

TEACHING RESPECT: LGBT-INCLUSIVE CURRICULUM AND SCHOOL CLIMATE

For many students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT), school is a hostile environment that can negatively affect academic performance and personal well-being. One strategy that educators can employ to promote safe and affirming school environments is including positive representations of LGBT people, history, and events in the curriculum. Among the LGBT students in GLSEN's 2009 *National School Climate Survey*, attending a school with an LGBT-inclusive curriculum was related to a less-hostile school experience for LGBT students as well as increased feelings of connectedness to their school communities. Despite these benefits, the vast majority of LGBT students do not have access to an inclusive curriculum.

FACT: Inclusive curriculum contributes to a safer school environment for LGBT youth.

GLSEN's 2009 *National School Climate Survey* revealed that when educators include positive representations of LGBT people, history, and events in their curricula, students experienced school as a less-hostile place. LGBT students in schools with an inclusive curriculum were:

- Half as likely to experience high levels of victimization because of sexual orientation or gender expression. Less than a fifth of students at schools with inclusive curriculum reported high levels of verbal harassment, physical harassment, and physical assault, compared to about 1 in 3 other students (See Figure 1);¹
- Less likely to feel unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation or gender expression.² For example, less than half (42.1%) of LGBT students in schools with inclusive curricula felt unsafe because of their sexual orientation, compared to almost two thirds (63.6%) of students in schools without this resource (see Figure 2); and
- About half as likely to miss school because of feeling unsafe or uncomfortable. Less than a fifth (17.1%) of students with inclusive curricula stayed home from school for at least one full day, compared to nearly a third (31.6%) of other students (see Figure 2).³

Figure 1. Inclusive Curriculum and Victimization

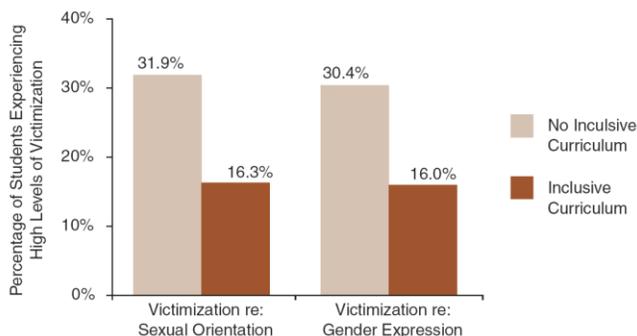
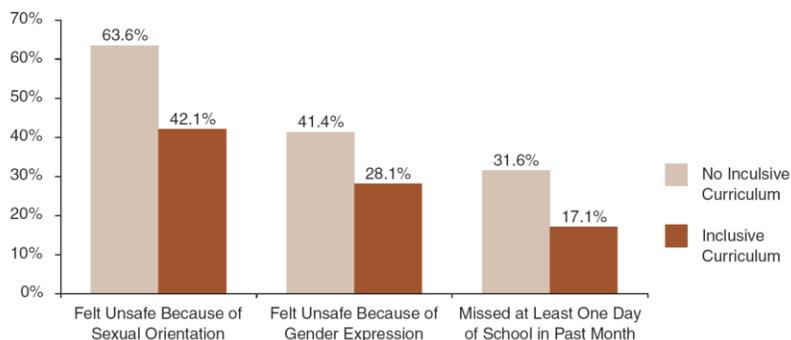


Figure 2. Inclusive Curriculum and Safety and Missing School

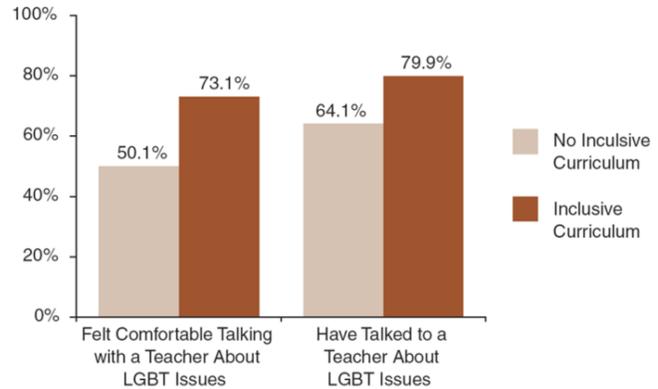


FACT: Inclusive curriculum helps LGBT students feel more connected to their schools.

Beyond fostering a safer school environment, positive representations of LGBT people, history, and events in the classroom may help promote a more welcoming climate for LGBT students. Students in schools with an inclusive curriculum feel a greater sense of connectedness to their school communities than other students.⁴

By including LGBT-related content in their curriculum, educators can send a message that they are a source of support for LGBT students. GLSEN research consistently finds that students in schools with an inclusive curriculum are more comfortable talking with teachers about LGBT issues and speak with their teachers about these issues more often.^{5,6} For example, almost three-quarters (73.1%) of students with an inclusive curriculum felt comfortable talking to a teacher about LGBT-related issues, compared to half (50.1%) of students without this resource in school (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Inclusive Curriculum and Talking with Teachers about LGBT Issues



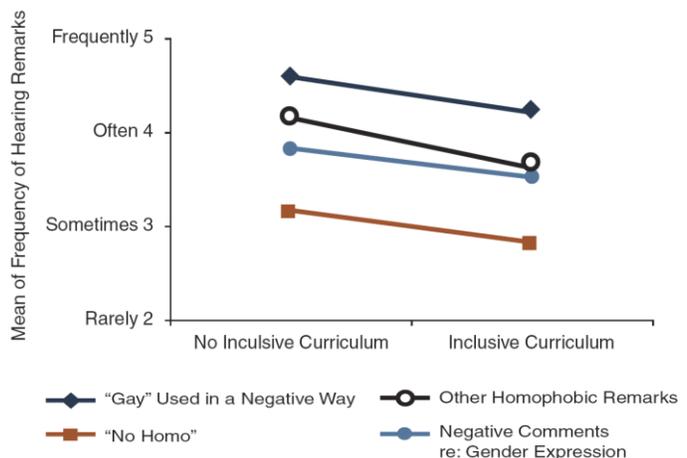
FACT: Inclusive curriculum can reinforce peer acceptance of LGBT students.

The inclusion of LGBT people, history, and events in the classroom curriculum educates all students about LGBT issues and may help to reduce prejudice and intolerance of LGBT people. When educators work to cultivate greater respect and acceptance of LGBT people among the student body, their efforts can result in a more positive school experience for LGBT students. GLSEN research consistently shows that an inclusive curriculum is associated with increased peer support for LGBT students.

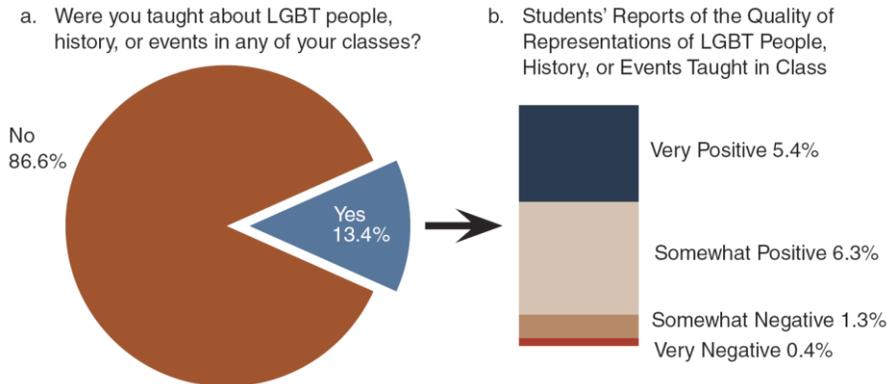
LGBT students who attended schools with an inclusive curriculum were:

- More likely to report that their classmates were accepting of LGBT people (61.2% vs. 37.3%);⁷
- Less likely to hear homophobic remarks, including negative use of the word “gay,” the phrase “no homo,” homophobic epithets (e.g., “fag” or “dyke”), and negative comments about someone’s gender expression (see Figure 4);⁸
- More likely to report that their peers usually intervene when hearing homophobic remarks (10.4% vs. 5.3%).⁹

Figure 4. Inclusive Curriculum and Frequency of Hearing Biased Remarks



FACT: Most LGBT students do not have access to an inclusive curriculum.

Figure 5. Inclusion of LGBT-Related Topics in Class

Even though having an inclusive curriculum is associated with positive outcomes for LGBT students, the vast majority (86.6%) reported they were never taught anything about LGBT people, history, or events in their classes (see Figure 5).

In total, only 11.7% were exposed to positive representations of LGBT topics in their classes, and less than a fifth (17.9%) reported that LGBT-related information was included in textbooks or other assigned class readings. Among students who did have access to an inclusive curriculum, History/Social Studies, English, and Health are the classes most often reported as inclusive.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Educating students to respect all people, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression is a key component of creating safer and more affirming schools for LGBT youth. GLSEN encourages educators to include positive representations of LGBT people, history, and events in curricula and classroom materials. Additionally, students, parents, educators, and other community members should take advantage of opportunities to join working groups that review curriculum standards and select textbooks and other classroom materials to ensure that positive representations of LGBT people and history are included in local classrooms.

For more inclusive curricular resources and information about how educators can be allies to LGBT students, visit www.glsen.org/educator.

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. About two-thirds of the sample (67.4%) was White/European American, over half (57.1%) was female, and over half identified as gay or lesbian (61.0%). Students were in grades 6 to 12, with the largest numbers in grades 11 and 12. Data collection was conducted through community-based groups, online outreach, and targeted advertising on the social networking sites Facebook and MySpace. For the full NSCS report or for other GLSEN research, visit www.glsen.org/research.

IN THE NEWS

California's Fair, Inclusive, and Respectful (FAIR) Education Act ensures that LGBT contributions are included in California social science education and also prohibits the adoption of textbooks and other instructional materials that discriminate against LGBT people. The FAIR Education Act is the first of its kind, and GLSEN research suggests that these new education standards will be beneficial for LGBT students in California.

In 2009, GLSEN found that only 18% of LGBT students in California reported that they had access to LGBT-inclusive curricula.¹⁰ Consistent with findings from across the U.S., California LGBT students who attended schools without inclusive curricula were less likely to feel unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation or gender expression.¹¹ GLSEN and safe schools advocates across the nation will be interested in understanding the implementation of the Act as well as its effects on school climate for LGBT youth in California.

GLSEN (the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network) is the leading national organization focused on ensuring safe schools for all students, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression.

NOTES

- 1 To compare frequency of victimization by presence of inclusive curricula, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with weighted victimization variables (composed of frequency and severity of verbal harassment, physical harassment, and physical assault) related to sexual orientation and gender expression as dependent variables. The results of this analysis were significant, Pillai's Trace=.02, $F(2, 6977)=61.37$, $p<.001$. Univariate analyses were considered significant at a $p<.01$ and effect sizes were also considered. Percentages of high levels of victimization are shown for illustrative purposes.
- 2 To compare feeling unsafe by presence of inclusive curricula, chi square tests were performed. Differences in feeling unsafe based on sexual orientation and gender expression were significant. Sexual orientation: $\chi^2=143.95$, $df=1$, $p<.001$, $\Phi=.14$. Gender expression: $\chi^2=54.66$, $df=1$, $p<.001$, $\Phi=.09$.
- 3 To compare missing days of school by presence of inclusive curricula, a chi-square test was performed: $\chi^2=74.60$, $df=1$, $p<.001$, $\Phi=.10$.
- 4 To compare sense of school belonging by presence of inclusive curricula, an independent sample t-test was performed. Means were significantly different: $t(7089)=22.35$, $p<.001$.
- 5 To compare comfort talking with a teacher about LGBT issues by presence of inclusive curricula, an independent sample t-test was performed. Means were significantly different: $t(7148)=15.02$, $p<.001$. Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.
- 6 To compare number of times talked with a teacher about LGBT issues, an independent sample t-test was performed. Means were significantly different: $t(7034)=11.76$, $p<.001$. Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.
- 7 To compare level of peer acceptance of LGBT people by presence of inclusive curriculum, an independent sample t-test was performed. Means were significantly different: $t(7202)=19.09$, $p<.001$. Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.
- 8 To compare frequency of hearing biased remarks between students in schools with inclusive curricula and students in schools without, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with frequency of hearing "gay" used in a negative way, "no homo," other homophobic remarks, and negative comments about someone's gender expression as the dependent variables. The results of this analysis were significant, Pillai's Trace=.04, $F(4, 7187)=68.17$, $p<.001$. Univariate analyses were considered significant at a $p<.01$ and effect sizes were also considered.
- 9 To compare intervention with homophobic remarks and negative remarks about gender expression by presence of inclusive curricula, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with frequencies of interventions by peers as the dependent variables. Results for intervention with homophobic remarks were significant: Pillai's Trace=.80, $F(1, 98.00)=39.48$, $p<.001$. Univariate analyses were considered at $p<.01$ and effect sizes were considered. Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.
- 10 GLSEN. (2011). *School Climate in California (Research Brief)*. New York: GLSEN.
- 11 To compare feeling unsafe by presence of inclusive curricula among the 684 California students who participated in *the 2009 National School Climate Survey*, a chi square test was performed. Differences in feeling unsafe based on sexual orientation or gender expression were significant: $\chi^2=9.722$, $df=1$, $p=.002$, $\Phi=.12$.