

TIPS FOR CONDUCTING THE *LOCAL SCHOOL CLIMATE SURVEY* (SCHOOL-BASED VERSION)

What is the GLSEN School Climate Survey?

There are two types of the GLSEN School Climate Survey: the National version and the Local version.

The National School Climate Survey is done by GLSEN's Research Department. The Local School Climate Survey is done by local schools or communities.

In 1999, GLSEN completed the first National School Climate Survey (NSCS), a biennial survey that examines intolerance toward LGBT students in school. In 2005, GLSEN completed a fourth NSCS that also examined the experiences of LGBT students regarding intolerance and harassment because of race/ethnicity, gender, gender expression, disability and religion, in addition to sexual orientation. Results from the national survey have helped advocate for LGBT students at the national and local levels.

Since the first national survey, GLSEN has heard from members of local GLSEN chapters and from school Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) members that they want to do the GLSEN survey in their local community or their school. Because of this, GLSEN created the Local School Climate Survey (LSCS). It is similar to the national survey except it is a survey that can be given to all students, not just LGBT students.

Why should we do the survey?

Results from the survey can be used to help GSAs advocate for better school policies and for educational events for students about LGBT issues. The survey will tell you how often students are hearing homophobic, racist and sexist remarks in your school and where these remarks are heard most often. It will also tell you whether students feel unsafe in school because of personal characteristics – sexual orientation, gender, gender expression, religion, etc. With this information, you will be able to tell your principal, your teachers, even the student council, how common intolerance is in your school and how unsafe school can be for some students.

How do we do it?

First, you have to decide who you want to do the survey. To get the best idea of the school climate, the more students who complete it the better. We recommend that the survey be given to all students in the school. But you can survey just the senior class or even just the students in your math class. However, the smaller the scope, the less representative your survey is of all the students in your school. For example, if you survey only those students who take French, those students may have different experiences than those students who take Spanish or German. Therefore, you cannot make generalizations about all students in your school if you only asked students who take French.

Once you have an idea of who you want to participate, you need to get permission from your school. You and/or your GSA Adviser may need to meet with the principal to discuss the purpose of the survey and why it is important for your school to do it. Depending on your school and your school district, you may need additional permission to do a school-wide survey, such as from a school district staff person or your school's PTA.

Anonymity. The survey should be kept completely anonymous. The students should be told that they should not put their name anywhere on the survey.

Partner with other groups. When talking about school climate and tolerance, it is important to remember that we are not just talking about homophobia and LGBT-related harassment, we are also talking about racism and sexism and sexual harassment. Your school may have other clubs or groups that may be interested in making your school a safer, more tolerant place for all students. Your GSA may want to think about other groups that could help you advocate for the survey and help with getting the survey done.

Parental permission. The powers-that-be may decide that you need to have parents give permission for their children to participate. There are two types of permission that may be required: active consent and passive consent. Active consent means that a parent must sign permission before their child can participate (similar to getting a permission slip signed for a trip). Passive consent is when the parents are notified that the survey is going to happen and they must notify the school if they do not want their child to participate.

What do we do with the surveys that are completed?

Tally up the results. There is no magic formula. For each question, count the number of students who responded to each answer, divide it by the total number of students and you get the percentage. It might be easiest to put the information in a table or use a spreadsheet program like Microsoft Excel. For example, let's say High School X had 100 students complete the survey. For the question "How often do you hear other homophobic remarks in our school?," 53 students checked "Frequently," 27 students checked "Often," 10 checked "Sometimes," 7 checked "Rarely" and 3 check "Never."

Question: How often do you hear other homophobic remarks in our school?			
Answer	Number of Students	Total Students Who Answered the Question	Number of Students divided by Total Students
Frequently	53	100	53%
Often	27	100	27%
Sometimes	10	100	10%
Rarely	7	100	7%
Never	3	100	3%

If you get stuck, ask your GSA Adviser or your favorite math teacher to help you. Also, the Institute for Gay and Lesbian Strategic Studies (IGLSS) is committed to connecting scholars with the people who need access to research findings and has created a directory of experts working in policy-related areas of interest to the LGBT community in general. This directory, the Gay Directory of Authoritative Studies (GayDAR), is available from the IGLSS website (www.iglss.org). You may want to consult this directory for researchers in your area.