked students who indicated that their school had a GSA or similar club whether or not their school required parental permission to participate in any school clubs. As illustrated in Figure 50a, just over a tenth of students (12.4%) whose school had a GSA were required to obtain parental permission in order to participate in school clubs. Most of these students indicated that they either had their parents' permission to participate in their GSA or believed they could obtain it (see Figure 50b).

Most students (70.5%) in schools with GSAs reported that their school did not require parental permission to participate in student clubs and an additional 17% did not know whether their school required parental

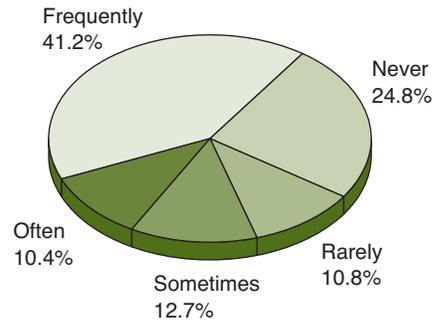
permission. We asked these students whether or not they could obtain permission if their school did require it. As illustrated in Figure 50c, most of these students believed they could get permission, yet many said they would not be able to get permission or did not know if they would. Although most of these students reported that they *could* obtain parental permission if needed, there is no way of knowing whether they would really ask their parents or if their parents would actually grant permission to participate in a GSA. Thus, the number of students who participate in their GSAs would be substantially diminished with the advent of a parental permission requirement.

Regardless of whether their school required parental permission to participate in student clubs, students who did not have parental permission or believed they would not be able to obtain permission were less likely to be out to their parents than students who did have permission or thought they could obtain it.<sup>80</sup> Over three-quarters (79.9%) of students who were out to at least one parent or guardian either had permission or believed they could get permission to participate in their GSA, compared to less than a quarter (20.1%) of students who were not out to their parents. For students who are not out to their parents, parental permission requirements for student club participation could restrict their use of an important school resource.

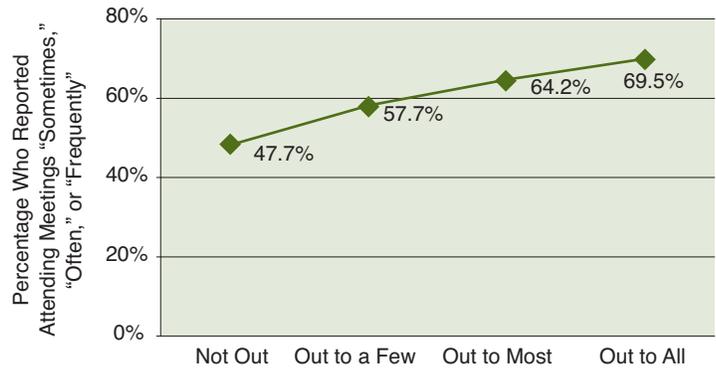
**Figure 47. LGBT-Related Resources in School**



**Figure 48. Frequency of Attending Gay-Straight Alliance Meetings**  
(n=2250)

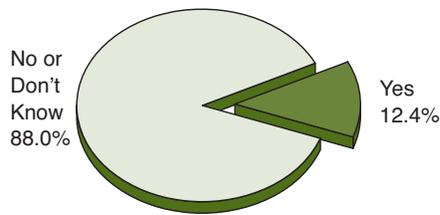


**Figure 49. Relationship Between Being Out to Students and Attending GSA Meetings**

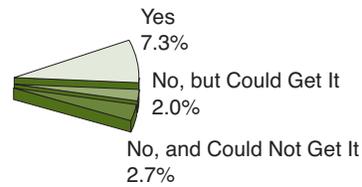


**Figure 50. Parental Permission for Students in Schools with Gay-Straight Alliance**

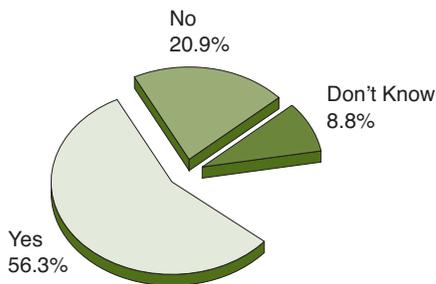
a. Does Your School Require Parental Permission to Participate in School Clubs?



b. Do You Have Parental Permission to Attend Your School's GSA?



c. If Your School Did Require Parental Permission to Attend the GSA, Could You Obtain Permission?



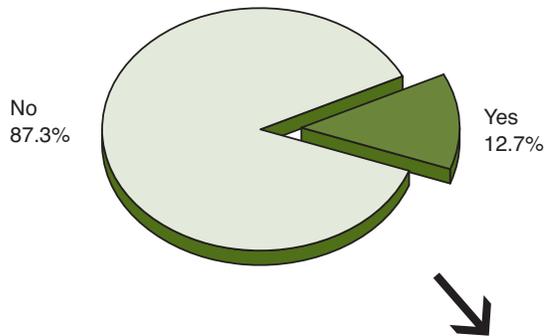
### Curricula Resources

For most students, LGBT-related curricular resources were not available in school. As shown in Figure 47, less than half reported that they could find information about LGBT people, history, or events in their school library (41.0%) and less than a third were able to access this information using the school Internet (29.9%). Additionally, less than a fifth of students (14.5%) reported that LGBT-related topics were included in their textbooks or other assigned readings.

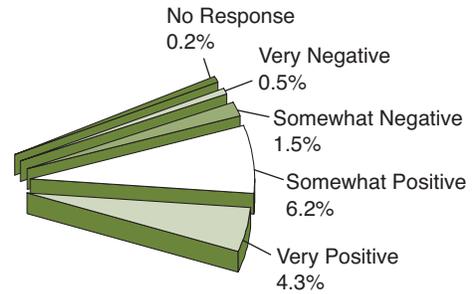
When asked whether they had been taught about LGBT people, history, or events in school, a vast majority (87.3%) of students reported that these topics were not taught in any of their classes (see Figure 51a). Among students who had been taught LGBT-related topics in class, History/Social Studies, English and Health were the classes most often mentioned as being inclusive of these topics (see Table 11). Out of the students who were taught about LGBT-related topics (12.6%), most reported that the representations of LGBT people, history and events were positive (see Figure 51b). However, as only a small portion reported that they were taught about LGBT topics in any of their classes, only a tenth (10.5%) of all students in the survey were exposed to positive representations of LGBT people, history, or events in their classes.

**Figure 51. Inclusion of LGBT-Related Topics in Classes**

a. Were LGBT-Related Topics Taught in Any Classes?



b. Quality of the Representations of LGBT—People, History, and Events that were Taught in Class



**Table 11. Classes in Which LGBT-Related Topics Were Taught**

Classes	Percentage of Students Taught LGBT-Related Topics (n=788)	Percentage of all Students in Survey (n=6191)
History	51.3%	6.5%
Science	13.1%	1.7%
Health	33.8%	4.3%
Gym	7.4%	0.9%
English	33.4%	4.2%
Foreign Language	7.1%	0.9%
Music	5.7%	0.7%
Math	3.6%	0.5%
Art	8.2%	1.0%
Other	16.9%	2.1%

### **Supportive School Personnel**

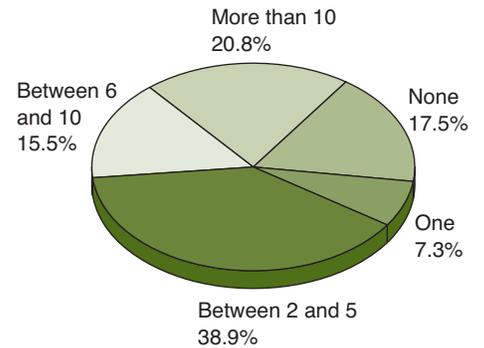
Supportive teachers, principals and other school staff serve as another important resource for LGBT students. Being able to speak with a caring adult in school may have a significant positive impact on the school experiences for students, particularly for those who feel marginalized or experience harassment. In our study, eight out of ten students could identify at least one school staff member whom they believed was supportive of LGBT students at their school, and more than a third (36.3%) could identify six or more supportive school staff (see Figure 52).

The presence of LGBT school personnel who are out or open at school about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, may provide another source of support for LGBT students. In addition, the number of out LGBT personnel may provide a visible sign of a more supportive and accepting school climate. Yet only a third (36.5%) of students said they could identify any openly LGBT personnel at their school (see Figure 53).

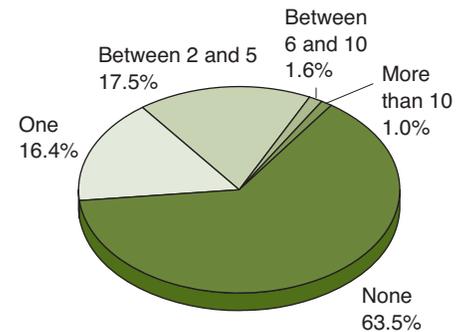
When asked about their level of comfort talking one-on-one with various school personnel about LGBT-related issues, students reported that they would be most comfortable talking with school counselors or social workers and teachers — about half of students reported that they would be somewhat or very comfortable talking with a school counselor or social worker (55.2%) or a teacher (49.0%) about LGBT issues (see Figure 54).<sup>81</sup> Additionally, about a third (35.5%) said that they would be comfortable talking with a school nurse. Fewer students in our study said they would feel comfortable talking one-on-one with a principal or vice principal, school librarian, or coach about these issues.

In addition to comfort level, students were asked how frequently in the past school year they had actually spoken with various school personnel about LGBT-related issues. Given that students reported feeling most comfortable with teachers and school counselors or social workers, it is not surprising that they were more likely to speak with these individuals than other school staff. However, as shown in Figure 55, students were more likely to have actually spoken with a teacher (61.7%) than a school counselor/social worker (39.1%) even though their comfort level with counselors/social workers was somewhat higher.<sup>82</sup> This finding is not surprising given that students usually spend more time interacting with teachers than school counselors/social workers. Students were much less likely to report having talked about LGBT issues with principals, vice principals or other school personnel.

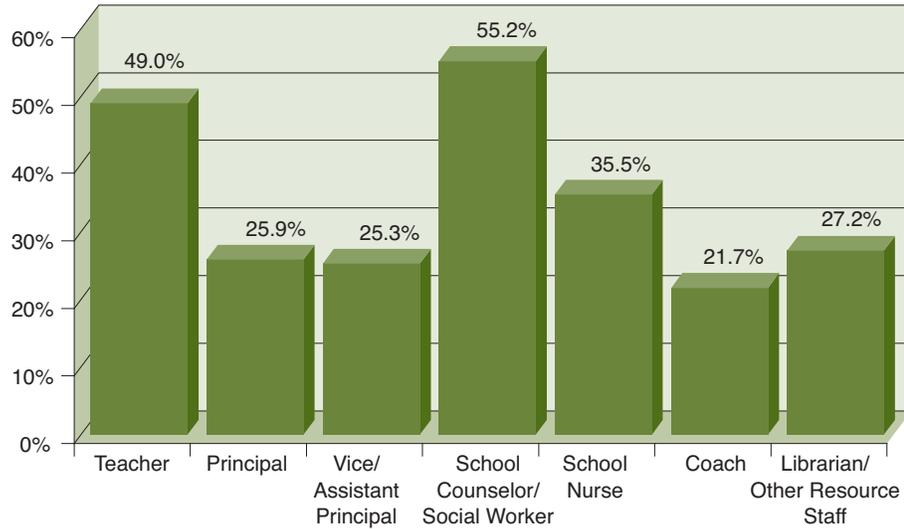
**Figure 52. Number of Teachers or Other School Staff Who are Supportive of LGBT Students**



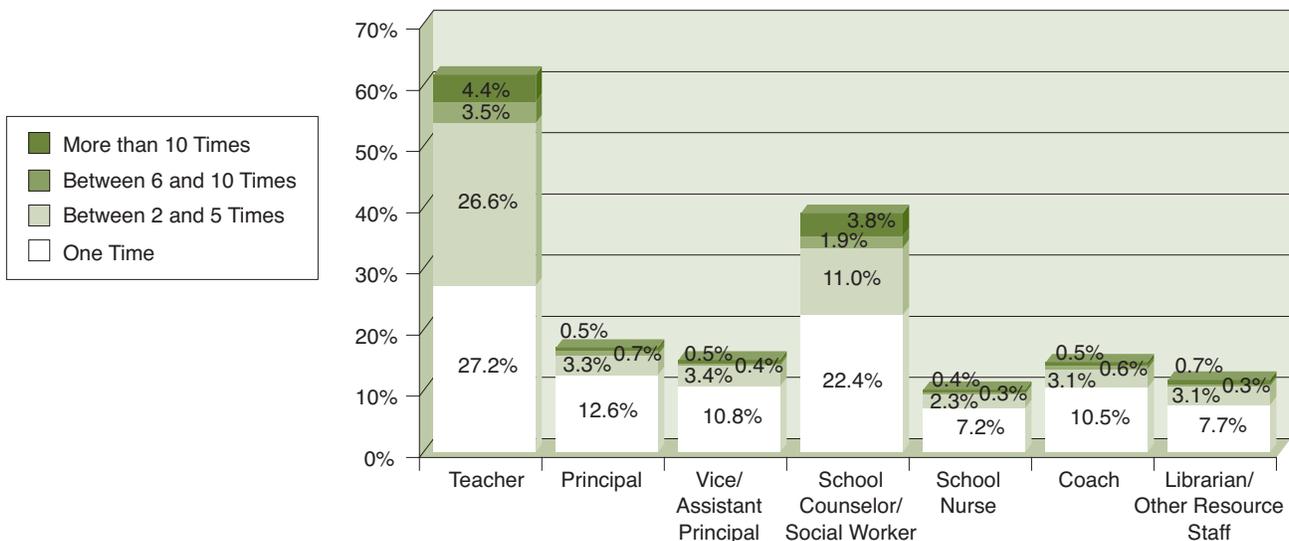
**Figure 53. Number of Openly LGBT Teachers or Other School Staff**



**Figure 54. Comfort Talking with School Personnel About LGBT Issues**  
(Percentage of students reporting they would be "somewhat comfortable" or "very comfortable")



**Figure 55. Frequency of Students Speaking to School Staff About LGBT Issues**



### ***School Policies for Addressing Harassment and Assault***

School policies that address in-school harassment and assault are imperative for creating school environments where students feel safe. Comprehensive policies specifically enumerate categories that explicitly state protection based on personal characteristics, such as sexual orientation and gender identity/expression, among others. When a school has and enforces a comprehensive policy, one which also includes procedures for reporting incidents to school authorities, it can send a message that harassment and assault are unacceptable and will not be tolerated. It can also send a message that student

safety, including the safety of LGBT students, is taken seriously by school administrators. “Generic” anti-bullying or anti-harassment school policies do not include enumerated categories or specify the various types of harassment that are unacceptable. Comprehensive school policies may provide students with greater protection against harassment and assault because they make clear the various forms of harassment and assault that will not be tolerated and provide guidelines for reporting such events.

Students were asked whether their school had a policy or procedure for reporting incidents of in-school harassment or assault, and if that policy explicitly included sexual orientation and gender identity or expression. As shown in Table 12, nearly half (43.8%) of students reported that their school did not have a policy or did not know if their school had a policy. A little more than half reported that their school had a policy, but among those students, few said that their school’s policy included sexual orientation and/or gender identity/expression (see also Table 12). Thus, only about a fifth (18.7%) of all students in our study reported that their school had a comprehensive policy that specifically mentioned sexual orientation and/or gender identity/expression (see also Table 12).

**Table 12. Students’ Reports Regarding School Policies for Reporting Harassment and Assault**

No Policy <sup>a,b</sup>	43.8%
Any Policy	56.3%
Generic Policy <sup>c</sup>	37.6%
Comprehensive Policy	18.7%
Sexual Orientation Only	8.5%
Gender Identity/Expression Only	3.2%
Both Sexual Orientation & Gender Identity/Expression	7.0%

<sup>a</sup> Includes students who indicated that they did not know if there was a policy or not.  
<sup>b</sup> Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding.  
<sup>c</sup> Includes students who indicated that they did not know if the policy included specific enumeration.

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## ***Comparison of School Resources and Supports by Locale and Region***

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Given the differences by school locale and geographic region regarding the experiences of harassment and assault discussed in the *Comparisons by School Characteristics of Biased Language and Experiences of Victimization* section, it is important to examine whether there were any differences with respect to the availability of LGBT-related resources in school. Specifically, we examined potential differences in access to Gay-Straight Alliances, comprehensive safe school policies, LGBT-related curricular resources, and supportive school staff.

**Comparison of School Resources and Supports by Locale.** We found significant differences by locale in the availability of LGBT-related resources and supports in school.<sup>83</sup> Overall, students from small town or rural schools were least likely to have any type of LGBT-related resources or supports (see Figures 56 to 58). Compared to urban and suburban school students, LGBT students in small town and rural schools were:

- Half as likely to have a Gay-Straight Alliance (see Figure 56);
- Less likely to have curriculum, textbooks or other assigned readings that included LGBT topics (see Figure 56);
- Less likely to have access to LGBT-related information in their school libraries or through the Internet using school computers (see Figure 56);
- Less likely to report having school staff who were supportive of LGBT students (see Figure 57), and

With regard to comprehensive school anti-harassment policies, small town and rural school students were significantly less likely than students in suburban schools to report that their school had this type of policy (see Figure 58).

### **Comparison of School Resources and Supports by Region.**

Some significant differences were found across geographic regions in the availability of LGBT-related resources and supports.<sup>84</sup> Overall, students in the Northeast and West were the most likely to have access to LGBT-related resources or supports, whereas students attending schools in the South were the least likely to have access to any resources or supports (see Figures 59 to 61). Compared to students in other regions, students in Southern schools were:

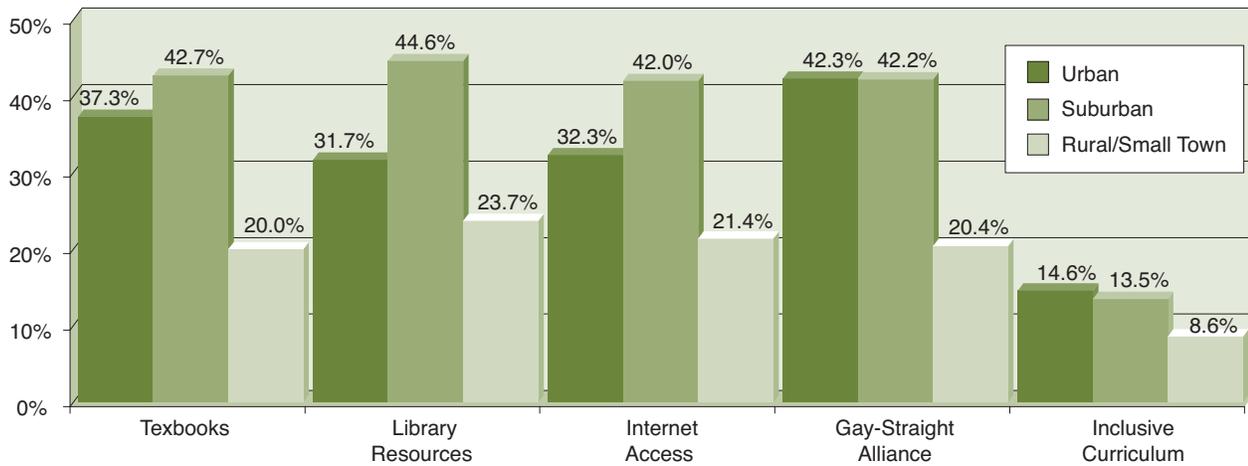
- Less likely to have a Gay-Straight Alliance (see Figure 59);
- Less likely to have curriculum, textbooks or other assigned readings that included LGBT-related topics (see Figure 59);
- Less likely to have access to LGBT-related information in their school libraries or through the Internet using school computers (see Figure 59);

- Less likely to attend a school with a comprehensive school anti-harassment policy (see Figure 60), and
- Less likely to report having supportive school personnel (see Figure 61).

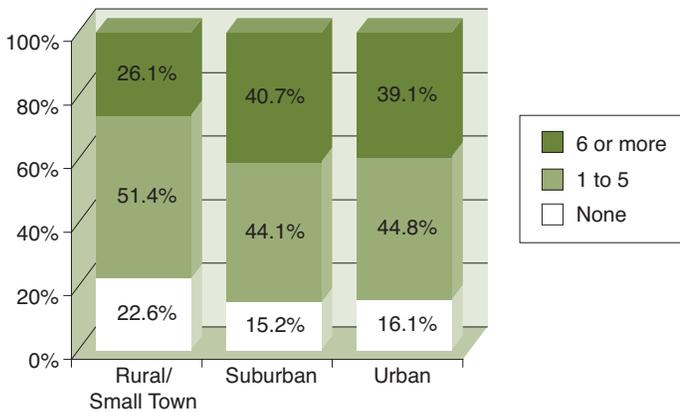
In addition, compared to students attending schools in the Midwest, students in the Northeast and West were:

- More likely to have a Gay-Straight Alliance in school (see Figure 59);
- More likely to have curriculum that included positive representations of LGBT people, history and events (see Figure 59), and
- More likely to report having school staff who were supportive of LGBT students (see Figure 61).

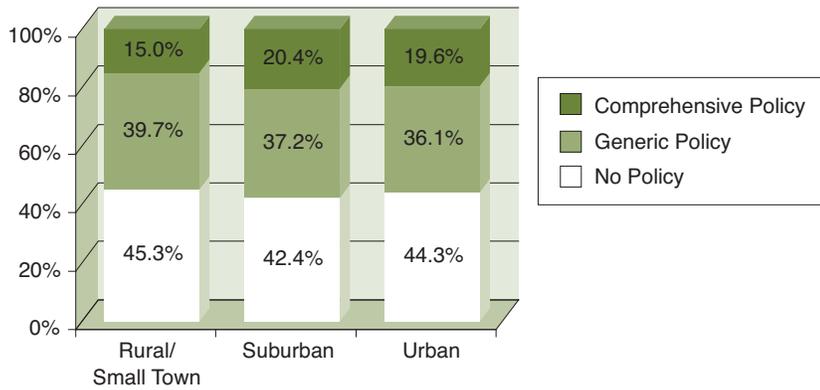
**Figure 56. LGBT-Related Resources by Locale**



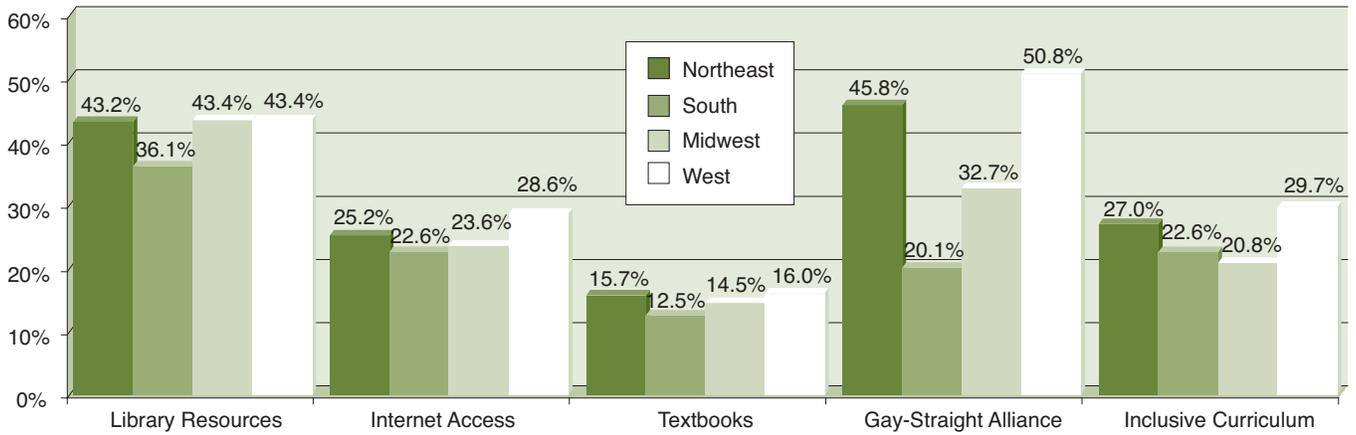
**Figure 57. Number of Teachers and Other Staff Supportive of LGBT Students by Locale**



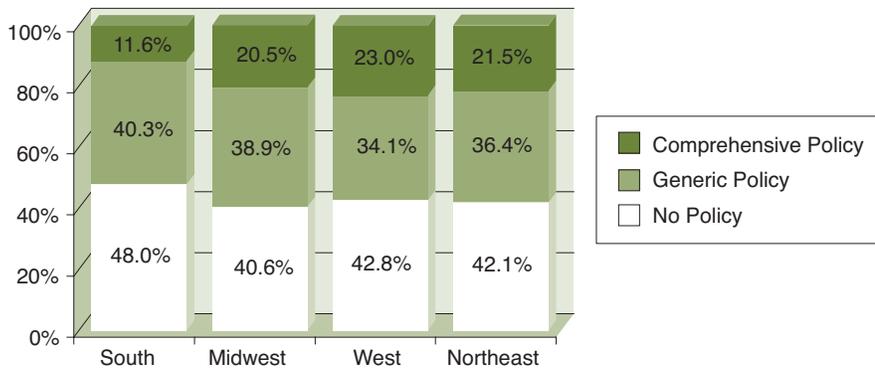
**Figure 58. Type of Safe School Policy by Locale**



**Figure 59. LGBT-Related Resources by Region**



**Figure 60. Type of Safe School Policy by Region**



**Figure 61. Number of Teachers and Other School Staff Supportive of LGBT Students by Region**



**Comparison of LGBT-Related School Resources and Supports among GLSEN’s 2001, 2003, 2005 and 2007 Surveys**

GLSEN works to improve school climate and resources for LGBT students in our nation’s schools by educating school staff about LGBT issues, working with educational policy makers, supporting students’ efforts to change their own school environments, and providing inclusive curricular resources. Therefore, it is important to examine whether there have been changes in the availability of these resources and supports over time.

In our 2005 report, we found a few differences across time, largely between 2001 and the other two reports (2003 and 2005).<sup>85</sup> In 2007, we looked across all years, paying specific attention to differences from 2005. We found some differences in resources and supports between 2007 and 2005, but these were most likely because of additions to our sampling methods this year: as mentioned in the *Methods* section of this report, our outreach methods in 2007 included targeted announcements on MySpace, a social networking site, and resulted in a larger and broader sample of students. This subsample of students may have less access to LGBT community resources than the other survey participants who primarily found out about the survey through community youth groups or other LGBT organizations. In fact, the majority (69.5%) of students from the MySpace sample reported not being aware of a non-school LGBT youth group in their community, compared to less than half (46.8%) of other survey participants. The availability of school-based resources for LGBT students may also be an indicator of the overall support of the LGBT population in the larger local community. It is possible that schools in less supportive communities have fewer supportive resources to support LGBT students and combat anti-LGBT bias. Thus, it is not surprising that a slightly smaller percentage of students in 2007 reported having access to certain school resources and supports than in past years.<sup>86</sup>

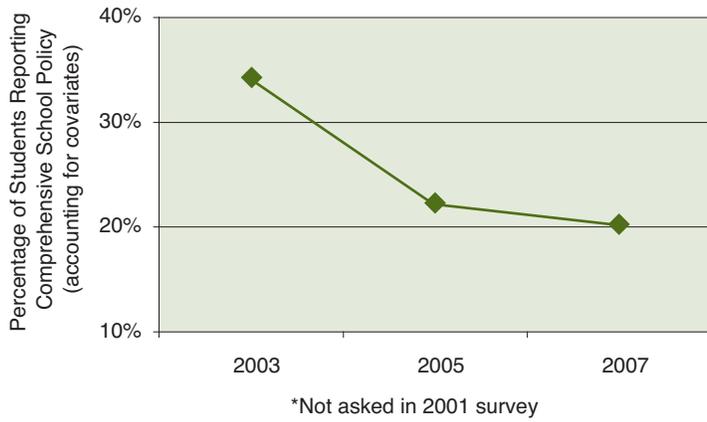
When accounting for this difference in samples across years, however, there were almost no changes in students' access to resources and supports from 2005 to 2007.<sup>87</sup> For example, although we saw a decrease in the percentage of students reporting that their school had a comprehensive policy from 2003 to 2005, as illustrated in Figure 62, there were no significant changes from 2005 to 2007.<sup>88</sup> There were also no changes in the availability of GSAs in 2007 — since the large increase observed from 2001 to 2003, the percentage of students reporting having a GSA in their school has remained stable (see Figure 63).<sup>89</sup>

With regard to school staff supports, other than an increase from 2001 to 2003, students' access to supportive staff resources has not changed over time.<sup>90,91,92</sup> Specifically, in 2005 and 2007 there were no differences in students' reports of having spoken to a staff person about LGBT issues, their overall comfort level talking to staff about these issues, or the percentage of students who reported having at least one staff person supportive of LGBT students (see Figure 64).

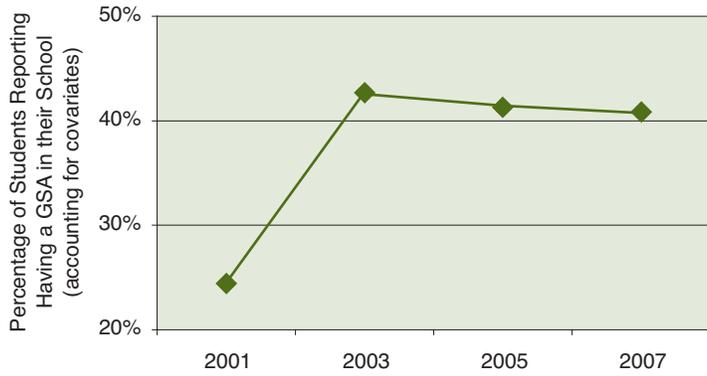
There were a few small changes in the availability of LGBT-related curricular resources in 2007, after accounting for methodological differences across years. As illustrated in Figure 65, after an increase from 2001 to 2003, the percentages of students with access to LGBT-related Internet resources through their school computers has decreased over time, with an even smaller percentage of students having access in 2007 than in 2001.<sup>93</sup> The percentage of students reporting positive representations of LGBT people, history, or events in their curriculum has also steadily decreased over time, although the differences between 2007 and 2005 were not significant (see also Figure 65).<sup>94</sup> However, the percentage of students who had LGBT-related resources in their school library has continually increased over time, reaching the highest levels in 2007.<sup>95</sup> In addition, there have been no changes over time in the percentage of students reporting inclusion of LGBT-related content in their textbooks.<sup>96</sup>

Across years, we saw a similar pattern in the availability of supports for LGBT students — students were less likely to report having a supportive infrastructure, such as policies, curricula, or GSAs, than they were to report having supportive school personnel. Nevertheless, it is important to note that most students across all survey years reported having only a small number of supportive school staff. Thus, the extent of this support is limited. It is also important to note that although we took into account the availability of community-based supports when looking at differences across years, students who may be less connected to LGBT community resources were less likely to report that they had LGBT-related in-school resources. Thus, it may be that the students who were the most isolated in their communities were also those students who had the fewest supports in schools.

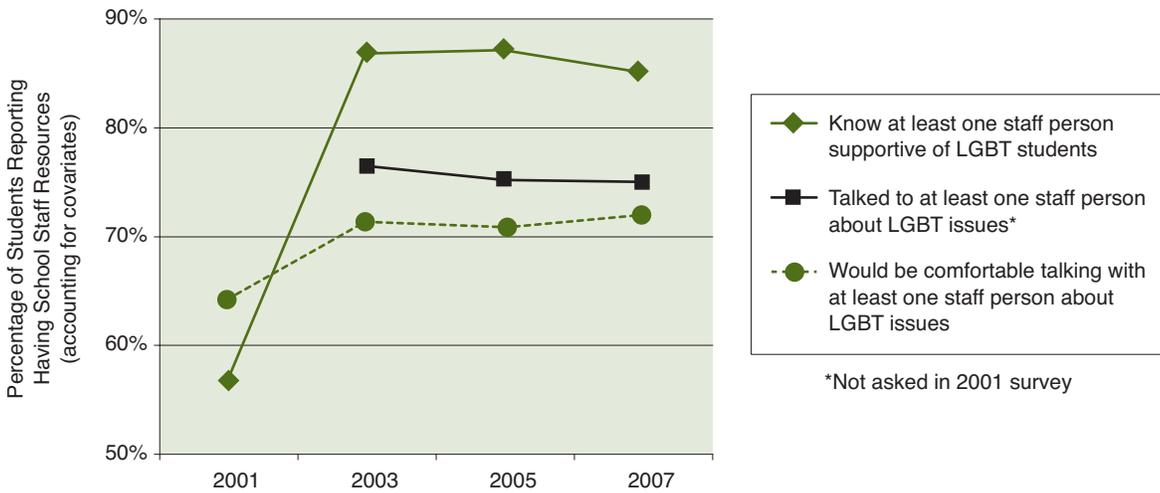
**Figure 62. Comprehensive Safe School Policy by Year\***



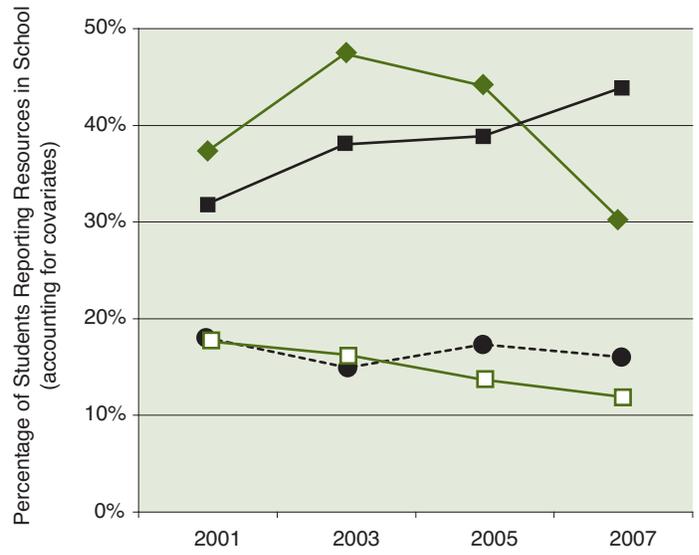
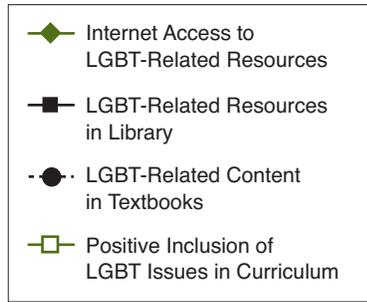
**Figure 63. Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) by Year**



**Figure 64. School Staff Members as Resources by Year**



**Figure 65. Curricular Resources by Year**



## Notes

- 78 The relationship between frequency of attending GSA meetings and outness was examined through a Pearson correlation:  $r=.13, p<.01$ . Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.
- 79 Passed in 1984, the federal Equal Access Act, 20 U.S.C. ' 4071(a), states that any public secondary school receiving federal funding that provides a meeting place during non-instructional time for any voluntary, student-initiated club is required to provide the same meeting facilities to all non-curriculum related clubs no matter what their "religious, political, philosophical or other" beliefs or discussions may be. This law protects students' rights to form and attend gay-straight alliances as long as there are other extracurricular clubs on campus. If a school does not permit other extracurricular clubs to meet, however, it does not have to permit a GSA. For more information see the GLSEN resource: "The Equal Access Act: What Does it Mean?" by David Buckel, Lambda Legal Defense Fund, available at [http://www.glsen.org/binary-data/GLSEN\\_ATTACHMENTS/file/95-1.pdf](http://www.glsen.org/binary-data/GLSEN_ATTACHMENTS/file/95-1.pdf).
- 80 To compare differences between students based on parental permission and outness to parents, a Chi square test was performed:  $\chi^2=132.41, df=1, p<.001, \Phi=.257$ .
- 81 Mean differences in students' comfort level were examined using repeated measures multivariate analysis of variance: Pillai's Trace=.52,  $F(6, 5958) =1056.76, p<.001$ .
- 82 Mean differences in the frequency of speaking with school staff were examined using repeated measures multivariate analysis of variance: Pillai's Trace=.48,  $F(6, 5849) =899.16, p<.001$ .
- 83 To compare differences across school locale, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with the resources and support variables as the dependent variables. The results of this analysis were significant, Pillai's Trace=.05  $F(14, 11786)=20.48, p<.001$ . Resulting univariate analyses were considered significant at  $p<.01$  and given the large size of the sample, effect sizes were also considered. Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.
- 84 To compare differences across region, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with the resources and support variables as the dependent variables. The results of this analysis were significant, Pillai's Trace=.09  $F(21, 17937)=24.90, p<.001$ . Resulting univariate analyses were considered significant at  $p<.01$  and, given the large size of the sample, effect sizes were also considered. Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.
- 85 Kosciw, J. G. and Diaz, E. M. (2006). *The 2005 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth in our nation's schools*. New York: GLSEN.
- 86 To test differences across the four time points, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with school resources as dependent variables. The multivariate results were significant: Pillai's Trace=.05  $F(18, 16392)=25.48, p<.001$ . Univariate effects were considered at  $p<.01$ .
- 76 Given that certain demographic differences in the 2007 sample based on the expansion of the Internet sampling method, we controlled for participation in a community group or program for LGBT youth ("youth group") and age in cross year analyses regarding school resources. These two individual-level covariates were chosen based on preliminary analysis that examined what locational and school characteristics and personal demographics were most predictive of subsample membership (MySpace, other Internet, and community group).
- 88 To test differences across the three time points (questions about school policy were not asked in 2001), an analysis of variance was conducted with school policy as the dependent variable. In order to account for differences in sampling method across year, youth group participation and age of student were used as covariates. Overall, there was a significant difference across years:  $F(2, 8792)=41.14, p<.001$ . However, these differences were only between 2007 and 2003 and between 2005 and 2003. There were no statistically significant differences between 2007 and 2005.
- 89 To test differences across the four time points, an analysis of variance was conducted with having a Gay-Straight Alliance as the dependent variable. In order to account for differences in sampling methods across years, youth group participation and age of student were used as covariates. Overall, there was a significant difference across years:  $F(3, 9617)=33.72, p<.001$ . However, these differences were only between 2001 and the other three time points, whereas the percentage of students reporting having a GSA in 2001 was significantly less than the percentage of students reporting having a GSA in 2003, 2005, and 2007. There were no differences between 2007 and 2005 or 2003.
- 90 To test differences across the four time points, an analysis of variance was conducted with having at least one supportive staff person as the dependent variable. In order to account for differences in sampling methods across years, youth group participation and age of student were used as covariates. Overall, there was a significant difference across years:  $F(3, 9477)=167.96, p<.001$ . However, the difference was only between 2001 and all other years (2001< 2003, 2005, 2007). There were no differences between 2007 and 2005 or 2003.
- 91 To test differences across the four time points, an analysis of variance was conducted with comfort talking to school personnel (teacher, principal, nurse, counselor/psychologist, librarian) about LGBT issues as the dependent variable. In order to account for differences in sampling methods across years, youth group participation and age of student were used as covariates. Overall, there was a significant difference across years:  $F(3, 9597)=7.24, p<.001$ . However, the difference was only between 2001 and all other years (2001< 2003, 2005, 2007). There were no differences between 2007 and 2005 or 2003.
- 92 To test differences across the three time points, an analysis of variance was conducted with talked to school personnel about LGBT issues as dependent variables (questions about whether students had talked to school personnel about LGBT issues were not asked in the 2001 survey). In order to account for differences in sampling methods across years, youth group participation and age of student were used as covariates. The multivariate results were not significant.
- 93 To test differences across the four time points, an analysis of variance was conducted with access to LGBT-related Internet resources as the dependent variable. In order to account for differences in sampling methods across years, youth group participation and age of student were used as covariates.

Overall, there was a significant difference across years:  $F(3, 9638)=14.99, p<.001$ . The specific significant differences between years were: 2007<2005, 2003; 2001<2005, 2003.

- 94 To test differences across the four time points, an analysis of variance was conducted with inclusive curriculum with positive representations as the dependent variable. In order to account for differences in sampling methods across years, youth group participation and age of student were used as covariates. Overall, there was a significant difference across years:  $F(3, 9604)=9.62, p<.001$ . The specific significant differences between years were: 2007<2003, 2001; 2001>2007, 2005.
- 95 To test differences across the four time points, an analysis of variance was conducted with LGBT-related resources in school library as the dependent variable. In order to account for differences in sampling methods across years, youth group participation and age of student were used as covariates. Overall, there was a significant difference across years:  $F(3, 9653)=17.10, p<.001$ . The specific significant differences between years were: 2007>2005, 2003, 2001; 2001<2007, 2005, 2003.
- 96 To test differences across the four time points, an analysis of variance was conducted with LGBT-inclusive textbooks as the dependent variable. In order to account for differences in sampling methods across years, youth group participation and age of student were used as covariates. There were no differences across years.



### **Utility of School Resources and Supports**

In addition to documenting whether or not schools have institutional supports for LGBT students, such as supportive educators, inclusive curricula or student clubs that address LGBT issues, it is also important to examine how such institutional supports may benefit LGBT students. Given that GLSEN's National School Climate Survey was cross-sectional in design, we cannot make definitive statements about the effectiveness of these supports. We can, however, examine whether there were relationships between students' reports of the availability of institutional supports and their access to education (i.e., whether or not they missed school due to safety concerns), academic achievement, educational aspirations, and overall school climate.

### **Key Findings**

- Students in schools with a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) reported hearing fewer homophobic remarks.
- Students with a GSA experienced less harassment and assault because of their sexual orientation or gender expression than those without a GSA.
- Students with a GSA were more likely to report incidents of harassment and assault to school personnel than those without a GSA.
- Students with a GSA were less likely to feel unsafe because of their sexual orientation or gender expression and were less likely to miss school because of safety concerns than those without a GSA.
- Students with a GSA reported a greater sense of belonging to their school community than those without a GSA.

Student clubs that address LGBT student issues can create safe schools by promoting respect for all people, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, and addressing anti-LGBT harassment in schools. However, there continue to be attempts to limit students' access to GSAs. For example, opponents have claimed that GSAs violate school districts' abstinence-only policies or have attempted to require that students obtain parental permission to participate in school clubs. Thus, it is important to demonstrate the possible benefits of having a GSA in one's school for LGBT students.

Attending a school that had a GSA was indeed related to a more positive school climate for LGBT students in our survey:

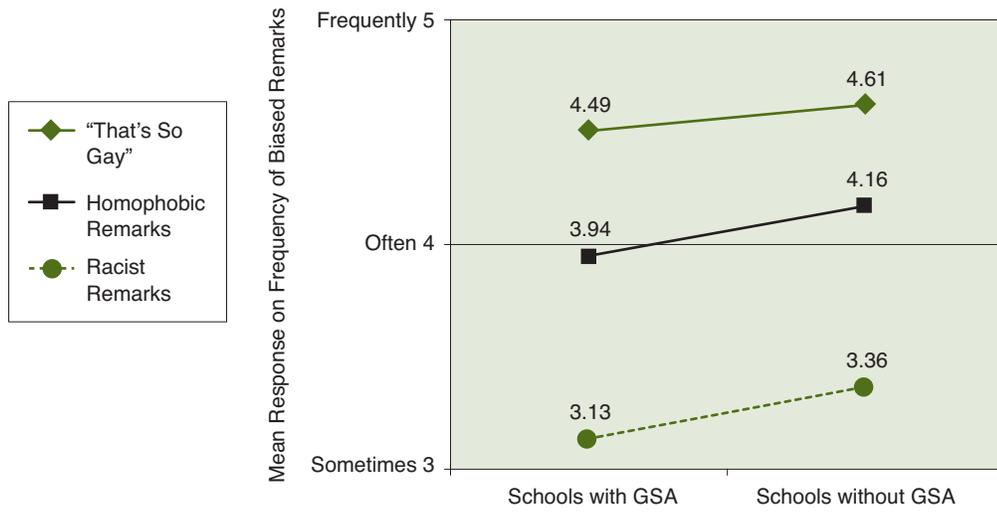
- Students in schools with a GSA were less likely than students in schools without a GSA to report hearing homophobic remarks, including negative expressions like "that's so gay," and racist remarks in school (see Figure 66).<sup>97</sup>
- Having a GSA was related to increased feelings of safety. Students in schools with a GSA were less likely to feel unsafe because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.<sup>98</sup> For example, as shown in Figure 67, 54.7% of students with a GSA reported feeling unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation compared to 64.3% of students without a GSA. Students with a GSA were also less likely to report missing school in the past month because of safety concerns (see also Figure 67).

- Students in schools with a GSA experienced less harassment and assault than students in schools without a GSA, specifically they experienced less victimization based on sexual orientation, gender expression, race/ethnicity, and religion (see Figure 68).<sup>99</sup>

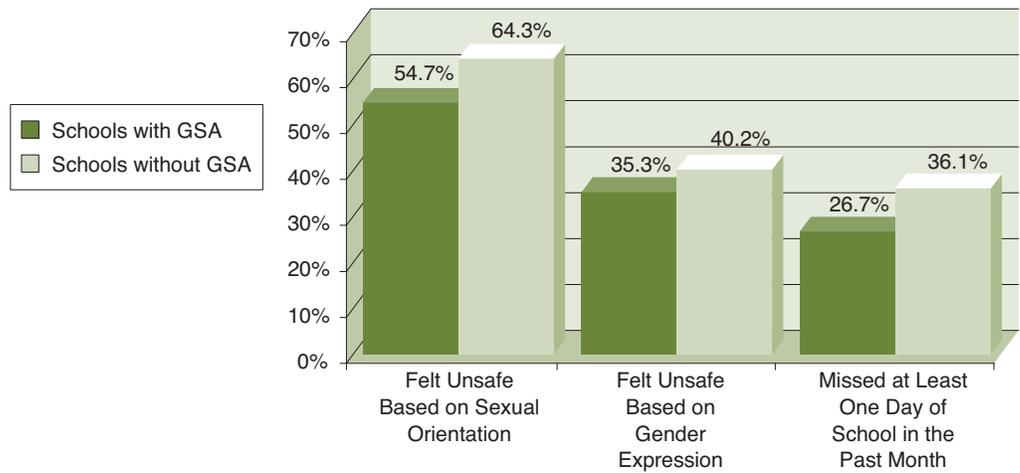
As all school-based GSAs must have an advisor, students in schools with a GSA should have at least one staff member supportive of LGBT students. Students with a GSA were more likely than students without a GSA to report that they had at least one supportive staff member —almost all students (97.4%) in schools with a GSA said that they could identify one or more supportive staff, compared to only three quarters (73.8%) of students in schools without a GSA (see Figure 69).<sup>100</sup> If a student is able to identify a supportive staff person, he or she may be more likely to report incidents of harassment and assault to school staff. Although most students in the survey did not report incidents of victimization to school staff, students with a GSA were more likely than those without a GSA to say that they reported incidents to school staff “most of the time” or “always” (16.7% vs. 11.5%), as shown in Figure 69.<sup>101</sup>

The presence of a GSA may demonstrate a school’s commitment to LGBT students and may allow these students to feel a stronger connection to the school community. We examined the relationship between students’ sense of school belonging and the availability of a GSA and found that students with a GSA reported higher levels of school belonging than students in schools without a GSA.<sup>102</sup> A sense of belonging may help to create a more positive learning environment, and in fact, we found that having a GSA was related to increased access to education. Students with a GSA reported missing fewer days of school because of safety concerns.<sup>103</sup> As illustrated in Figure 67, a little more than a quarter (26.7%) of students in schools with a GSA reported missing at least one day of school in the past month due to safety concerns, compared to more than a third (36.1%) of students in schools without a GSA.

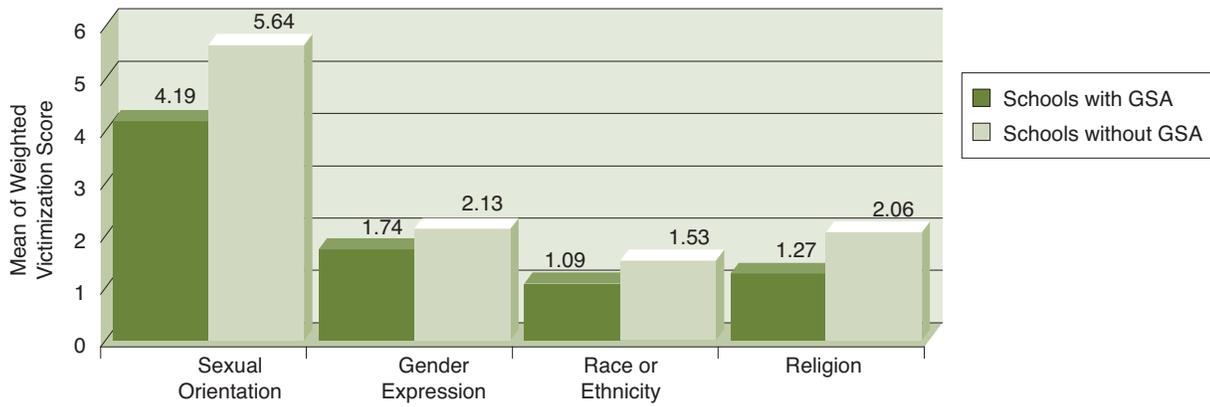
**Figure 66. Presence of Gay-Straight Alliances and Frequency of Hearing Biased Remarks**



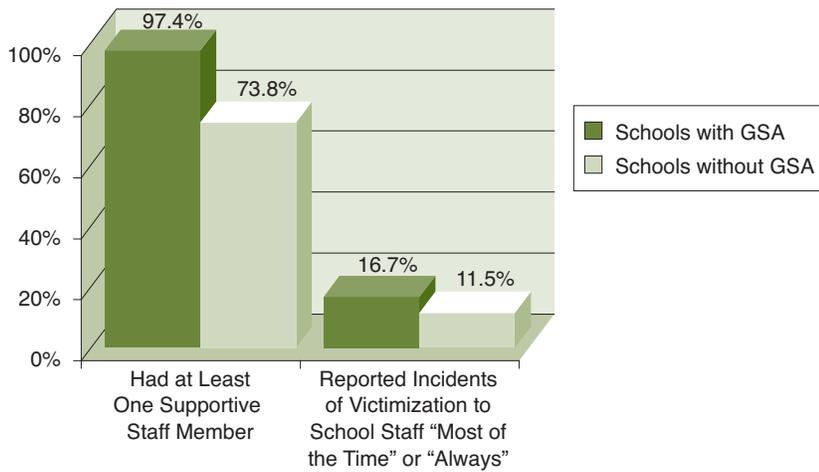
**Figure 67. Presence of Gay-Straight Alliances and Feelings of Safety and Missing School**



**Figure 68. Presence of Gay-Straight Alliances and Victimization**



**Figure 69. Presence of Gay-Straight Alliances and Supportive Staff and Reporting to Staff**



### **Key Findings**

- Students in schools with a curriculum that included positive representations of LGBT people, history and events heard fewer homophobic remarks than those in schools without an inclusive curriculum.
- Students with an inclusive curriculum were less likely to be harassed or assaulted because of their sexual orientation or gender expression than those without an inclusive curriculum.
- Students with an inclusive curriculum were less likely to feel unsafe because of their sexual orientation or gender expression and were less likely to miss school because of safety concerns than students without an inclusive curriculum.
- Students with an inclusive curriculum reported a greater sense of belonging to their school community than those without an inclusive curriculum.
- Students with an inclusive curriculum talked about LGBT issues with their teachers more often and rated these conversations with their teachers more positively than students without an inclusive curriculum.

Many experts in multicultural education believe that curricula that is inclusive of diverse groups promotes respect and equity for all, regardless of culture, race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation, in that it enforces the belief in the intrinsic worth of all individuals and the value of different cultures.<sup>104</sup> Including positive representations of LGBT people, history, and events in the curriculum may promote a general tone of acceptance of LGBT people and increased awareness of LGBT-related issues, resulting in a more positive school climate for LGBT students. Among the LGBT students in this study, attending a school that had positive representations of LGBT topics in the curriculum was related to a more positive school climate.

Students in schools with an inclusive curriculum were less likely to:

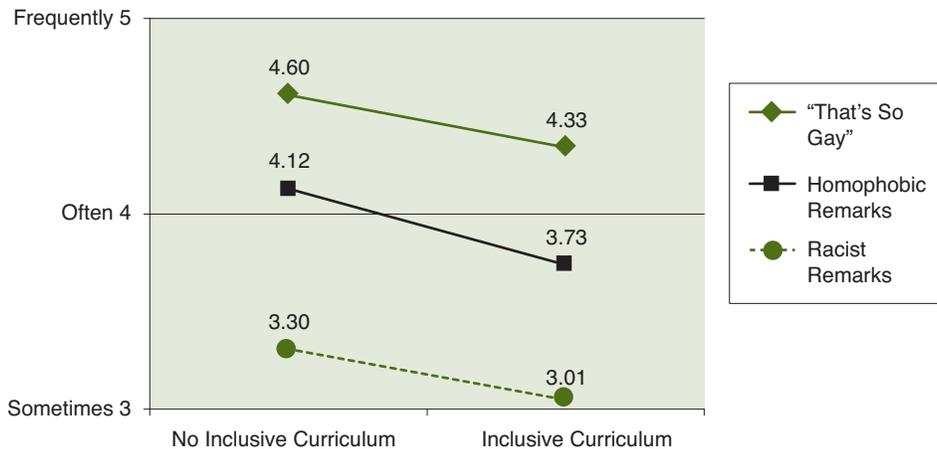
- Report hearing homophobic remarks, including negative expressions like “that’s so gay,” and racist remarks in school (see Figure 70);<sup>105</sup>
- Report that they felt unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation or gender expression.<sup>106</sup> For example, less than half (44.8%) of students in schools with inclusive curricula felt unsafe because of their sexual orientation compared to almost two-thirds (63.1%) of students in schools without inclusive curricula (see Figure 71), and
- Report experiencing harassment or assault based on their sexual orientation or gender expression (see Figure 72).<sup>107</sup>

By showing positive representations of LGBT people, history, and events, inclusive curricula may help LGBT students to feel more a part of their school community. We examined the relationship between inclusive curricula and school belonging and found that students in schools with an inclusive curriculum had higher levels of school belonging than other students.<sup>108</sup>

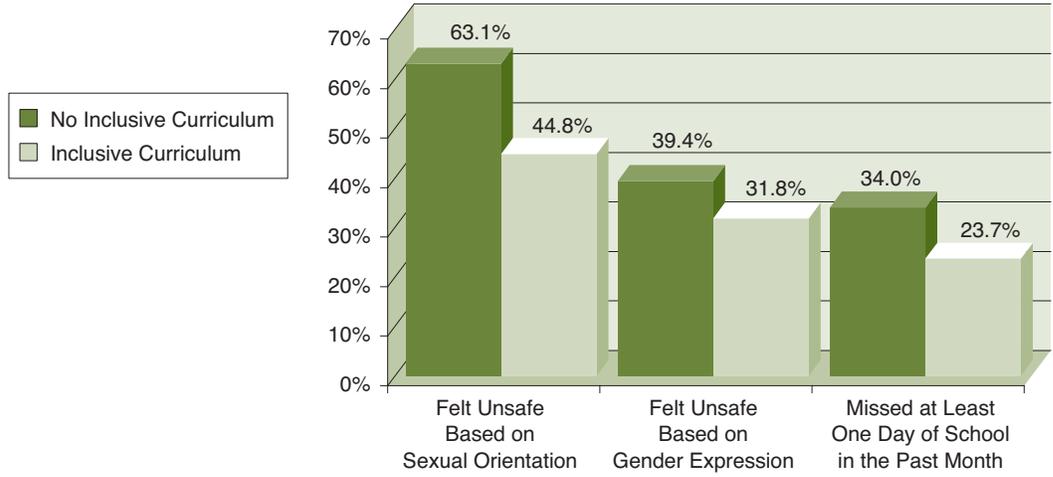
Given that inclusive curricula was related to greater feelings of safety and school belonging, it is not surprising that students in schools with an inclusive curriculum were less likely to report missing school because of safety concerns.<sup>109</sup> Whereas over a third (34.0%) of students without an inclusive curriculum reported missing at least one day of school in the past month because of safety concerns, a quarter (23.8%) of students with an inclusive curriculum report having missed a day of school for these reasons (see Figure 71).

When educators include LGBT-related content in their curriculum, they may also be sending a message that they are open to discussing LGBT-related issues. We examined the relationship between having an inclusive curriculum and student’s comfort level talking with teachers about LGBT issues, the number of times students actually talked with teachers about these issues, and the quality of their interactions when talking about these issues with teachers. We found that students in schools with an inclusive curriculum were more comfortable talking with teachers about LGBT issues, had talked with their teachers about these issues more often, and rated their interactions talking with teachers about these issues more positively than students without an inclusive curriculum.<sup>110,111,112</sup> For example, as shown in Figure 73, 80.9% of students in schools with inclusive curricula reported having talked at least once with a teacher about LGBT issues, compared to 59.4% students in schools without inclusive curricula.

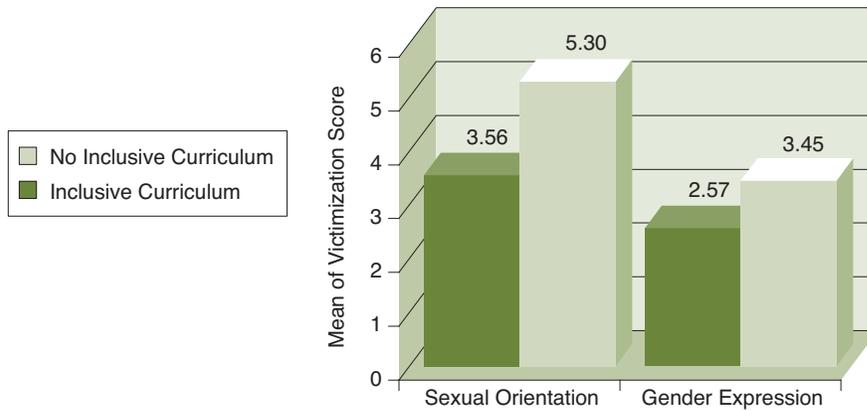
**Figure 70. Existence of Inclusive Curriculum and Frequency of Biased Remarks**



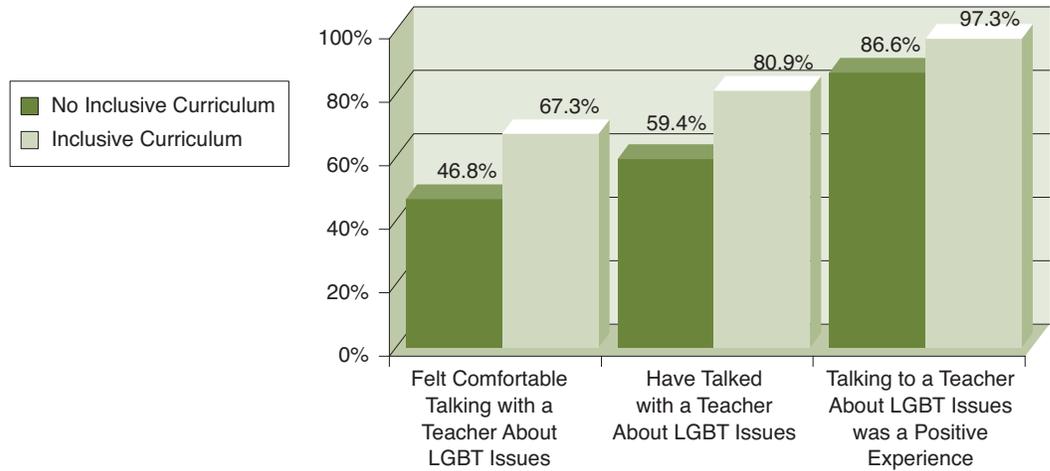
**Figure 71. Existence of Inclusive Curriculum and Feelings of Safety and Missing School**



**Figure 72. Presence of Inclusive Curriculum and Victimization**



**Figure 73. Presence of Inclusive Curriculum and Talking with Teachers about LGBT Issues**



### **Key Findings**

- Students with supportive educators were less likely to feel unsafe because of their sexual orientation or gender expression and were less likely to miss school because of safety concerns than students without supportive educators.
- Students with supportive educators had higher grade point averages and educational aspirations than students without supportive educators.
- Students with supportive educators reported a greater sense of belonging to their school community than those without supportive educators.
- Students who reported that educators effectively intervened in incidents of harassment or assault experienced less harassment based on sexual orientation or gender expression and decreased absenteeism related to safety concerns.

In general, having supportive teachers and school staff can have a positive effect on the educational experiences of any student. Given that LGBT students often feel unsafe in school, having access to school staff who provide support to LGBT students may be critical for creating safer learning environments. In our 2007 report, we examined the relationships between the presence of supportive school staff and various indicators of school climate and found that the presence of school staff supportive of LGBT students is one critical piece toward improving school climate.

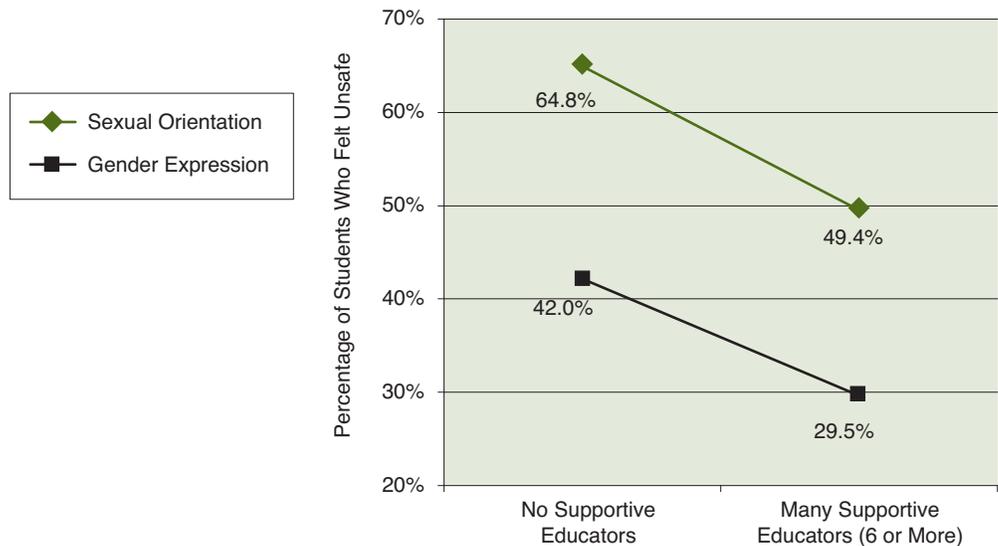
The more supportive school staff that students were able to identify, the less likely they were to report feeling unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation or how they expressed their gender.<sup>113</sup> For example, as shown in Figure 74, about half (49.4%) of students who had many (six or more) supportive staff at their school said that they felt unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation, compared to nearly two-thirds (64.8%) of those with no supportive staff. In addition, less than a third (29.5%) of students who could identify many supportive staff at their school reported feeling unsafe because of their gender expression, compared to 42% of students with no supportive staff (see also Figure 74).

Having a greater number of supportive school personnel was also related to missing fewer days of school due to safety concerns.<sup>114</sup> For example, nearly half of LGBT students with no supportive staff (39.8%) reported missing school in the past month compared to a fifth (20.4%) of students with many supportive staff (see Figure 75).

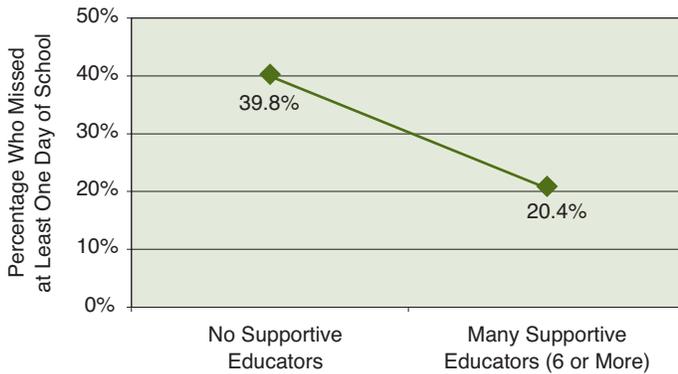
Perhaps not surprising given that the presence of supportive educators was related to less absenteeism related to safety, having a greater number of supportive educators was also related to better educational indicators:

- Students with greater numbers of supportive staff had a greater sense of belonging or being a part of their school community than other students (see Figure 76).<sup>115</sup>
- Students with greater numbers of supportive staff reported receiving higher grades than other students — the grade point average of students who had many supportive teachers or other staff was about half a grade higher than those who did not have this kind of support (2.9 versus 2.5).<sup>116</sup>
- A greater number of educators supportive of LGBT students was also associated with higher educational aspirations — 15.1% of students with many supportive educators reported not planning on attending college versus 26.5% with no supportive educators.<sup>117</sup>

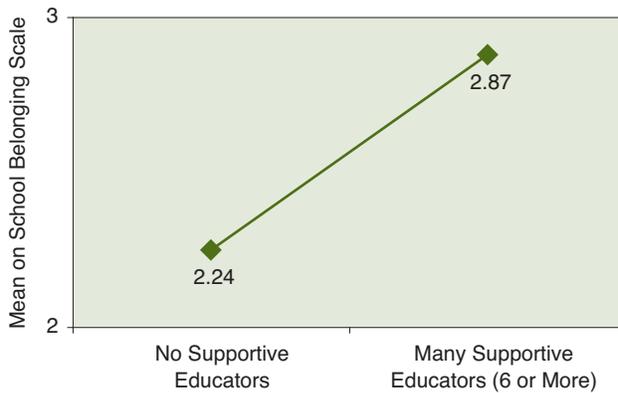
**Figure 74. Feelings of Safety and Number of Supportive Educators**



**Figure 75. Missing School for Safety Reasons and Number of Supportive Educators**



**Figure 76. School Belonging and Supportive Educators**

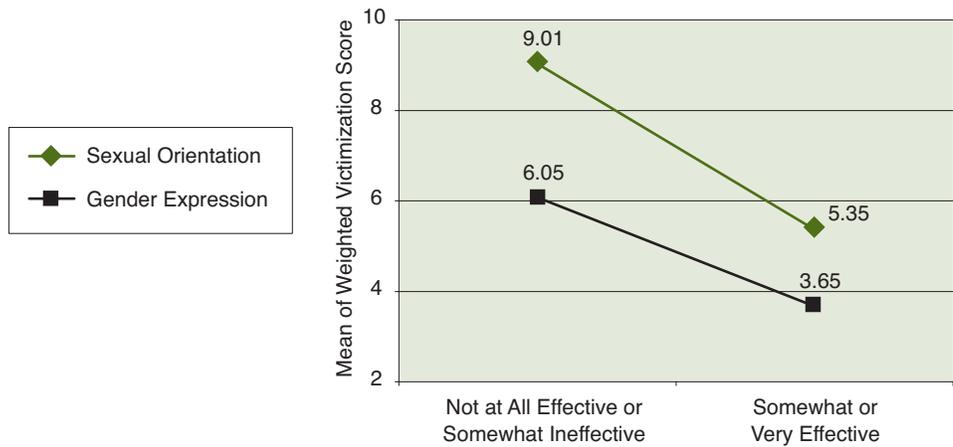


As previously discussed in the *Reporting of School-Based Harassment and Assault* section, when asked about what school personnel did after learning of incidents of harassment or assault, students most commonly said that staff did nothing to address the situation. The overarching goal of effective staff intervention is to protect students and prevent future victimization. Therefore, we examined whether or not students' reports on the effectiveness of staff intervention was at all related to the incidence of harassment or assault in school. As shown in Figure 77, students who said that school staff effectively addressed the situation when learning about an incident of harassment or assault also reported experiencing lower levels of victimization based on sexual orientation or gender expression.<sup>118</sup>

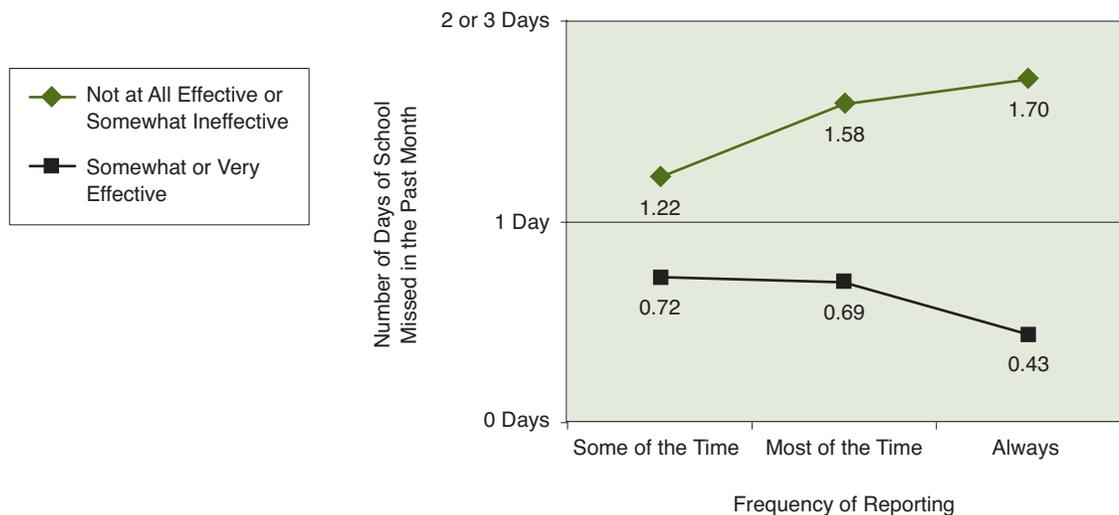
In students' descriptions of why they did not report harassment to school authorities, it became clear that most students did not believe that any benefit would come from reporting or that reporting would worsen the situation. This sense of hopelessness could make a difficult experience even worse and these students may become even more disengaged from their education. We examined whether the frequency of reporting harassment or assault and the perceived

effectiveness of the staff's response were related to missing school because of feeling unsafe. As shown in Figure 78, we found that when students believed that school staff effectively intervened in harassment, there was a decrease in missing entire days of school the more they reported victimization to the staff. However, among students who did not believe that staff interventions were effective, there was an increase in missing school the more they reported harassment. Students who continually report harassment to school authorities and find again and again that nothing is done to improve the situation may feel they have no other choice but to stop going to school. These findings demonstrate how clear and appropriate actions need to be taken by school personnel in response to LGBT student harassment and assault.

**Figure 77. Experiences of Victimization by Effectiveness of Reporting to School Staff**



**Figure 78. Frequency and Effectiveness of Reporting and Missing Days of School for Safety Reasons**



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## ***School Policies for Reporting Harassment and Assault***

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### **Key Findings**

- Students in schools with comprehensive school anti-harassment policies reported hearing fewer homophobic remarks and experiencing lower levels of harassment than students in schools with no policies or schools with generic anti-harassment policies.
- Students in schools with comprehensive school policies were more likely to report that school staff intervened when hearing biased language in school than students in schools with no policies or schools with generic anti-harassment policies.
- Students in schools with comprehensive school policies were more likely to report incidents of harassment and assault to school staff than students in schools with no policies or schools with generic anti-harassment policies.
- Students in schools with comprehensive school policies were more likely to report that school staff effectively intervened in incidents of harassment or assault than students in schools with no policies or schools with generic anti-harassment policies.

GLSEN believes that all schools should have comprehensive school anti-harassment policies that protect all students from harassment and assault, and that the most effective policies are those that include enumerated categories and explicitly state protection based on personal characteristics including sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. The presence of comprehensive school policies may send a message to the school community that harassment and assault will not be tolerated. As such, comprehensive school policies may provide students with a greater degree of protection against various types of victimization and other negative experiences in school than generic anti-harassment policies, i.e., policies that do not explicitly state protection based on personal characteristics, such as sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. Thus, we examined whether having a comprehensive school policy was related to students' reports of hearing biased language, their sense of safety and experiences of victimization.

Although homophobic remarks were commonly heard in students' schools overall, students who attended schools that had comprehensive anti-harassment policies reported a lower incidence than other students.<sup>119</sup> As shown in Figure 79, about two-thirds (68.8%) of students in schools with comprehensive policies reported hearing derogatory homophobic remarks often or frequently, compared to three-quarters of students in schools with generic policies (74.3%) or no policy whatsoever (75.0%). Students in comprehensive policy schools were also less likely to report hearing the word "gay" used in a negative way in school, such as hearing

“that’s so gay” (see also Figure 79). Furthermore, there were no significant differences in reports of hearing homophobic remarks between students at generic policy schools and no policy schools.

As shown in Figure 80, LGBT students in schools with a comprehensive policy also experienced significantly lower levels of victimization related to their sexual orientation, compared to students in schools with no policy. Students in schools with a comprehensive policy also experienced marginally lower levels of victimization than those in schools with a generic anti-harassment policy.<sup>120</sup>

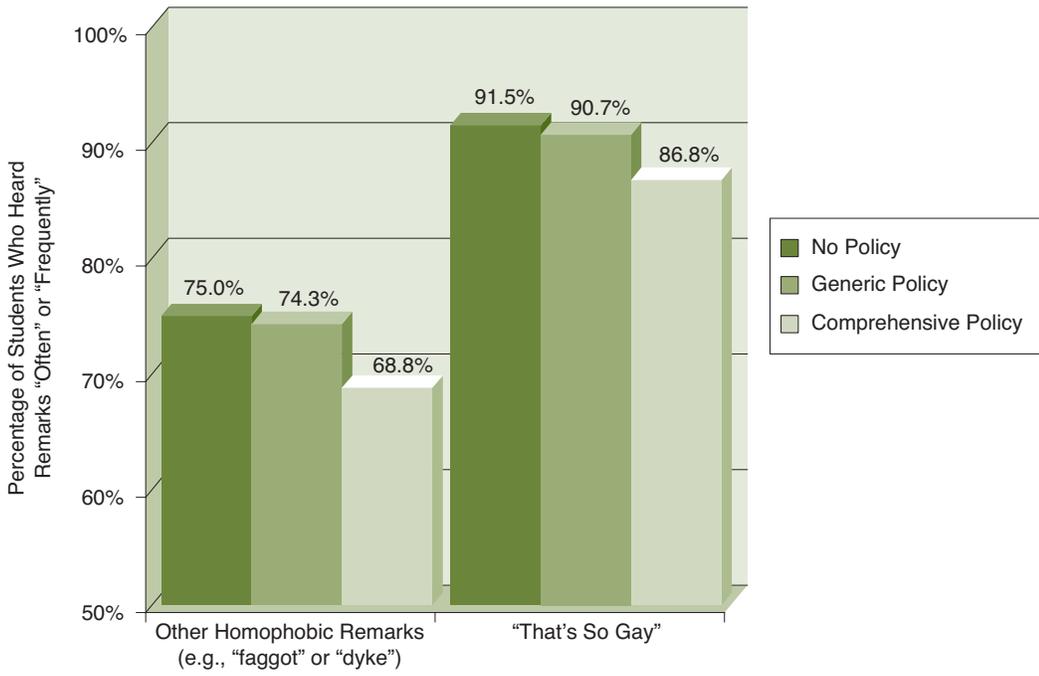
In addition to sending a message regarding the seriousness of creating a safe school environment, comprehensive policies may also provide school staff with the guidance needed for them to appropriately intervene and address victimizing events. Thus, we examined whether there were differences by school policy in the level of school staff intervention in anti-LGBT behaviors. Specifically, we examined school staff intervention in biased language, students’ frequency of reporting victimization to school staff and the effectiveness of staff’s response to such reports.

Comprehensive school anti-harassment policies were related to more frequent intervention by school personnel when hearing biased language in school. As shown in Figure 81, significantly more students in schools with comprehensive school policies reported that school staff intervened always or most of the time when homophobic remarks were made compared to students from schools with no policy or a generic policy.<sup>121</sup> This finding was also true for staff intervention in negative remarks about gender expression.

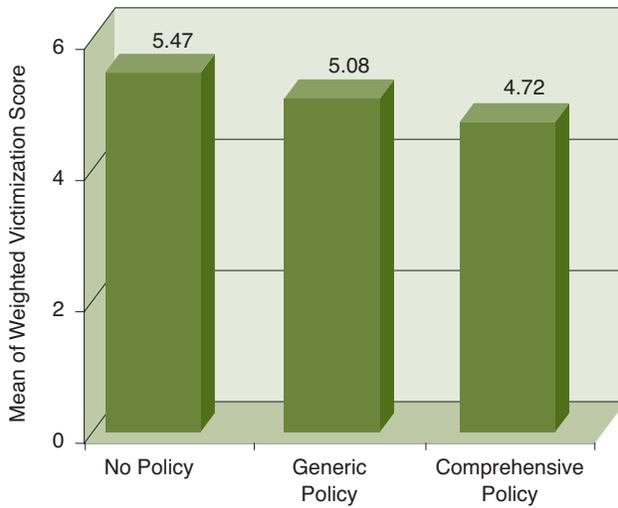
Although students did not often tell school authorities when they had been harassed or assaulted in school, having a comprehensive school policy increased the likelihood that a student would tell school authorities. Among students who had been harassed or assaulted in school in the past year, 18.7% of those in schools with a comprehensive policy reported incidents to school personnel compared to 13.7% of students in generic policy schools and 11.0% in schools with no policy (see Figure 82).

Students in schools with comprehensive policies reported that school staff were more effective in addressing harassment or assault. As shown in Figure 82, nearly half (45.7%) of students in comprehensive policy schools said that staff effectively intervened on their behalf compared to a third (33.2%) of students in generic policy schools and about a quarter (26.4%) of those in schools with no policy.

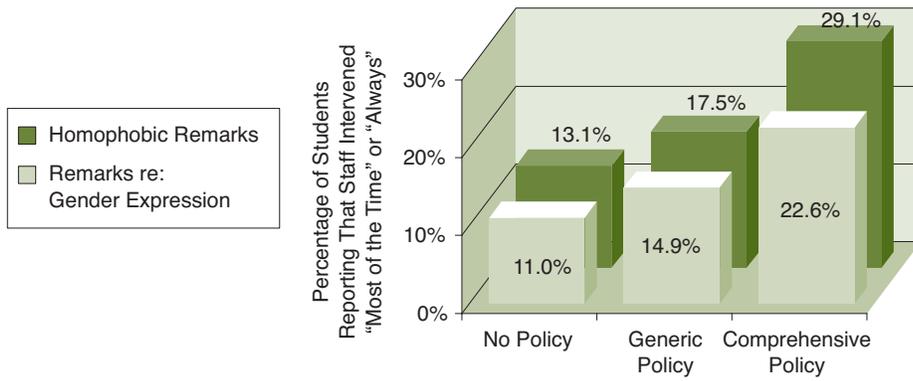
**Figure 79. Homophobic Remarks and Type of Safe School Policy**



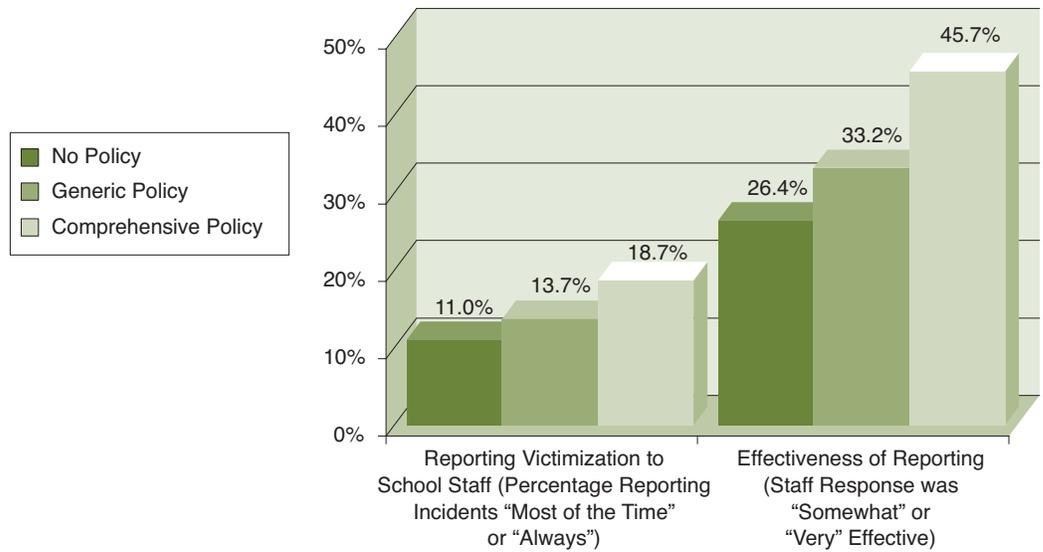
**Figure 80. Victimization Based on Sexual Orientation by Type of Safe School Policy**



**Figure 81. Staff Intervention with Biased Remarks and Type of Safe School Policy**



**Figure 82. Reporting of Incidents and Effectiveness of Reporting by Type of Safe School Policy**



### Key Findings

- Students in states with comprehensive safe school laws reported hearing homophobic remarks less frequently than students in states with no law or in states with a generic safe school law. Students with a comprehensive law also reported higher frequency of staff intervention with these remarks.
- Students in states with comprehensive safe school laws experienced lower levels of harassment and assault based on their sexual orientation or gender expression than students in states with no law or in states with a generic safe school law.

Along with school-level anti-harassment policies, state-level laws that specifically address harassment and assault in schools may add further protections regarding student safety. Currently, only 11 states plus the District of Columbia prohibit discrimination or harassment on the basis of sexual orientation in schools and seven of these states also include protections on the basis of gender identity.<sup>122</sup> Twenty-four states currently have statewide “safe school” laws that do not include any specific protections based on a student’s personal characteristics, referred to as generic safe school laws.<sup>123</sup> For students who are harassed or assaulted because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity/expression, protections from these laws may only result when sexual orientation and/or gender identity/expression are explicitly included among other enumerated categories of protection, such as race, gender, or religion. Thus, many safe school advocates believe that generic safe school laws that do not explicitly include protections based on individual characteristics are insufficient in protecting students from harassment and discrimination in schools because they are vague and do not provide teachers and administrators with clear legal guidance. Proponents of the generic safe school laws often argue that enumerated categories do not necessarily provide any extra protection and are not necessary for protective safe school legislation. As reported earlier in this section, students from schools with a comprehensive school policy that included sexual orientation and/or gender identity/expression reported hearing fewer homophobic remarks in school, higher rates of staff intervention regarding such remarks, and less harassment based on sexual orientation. Given these differences between school-level policies, it is important to examine any differential effects of generic versus comprehensive safe school legislation. Therefore, we examined whether there were differences in students’ reports of being harassed or assaulted because of their sexual orientation and gender expression based on the presence and type of statewide safe school legislation. Furthermore, we believed it to be important to examine

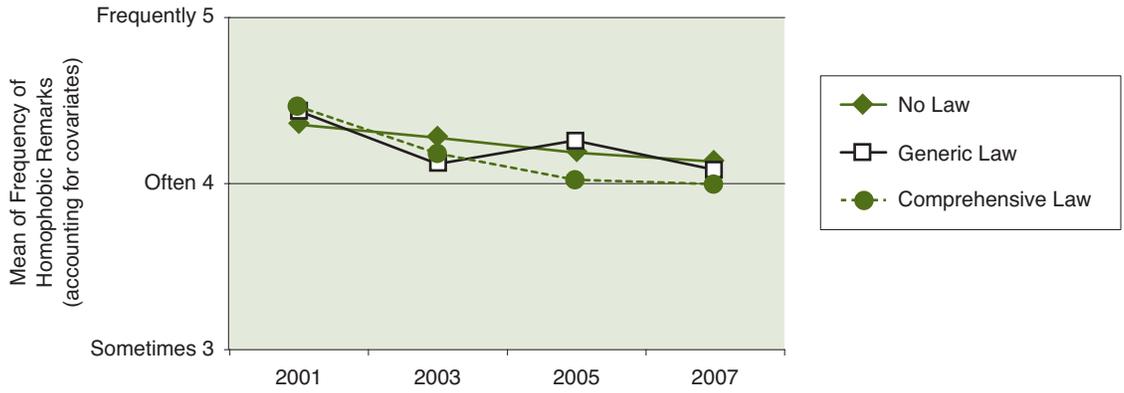
any changes across these state groups over time using data from the 2001, 2003, 2005 and 2007 National School Climate Surveys.<sup>124,125</sup>

Figure 83 shows the frequency of homophobic remarks over time by state legislation group (states with no safe school law, states with a generic safe school law and states with a comprehensive safe schools law). For students who live in states with comprehensive safe school laws, there was a decrease in reports of homophobic remarks over time and, in 2007, these students reported a significantly lower incidence of hearing these remarks than all other students.<sup>126</sup> Students from states with comprehensive laws also reported a higher frequency of school staff intervention regarding homophobic remarks across all survey years, with no appreciable differences between students from states with no safe school laws and those from states with generic safe school laws (see Figure 84).<sup>127</sup>

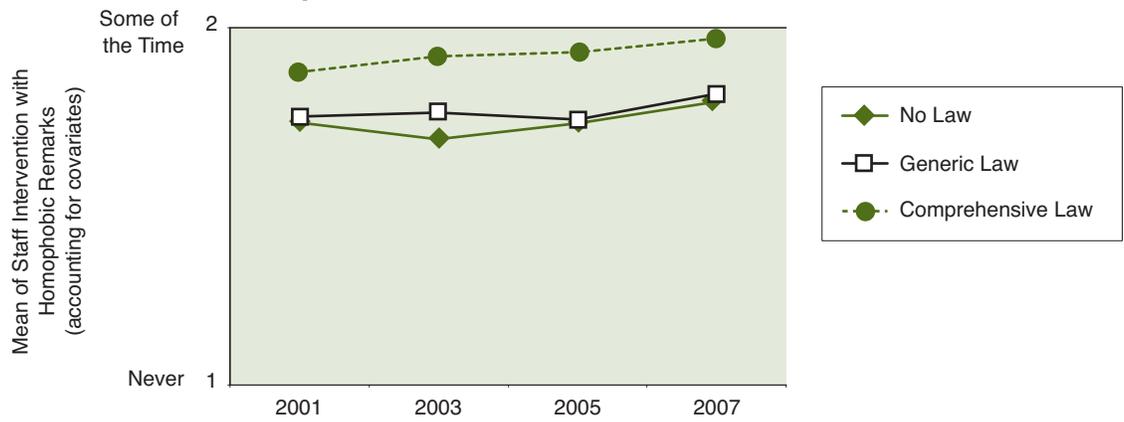
Figures 85a and 85b show the severity of harassment and assault over time and by state legislation group for both victimization related to sexual orientation and gender expression. For students in states with comprehensive state safe school legislation, there was a trend showing a general decrease since 2001 in victimization based on sexual orientation and gender expression.<sup>128,129</sup> In contrast, there was a general increase over time in these levels of victimization for all other students. In 2007, students from comprehensive law states were significantly lower in frequency of victimization than all other students, and there were virtually no differences between students from states with no safe school law and those from the generic law states group.

Although it is logical to think that safe school laws with specific, enumerated categories offer more complete protection, more states have passed generic laws in recent years than have passed comprehensive ones. Furthermore, there continues to be legislative battles in states across the country about enumerated categories that include sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. Results from GLSEN's biennial surveys of LGBT students provide evidence that students in states with comprehensive legislation experience less victimization based on their sexual orientation and gender expression. Further, on these indicators of school climate, states with generic safe school laws appeared to offer no greater protection than states with no safe school legislation whatsoever.

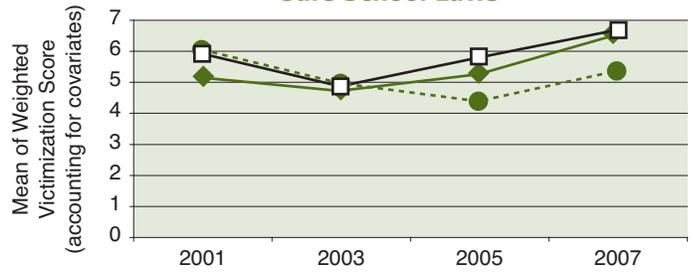
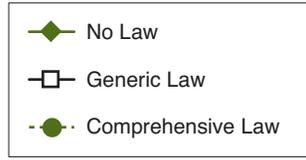
**Figure 83. Frequency of Homophobic Remarks by State-Level Safe School Laws**



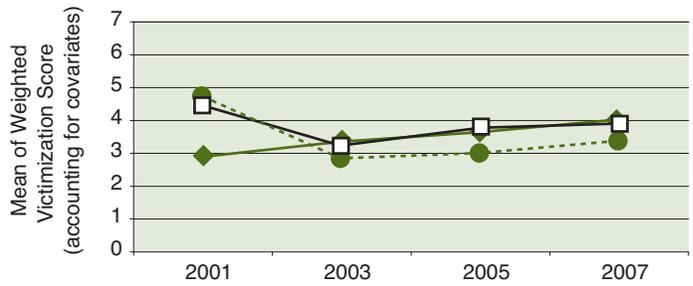
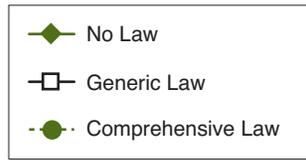
**Figure 84. School Staff Intervention Re: Homophobic Remarks by State-Level Safe School Laws**



**Figure 85a. Victimization Based on Sexual Orientation by State-Level Safe School Laws**



**Figure 85b. Victimization Based on Gender Expression by State-Level Safe School Laws**



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## ***Education Laws and Policies that Stigmatize LGBT People***

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### **Key Findings**

- Students in states with laws that prohibit positive portrayals of homosexuality in schools reported higher levels of harassment and assault based on sexual orientation and gender expression than students in states without these laws.
- Students in states with laws that prohibit positive portrayals of homosexuality in schools were less likely to have LGBT-supportive resources in their schools.
- Students in schools with an abstinence-only curriculum reported higher levels of harassment and assault based on sexual orientation and gender expression than those in schools without an abstinence-only curriculum
- Students in schools with an abstinence-only curriculum were more likely to feel unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation and gender expression and were more likely to miss school because of safety concerns.
- Students in schools with an abstinence-only curriculum had fewer educators supportive of LGBT students than students in schools without abstinence-only curriculum and felt less comfortable talking with school staff about LGBT issues.

In our discussions of the 2007 survey results thus far, we have seen how a hostile school climate can negatively affect student achievement and educational aspirations. We have also seen how positive school resources, such as comprehensive protective policies and supportive school personnel, can contribute to a better learning environment for LGBT students. However, there exist certain state and local policies and laws that may act to stigmatize LGBT people and that may, in turn, negatively affect LGBT students and their education.

### **State Legislation about the Portrayal of Homosexuality in Schools.**

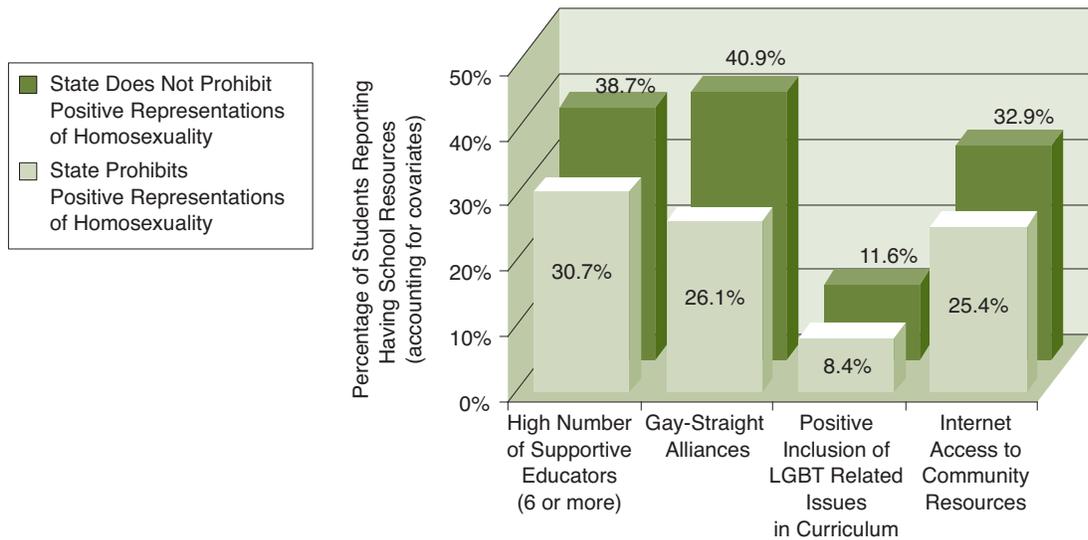
Given that most states do not have laws that specifically protect students on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender expression/identity, the vast majority of students in this country are potentially left vulnerable to in-school harassment based on their actual or perceived sexual orientation and/or gender identity/expression. In addition, several states have education laws that may further stigmatize LGBT students — several states have prohibitions on the positive portrayal of homosexuality in schools.<sup>130</sup> Thus, LGBT students in those states would be restricted from learning information about themselves and their communities. For example, students would not have access to young adult literature with LGBT characters and would be unlikely to learn about historical events in LGBT communities. We examined whether students from states with potentially stigmatizing laws would, in fact, report having fewer school supports for LGBT students.<sup>131</sup> We specifically examined differences in: 1) the number of teachers and

other school staff supportive of LGBT students; 2) the presence of a Gay-Straight Alliance; 3) inclusive curricula about LGBT people, history, and events, and 4) Internet access in school to LGBT community resources. As shown in Figure 86, students from states that prohibit positive portrayals of homosexuality were less likely to have each of these supports in their schools.<sup>132</sup> For example, nearly 40% of students from states without these restrictions reported having a high number of supportive school staff compared to about 30% of students with such state-level restrictions.

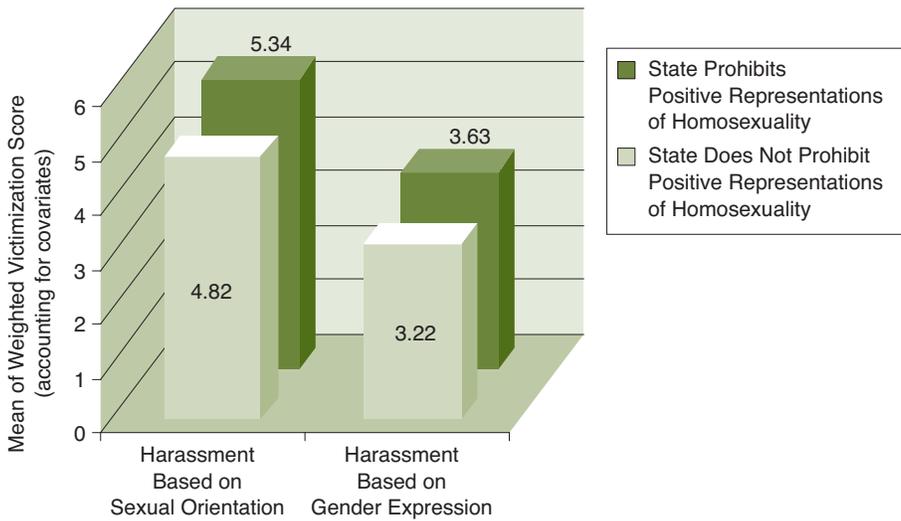
Although we would imagine these laws to have a more direct impact on LGBT-related supports, we also understand that they may contribute to a general hostile school climate for LGBT students. Evidence from the 2007 National School Climate Survey showed that this type of negative state legislation is indeed related to an increased hostile school climate for LGBT students. As shown in Figure 87, students from states that prohibit positive representations of LGBT people reported a higher level of victimization in their schools based on both sexual orientation and gender expression.<sup>133</sup>

As discussed earlier in this section, having affirmative resources in school, such as a Gay-Straight Alliance, an inclusive curriculum, or supportive school personnel, was related to better educational outcomes for LGBT students, such as an increased sense of belonging in school and fewer missed days of school. Thus, decreases in these resources as a function of state legislation that stigmatizes LGBT people would then, in turn, be related to poorer educational outcomes for these students.

**Figure 86. School Resources for LGBT Students by State Law Prohibiting Positive Representations of Homosexuality in School**



**Figure 87. Severity of Victimization by State Law Prohibiting Positive Representations of Homosexuality in School**



**Abstinence-Only Sexuality Education.** Many abstinence-only curricula provide misleading and medically inaccurate information about health matters such as the prevention of pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections.<sup>134</sup> The most commonly used abstinence-only curricula ignore the needs of LGBT youth who may then not receive accurate information about HIV prevention and other sexual health matters.<sup>135</sup> Given that the most commonly used of these curricula emphasize marriage (federally funded programs are, in fact, required to emphasize marriage as the only appropriate time for sexually intimate relationships), LGBT students also may be taught that they cannot have positive, intimate relationships unless they are married (which, at this time, can only happen for LGB adults in Massachusetts and California).<sup>136</sup> Moreover, such biased curricula may foster greater intolerance and further create a negative school climate for LGBT students. Thus, we were interested in the possible impact of abstinence-only curricula education on school climate for LGBT students and asked students if their school used such curricula when providing sexuality or sex education.<sup>137</sup>

As illustrated in Figure 88, more than a third of the students in our study reported that their school used an abstinence-only curriculum for providing sex education. We examined whether LGBT students in abstinence-only schools reported more negative school environments and indeed found that the presence of such curricula was related to poorer school experiences:

- A significantly greater portion of students in schools that used an abstinence-only curriculum reported feeling unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation and gender expression — 64.8% of these students felt unsafe because of their sexual orientation compared to 57.3% of all other students.<sup>138</sup> With regard to safety and gender expression, 41.4% of students in

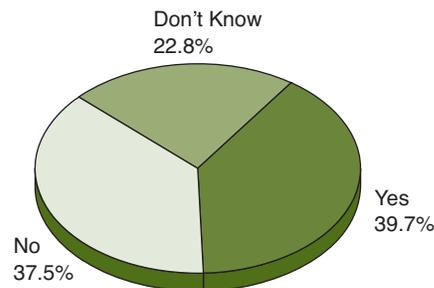
schools using abstinence-only curricula felt unsafe for this reason compared to 35.8% of other students.<sup>139</sup>

- Students in schools using an abstinence-only curriculum were also more likely than other students to report feeling unsafe because of their actual or perceived religion (21.7% versus 15.2%).<sup>140</sup>
- Students in schools using an abstinence-only curriculum were somewhat more likely to miss school because they felt unsafe — 34.7% of these students had missed at least one day of school in the past month due to safety concerns compared to 30.1% of other students.<sup>141</sup>

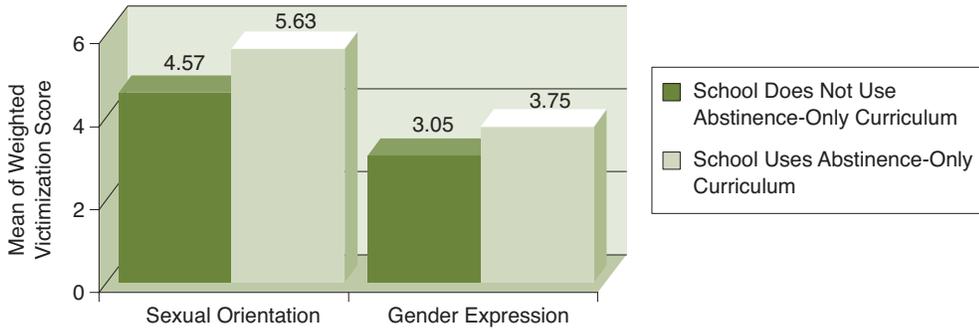
LGBT students in schools that used abstinence-only sex education curricula also reported experiencing higher levels of victimization related to their sexual orientation and gender expression than other students (see Figure 89).<sup>142</sup>

Schools that use abstinence-only curricula may also foster a climate where students are less inclined to or even fearful of discussing LGBT issues in class or with school staff. Thus, we examined whether there were differences between students from schools that used an abstinence-only curriculum and other students in their reports of how many supportive staff members they had in school as well as in their comfort in talking with various types of school staff about LGBT issues. As shown in Figure 90a, students from abstinence-only schools reported having fewer teachers or other school staff who were supportive of LGBT students.<sup>143</sup> For example, 30.9% of these students could identify many supportive school staff compared to 43.9% of students in schools without such curricula. In addition, students from abstinence-only schools reported having fewer out LGBT faculty — 31.8% reported having any out staff at their school compared to 41.6% of students in schools without abstinence-only curricula.<sup>144</sup> Furthermore, as illustrated in Figure 90b, students from abstinence-only schools also reported feeling less comfortable talking one-on-one with each type of school staff.

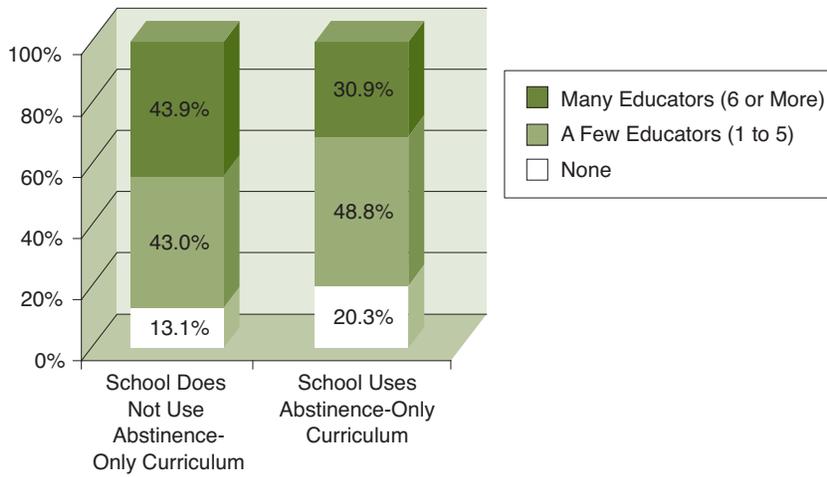
**Figure 88. Presence of Abstinence-Only Sex Education Curricula**



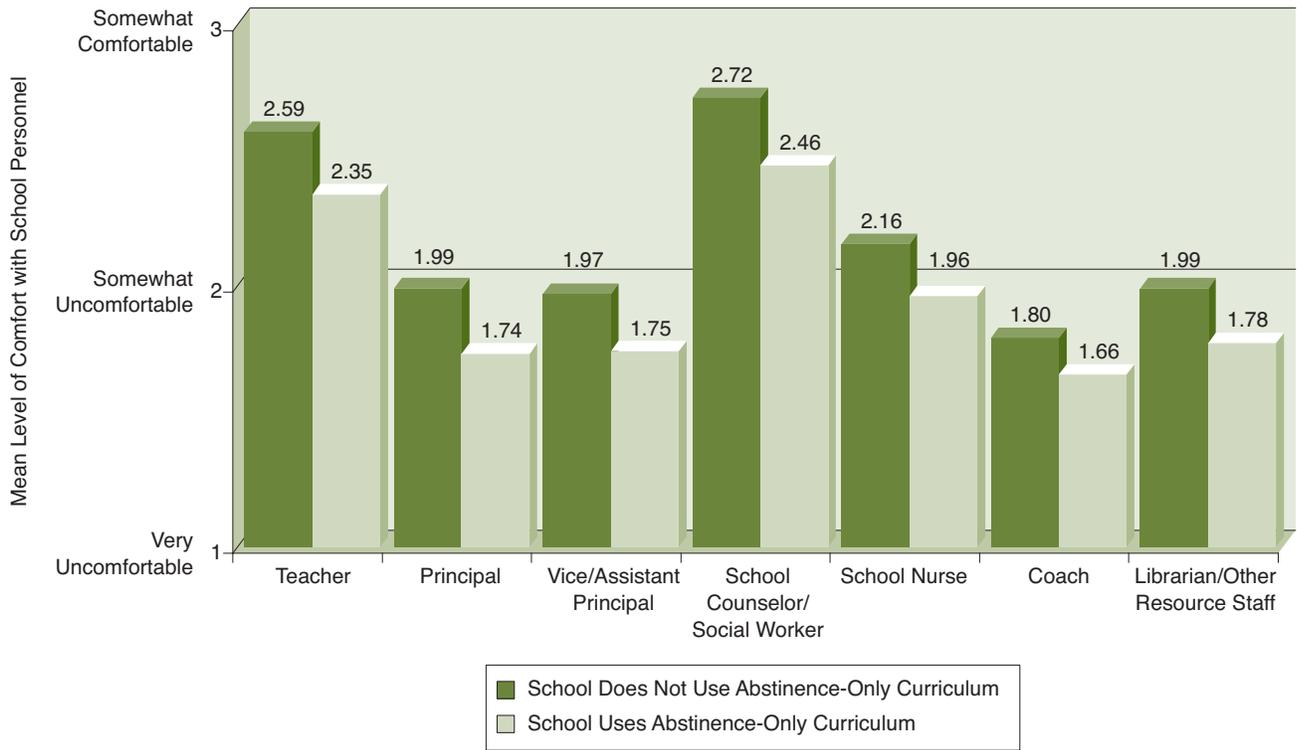
**Figure 89. Abstinence-Only Education and Experiences of Victimization Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Expression**



**Figure 90a. Abstinence-Only Education and Number of Supportive Educators**



**Figure 90b. Abstinence-Only Education and Comfort Talking with School Personnel About LGBT Issues**



## Notes

- 97 To compare differences in the frequency of hearing biased language between students in schools with a GSA and students in schools without a GSA, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with all types of biased remarks as the dependent variables. The results of this analysis were significant, Pillai's Trace=.02  $F(6, 6143)=17.29$ ,  $p<.001$ . Resulting univariate analyses were considered significant at a  $p<.01$  and given the large size of the sample, effect sizes were also considered.
- 98 To compare differences in feeling unsafe based on presence of a GSA, Chi-square tests were performed. Differences in feeling unsafe based on sexual orientation and gender expression were significant: sexual orientation —  $\chi^2=55.87$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.001$ ;  $\Phi =-.095$ ; gender expression-  $\chi^2=4.43$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.001$ ;  $\Phi =-.05$ .
- 99 To compare differences between students in schools with a GSA and students in schools without a GSA, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with the weighted victimization scores as the dependent variables. The results of this analysis were significant, Pillai's Trace=.02  $F(6, 5684)=19.01$ ,  $p<.001$ . Resulting univariate analyses were considered significant at a  $p<.01$  and given the large size of the sample, effect sizes were also considered. Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.
- 100 To compare differences in the number of supportive staff members based on the presence of a GSA, a Chi-square test was performed. Differences were significant,  $\chi^2=543.78$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.001$ ;  $\Phi =.30$ .
- 101 To compare differences in the frequency of reporting incidents of harassment and assault to school staff based on the presence of GSA, a t-test was performed. Differences were significant,  $t(4686)=4.67$ ,  $p<.001$ . Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.
- 102 To compare differences in school belonging based on the presence of a GSA, an independent sample t-test was performed. Means were significantly different,  $t(6155)=-16.33$ ,  $p<.001$ .
- 103 To compare differences in missing school because of feeling unsafe or uncomfortable based on the presence of a GSA, a Chi-square test was performed. Differences were significant,  $\chi^2=32.69$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.001$ ; Cramer's  $V=.07$ .
- 104 National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME). (2003). Definition of multicultural education. Resolutions and position papers. [www.nameorg.org](http://www.nameorg.org).
- 105 To compare differences between students in schools with an inclusive curriculum and students in schools without, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with all types of biased remarks as the dependent variables. The results of this analysis were significant, Pillai's Trace=.02  $F(6, 6155)=20.18$   $p<.001$ . Resulting univariate analyses were considered significant at a  $p<.01$  and given the large size of the sample, effect sizes were also considered. Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.
- 106 To compare differences in feeling unsafe based on presence of inclusive curriculum, Chi-square tests were performed. Differences in feeling unsafe based on sexual orientation and gender expression were significant: sexual orientation —  $\chi^2=107.71$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.001$ ;  $\Phi =.132$ ; gender expression-  $\chi^2=22.66$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.001$ ;  $\Phi =-.06$ .
- 107 To compare differences between students in schools with an inclusive curriculum and students in schools without an inclusive curriculum, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with the weighted victimization scores as the dependent variables. The results of this analysis were significant, Pillai's Trace=.01  $F(6, 5695)=9.52$ ,  $p<.001$ . Resulting univariate analyses were considered significant at a  $p<.01$  and given the large size of the sample, effect sizes were also considered. Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.
- 108 To compare differences in feelings of school belonging based on the presence of inclusive curricula, a t-test was performed. Differences were significant,  $t(6166)=-14.90$ ,  $p<.001$ .
- 109 To compare differences in missed school based on presence of inclusive curricula, a Chi-square test was performed. Differences were significant,  $\chi^2=44.56$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.001$ ; Cramer's  $V=.09$ .
- 110 To compare differences in comfort level talking with teacher about LGBT issues based on the presence of inclusive curricula, an independent samples t-test was performed. Differences were significant,  $t(6181)=-11.53$ ,  $p<.001$ . Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.
- 111 To compare differences in number of times talked with teacher about LGBT issues based on the presence of inclusive curricula, a t-test was performed. Differences were significant,  $t(6122)=-11.74$ ,  $p<.001$ . Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.
- 112 To compare differences in quality of interactions talking with teacher about LGBT issues based on the presence of inclusive curricula, a t-test was performed. Differences were significant,  $t(6064)=-13.61$ ,  $p<.001$ . Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.
- 113 To compare differences in feeling unsafe based on existence of supportive staff, Chi-square tests were performed — sexual orientation:  $\chi^2=202.14$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<.001$ , Cramer's  $V=.18$ ; gender expression:  $\chi^2=127.58$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<.001$ , Cramer's  $V=.15$ .
- 114 The relationship between missing school and number of supportive staff was examined through Pearson correlation:  $r=-.22$ ,  $p<.01$ . Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.
- 115 The figure represents a correlational relationship. The relationship between sense of school belonging and number of supportive staff was examined through Pearson correlation:  $r=.42$ ,  $p<.01$ .
- 116 The figure represents a correlational relationship. The relationship between GPA and number of supportive staff was examined through Pearson correlation:  $r=.14$ ,  $p<.01$ .
- 117 To compare differences in students' plans to attend college based on existence of supportive staff, a Chi-square test was performed:  $\chi^2=62.19$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<.001$ , Cramer's  $V=.10$ .
- 118 Differences were examined using independent samples t-tests: victimization re: sexual orientation —  $t(1437.16)=12.35$ ,  $p<.001$ ; verbal harassment re: gender expression —  $t(1485.01)=8.79$ ,  $p<.001$ .

- 119 To test difference across school policy groups, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with the homophobic remarks variables as dependent variables. Multivariate results were significant: Pillai's Trace=.01,  $F(4, 12382)=8.44$ ,  $p<.001$ . Univariate effects were considered at  $p<.01$ . Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.
- 120 To test difference across school policy groups, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with the weighted variables re: sexual orientation and gender expression as dependent variables. Multivariate results were significant: Pillai's Trace=.003,  $F(4, 12000)=5.16$ ,  $p<.001$ . Univariate effects were considered at  $p<.01$ . The difference between the comprehensive policy group and the generic policy group was marginally significant at  $p<.10$ .
- 121 To test difference across school policy groups, a series of one-way analysis of variance was conducted with the staff intervention variables as dependent variables. Intervention re: homophobic remarks:  $F(2, 5554)=82.91$ ,  $p<.001$ . Intervention re: remarks about gender expression:  $F(2, 4725)=49.61$ ,  $p<.001$ . Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.
- 122 States that include protection based on sexual orientation are: California, Connecticut, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, Vermont, Washington, and Wisconsin. States that also include protection on the basis of gender identity are California, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Minnesota, New Jersey, and Vermont. The District of Columbia also has protections based on sexual orientation and gender identity.
- 123 States that have generic legislation are: Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Louisiana, Missouri, Nevada, New Hampshire, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia and West Virginia.
- 124 Given that state laws may take time to be implemented effective and/or to become effective, our state law group categories were based on the presence of a safe school law that was in effect for more than a year prior to our data collection (Spring/Summer 2007). Thus, Iowa and Maryland were not included in the Comprehensive group but in the No Legislation group. Similarly, Alaska, Florida, Kansas, Ohio, Rhode Island, and Utah were not included in the Generic group but in the No Legislation group.
- 125 To examine differences by state law group over time, we used a hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) framework, using SPSS MIXED analyses. HLM is specifically geared toward handling nested data and can partition the variance between and within individual participants. In this case, students are nested in states that share certain characteristics including type of education law. Furthermore, key state-level educational and political characteristics were included as covariates to provide a clearer picture of the contribution of the state legal group variable above and beyond other state-level characteristics. These state-level variables included: teacher-student ratio, cost spent per student, percent of freshmen who graduate, and legislative climate. In addition, because of the differences in how long states have had an extant law, we also controlled for the number of years since the legislation passed. Lastly, given certain demographic differences in the 2007 sample based on the expansion of the Internet sampling method, we controlled for participation in a community group or program for LGBT youth ("youth group") and age. These two individual-level covariates were chosen based on preliminary analyses that examined what locational and school characteristics and personal demographics were most predictive of subsample membership (MySpace, other Internet, and community group). Subsequent statistical endnotes reflect the trimmed model with non-significant covariates excluded. Because the number of states is small relative to the number of students, we used the standard significance level of  $p<.05$  for these state-level analyses.
- 126 The main effect of time and the interaction time X state law group were significant: time —  $F(3, 9045)=31.57$ ,  $p<.001$ ; time X state law group —  $F(6, 8982)=3.00$ ,  $p<.01$ . Significant covariates included in the trimmed model were age, teacher-student ratio and cost per student.
- 127 The main effects for time and for state law group were significant: time —  $F(3, 8479)=3.34$ ,  $p<.05$ ; state law group —  $F(2, 53.60)=7.40$ ,  $p<.001$ . Community group and age were significant covariates.
- 128 Regarding victimization based on sexual orientation, we examined group differences on the weighted sexual orientation victimization variable. The main effect for time and the time X state law group interaction were significant: time —  $F(3, 8865)=12.33$ ,  $p<.01$ ; time X state law group —  $F(6, 8609)=2.55$ ,  $p<.05$ . Youth group, cost per student and age were significant covariates.
- 129 Regarding victimization based on gender expression, we examined group differences on the weighted gender expression victimization variable. The main effects for both time and state law group, as well as the time X state law group interaction were significant: time —  $F(3, 8905)=3.99$ ,  $p<.05$ ; state law group —  $F(2, 69)=3.99$ ,  $p<.05$ ; Time X state law group —  $F(6, 8739)=2.69$ ,  $p<.05$ . Youth group and age were significant covariates.
- 130 States that prohibit the positive portrayal of homosexuality in schools include: Alabama, Arizona, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas and Utah. However, as North Carolina's law was in effect for less than a year prior to our data collection (Spring/Summer 2007), North Carolina was not considered a state that prohibits the positive portrayal of homosexuality in schools for this analyses. For more information, also see GLSEN's report, *State of the States 2004: A Policy Analysis of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Safer School Issues*. Available from the GLSEN website: [www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org).
- 131 To examine differences by state group, we used a hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) framework, using SPSS MIXED analyses, including state-level educational and political characteristics as covariates. These state-level variables included: teacher-student ratio, cost spent per student, percent of freshmen who graduate, and legislative climate.
- 132 Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes and reflect the estimated marginal means of dichotomous variables. To examine differences in supportive teachers, the full variable was used. The other three resources — GSAs, inclusive curriculum and Internet access — were treated as interval variables in order to test the nested model. All mixed models were statistically significant for the main effect of state law: supportive staff,  $F(1, 27.52)=6.05$ ,  $p<.05$ ; GSAs,  $F(1, 42.20)=8.24$ ,  $p<.01$ ; inclusive curriculum —  $F(1, 37.66)=10.90$ ,  $p<.01$ ; Internet access —  $F(1, 35.26)=7.43$ ,  $p<.01$ .

- 133 Mean differences were examined using the weighted victimization variables for sexual orientation and gender expression. For both variables, the main effect for state group was significant: sexual orientation —  $F(1, 26.7)=5.12, p<.05$ ; gender expression —  $F(1, 25.0)=5.55, p<.05$ .
- 134 Ott, M. & Santelli, J. (2007). Abstinence and abstinence-only education. *Current Opinion in Obstetrics & Gynecology*, 19(5), 446–452.
- Santelli J., Ott, M., Lyon, M., Roger, J., Summer, D., & Schleifer, R. (2006) Abstinence and abstinence-only education: A review of US policies and programs. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 38(1), 72–81.
- U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Government Reform – Minority Staff Special Investigations Division. (December 2004). *The Content of Federally Funded Abstinence-Only Education Programs*, prepared for Rep. Henry A. Waxman. Available at: <http://www.democrats.reform.house.gov/Documents/20041201102153-50247.pdf>.
- 135 Heitel Yakush, J. (2007) *Legalized Discrimination: The Rise of the Marriage-Promotion Industry and How Federally Funded Programs Discriminate Against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth and Families*. Washington, D.C., Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS). Available at: [http://www.siecus.org/\\_data/global/images/Legalized-Discrimination.pdf](http://www.siecus.org/_data/global/images/Legalized-Discrimination.pdf).
- 136 Heitel Yakush, J. (2007). For full citation see previous endnote.
- Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS) (2004). *A Portrait of Sexuality Education and Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Programs in The States*. Available at: <http://www.siecus.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Page.viewPage&pageId=487&parentID=478>.
- 137 Survey participants were asked the following question: “‘Abstinence-only’ curricula may teach that you are expected to wait until marriage to engage in sexual activity, or that sexual activity outside of marriage is likely to have harmful effects on you. Does your school follow an ‘abstinence-only’ curriculum when teaching sexuality/sex education?” The examples were based on the federal government’s *8-Point Definition of Abstinence-Only Education as Defined by Section 510(b) of Title V of the Social Security Act (Public Law 104-193)*. Available at: [http://www.socialsecurity.gov/OP\\_Home/ssact/title05/0510.htm](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/OP_Home/ssact/title05/0510.htm).
- 138 To compare differences in feeling unsafe because of sexual orientation based on the presence of an abstinence-only curricula, a Chi-square test was performed:  $\chi^2=26.37, df=1, p<.001, \Phi=.08$ .
- 139 To compare differences in feeling unsafe because of gender expression based on the presence of an abstinence-only curricula, a Chi-square test was performed:  $\chi^2=14.94, df=1, p<.001, \Phi=.06$ .
- 140 To compare differences in feeling unsafe because of religion based on the presence of an abstinence-only curricula, a Chi-square test was performed:  $\chi^2=31.75, df=1, p<.001, \Phi=.08$ .
- 141 To examine group differences in missing school based on the presence of an abstinence-only curricula, an independent samples t-test was performed:  $t(4460)=3.96, p<.001$ .
- 142 To test differences between groups, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with all the weighted victimization variables as dependent variables. Multivariate results were significant: Pillai’s Trace=.01,  $F(6, 4105)=6.50, p<.001$ . Univariate effects were considered at  $p<.01$ .
- 143 To examine group differences in having supportive staff based on the presence of an abstinence-only curricula, an independent samples t-test was performed:  $t(4410)=-9.85, p<.001$ . Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.
- 144 To examine group differences in out LGBT school staff based on the presence of an abstinence-only curricula, an independent samples t-test was performed:  $t(4432)=-6.42, p<.001$ . Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.





# DISCUSSION & RECOMMENDATIONS



## Limitations

The methods used for our survey result in a fairly representative sample of LGBT youth. However, it is important to note that our sample is representative only of youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender and have some connection to the LGBT community (either through their local youth organization or through the Internet) or have a MySpace page. As discussed in the *Methods* section, in addition to the traditional methods of announcing the survey, we conducted targeted advertising on MySpace in order to broaden our reach and obtain a more representative sample than in past years when our advertising was limited to local youth organizations and other advocacy and community groups. Advertising on MySpace did allow LGBT students who did not necessarily have any connection to the LGBT community to participate in the survey and resulted in a higher level of participation from previously hard-to-reach populations than in past years. Yet, the MySpace subsample is still limited only to those LGBT students who use the Internet and have a MySpace profile. Although available data have shown that nearly all secondary school students report using the Internet, only half use social networking sites like MySpace.<sup>145</sup> LGBT students who do not use the Internet or do not have a MySpace profile may differ from LGBT students who do. For example, girls are more likely than boys to use social networking sites.<sup>146</sup> In the NSCS, female students were more likely to be in the Internet sample overall, but that likelihood was not greater for MySpace specifically. However, by increasing our sample size through the use of a social networking site, we might be oversampling female students. In fact, we had a slightly higher percentage of female students in 2007 compared to 2005 (57.7% vs. 52.2%).

Furthermore, the MySpace advertisements for the survey were sent only to 13 to 18 year-olds who identified on their MySpace profile that they were lesbian, gay or bisexual,<sup>147</sup> and thus, LGB youth who were not comfortable identifying their sexual orientation in this manner would not have received the advertisement about the survey through MySpace, nor would transgender youth who did not identify as LGB.

We also cannot make determinations from our data about the experiences of youth who might be engaging in same-sex sexual activity or be experiencing same-sex attractions but who do not identify themselves as lesbian, gay or bisexual. Such youth may have experiences that differ from those of youth who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual — they may be more isolated, they may not be aware of supports for LGBT youth, or, even if aware, may not be comfortable using such supports. Similarly, not all youth whose gender identity or gender expression is outside of cultural norms may experience themselves as, or identify as, transgender or even have the resources to understand what being transgender means. Our data may not reflect the experiences of these youth, who may also be more isolated and without the same access to resources as the transgender youth in our survey.

Large-scale population-based studies, such as the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), must include questions about sexual orientation and gender identity and expression because youth who do not presently identify as LGBT but may do so at a later time would be difficult to reach through other means. It is important to remember that our survey reflects the experiences only of LGBT students who were in school during the 2006–2007 school year. Thus, it does not reflect the experiences of students who may have already dropped out of school, whose experiences in school with regard to hostile school climate or access to supportive resources may be very different than those students who have remained in school.

An additional limitation worth noting, regarding the racial/ethnic composition of the sample, is that African American and Latino/a students are underrepresented relative to national population statistics. Furthermore, the sample size of the non-White racial/ethnic groups is smaller than would be expected in the national population. However, this finding is consistent with demographics in our previous surveys. Nevertheless, further research that more specifically examines the school experiences of LGBT African American, Latino/a and other youth of color is needed.

Lastly, the data from our survey is largely cross-sectional, meaning that the data were collected at one point in time. Thus, with the possible exception of the policy analyses, we cannot determine causality. For example, we cannot make definitive statements regarding the effectiveness of having supportive school staff, although we can say that there was a positive relationship between the number of supportive staff and students' sense of belonging at school.

## **Discussion**

The results of our 2007 National School Climate Survey demonstrate that school is not always a safe or affirming environment for LGBT students. Hearing biased or derogatory language at school, especially homophobic and sexist remarks, was a common occurrence. Intervention on the part of school staff, however, was not. Teachers and other school authorities did not often intervene when homophobic or negative remarks about gender expression were made in their presence, and students' use of such language remained largely unchallenged. More than two-thirds of the students in our survey reported being made to feel unsafe at school because of at least one personal characteristic, with sexual orientation and gender expression being the characteristics most commonly reported. Almost 90% of the students reported that they had been verbally harassed at school because of their sexual orientation, and almost two-thirds had been harassed because of how they expressed their gender. In addition, many students reported experiencing incidents of physical harassment related to their sexual orientation or gender expression, sexual harassment, deliberate property damage and cyberbullying.

The findings from the survey remind us that school climate is much more than a safety issue; it is also an issue of a student's right to an education. LGBT students in our survey who experienced frequent harassment because of their sexual orientation reported missing more days of school and having lower GPAs than students who were less often harassed. Thus, steps that schools take to improve school climate are also an investment in better educational outcomes.

Although our results suggest that school climate remains dire for many LGBT students, they also highlight the important role that institutional supports can play in making schools safer for these students. Supportive educators positively influenced students' sense of belonging, academic performance and aspirations, and their feelings of safety. Students attending schools that had a GSA reported fewer homophobic remarks were less likely to feel unsafe and to miss school for safety reasons, and reported a greater sense of belonging to their school community. Similarly, students who reported positive representations of LGBT issues in their curricula were much less likely to miss school, had a greater sense of belonging and reported less harassment related to their sexual orientation and gender identity/ expression. Unfortunately, these resources and supports were often not available to LGBT students. Although the majority reported having a supportive teacher or staff person in school, less than half reported having a GSA or LGBT-related materials in the school library. Other resources, such as Internet access to LGBT community resources and curricula that were inclusive of LGBT people, history, or events, were even less common. Furthermore, students from small towns or rural areas and students from the South were less likely than other students to report having supportive resources at their schools. These findings clearly indicate the importance of advocating for inclusive curricula and resources in schools so that a positive learning environment can be ensured for all LGBT students in all regions and all locales, one in which students can receive a high quality education, graduate and continue on to college.

Findings from the 2007 survey indicate that inclusive school safety policies can result in concrete improvements in school climate for LGBT students. Students at schools with anti-harassment/bullying policies that included sexual orientation and/or gender identity/ expression reported a lower incidence of hearing homophobic language and a lower incidence of verbal harassment based on sexual orientation. In addition, faculty and other school staff were more likely to intervene when hearing homophobic remarks, and students were more likely to report incidents of harassment to school authorities when they occurred. Unfortunately, students at schools with comprehensive safe school policies remained in the minority. Although a majority of students said that their school had some type of safe school policy, few said that it was a comprehensive policy that explicitly stated protection based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity/expression.

There were improvements in school climate associated with statewide safe school legislation as well. For students from states with comprehensive safe school legislation, one that includes enumerated categories of protection, there was a continuous decrease in the rates victimization based on sexual orientation from 2001 to 2007. In contrast, there was no change over time among students in states with general safe school legislation or no legislation whatsoever. In fact, there were no differences in the rates of victimization based on sexual orientation between students from states with general legislation and students from states with no legislation at all. This finding suggests that comprehensive state-wide safe school legislation may provide greater protection than general anti-harassment/bullying laws that do not enumerate categories of protection, such as sexual orientation and/or gender identity/expression. Unfortunately, while some states have made progress in implementing this legislation, the majority of our nation's students are not covered by comprehensive legislation.

It is particularly discouraging to note that there has not been consistent progress on the issue of LGBT students' safety in school since our 2005 survey. In fact, the most widespread indicators of a hostile climate for LGBT students—hearing the expression “that’s so gay” used in school and direct verbal harassment because of one’s sexual orientation—remain unchanged since 2001. Even though, our survey provides evidence that in-school supports, such as GSAs, supportive educators and inclusive curriculum, may improve school climate for LGBT students, we have seen little change in the availability of such resources over time.

## **Recommendations**

It is clear that there is an urgent need for action to create a safer school climate for all students. There are steps that all concerned stakeholders can take to remedy the situation. The 2007 National School Climate Survey illustrates the ways in which the presence of effective legislation or policy and in-school resources and supports can have beneficial effects on school climate, students' sense of safety, and, ultimately, on students' academic achievement and educational aspirations. Therefore, we recommend the following measures:

- Advocate for comprehensive anti-bullying and anti-discrimination legislation at the state and federal level that specifically enumerate sexual orientation and gender identity/expression as protected categories alongside others such as race, faith and age;
- Adopt and implement comprehensive anti-bullying policies in individual schools and districts, with clear and effective systems for reporting and addressing incidents that students experience;
- Support student clubs, such as GSAs, that address LGBT issues in education;

- Provide training for school staff to improve rates of intervention and increase the number of supportive faculty and staff available to students, and
- Increase student access to appropriate and accurate information regarding LGBT people, history and events through inclusive curriculum and library and Internet resources.

Taken together, such measures can move us towards a future in which every child learns to respect and accept all people, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

## Notes

145 Findings from a recent Pew Center survey found that 93% of 12–17 year olds use the Internet and 52% use social networking sites like MySpace or Facebook (with an overwhelming majority reporting they use MySpace more often). See:

Lenhart, A. et al. (2007). *Teens and social media: The use of social media gains a greater foothold in teen life as they embrace the conversational nature of interactive online media*. Washington, DC: Pew Internet and American Life Project.

Lenhart, A. & Madden, M. (2007). *Social networking websites and teens: An overview*. Washington, DC: Pew Internet and American Life Project.

146 The Pew Center survey found that 61% of girls used social networking sites, compared to 49% of boys (Lenhart & Madden, 2007).

147 MySpace did not have the capability to send targeted advertisements to students who identify as “transgender.”

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Joseph Kosciw**, GLSEN's Research Director, has a Ph.D. in Psychology from New York University, a B.A. in Psychology and an M.S.Ed. in Counseling Psychology from the University of Pennsylvania. He trained as a family therapist and has worked as a school counselor and psychoeducational consultant in elementary and secondary schools. Dr. Kosciw has been conducting community-based research for over 15 years, program evaluations for non-profit social service organizations and for local and state government, including Gay Men's Health Crisis, Safe Horizons, the New York City Mayor's Office for AIDS Policy Coordination and the New York State Department of Health. He has been involved in GLSEN's research efforts since 1999 and has been with GLSEN full time since November 2003. Dr. Kosciw's doctoral dissertation was on the family processes of LGB-headed families and, in particular, how families address and understand family diversity as well as bias and discrimination.

**Elizabeth Diaz**, Research Associate at GLSEN, has a B.A. in Sociology and Chicano/Latino Studies from the University of Minnesota, and is working toward a Master's degree in Sociology from George Washington University. Her research interests include the educational experiences of LGBTQ youth of color and the effects of abstinence-only sex education on school climate. Elizabeth has been with GLSEN since November 2004. As part of GLSEN's research team, she has worked on projects such as the National School Climate Survey and a study about the experiences of LGBT families in their school communities.

**Emily Greytak**, Senior Research Associate at GLSEN, has an M.S.Ed. in Education Policy from the University of Pennsylvania and a B.A. in Psychology from Haverford College. She is currently a doctoral candidate in Education Policy, Measurement and Evaluation at the University of Pennsylvania. Her dissertation examines the factors related to teachers' compliance with child abuse mandated reporting laws. Her other research interests include evaluation of training programs and the readiness of school personnel to foster safe school environments. Prior to working at GLSEN, Emily has conducted research for a variety of non-profit and educational institutions, such as the Anti-Defamation League, the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, and the School District of Philadelphia. Emily first became involved with GLSEN as a volunteer Chapter Member in Philadelphia 10 years ago and has been part of GLSEN's staff since 2006.





**Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network**  
**90 Broad Street**  
**2nd Floor**  
**New York, NY 10004**  
**[www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org)**

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