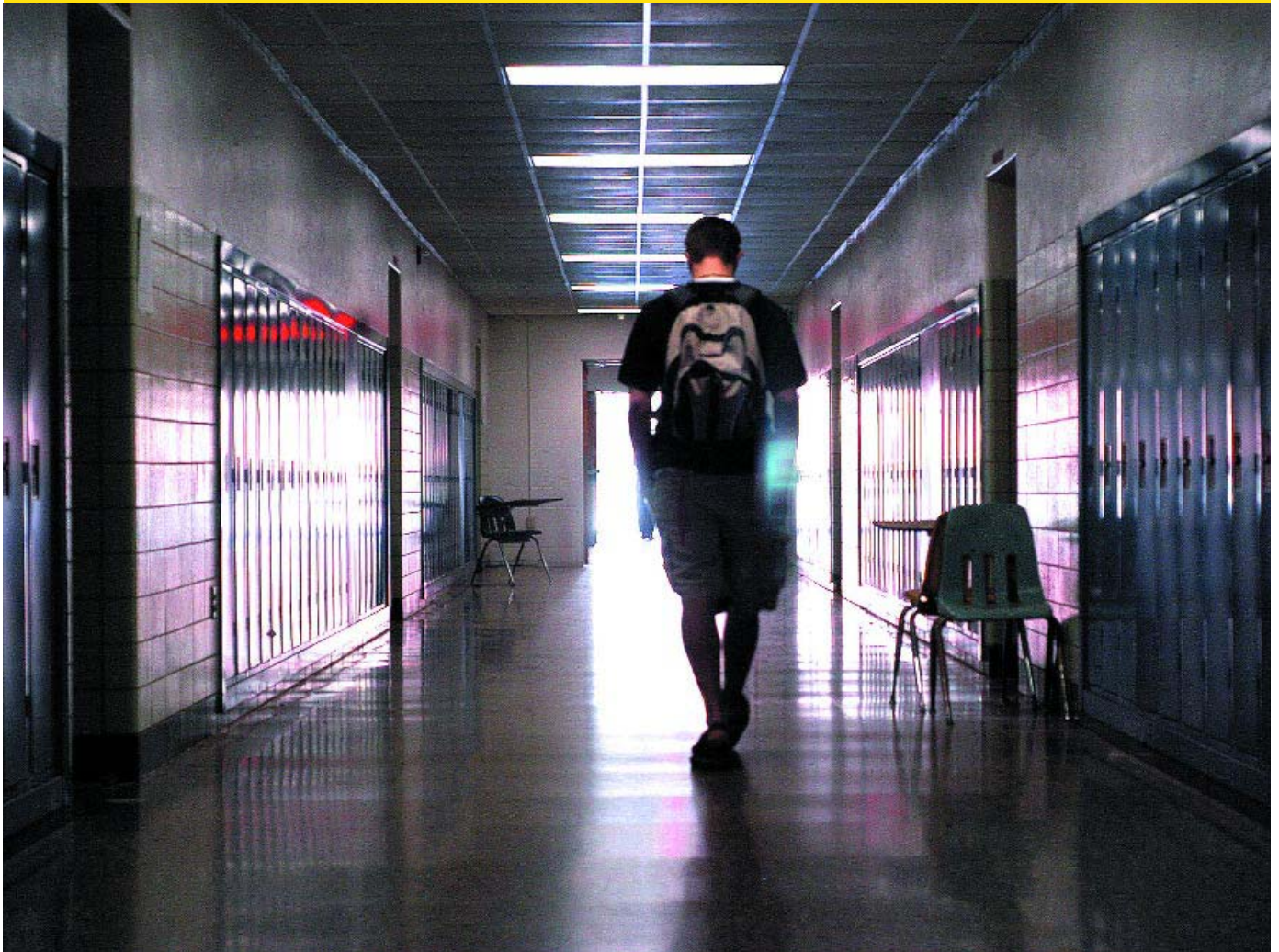




# The 2003 National School Climate Survey

The School Related Experiences of Our Nation's  
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth



**KEY FINDINGS** of a Report from the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network  
[www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org)

## Introduction

GLSEN's National School Climate Survey is the only national survey to document the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students in America's high schools. Conducted biennially since 1999, the National School Climate Survey fills a crucial void in our collective understanding of the contemporary high school experience.

The results of this survey are intended to inform educators, policymakers and the public at large, as part of GLSEN's on-going effort to ensure that all schools are places where students are free to learn, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression.

The 2003 National School Climate Survey results summarized here continue to track the basic and endemic problem of name-calling, harassment and violence directed at LGBT students, while offering new information about the impact of these experiences on academic performance and the effect of interventions designed to mend – or at minimum address – the underlying problem. For the first time, the 2003 survey data allowed us to ascertain that school climate is definitely linked to the academic performance and college aspirations of LGBT youth.

Violence, bias and harassment of LGBT students continue to be the rule – not the exception – in America's schools. And this survey demonstrates that this hostile school climate has a direct and measurable link to LGBT students' ability to learn, their sense of belonging in school, their academic performance and their educational aspirations.

*For complete results of GLSEN's 2003 National School Climate Survey, including complete information about methodology and demographics, please visit [www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org) or call GLSEN's Communications Department at (212) 727-0135.*

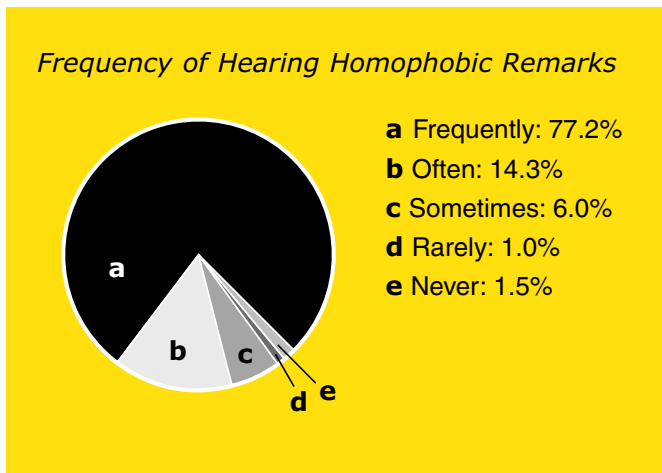
## Methodology

A total of 887 LGBT youth from 48 states and the District of Columbia completed the survey. In order to ensure a more representative sample, we had two methods of obtaining participants. In the first, surveys were completed by LGBT youth involved with community-based groups or service organizations. Fifty such groups and organizations were randomly chosen from a master list of over 200 groups nationwide. Of the original 50 groups contacted, 38 returned completed surveys, accounting for a total of 308 surveys of LGBT youth in middle school or high schools. We also made the National School Climate Survey available on the Internet via GLSEN's website. Notices about our on-line survey were posted on LGBT youth-oriented listserves and electronic bulletin boards. Also, notices were emailed to GLSEN chapters and to youth advocacy organizations. Through the on-line version, we obtained completed surveys from an additional 579 LGBT youth. Data was collected from community-based groups from the end of May to the end of August 2003. On-line data collection took place from June to the end of August 2003.

# Key Findings

## Homophobic Remarks, Harassment and School Safety: Harassment at School is the Rule, Not the Exception

As in 1999 and 2001, the overwhelming majority of LGBT students report hearing homophobic remarks. At times, faculty and staff contributed to the problem by either making homophobic comments themselves or failing to intervene when they hear students making them. The survey results further demonstrate that verbal, sexual and physical harassment are common experiences for LGBT students and that a majority feel unsafe, and many skip school altogether, because they are simply too afraid to go.



### **Homophobic Remarks/Verbal Harassment**

84% of LGBT students report being verbally harassed (name calling, threats, etc.) because of their sexual orientation.

91.5 % of LGBT students report hearing homophobic remarks, such as “faggot”, “dyke” or the expression “that’s so gay” frequently or often.

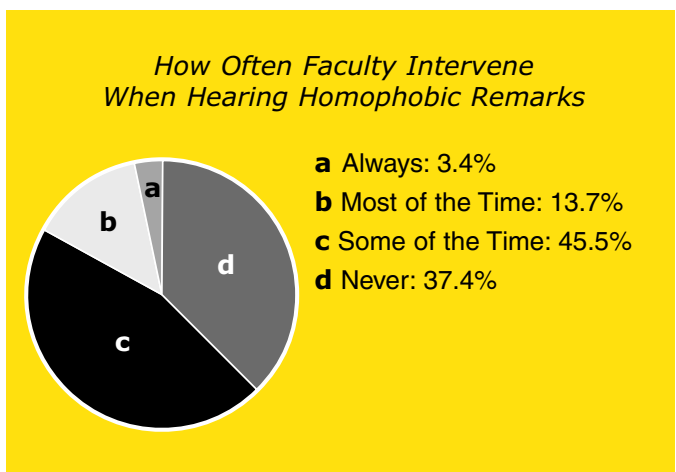
44.7% of LGBT youth of color report being verbally harassed because of both their sexual orientation and race/ethnicity.

82.9% of LGBT students report that faculty or staff never intervened or intervened only some of the time when present and homophobic remarks were made.

### **Physical Harassment/Victimization**

39.1% of LGBT students report being physically harassed (being shoved, pushed, etc.) because of their sexual orientation.

Within this vulnerable population, transgender students are even more at risk: 55.0% of transgender youth report being physically harassed because of their gender, gender expression, or sexual orientation, as compared with 41% of LGB students who report physical harassment for any one of these reasons, meaning that transgender students are more than 30% likelier to suffer physical harassment than LGB students.



57.9% of LGBT students reported having property stolen or deliberately damaged at school, as compared with 35% of students in a national sample of all high school students in a 1999 U.S. Department of Justice survey, meaning they were significantly more likely to be victimized by such crimes and attacks.

### ***Sense of Safety at School***

64.3% of LGBT students report feeling unsafe at their school because of their sexual orientation.

28.6% of LGBT students report missing at least one entire day of school in the past month because they felt unsafe. The rate was even higher (35.1%) among LGBT youth of color who felt unsafe at school for a variety of reasons (because of their sexual orientation, their race or both).

### **Bias and Its Impact on School Performance and Aspirations: Harassment Significantly Related to Diminished Achievement and Future Educational Aspirations**

For the first time, we examined how school climate was related to school performance, grade-point average (GPA) and college aspirations for LGBT students. The school performance and college aspirations are significantly diminished for LGBT student who experience harassment.

Students who frequently experienced harassment because of their sexual orientation had GPA's that were more than 10% lower than those who did not: Average GPA for LGBT students who report frequent verbal harassment: 2.9; Average GPA for LGBT students who report only rare or less frequent verbal harassment: 3.3.

Students who experience frequent verbal harassment because of their sexual orientation are less likely than other students to plan to attend college: 13.4% of LGBT students who report verbal harassment do not intend to go to college, twice the figure of those LGBT students who report only rare or less frequent verbal harassment (6.7%).

### **LGBT Resources, School Policies and Support Systems: Policies, Programs and Teachers Make a Difference**

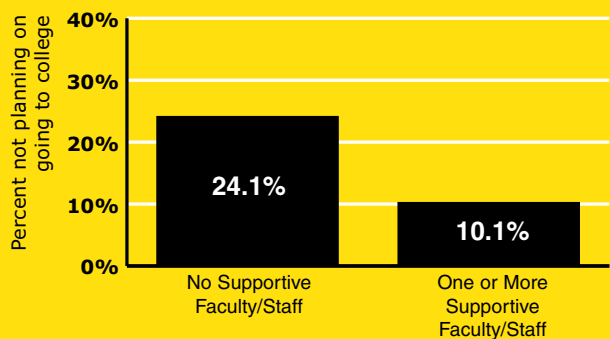
Many schools fail to provide resources or support for their LGBT students. However, when supportive faculty or LGBT-related resources are available, LGBT students do better in school and are much more likely to plan to attend college. Furthermore, there is a definitive relationship between schools and communities having policies and laws regarding violence, bias and harassment against LGBT students and student safety.

37.3% of LGBT students do not feel comfortable discussing LGBT issues with their teachers.



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*Relationship Between Supportive Faculty or Staff and Educational Aspirations*



LGBT students unable to identify supportive teachers or staff were more than twice as likely not to plan to continue their education after secondary school: 24.1% of LGBT students with no supportive faculty or staff say they do not intend to go to college. Only 10.1% of LGBT students who did report having one or more supportive faculty or staff member say they will not go to college.

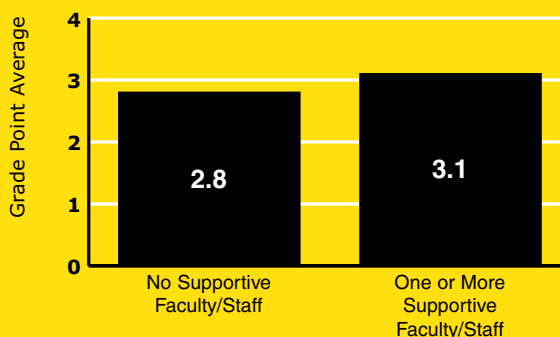
LGBT students who can identify supportive faculty or staff do better in school than those who cannot, with grade point averages more than 10% higher than their peers:

Average GPA for LGBT students who cannot identify any supportive faculty or staff: 2.8

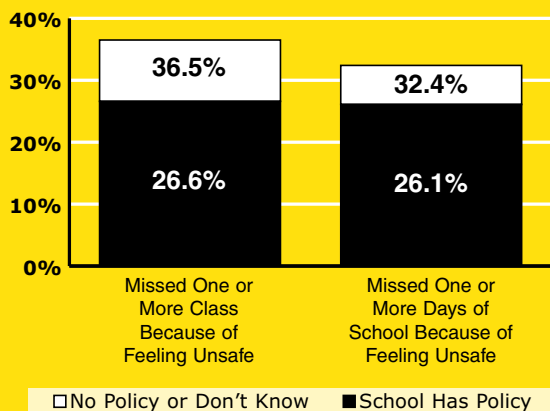
Average GPA for LGBT students who can identify one or more supportive faculty or staff member: 3.1

LGBT students in schools with GSAs were more likely to feel safe in school than students whose schools do not have a GSA: 68.3% of LGBT students who report their schools do not have a GSA say they feel unsafe in their schools because of their sexual orientation. Students who said their school had a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) were less likely to report feeling unsafe at school for the same reason (60.9%).

*Relationship Between Supportive Faculty or Staff and Academic Achievement*



*Relationship between Existing School Policy on Harassment or Assault and Missing School for Safety Reasons*



Students who did not have (or did not know of) a policy protecting them from violence and harassment were nearly 40% more likely to skip school than those who did: 36.5% of LGBT students who said their school did not have a specific harassment policy skipped class in the last month because they felt unsafe, with that number dropping to 26.6% among LGBT students who know that there is some sort of harassment policy in place to protect them.

# Conclusions and Recommendations

GLSEN's 2003 National School Climate Survey presents a striking and troubling picture of the experience of our nation's lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students. For so many, school can be a dangerous and unsafe place.

These findings suggest that schools should consider the following steps to improve school climates and create environments that encourage participation in school activities, improve educational outcomes, and raise future educational aspirations for LGBT students:

- Institute policies that include “sexual orientation and gender identity” as protected classes along with existing categories such as race, religion, and ability, as such policies dramatically reduce absenteeism among LGBT students.
- Provide training for teachers on how to support LGBT students, as building the skills of teachers in supporting LGBT students would not only increase the currently low rate of intervention by teachers in stopping harassment (and thus diminish the negative effects on student achievement) but would also significantly increase the future aspirations of LGBT students in terms of pursuing higher education.
- Create and support programs such as Gay-Straight Student Alliances, which can significantly increase students' sense of belonging at school and thereby their likelihood of attending and graduating from high school.

Clearly, more work needs to be done in our nation's schools to create safer climates for all students. Local community leaders, teachers, parents and GSA members need to work within their schools and their school districts to ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to learn. These findings help us better understand what that work should entail, and we call upon all school authorities to undertake such measures so that school may promote better educational outcomes for LGBT students.

## About GLSEN

GLSEN, or 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. For more information on our educator resources, public policy agenda, student organizing programs or development initiatives, visit [www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org).

## GLSEN's Vision

GLSEN envisions a world in which every child learns to respect and accept all people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression.