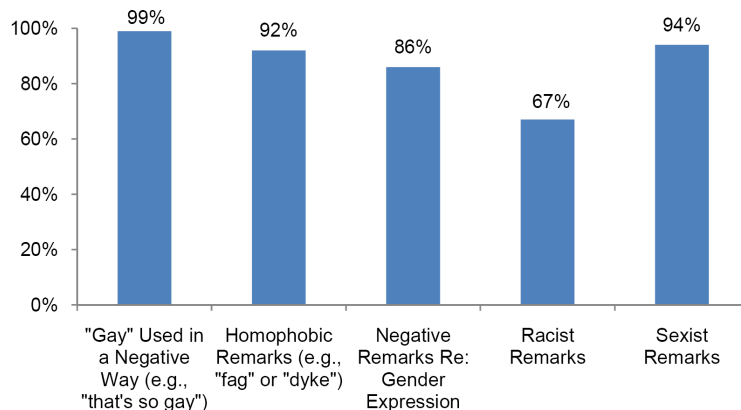


Findings from the GLSEN 2009 National School Climate Survey demonstrate that Pennsylvania schools were not safe for many lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) secondary school students. In addition, many LGBT students in Pennsylvania did not have access to important school resources, such as Gay-Straight Alliances, and were not protected by comprehensive bullying/harassment school policies.

FACT: LGBT students in Pennsylvania most commonly heard homophobic, sexist and negative remarks about gender expression.

- Nearly all heard “gay” used in a negative way (e.g., “that’s so gay”) and more than 9 in 10 heard other homophobic remarks (e.g., “fag” or “dyke”) regularly at school (see Figure 1).
- Almost 9 in 10 regularly heard other students in their school make negative remarks about how someone expressed their gender, such as comments about someone not acting “feminine” or “masculine” enough (see Figure 1).
- Students also heard biased language from school staff. 26% regularly heard staff make negative remarks about someone’s gender expression, and 25% regularly heard school staff make homophobic remarks.

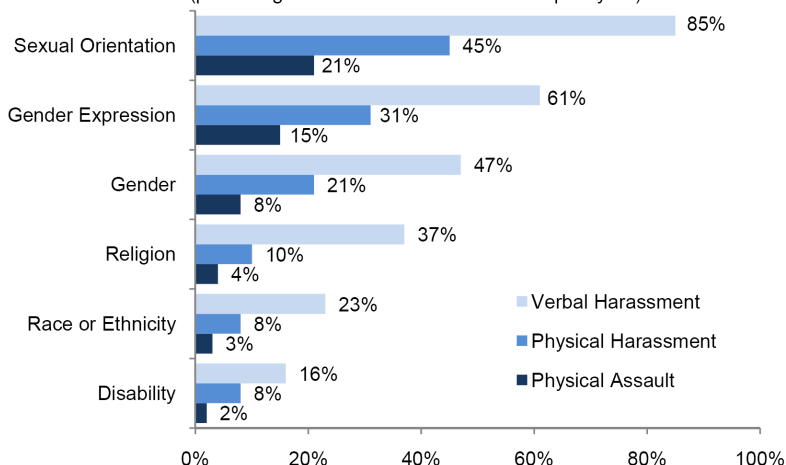
Figure 1. Hearing Biased Remarks from Students in Pennsylvania Schools
(percentage hearing remarks “sometimes,” “often,” or “frequently”)



FACT: Most LGBT students in Pennsylvania had been victimized at school. Many of these incidents were not reported to adult authorities.

- The majority experienced verbal harassment (e.g., called names or threatened): just under 9 in 10 because of their sexual orientation and about 3 in 5 because of the way they expressed their gender (see Figure 2).
- Many also experienced physical harassment and physical assault: about 3 in 10 were physically harassed (e.g., pushed or shoved) because of the way they expressed their gender and about 1 in 5 was physically assaulted (e.g., punched, kicked or injured with a weapon) because of their sexual orientation (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Harassment and Assault in Pennsylvania Schools
(percentage harassed or assaulted in the past year)

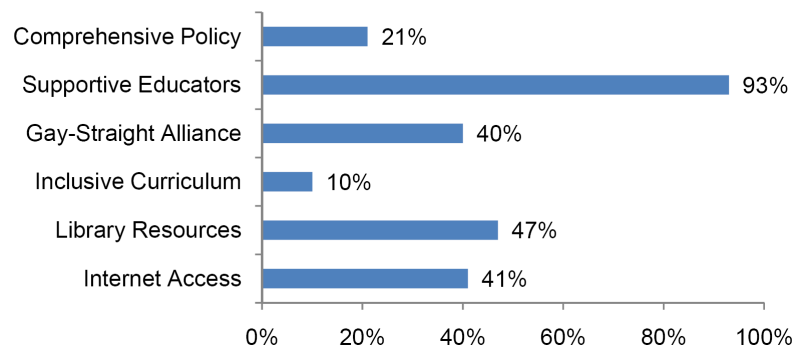


- Students also reported high levels of other forms of harassment at school: 87% felt deliberately excluded or “left out” by peers; 87% had mean rumors or lies told about them; 70% were sexually harassed; 55% experienced electronic harassment or “cyberbullying”; and 50% had property (e.g., car, clothing or books) deliberately damaged and/or stolen.
- 52% of students who were harassed or assaulted in school *never* reported it to school staff, and 48% *never* told a family member about the incident. Among students who did report incidents to school authorities, only 34% said that reporting resulted in effective intervention by staff.

FACT: LGBT students in Pennsylvania most often did not have access to in-school resources and supports.

- Only about 2 in 5 attended a school with a comprehensive bullying/harassment policy that included specific protections based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity/ expression (see Figure 3).
- Most could identify at least one school staff member supportive of LGBT students, but only 48% could identify many (6 or more) supportive school staff.
- Many did not have LGBT-inclusive curricular resources: only 1 in 10 was taught positive representations of LGBT people, history and events, and only about 2 in 5 could access information about LGBT communities on school Internet (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Availability of LGBT-Related Resources and Supports in School in Pennsylvania Schools



School-based supports such as comprehensive bullying/harassment policies, school personnel who are supportive of LGBT students, Gay-Straight Alliances and LGBT-inclusive curricular resources can positively affect school climate for LGBT students. Findings from the *2009 National School Climate Survey* demonstrate that students attending schools with these resources and supports report more positive school experiences, including lower victimization and absenteeism and higher academic achievement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the high percentages of LGBT students in Pennsylvania who experience harassment at school and the limited access to key resources and supports that can have a positive effect on their school experiences, it is critical that school leaders, education policymakers and other individuals who are obligated to provide safe learning environments for all students take the following steps:

- Implement comprehensive school bullying/harassment policies;
- Support Gay-Straight Alliances;
- Provide training for school staff to better respond to LGBT harassment in school; and
- Increase student access to LGBT-inclusive curricular resources.

These actions can move us toward a future in which all students in Pennsylvania will have the opportunity to learn and succeed in school, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.

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GLSEN (the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network) is the leading national education organization focused on ensuring safe schools for all students.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

In 2009, GLSEN conducted the sixth National School Climate Survey (NSCS), a biennial survey of the experiences of LGBT youth in U.S. secondary schools. The national sample consisted of 7,261 LGBT students from all 50 states and the District of Columbia. A total of 332 respondents were attending schools in Pennsylvania at the time of the survey. The majority of this sample was White (80%), 8% was Hispanic/Latino, 7% was multi-racial and less than 2% identified as African American/Black, Asian/Pacific Islander, Middle Eastern/Arab American or Native American/Alaska Native. Most identified as female (56%), 33% as male and 8% as transgender. Most (86%) attended public schools, and 66% attended school in urban or suburban communities. The results reported in this Research Brief have a margin of error of +/-5%.

For the national NSCS report or for any other GLSEN research, go to www.glsen.org/research.