



SCHOOL CLIMATE IN TENNESSEE

Findings from the GLSEN 2017 National School Climate Survey demonstrate that Tennessee schools were not safe for most lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) secondary school students. In addition, many LGBTQ students in Tennessee did not have access to important school resources, such as an LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum, and were not protected by supportive and inclusive school policies.

FACT: The vast majority of LGBTQ students in Tennessee regularly (sometimes, often, or frequently) heard anti-LGBTQ remarks (Fig. 1). Some also regularly heard school staff make homophobic remarks (24%) and negative remarks about someone's gender expression (43%).

FACT: Most LGBTQ students in Tennessee experienced anti-LGBTQ victimization at school (Fig. 2). They also experienced victimization at school based on religion (40%), disability (26%), and race/ethnicity (23%). Most never reported the incident to school staff (58%). Only 24% of students who reported incidents said it resulted in effective staff intervention.

Figure 1. Hearing Anti-LGBTQ Remarks from Students in Tennessee Schools
(percentage of LGBTQ students hearing remarks regularly)

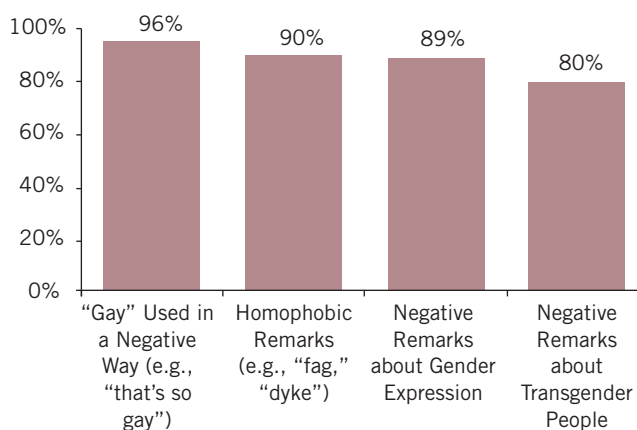
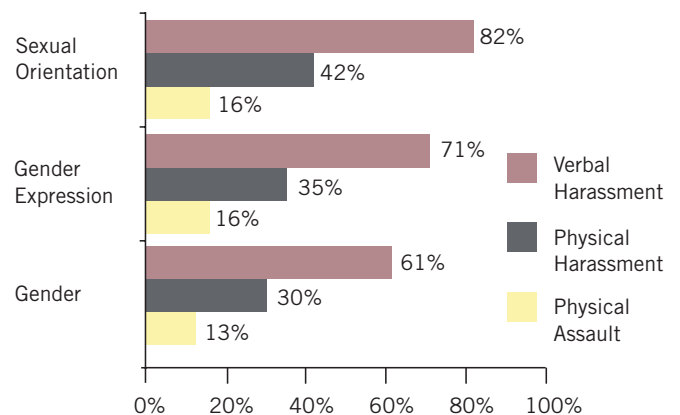


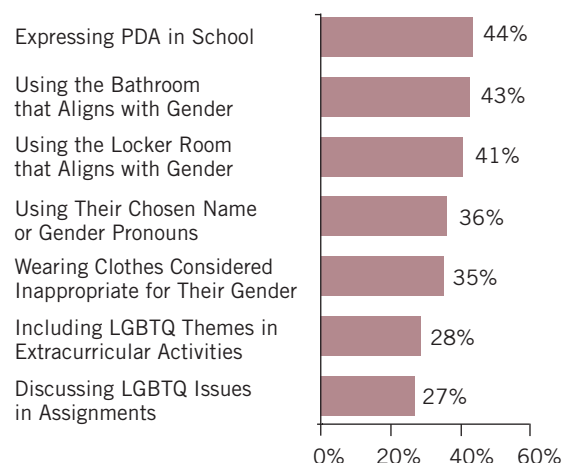
Figure 2. Anti-LGBTQ Harassment & Assault in Tennessee Schools
(percentage of LGBTQ students harassed or assaulted in the past year based on...)



FACT: Many LGBTQ students in Tennessee reported discriminatory policies or practices at their school (Fig. 3). More than three-fourths (76%) experienced at least one form of anti-LGBTQ discrimination at school during the past year.

- More than 2 in 5 LGBTQ students (44%) in Tennessee were disciplined for public displays of affection (PDA) that did not result in similar action for non-LGBTQ students.
- In Tennessee, over 2 in 5 LGBTQ students (43%) and nearly 3 in 4 transgender students (71%) were unable to use the school restroom aligned with their gender. Additionally, more than 1 in 3 LGBTQ students (36%) and 3 in 5 transgender students (61%) were prevented from using their chosen name or pronouns in school.
- LGBTQ students in Tennessee experienced other forms of school discrimination (not in Fig. 3): being unable to form a GSA (20%), being unable to wear LGBTQ-supportive apparel (20%), being unable to bring a same-gender date to a school dance (19%), being prevented or discouraged from playing school sports due to an LGBTQ identity (16%), and being disciplined at school for identifying as LGBTQ (5%).

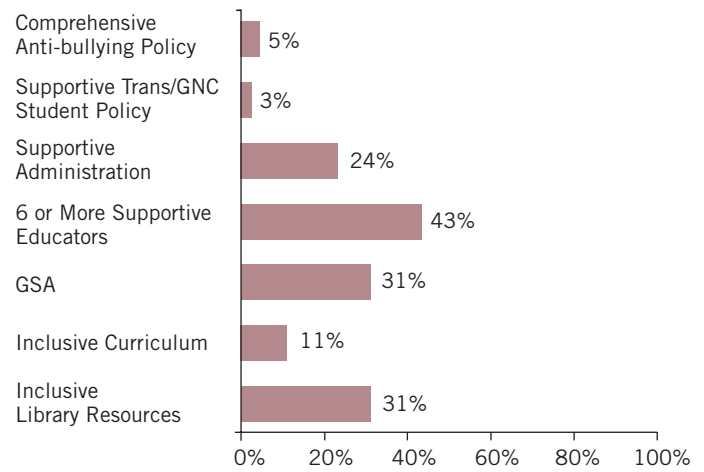
Figure 3. Anti-LGBTQ Discrimination in Tennessee Schools
(percentage of LGBTQ students that were prevented from...)



FACT: Many LGBTQ students in Tennessee did not have access to in-school resources and supports (Fig. 4).

- Only 5% attended a school with a comprehensive anti-bullying/harassment policy that included specific protections based on sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. Only 3% had a policy or official guidelines to support transgender or gender nonconforming (trans/GNC) students.
- Only 1 in 4 (24%) reported that their school administration was somewhat or very supportive.
- The vast majority (94%) could identify at least one school staff member supportive of LGBTQ students (not in Fig. 4), but only 43% could identify 6 or more supportive school staff.
- Fewer than 1 in 3 (31%) had access to a GSA or similar student club which provides a safe and affirming space and promotes a more welcoming school climate for LGBTQ students.
- Approximately 1 in 10 (11%) were taught positive representations of LGBTQ people, history, or events (“inclusive curriculum”). Only 2% reported receiving LGBTQ-inclusive sex education at school (not in Fig. 4).

Figure 4. Availability of LGBTQ-Related Resources & Supports in Tennessee Schools



RECOMMENDATIONS

School-based supports such as supportive and inclusive school policies, school personnel who are supportive of LGBTQ students, GSAs, and LGBTQ-inclusive curricular resources can positively affect school climate for LGBTQ students. Findings from the 2017 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.

Given the high percentages of LGBTQ students in Tennessee 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 Tennessee school leaders, education policymakers, and other individuals who are obligated to provide safe learning environments for all students take the following steps:

- Implement supportive and inclusive school policies, such as comprehensive anti-bullying/harassment and supportive transgender and gender nonconforming student policies;
- Support GSAs;
- Provide professional development for school staff on LGBTQ student issues; and
- Increase student access to LGBTQ-inclusive curricular resources.

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

To learn more about GLSEN and to get involved, visit glsen.org or contact glsen@glsen.org.

To get involved in the GLSEN Tennessee chapter, visit glsen.org/chapters/middletn or contact tennessee@chapters.glsen.org.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH In 2017, GLSEN conducted the tenth National School Climate Survey, a biennial survey of the experiences of LGBTQ youth in U.S. secondary schools. The national sample consisted of 23,001 LGBTQ students from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and all 5 major U.S. territories. A total of 332 respondents were attending schools in Tennessee. The Tennessee sample was majority White (75%), 11% Multiracial, 8% Hispanic/Latinx, 3% Black/African American, 1% Asian/South Asian/Pacific Islander, < 1% Arab/Middle Eastern, and < 1% Native American. The gender composition was 46% cisgender, 28% transgender, 11% genderqueer, and 15% another gender (e.g. questioning, genderfluid). Most (89%) attended public schools. The school community makeup was 43% rural/small town, 31% suburban, and 26% urban. The results reported for Tennessee had a margin of error of +/- 5%.

For the full 2017 National School Climate Survey report or for any other GLSEN research, go to glsen.org/research.

Follow @GLSENResearch on Twitter.

Suggested citation: GLSEN. (2019). *School Climate in Tennessee (State Snapshot)*. New York: GLSEN.

GLSEN is the leading national education organization focused on ensuring safe schools for all students.

© GLSEN 2019