

The Puerto Rico School Climate Survey

The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Youth in Puerto Rico's Schools



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and Queer Youth in Puerto Rico's Schools**

by Noreen M. Giga, MPH
David J. Danischewski, MA
Emily A. Greytak, PhD
Joseph G. Kosciw, PhD
Samuel Ocasio-Domínguez, MS

National Headquarters

110 William St.
New York, NY 10038
Ph: 212-727-0135 Fax: 212-727-0254

DC Policy Office

1001 Connecticut Ave NW, Suite 206
Washington, DC 20036
Ph: 202-347-7780 Fax: 202-347-7781

info@glSEN.org
www.glSEN.org

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Quotes throughout are from students' responses to open-ended questions in the survey.

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Executive Summary

ABOUT THE PUERTO RICO SCHOOL CLIMATE SURVEY

In 1999, GLSEN identified that little was known about the school experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) youth and that LGBTQ youth were nearly absent from national studies of adolescents. We responded to this national need for data by launching the first National School Climate Survey (NSCS) to document the unique challenges LGBTQ students face and identify interventions that can improve school climate. We continue to meet this need for current data by conducting the study every two years in the 50 states and District of Columbia. The NSCS remains one of the few studies to examine the school experiences of LGBTQ students across the U.S., and its results have been vital to GLSEN's understanding of the issues that LGBTQ students face, thereby informing our ongoing work to ensure safe and affirming schools for all. In recent years, GLSEN has also provided state-specific insights into the experiences of LGBTQ students, and in 2015, we produced 30 state-specific insights. However, this survey had not previously been conducted in the U.S. territories, such as Puerto Rico.

There has been growing interest among LGBTQ youth advocates in Puerto Rico for Puerto Rico-specific data to better understand the particular experiences of their LGBTQ student population. As a result, in 2015, we also collected data for LGBTQ secondary students in Puerto Rico.

This Puerto Rico School Climate Survey report provides the first-ever empirical data from LGBTQ students on their experiences in Puerto Rico.

In the Puerto Rico School Climate Survey, we examine the experiences of LGBTQ students with regard to indicators of negative school climate:

- Hearing biased remarks, including homophobic remarks, in school;
- Feeling unsafe in school because of personal characteristics, such as sexual orientation, gender expression, or body size or weight;
- Missing classes or days of school because of safety reasons;
- Experiencing harassment and assault in school; and
- Experiencing discriminatory policies and practices at school.

In addition, we demonstrate the degree to which LGBTQ students have access to supportive resources in school, and we explore the possible benefits of these resources:

- Curricular resources that are inclusive of LGBTQ-related topics;
- School staff who are supportive of LGBTQ students;
- School anti-bullying/harassment policies; and
- Supportive student clubs, such as Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs).

METHODS

The Puerto Rico School Climate Survey was conducted online during the spring and summer of 2015. To obtain a diverse sample of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) youth attending middle or high school in Puerto Rico, we conducted outreach through local organizations that provide services to or advocate on behalf of LGBTQ youth, and advertised and promoted on social networking sites, such as Facebook.

The final sample consisted of a total of 211 students between the ages of 13 and 20. Students were from all five regions in Puerto Rico. Slightly less than half of the sample (44.8%) was cisgender male, and over two-thirds identified as gay or lesbian (69.9%). Students in our sample were in grades 8 to 12 during the 2014-2015 school year, with the largest numbers in 12th grade.

KEY FINDINGS

Hostile School Climate

For a distressing number of LGBTQ students in Puerto Rico, schools are hostile environments — the overwhelming majority of these students routinely hear anti-LGBTQ language and experience victimization and discrimination at school. As a result, many LGBTQ students avoid school activities or miss school entirely.

School Safety

- Over two-thirds of LGBTQ students in Puerto Rico (69.0%) felt unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation, and 57.0% because of their gender expression.
- Over a third of LGBTQ students (36.6%) missed at least one entire day of school in the past month because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable, and over a tenth (13.8%) missed four or more days in the past month.
- About a third avoided school bathrooms, school athletic fields or facilities, and Physical Education (P.E.)/Gym classes because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable (39.8%, 32.8%, and 30.3%, respectively).
- Most reported avoiding school functions and extracurricular activities (73.7% and 63.7%, respectively) because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable.

Anti-LGBTQ Remarks at School

- 96.2% of LGBTQ students in Puerto Rico heard “gay” used in a negative way (e.g., “that’s so gay”) at school; 67.3% heard these remarks often or frequently, and 88.7% reported that they felt distressed because of this language.
- Almost all LGBTQ students (99.5%) heard other types of homophobic remarks (e.g., “dyke” or “faggot”); 83.8% heard this type of language often or frequently.
- 95.7% of LGBTQ students heard negative remarks about gender expression (not acting “masculine enough” or “feminine enough”); 69.0% heard these remarks often or frequently.
- 66.3% of LGBTQ students heard negative remarks specifically about transgender people, like “tranny” or “he/she;” 30.8% heard them often or frequently.
- 78.8% of students reported hearing homophobic remarks from their teachers or other school staff, and 77.2% of students reported hearing negative remarks about gender expression from teachers or other school staff.

Harassment and Assault at School

- The vast majority of LGBTQ students in Puerto Rico (83.8%) experienced verbal harassment (e.g., called names or threatened) at school based on a personal characteristic, most commonly sexual orientation (75.8%) and gender expression (67.8%).

- 31.4% of LGBTQ students were physically harassed (e.g., pushed or shoved) in the past year because of their sexual orientation, and 24.9% because of their gender expression.
- 13.9% of LGBTQ students were physically assaulted (e.g., punched, kicked, injured with a weapon) in the past year because of their sexual orientation, and 12.0% because of their gender expression.
- 42.2% of LGBTQ students experienced electronic harassment in the past year (via text messages or postings on Facebook), often known as cyberbullying.
- 58.0% of LGBTQ students were sexually harassed (e.g., unwanted touching or sexual remarks) in the past year at school.
- 57.1% of LGBTQ students who were harassed or assaulted in school did not report the incident to school staff, most commonly because they feared making the situation worse if reported or doubted that effective intervention would occur.
- 70.4% of the students who did report an incident said that school staff did nothing in response or told the student to ignore it.

Discriminatory School Policies and Practices

The vast majority of LGBTQ students in Puerto Rico (79.0%) reported personally experiencing LGBTQ-related discriminatory policies or practices at school. For example:

- 50.0% of students reported being disciplined for public displays of affection that were not disciplined among non-LGBTQ students.
- 42.4% of students had been prevented from wearing clothes considered inappropriate based on their legal sex.
- 30.1% of students had been required to use a bathroom or locker room of their legal sex.
- 24.6% of students were prohibited from discussing or writing about LGBTQ topics in school assignments, and 23.3% were prohibited from doing so in school extracurricular activities.
- 23.8% of students were prevented from wearing clothing or items supporting LGBTQ issues.
- 23.3% of students were prevented from using their preferred name or pronoun.
- 20.0% of students were prevented from attending a dance or function with someone of the same gender.

LGBTQ-Related School Resources and Supports

Students who feel safe and respected at school have better educational outcomes. LGBTQ students who have LGBTQ-related school resources report better school experiences. Unfortunately, all too many schools fail to provide these critical resources.

Inclusive Curricular Resources

Availability

- Only 16.3% of LGBTQ students in Puerto Rico were taught positive representations about LGBTQ people, history, or events in their schools; 37.8% had been taught negative content about LGBTQ topics.

- Less than a fifth (13.1%) of students reported that they could find information about LGBTQ-related issues in their school library.
- Less than a quarter of students (22.9%) with Internet access at school reported being able to access LGBTQ-related information online via school computers.

Utility

- LGBTQ students in Puerto Rican schools with an LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum:
 - Were less likely to hear “gay” used in a negative way often or frequently (47.2% vs. 71.4%);
 - Were less likely to hear negative remarks about gender expression and transgender people often or frequently (gender expression: 52.7% vs. 72.4%; transgender people: 16.7% vs. 33.7%);
 - Were more likely to say their classmates were somewhat or very accepting of LGBTQ people (66.6% vs. 31.3%);
 - Were more likely to have had a positive or helpful conversation with a teacher about LGBTQ issues at least once (74.5% vs. 45.6%), and they were more likely to say they felt comfortable discussing these issues with their teachers than other students (66.7% vs. 38.5%); and
 - Felt more connected to their school community than other students.

Supportive Educators

Availability

- Almost all LGBTQ students in Puerto Rico (95.8%) could identify at least one staff member supportive of LGBTQ students at their school.
- A third (33.0%) could identify at least six supportive school staff.
- Only 15.7% of students could identify 11 or more supportive staff.
- 15.7% of students reported that their school administration was supportive of LGBTQ students.

Utility

- Compared to LGBTQ students with no supportive school staff, LGBTQ students with many (11 or more) supportive staff at their school:
 - Were less likely to feel unsafe than students because of their sexual orientation (60.7% vs. 75.0%) or how they express their gender (50.0% vs. 75.0%); and
 - Were less likely to miss school because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable (24.1% vs. 62.5%).

Comprehensive Bullying/Harassment Policies

Availability

- Less than half of LGBTQ students in Puerto Rico (48.3%) reported that their school had an anti-bullying policy at their school.

- Only one in ten students (10.0%) reported that their school had a partially enumerated policy (i.e., a policy that enumerates sexual orientation only, or gender identity/expression only), and 4.7% had a comprehensive policy (i.e., a policy that specifically enumerates both sexual orientation and gender identity/expression).

Utility

Students in schools with a partially enumerated policy or comprehensive anti-bullying policy were more likely to report that school staff intervened when hearing homophobic remarks: 38.4% reported staff intervened most of the time or always compared to 14.6% of students with a generic policy or 13.3% of students with no policy.

Gay-Straight Alliances

Only 1.9% of LGBTQ students in Puerto Rico said that their school had a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) or similar student club. Due to the overwhelming absence of GSAs in Puerto Rico middle and high schools, we were unable to examine differences in school climate for students who reported having a GSA compared to those who did not. However, other research from the 50 states and D.C., including our National School Climate Survey, has demonstrated that LGBTQ students in schools with GSAs report more positive school experiences, including lower victimization and more positive connections with school staff and peers.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Puerto Rico School Climate Survey provides evidence, similar to schools in the 50 states and D.C., that LGBTQ students are often unsafe in Puerto Rico's schools. There is, therefore, an urgent need for action in order to create safe and affirming learning environments for LGBTQ students in Puerto Rico. Results from the Puerto Rico School Climate Survey demonstrate the ways in which school-based supports — such as supportive staff, enumerated anti-bullying/harassment policies, and curricular resources inclusive of LGBTQ people — can positively affect LGBTQ students' school experiences. Based on these findings, we recommend:

- Increasing middle and high school student access to appropriate and accurate information regarding LGBTQ people, history, and events through inclusive curricula and library and Internet resources;
- Providing professional development for school staff to improve rates of intervention in biased behaviors and increase the number of supportive teachers and other staff available to LGBTQ students;
- Ensuring that school policies and practices, such as those related to dress codes and school dances, do not discriminate against LGBTQ students; and
- Adopting and implementing comprehensive bullying/harassment policies that specifically enumerate sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression in individual schools, with clear and effective systems for reporting and addressing incidents that students experience;
- Supporting student clubs, such as GSAs, and other school-wide programming that provide support for LGBTQ students, provide opportunities for student leadership development for LGBTQ students, and address LGBTQ issues in education.

Taken together, such measures can move us toward a future in which all students in Puerto Rico have the opportunity to learn and succeed in school, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

Introduction

Students in Puerto Rico, especially lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ)* students, experience challenges when it comes to their education. Puerto Rico is currently facing an economic crisis that threatens the funding for public education. Budget cuts have already led to school closures¹ and could also lead to a reduction in school staff and salaries, which could make the implementation of critical school supports and resources more limited than they already are. Additionally, the new administration in Puerto Rico rescinded recent guidance from the Puerto Rico Department of Education that would have allowed transgender students to wear the school uniform or use the school bathroom that aligned with their gender identity, and promoted the inclusion of LGBTQ topics in the curriculum.²

There is now a growing body of literature on LGBTQ youth in the United States, mostly drawn from the population of the 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia. GLSEN has been conducting the National School Climate Survey (NSCS), a survey of LGBTQ students' school experiences in the U.S., biennially since 1999, and this research, along with other scholarship, has consistently demonstrated that LGBTQ students are particularly vulnerable to bullying and harassment. These students frequently experience in-school victimization,³ which often includes recurrent verbal and physical harassment and assault,⁴ sexual harassment,⁵ and social exclusion and isolation.⁶ These experiences of victimization can lead to poorer psychological well-being,⁷ and can negatively impact access to education due to increased absenteeism resulting from feeling uncomfortable or unsafe in school, increased discipline problems, and lower levels of school engagement or academic achievement.⁸ Research findings from GLSEN's *From Teasing to Torment: School Climate Revisited, A Survey of U.S. Secondary School Students and Teachers*, provide evidence that LGBTQ students remain at significant risk for bullying and harassment compared to their non-LGBTQ peers, and that these elevated rates of victimization contribute to disparities between LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ students on educational indicators, such as educational attainment and school discipline.⁹

Despite the strong evidence of hostile school climate and its damaging effects on LGBTQ youth's educational well-being in the United States generally, there is limited data on LGBTQ students in Puerto Rico's schools. However, there is a small, but growing, body of literature on the experiences of LGB youth in Puerto Rico, much of which has focused specifically on gay and bisexual males.¹⁰ For example, one study contextualized how structures of family, religion, and cultural norms, especially machismo, impact the lives of young, Puerto Rican gay males, especially as they relate to their coming-out process.¹¹ Another study provided retrospective data on LGBT student experiences in Puerto Rico's schools, as well as the attitudes of school social workers towards LGBT students.¹² More recently, the 2015 Puerto Rico Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) included survey items to assess sexual orientation, providing Puerto Rico-specific data for lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) high school students with respect to health behaviors. This YRBS data allowed, for the first time, an examination of potential disparities between LGB youth and heterosexual youth.¹³ In fact, these findings demonstrated that LGB youth were at considerably greater risk at school. Specifically, LGB students were more likely to be bullied (both electronically and on school property), and to be in a physical fight at school, as compared to their heterosexual peers.¹⁴ Additionally, LGB youth in Puerto Rico were three times more likely to miss school because they felt unsafe at school or on their way to or from school.¹⁵ These data provide a snapshot into the experiences and disparities that exist for LGB students in Puerto Rico. However, the YRBS had very few items that focus on the school environment and did not include a way to identify transgender or other non-cisgender youth (e.g., genderqueer youth).

There has been growing interest from Puerto Rican LGBTQ youth advocates for Puerto Rico-specific data to better understand the particular experiences of their LGBTQ student population. To help address this gap in knowledge, in 2015, GLSEN surveyed LGBTQ students from Puerto Rico. This report provides the first-ever empirical findings about the recent school experiences of LGBTQ students in Puerto Rico's schools. Similar

* For simplicity, throughout this report we use the acronym "LGBTQ" when referring to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer students, as well as in reference to the LGBTQ population in general, and when referencing any particular items from the Puerto Rico School Climate Survey, even when those survey items used "LGBT." Any specific reference to "LGBT" in this report is done to reflect the terminology that was used by other authors in their particular works cited.

to the NSCS, the Puerto Rico School Climate Survey reports on the prevalence of anti-LGBTQ language, discrimination, and victimization. The survey also examines the factors that can result in safer and more affirming learning environments for LGBTQ students by assessing the availability of resources and supports for students in Puerto Rico's schools, such as LGBTQ-inclusive curricular resources, supportive educators, anti-bullying/

harassment policies that explicitly protect LGBTQ students, and student clubs that address LGBTQ issues (e.g., Gay-Straight Alliances).

This report offers a broad understanding of the policies, practices, and circumstances that make LGBTQ students in Puerto Rico vulnerable to discrimination and victimization at school.

Methods and Sample

Participants in Puerto Rico completed an online survey about their experiences in school during the 2014–2015 school year, including hearing biased remarks, feeling safe, being harassed, feeling comfortable at school, and experiencing discriminatory actions; they were also asked about the availability of supportive school resources. Youth were eligible to participate in the survey if they were at least 13 years of age, attended a K–12 school in Puerto Rico during the 2014–2015 school year, and identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, another sexual orientation other than heterosexual (e.g., pansexual, questioning), or described themselves as transgender or as having another gender identity that is not cisgender (“cisgender” describes a person whose gender identity is aligned with the sex they were assigned at birth). Data collection occurred during the spring and summer of 2015.

The survey was available online through GLSEN’s website. Notices and announcements were sent through GLSEN’s email networks as well as through local organizations that provide services to or advocate on behalf of LGBTQ youth in Puerto Rico. Local organizations were also notified about the survey through in-person visits by GLSEN staff. Local organizations serving LGBTQ youth notified their participants about the online survey via email, social media, and by distributing paper flyers and promotional stickers. Also, to increase our reach to LGBTQ youth, we conducted outreach to Puerto Rican universities and college campuses during the summer to reach incoming first-year students who were in high school during the previous year. The survey and all information and promotional materials were available in both English and Spanish.

Contacting participants only through LGBTQ youth-serving groups and organizations would have limited our ability to reach LGBTQ students who were not connected to or engaged in LGBTQ communities in some way. Thus, in order to broaden our reach to LGBTQ students who may not have had such connections, we conducted targeted outreach and advertising through social media sites. Specifically, we advertised the survey on Facebook to Puerto Rican users between 13 and 18 years of age who indicated on their profile that they were: male and interested in men, male and interested in men and women, female and interested in women, or female and interested in women and men. We also advertised to those 13–18 year old Facebook users in Puerto Rico who listed relevant interests or “likes” such as “LGBT,” “queer,” “transgender,” or other LGBTQ-related terms or interests. We also promoted the survey to youth who were connected to Facebook pages relevant to LGBTQ students (e.g., Day of Silence page), or friends of other youth connected to relevant Facebook pages.

The final sample consisted of a total of 211 students in Puerto Rico between the ages of 13 and 20. Table 1.1 presents participants’ demographic characteristics and Table 1.2 shows the characteristics of the schools attended by participants. Slightly less than half (44.8%) were cisgender male, and over two-thirds identified as gay or lesbian (69.9%). Students were in grades 8 to 12 in Puerto Rico, with the largest numbers in 12th grade. It is important to note that the Puerto Rico School Climate Survey report includes LGBTQ students that attended school in Puerto Rico during the 2014–2015 school year, but does not include students whose ethnicity is Puerto Rican that attended school outside of the island.¹⁶

Table 1.1 Characteristics of Survey Participants

Sexual Orientation ¹⁷ (n = 136)		Gender ¹⁸ (n = 134)	
Gay or Lesbian	69.9%	Cisgender	76.9%
Bisexual ¹⁹	14.7%	<i>Female</i>	32.1%
Pansexual ²⁰	10.3%	<i>Male</i>	44.8%
Queer	2.2%	Transgender	9.7%
Questioning or Unsure	2.9%	<i>Female</i>	3.0%
		<i>Male</i>	4.5%
		<i>Non-binary (i.e., identifies as something other than male or female)</i>	2.2%
Grade in School (n = 127)			
8 th	1.6%		
9 th	7.9%	Genderqueer	9.7%
10 th	15.0%	Another Gender (e.g., agender, genderfluid)	3.7%
11 th	18.9%		
12 th	56.7%		
Average Age (n = 211) = 16.7 years			

Table 1.2 Characteristics of Survey Participants' Schools

Grade Levels (n = 209)		School Type (n = 211)	
K through 12 School	17.2%	Public School	75.4%
Lower School (elementary and middle grades)	0.5%	<i>Charter</i>	7.1%
Middle School	6.2%	<i>Magnet</i>	12.2%
Upper School (middle and high grades)	16.7%	Religious-Affiliated School	14.2%
High School	59.3%	Other Independent or Private School	10.4%
School Locale (n = 205)		Region ²¹ (n = 156)	
Urban	62.9%	North	40.4%
Suburban	18.0%	East	21.8%
Rural or Small Town	19.0%	West	18.6%
		Central	10.9%
		South	8.3%

Results

PART ONE: INDICATORS OF HOSTILE SCHOOL CLIMATE

School Safety

Overall Safety at School

For LGBTQ youth in Puerto Rico, school can be an unsafe place for a variety of reasons. Students in our survey were asked whether they ever felt unsafe at school because of a personal characteristic, including: sexual orientation, gender, gender expression (i.e., how traditionally “masculine” or “feminine” they were in appearance or behavior), body size or weight, family’s income or economic status, academic ability, citizenship status, and actual or perceived race or ethnicity, disability, or religion. The preponderance of LGBTQ students in Puerto Rico (87.5%) reported feeling unsafe at school because of at least one of these personal characteristics. As shown in Figure 1.1, students most commonly felt unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation and gender expression:

- Over two-thirds of LGBTQ students (69.0%) reported feeling unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation.
- More than half of students (57.0%) felt unsafe because of how they expressed their gender.
- A sizable percentage of LGBTQ students also reported feeling unsafe because of their body size or weight (39.0%).

We also asked students if they felt unsafe at school for another reason not included in the listed

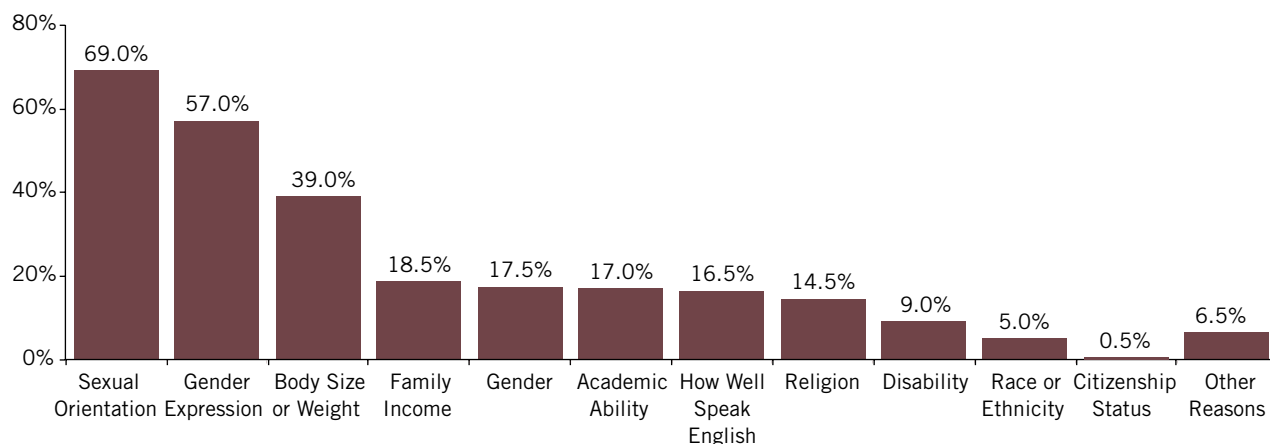
characteristics, and if so, why. Of the 6.5% who said they felt unsafe for another reason, students mentioned a variety of reasons, including: for simply being who they are, because of mental health issues, etc.

School Engagement and Safety Concerns

When students feel unsafe or uncomfortable in school, they may choose to avoid the particular areas or activities where they feel most unwelcome, or may feel that they need to avoid attending school altogether. Thus, a hostile school climate can impact an LGBTQ student’s ability to fully engage and participate with the school community. To examine this possible restriction on LGBTQ students’ school engagement, we asked about specific spaces and school activities they might avoid because of safety concerns. As shown in Figure 1.2, school bathrooms, school athletic fields or facilities, and Physical Education (P.E.)/Gym classes were the most common spaces avoided, with about one-third of LGBTQ students in Puerto Rico avoiding each of these spaces because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable (39.8%, 32.8%, and 30.3%, respectively). In addition, nearly one out of five students (19.9%) avoided the cafeteria or lunch room because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable.

In addition to avoiding certain spaces in school because of safety reasons, LGBTQ students may also avoid other more social aspects of student life for similar concerns for personal safety.

Figure 1.1 LGBTQ Students Who Felt Unsafe at School Because of Actual or Perceived Personal Characteristics



Thus, we asked students if they avoid attending school functions, such as school dances or assemblies, or participating in extracurricular clubs or programs because they feel unsafe or uncomfortable. Most LGBTQ students reported avoiding school functions and extracurricular activities to some extent (73.7% and 63.7%, respectively), and about around one out of three students avoided them often or frequently (36.4% and 29.4%, respectively; see Figure 1.3).

Involvement in school community activities like clubs or special events can have a positive impact on students' sense of belonging at school, self-

esteem, and academic achievement.²² Therefore, it is concerning that such a high rate of LGBTQ students in Puerto Rico may not have full access to the benefits of engaging in these school activities.

Feeling unsafe or uncomfortable at school can negatively affect the ability of students to thrive and succeed academically, particularly if it results in avoiding school. When asked about absenteeism, over one-third of LGBTQ students (36.6%) reported missing at least one entire day of school in the past month because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable, and over a tenth (13.8%) missed four or more days in the past month (see Figure 1.4).

Figure 1.2 Percentage of LGBTQ Students Who Avoid Spaces at School Because They Felt Unsafe or Uncomfortable

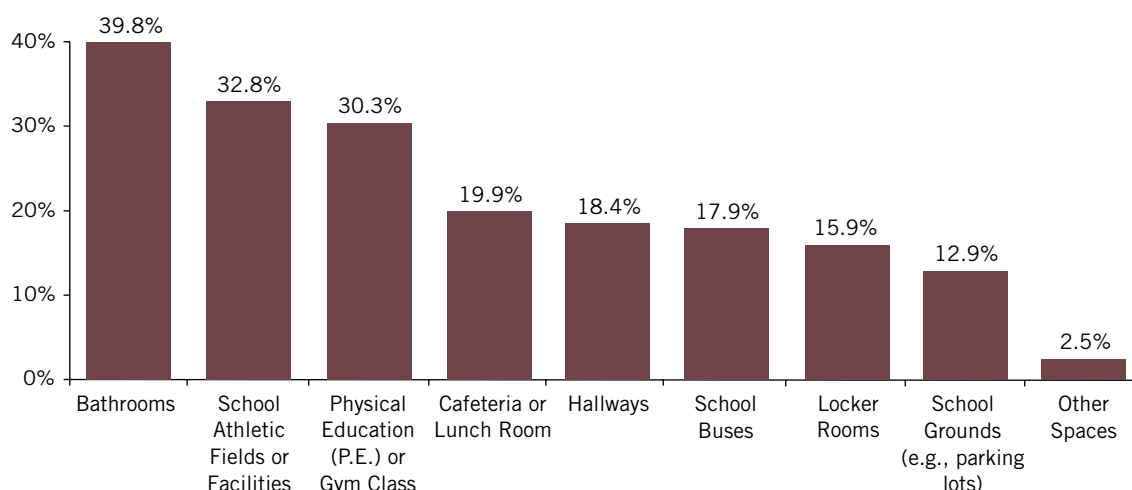


Figure 1.3 LGBTQ Students Who Avoided School Activities Because They Felt Unsafe or Uncomfortable

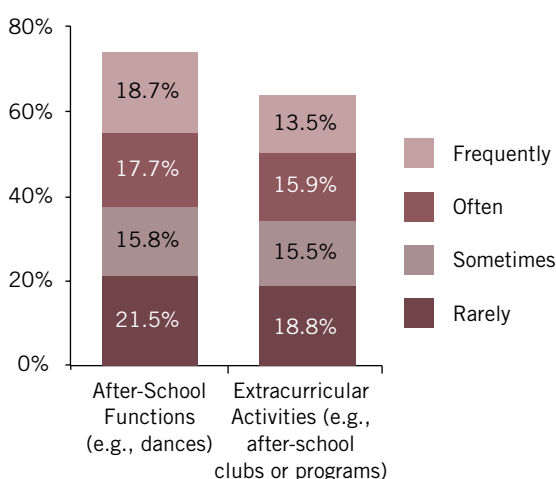
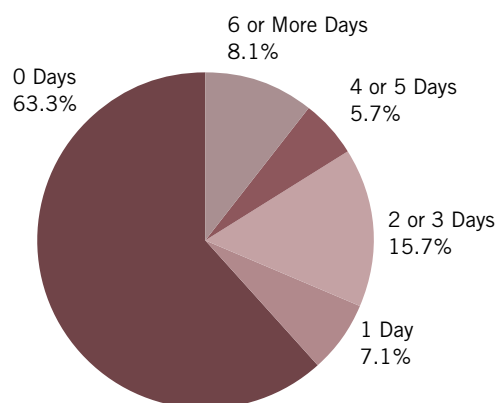


Figure 1.4 Frequency of Missing Days of School in the Past Month Because of Feeling Unsafe or Uncomfortable



Exposure to Biased Language

GLSEN strives to make schools safe and affirming for all students, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or any other characteristic that may be the basis for harassment. Keeping classrooms and hallways free of homophobic, sexist, racist, and other types of biased language is one aspect of creating a more positive school climate for all students. In order to assess this feature of school climate, we asked LGBTQ students in Puerto Rico about their experiences with hearing anti-LGBTQ and other types of biased remarks while at school. Because homophobic remarks and negative remarks about gender expression are specifically relevant to LGBTQ students, we asked Puerto Rico students in our survey additional questions about school staff's usage of and responses to hearing these types of anti-LGBTQ language.

Hearing Anti-LGBTQ Remarks at School

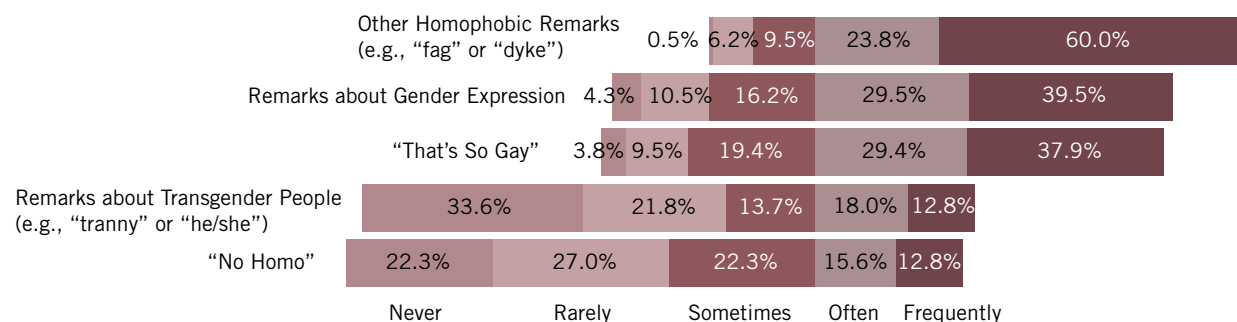
We asked Puerto Rican LGBTQ students about the frequency with which they heard homophobic remarks (such as “faggot” and “dyke,” the word “gay” being used in a negative way, or the phrase “no homo”). We also asked about the frequency of hearing negative remarks about the way students expressed their gender at school (such as comments related to a female student not acting “feminine enough”) and negative remarks about transgender people (such as “tranny” or “he/she”). Further, we also asked students about the frequency of hearing these types of remarks from school staff, as well as whether anyone intervened when hearing this type of language at school.

Homophobic Remarks. The most common form of homophobic language heard by LGBTQ students in our survey was hearing homophobic epithets, such as “faggot,” or “dyke.”²³ As shown in

Figure 1.5, the overwhelming majority of LGBTQ students (83.8%) reported hearing these types of comments often or frequently in their schools. Hearing negative expressions with the word “gay,” such as “that’s so gay,” or “you’re so gay” were also regularly heard by LGBTQ students, with two-thirds (67.3%) hearing these types of remarks often or frequently. These types of expressions are often used to mean that something or someone is stupid or worthless and, thus, may be dismissed as innocuous by school authorities and students in comparison to overtly derogatory remarks such as “faggot” or “dyke.” However, many LGBTQ students did not view these expressions as innocuous. In fact, the preponderance of LGBTQ students in Puerto Rico (88.7%) reported that hearing “gay” used in a negative manner caused them to feel bothered or distressed to some degree (see Figure 1.6). By comparison, the phrase “no homo” was the least-commonly reported homophobic remark heard by LGBTQ students at school; however, this expression was still heard often or frequently by more than a quarter of students (28.4%) in our survey (see also Figure 1.5). “No homo” is a phrase employed at the end of a statement in order to rid it of a potential homosexual connotation. For instance, some might use the phrase after giving a compliment to someone of the same gender, as in, “I like your jeans — no homo.” This phrase is homophobic in that it promotes the notion that it is unacceptable to have a same-gender attraction.

We also asked LGBTQ students that heard homophobic remarks in school how pervasive this behavior was among the student population. As shown in Figure 1.7, nearly a third (30.8%) reported that these types of remarks were made by most of their peers. Additionally, and disturbingly, more than three-fourths of students (78.8%) reported ever hearing homophobic remarks from their teachers or other school staff (see Figure 1.8).

Figure 1.5 Frequency that LGBTQ Students Hear Anti-LGBTQ Remarks at School



Students who reported hearing homophobic remarks at school were asked how often homophobic remarks were made in the presence of teachers or other school staff, and whether staff intervened if present. Less than a third of students (26.6%) in our survey reported that school staff members were present all or most of the time when homophobic remarks were made.²⁴ When school staff were present, the usage of biased and derogatory language by students remained largely unchallenged. For example, less than a fifth of students (17.7%) reported that school personnel intervened most of the time or always when homophobic remarks were made in their presence, and 42.7% reported that staff never intervened when hearing homophobic remarks (see Figure 1.9).

One would expect teachers and school staff to bear the responsibility for addressing problems of biased language in school. Though, students may also intervene when hearing biased language, especially given that school personnel are often not present during these incidents. Thus, other students' willingness to intervene when hearing this kind of language may be another important indicator of school climate. However, only 13.9% reported that their peers intervened most of the time or always when hearing homophobic remarks, and more than one-third (38.1%) said their peers never intervened (see also Figure 1.9).

These findings indicate that the majority of LGBTQ students in Puerto Rico report rampant usage

Figure 1.6 Degree that LGBTQ Students Were Bothered or Distressed as a Result of Hearing "Gay" Used in a Derogatory Way

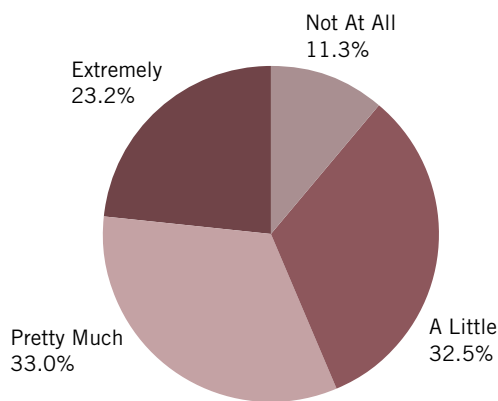


Figure 1.7 LGBTQ Students' Reports of How Many Students Make Homophobic Remarks

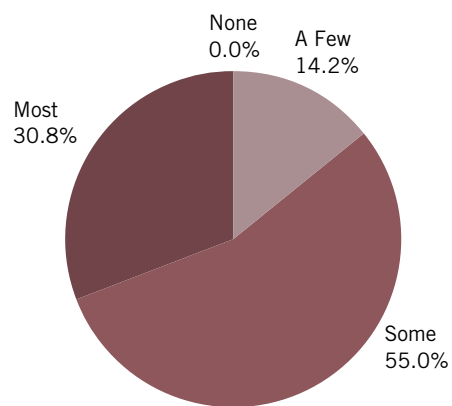


Figure 1.8 LGBTQ Students Hearing Biased Remarks from Teachers or Other School Staff

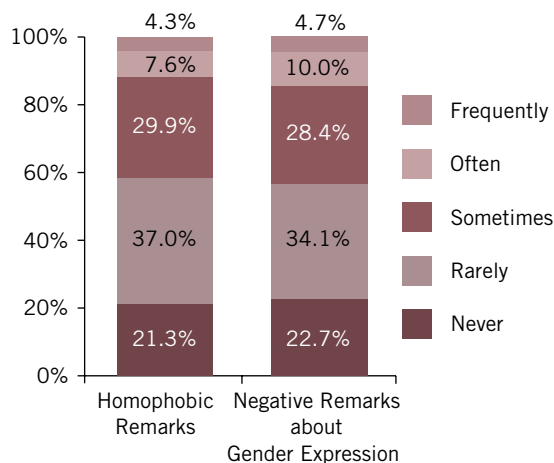
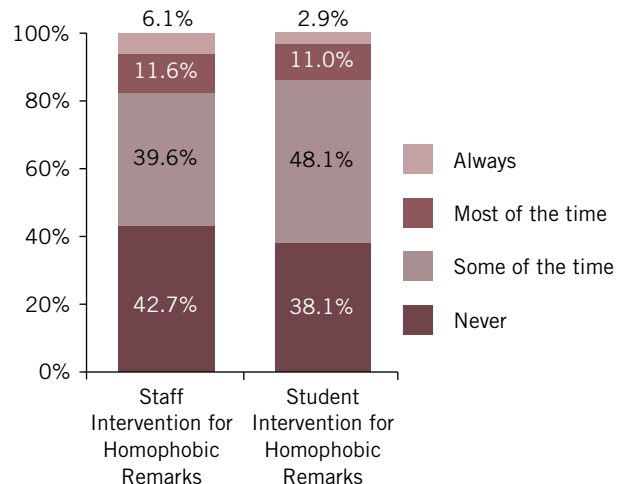


Figure 1.9 LGBTQ Students' Reports of School Staff and Student Intervention in Homophobic Remarks



of homophobic remarks in their schools, which contributes to a hostile learning environment for this population. Infrequent intervention by school authorities when hearing such language in school may send a message to students that homophobic language is tolerated. Furthermore, school staff may be modeling poor behavior and legitimizing the usage of homophobic language, in that most students heard school staff make homophobic remarks themselves.

Negative Remarks about Gender Expression.

Society often imposes norms for what is considered an appropriate expression of one's gender. Those who express themselves in a manner considered to be atypical may experience criticism, harassment, and sometimes violence. Thus, we asked LGBTQ students in Puerto Rico two separate questions about hearing comments related to a student's gender expression; one question asked how often they heard remarks about someone not acting "masculine enough," and another question asked how often they heard comments about someone not acting "feminine enough."

Findings from this survey demonstrate that negative remarks about someone's gender expression were pervasive in Puerto Rico schools. Overall, as shown previously in Figure 1.5, more than two-thirds of students (69.0%) reported hearing either type of remark about someone's gender expression often or frequently at school. In addition, Figure 1.10 shows the frequency of hearing remarks about other students not acting "masculine enough" and not acting "feminine enough" separately — there were no significant differences in the frequency of students hearing negative remarks about students' masculinity compared to students' femininity.²⁵

When asked how much of the student population made these types of remarks, over a third of students in Puerto Rico (34.2%) reported that most of their peers made negative remarks about someone's gender expression (see Figure 1.11). Further, over three-quarters of students (77.2%) had heard teachers or other school staff make negative comments about a student's gender expression (see Figure 1.8).

Nearly a quarter of students (24.3%) in our survey that heard negative remarks about gender expression reported that school staff members were present all or most of the time when these remarks

were made.²⁶ We asked students how often school staff intervened when they did hear these remarks, as well as how often other students intervened. Approximately one in ten LGBTQ students reported that school staff (11.2%) or that their peers (12.4%) intervened most of the time or always when remarks about gender expression were made in their presence (see Figure 1.12). No differences were found in the frequencies of intervention by school staff in negative remarks about gender expression compared to intervention in homophobic remarks, nor were there any differences in how frequently students intervened in these two types of remarks.²⁷

Figure 1.10 Frequency of LGBTQ Students Hearing Different Types of Remarks about Students' Gender Expression

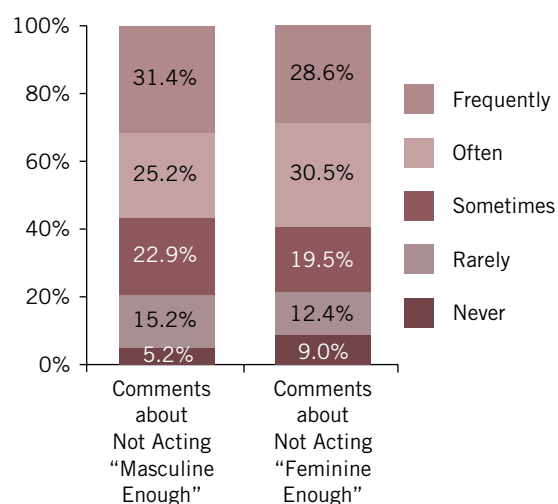


Figure 1.11 LGBTQ Students' Reports of How Many Students Make Negative Remarks about Gender Expression

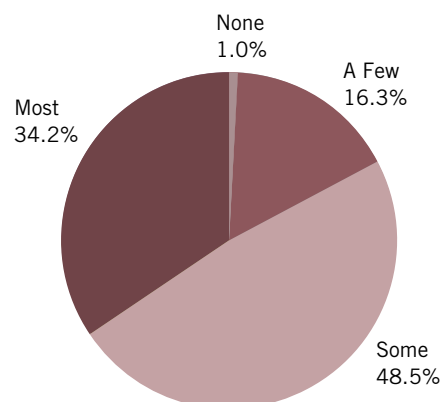
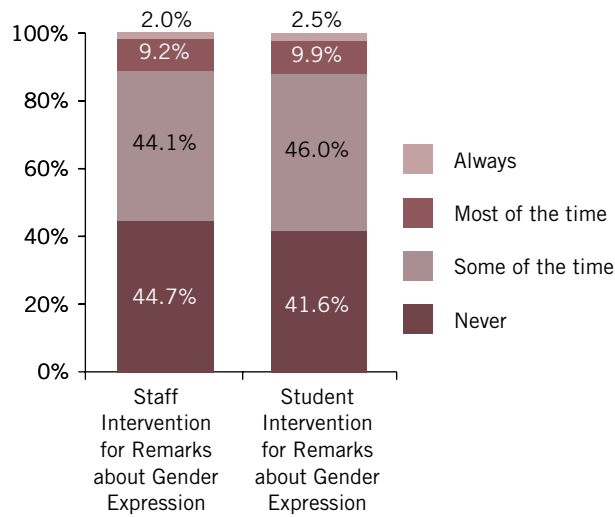


Figure 1.12 LGBTQ Students' Reports of School Staff and Student Intervention for Remarks about Gender Expression



Negative Remarks about Transgender People.

Similar to negative comments about gender expression, people may make negative comments about transgender people because they can pose a challenge to “traditional” ideas about gender. Therefore, we asked students about how often they heard negative remarks specifically about transgender people, like “tranny” or “he/she.” Nearly two-thirds of LGBTQ students (30.8%) in our survey reported hearing these comments often or frequently (see Figure 1.5).

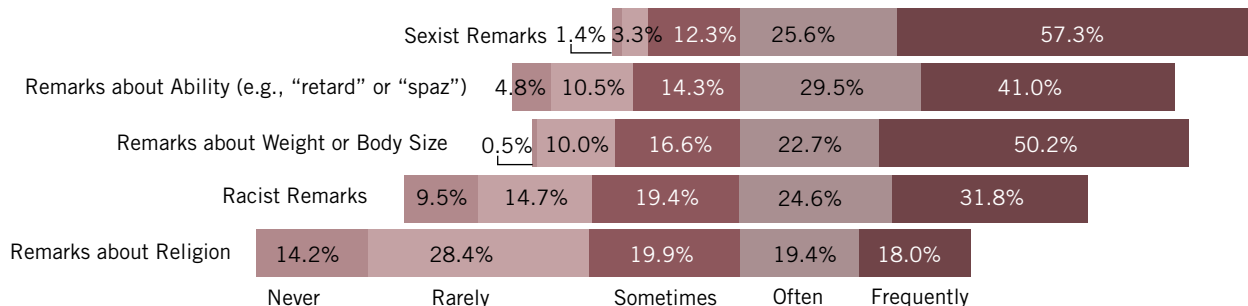
The pervasiveness of anti-LGBTQ remarks is a concerning contribution to hostile school climates for all LGBTQ students. Any negative remark about sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression may signal to LGBTQ students that they are unwelcome in their school communities, even if a specific negative comment is not directly applicable to the individual student who hears it.

For example, negative comments about gender expression may disparage transgender or LGB people, even if transgender-specific or homophobic slurs are not used.

Hearing Other Types of Biased Remarks at School

In addition to hearing anti-LGBTQ remarks at school, hearing other types of biased language is also an important indicator of school climate for LGBTQ students. We asked students in Puerto Rico about their experiences hearing racist remarks (such as “nigger” or “spic”), sexist remarks (such as someone being called “bitch” in a negative way, or girls being talked about as inferior to boys), negative remarks about other students’ ability (such as “retard” or “spaz”), negative remarks about other students’ religion, and negative remarks about other students’ body size or weight at school. For most of these types of remarks, LGBTQ students in our survey reported that they were commonplace at their schools, although some comments were more prevalent than others (see Figure 1.13).²⁸ Along with homophobic remarks, sexist remarks were the most commonly heard biased remarks. More than three-quarters of LGBTQ students in Puerto Rico (82.9%) heard sexist remarks regularly (i.e., often or frequently) at their school. Negative remarks about students’ ability/disability, and remarks about their weight or body size, were also commonly heard types of biased remarks; over two-thirds heard these types of remarks regularly from other students (70.5% and 72.9%, respectively). Comments about race/ethnicity were somewhat less common, with about half of students (56.4%) reporting hearing racist remarks from other students regularly. Least commonly heard were negative remarks about other students’ religion, with just over a third (37.4%) reporting that they heard them regularly at school.

Figure 1.13 Frequency that LGBTQ Students Hear Other Biased Remarks at School



Experiences of Harassment and Assault at School

Hearing anti-LGBTQ remarks in school can contribute to feeling unsafe at school and create a negative learning environment. However, direct experiences with harassment and assault may have even more serious consequences on the lives of students. We asked survey participants how often (“never,” “rarely,” “sometimes,” “often,” or “frequently”) they had been verbally harassed, physically harassed, or physically assaulted at school during the past year specifically based on a personal characteristic, including sexual orientation, gender, gender expression (e.g., not acting “masculine” or “feminine” enough), actual or perceived race or ethnicity, and actual or perceived disability.

Verbal Harassment

An overwhelming majority of LGBTQ students in Puerto Rico (83.8%) reported being verbally harassed (e.g., called names, threatened) at some point in the past year based on any of these characteristics, and 42.7% experienced high frequencies (i.e., often or frequently) of verbal harassment. LGBTQ students in Puerto Rico most commonly reported experiencing verbal harassment at school based on their sexual orientation and how they expressed their gender (see Figure 1.14):²⁹

- Over three-quarters of LGBTQ students (75.8%) had been verbally harassed based

on their sexual orientation; over a quarter (27.7%) experienced this harassment often or frequently; and

- Over two-thirds of LGBTQ students (67.8%) were verbally harassed at school based on their gender expression; a quarter (25.0%) reported being harassed for this reason often or frequently.

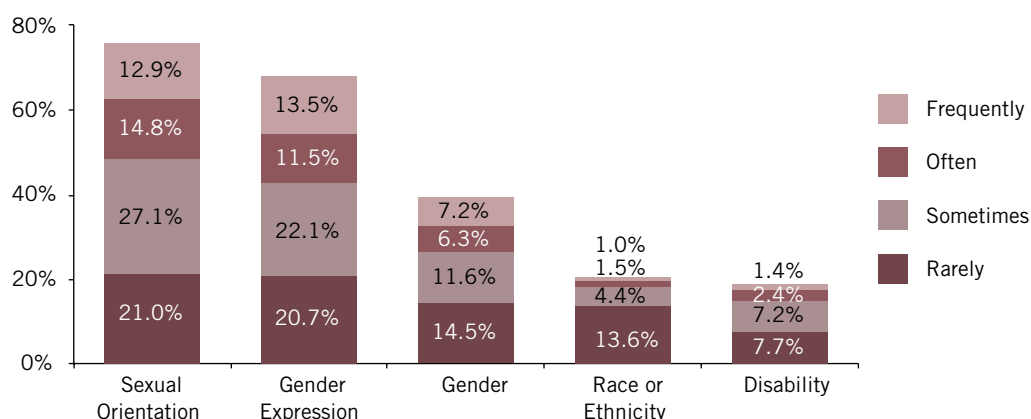
Although not as commonly reported, many LGBTQ students in Puerto Rico were harassed in school based on their gender — almost two-fifths (39.6%) had been verbally harassed in the past year for this reason; over a tenth (13.5%) were verbally harassed often or frequently. In addition, as shown in Figure 1.14, sizable percentages of LGBTQ students reported being verbally harassed at school based on their actual or perceived race or ethnicity (20.5%) and disability (18.7%).

Physical Harassment

With regard to physical harassment, over a third of LGBTQ students in Puerto Rico (35.7%) had been physically harassed (e.g., shoved or pushed) at some point at school during the past year based on any personal characteristic. Students most commonly reported being physically harassed at school based on their sexual orientation, followed by how they expressed their gender (see Figure 1.15):³⁰

- Nearly one-third of LGBTQ students (31.4%) had been physically harassed at school

Figure 1.14 Frequency of Verbal Harassment Experienced by LGBTQ Students in the Past School Year



based on their sexual orientation, and 8.1% reported that this harassment occurred often or frequently; and

- A quarter (24.9%) had been physically harassed at school based on their gender expression, with 7.4% experiencing this often or frequently.

With regard to other personal characteristics, about a fifth of respondents (18.8%) had been physically harassed based on their gender, 5.9% based on their race/ethnicity, and 7.5% based on an actual or perceived disability (see also Figure 1.15).

Physical Assault

LGBTQ students in Puerto Rico were less likely to report experiencing physical assault (e.g., punched, kicked, or injured with a weapon) at

school than verbal or physical harassment, which is not surprising given the more severe nature of assault.³¹ Nonetheless, 16.3% of students in our survey were assaulted at school during the past year for any personal characteristic, again most commonly based on their sexual orientation or gender expression (see Figure 1.16):³²

- 13.9% of LGBTQ students were assaulted at school based on their sexual orientation; and
- 12.0% were assaulted at school based on how they expressed their gender.

Physical assault based on gender, actual or perceived race/ethnicity or disability was less commonly reported: 9.7%, 4.4%, and 4.7% of LGBTQ students reported any occurrence in the past year, respectively (see also Figure 1.16).

Figure 1.15 Frequency of Physical Harassment Experienced by LGBTQ Students in the Past School Year

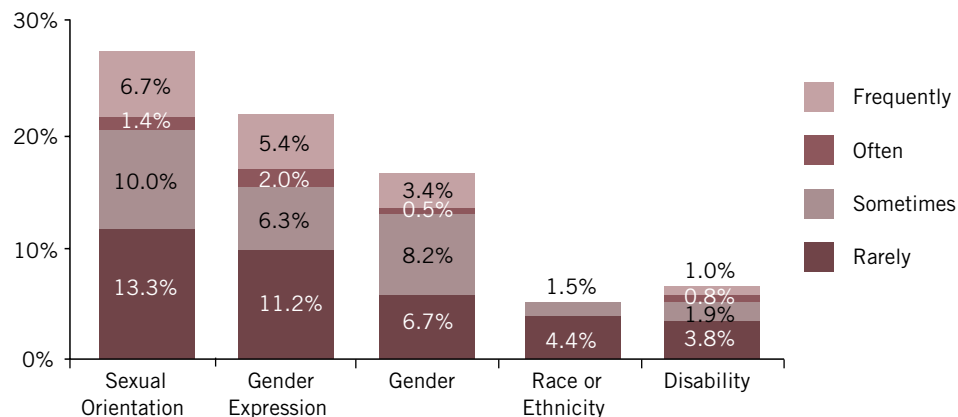
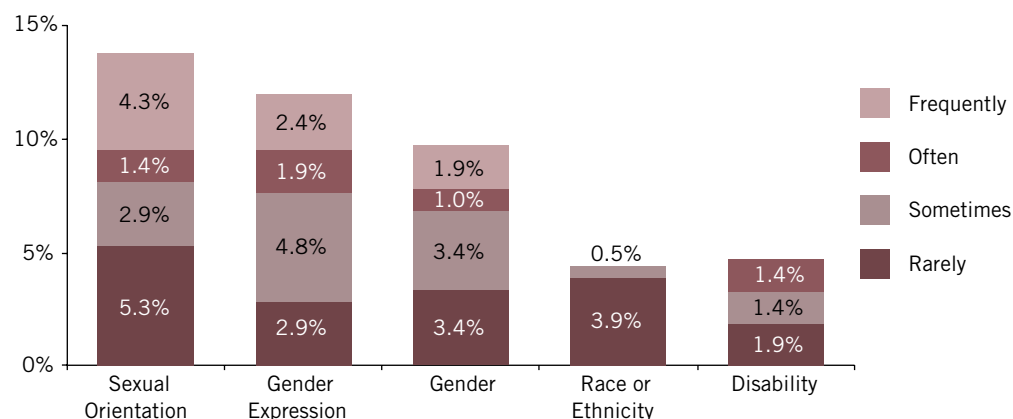


Figure 1.16 Frequency of Physical Assault Experienced by LGBTQ Students in the Past School Year



Experiences of Other Types of Harassment and Negative Events

LGBTQ students may be harassed or experience other negative events at school for reasons that are not clearly related to sexual orientation, gender expression, or another personal characteristic. In our survey, we also asked Puerto Rico LGBTQ students how often they experienced these other types of events in the past year, such as being sexually harassed or deliberately excluded by their peers.

Relational Aggression. Research on school-based bullying and harassment often focuses on physical or overt acts of aggressive behavior; however, it is also important to examine relational forms of aggression that can damage peer relationships, such as spreading rumors or excluding students from peer activities. We asked participants how often they experienced these two common forms of relational aggression. As illustrated in Figure 1.17, the vast majority of LGBTQ students (89.2%) reported that they had felt deliberately excluded or “left out” by other students, and over half (55.5%) experienced this often or frequently. Similarly, the vast majority of students (87.6%) had mean rumors or lies told about them at school, and nearly half (48.8%) experienced this often or frequently.

Sexual Harassment. Harassment experienced by LGBTQ students in school can often be sexual in nature, particularly for lesbian and bisexual young women and transgender youth.³³ Survey participants were asked how often they had

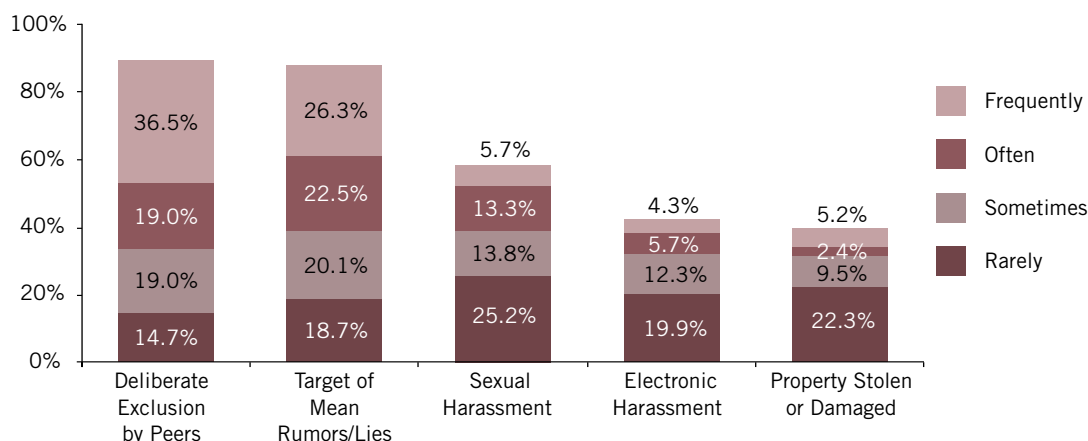
experienced sexual harassment at school, such as unwanted touching or sexual remarks directed at them. As shown in Figure 1.17, about three in five LGBTQ students (58.0%) had been sexually harassed at school, and nearly a fifth (19.0%) reported that such events occurred often or frequently.

Electronic Harassment or “Cyberbullying.”

Electronic harassment (often called “cyberbullying”) is using an electronic medium, such as a mobile phone or Internet communications, to threaten or harm others. In the past decade there has been growing attention given to this type of harassment, as access to the Internet, smart phones, and other electronic forms of communication has increased for many youth. We asked students in our survey how often they were harassed or threatened by students at their school via electronic mediums (e.g., text messages, emails, instant messages, or postings on Internet sites such as Facebook). About two-fifths of LGBTQ students (42.2%) reported experiencing this type of harassment in the past year. One in ten (10.0%) had experienced it often or frequently (see also Figure 1.17).

Property Theft or Damage at School. Having one’s personal property damaged or stolen is yet another dimension of a hostile school climate for students. Over a third of LGBTQ students (39.4%) reported that their property had been stolen or purposefully damaged by other students at school in the past year, and 7.6% said that such events had occurred often or frequently (see Figure 1.17).

Figure 1.17 Frequency of Other Types of Harassment Experienced by LGBTQ Students in the Past Year



Reporting of School-Based Harassment and Assault

GLSEN advocates that anti-bullying/harassment measures in school must include clear processes for reporting by both students and staff, and that staff are adequately trained to effectively address instances of bullying and harassment when informed about them. In our survey, we asked students in Puerto Rico who had experienced harassment or assault in the past school year how often they had reported the incidents to school staff. As shown in Figure 1.18, over half of these students (57.1%) never reported incidents of victimization to school staff, and less than a fifth of students (16.6%) indicated that they reported these incidents to staff regularly (i.e., reporting “most of the time” or “always”).

Given that family members may be able to advocate on behalf of the student with school personnel, we also asked LGBTQ students in Puerto Rico if they reported harassment or assault to a family member (i.e., to their parent or guardian, or to another family member). About two-fifths of students (41.0%) said that they had ever told a family member about the victimization they faced at school, while 59.0% indicated that they never reported harassment to their families (see also Figure 1.18). Furthermore, students who had reported incidents to a family member were also asked how often their family member had talked to school staff about the incident, and more than half of students who had told their family (56.7%) said that a family member had ever addressed the issue with school staff (see Figure 1.19). Not surprisingly, students that were out as LGBTQ to

at least one parent/guardian were more likely than those who were not out to their parents at all to tell their families about the victimization they were experiencing in school.³⁴

Reasons for Not Reporting Harassment or Assault

Reporting incidents of harassment and assault to school staff may be an intimidating task for students, especially when there is no guarantee that reporting these incidents will result in effective intervention. LGBTQ students in Puerto Rico who reported that they had not told school personnel about their experiences with harassment or assault were asked why they did not do so (see Table 1.3).

Feared Making the Situation Worse. Almost three-quarters of students (73.5%) indicated that they did not report instances of victimization because they were afraid of exacerbating an already hostile situation. For example, nearly half of students (49.6%) indicated that they wanted to avoid being labeled a “snitch” or “tattle-tale.” Further, many students did not report their harassment or assault to school staff due to concerns about their confidentiality. Specifically, about two-fifths of LGBTQ students (44.2%) in our survey were worried about being “outed” to school staff or to their family members simply if they reported the bias-based bullying that they were experiencing. Lastly, over a third of students (39.8%) expressed explicit safety concerns, such as fear of retaliation from the perpetrator if they reported the harassment to school staff.

Figure 1.18 Frequency of LGBTQ Students Reporting Incidents of Harassment and Assault

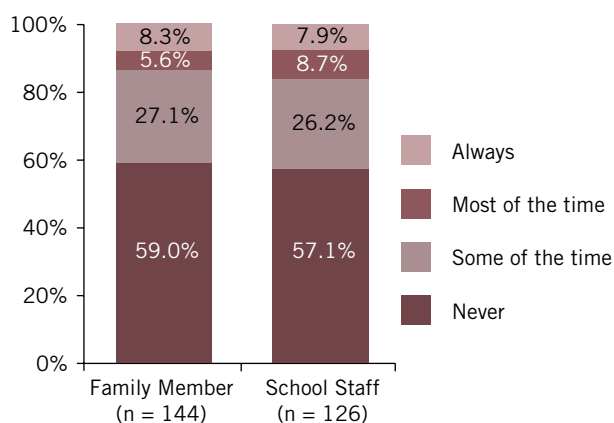
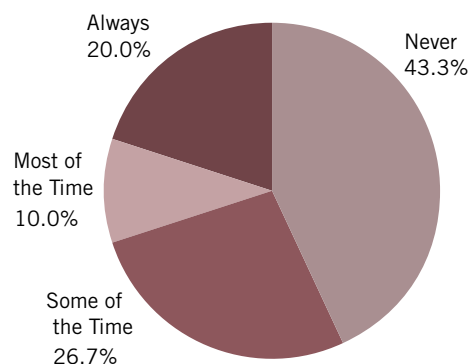


Figure 1.19 Frequency of Intervention by LGBTQ Students' Family Members (n = 60)



“The staff told me it was my fault because I was going ‘against the current.’”

Doubted that Effective Intervention Would Occur.

As shown in Table 1.3, over two-thirds of victimized students (68.1%) in our survey expressed the belief that school staff would not do anything about the harassment even if they reported it, or they did not believe the actions of staff would effectively address the victimization that they were experiencing.

Concerns about Staff Members’ Reactions. Nearly two-thirds of students (62.8%) expressed concerns about how staff might react if they had reported their bullying and harassment to them. More than one-third of students (38.9%) expressed concerns about staff specifically blaming them for the incident and/or disciplining them simply

for reporting incidents of harassment, and 35.4% said they felt too embarrassed or ashamed about the incident to report it to school staff members. Further, one-third of students (33.6%) were deterred from reporting harassment or assault because they felt that staff members at their school were homophobic or transphobic themselves, and thus would not help them properly address the victimization they were experiencing. Perhaps the most troubling, however, is that over one-tenth of victimized students (12.4%) in our survey said that school staff members were actually part of the harassment or assault they were experiencing, thus leaving students to feel that there was no recourse for addressing incidents of victimization at their school. The idea of staff acting as the perpetrators

Table 1.3 Reasons LGBTQ Students Did Not Always Report Incidents of Harassment or Assault to School Staff (n = 113)

	Students Reporting Specific Response*	
	%	number
Feared Making the Situation Worse	73.5%	83
Did not want to be perceived as a “snitch” or a “tattle tale”	49.6%	56
Did not want to be “outed” as being LGBTQ to staff or family members	44.2%	50
Was concerned for their safety (e.g., retaliation, violence from perpetrator)	39.8%	45
Doubted that Effective Intervention Would Occur	68.1%	77
Did not think school staff would do anything about it	60.2%	68
Did not think school staff’s handling of the situation would be effective	60.2%	68
Concerns about Staff Members’ Reactions	62.8%	71
Fear of being blamed or getting in trouble for the harassment	38.9%	44
Was too embarrassed or ashamed to report it	35.4%	40
Because school staff are homophobic/transphobic	33.6%	38
Because school staff were part of the harassment	12.4%	14
Did Not Think the Harassment was Serious Enough	31.9%	36
Student Handled it Themselves	30.1%	34
Other Reason	2.7%	3

*Because respondents could select multiple responses, categories are not mutually exclusive.

of victimization is particularly disturbing and underscores the hostile school climate that many LGBTQ students often experience. Harassment by educators, while troubling enough on its own, can cause additional harm when witnessed by other students by sending a message that harassment is acceptable in the classroom or within the school community. Harassment of students by school personnel also serves as a reminder that safer school efforts must address all members of the school community, and not just the student body.

Did Not Think it was that Serious. Almost a third of students (31.9%) expressed that they did not report incidents of victimization to school personnel because they did not consider the harassment to be serious enough to report. Because we lack specific details about these particular incidents of victimization, we cannot examine whether only those events that were truly minor were perceived as “not serious enough” to report. It is also possible that some students may convince themselves that their harassment is insignificant, and therefore not worth reporting, due to the many other inhibiting factors discussed throughout this section.

Students Addressing Matters on their Own. Three in ten students (30.1%) in our survey said they did not report harassment or assault to school staff because they handled the situation themselves. Without further information we cannot know what specific actions these students took to address these incidents. It may be that they confronted the perpetrator directly, either instructing them to stop, or by retaliating in some way. It is possible that retaliation against those responsible for the harassment may result in disciplinary consequences for the student originally victimized. As indicated in the next section on how staff respond to incidents, we found that some LGBTQ students reported that they themselves were disciplined when they reported being harassed. Handling the situation on their own could also mean that they ignored the situation. Although it is possible that ignoring or acting undisturbed by the harassment could be an effective strategy in some situations, it is also possible that appearing unaffected may prevent some students from accessing important resources and supports in cases of harassment. Further research is needed to explore the nature and possible consequences of the various ways students handle incidents of harassment “on their own.”

Taken together, these responses demonstrate a pervasive problem that seems to be plaguing Puerto Rico's schools. Whether due to doubts about school staff taking effective action, fear of retaliation from perpetrators, concerns about being “outed” as LGBTQ, or by simply being too embarrassed to come forward and report the victimization they are experiencing, it is clear that LGBTQ youth are struggling to find their voice when it comes to reporting harassment and assault in their schools.

In order to create a safe learning environment for all students, schools should work toward appropriately and effectively responding to incidents of victimization. Many of the reasons students gave for not reporting victimization could be addressed through more intentional policies and practices. School staff should respond to each incident brought to their attention, as well as inform victims of the action that was taken. Training all members of the school community to be sensitive to LGBTQ student issues and effectively respond to bullying and harassment, in addition to doing away with zero-tolerance policies that may lead to automatic discipline of targets of harassment and assault, could increase the likelihood of reporting by students who are victimized at school. Such efforts could, in turn, improve school climate for all students.

Students’ Reports on the Nature of School Staff’s Responses to Harassment and Assault

The majority of LGBTQ students in Puerto Rico (57.1%, see Figure 1.18) did not report an incident of harassment or assault to a teacher, principal, or other school staff personnel; however, we asked the LGBTQ students who had reported incidents to school staff about the actions taken by staff in response to the most recent incident of harassment or assault that these students had reported (see Table 1.4). The most common response was that the staff member:

- Did nothing and/or told the reporting student to ignore the victimization (70.4%);
- Attempted to educate students about bullying, either by educating the perpetrator or the whole class (48.1%); and
- Talked to the perpetrator and/or told the perpetrator to stop (46.3%).

“Teachers don’t care, and they don’t do anything about it.”

Formal disciplinary action to address reported incidents of victimization occurred less frequently, and was sometimes directed at the target of the harassment themselves. Approximately one-tenth of students (11.1%) reporting harassment indicated that the perpetrator was disciplined by school staff, and unfortunately, 7.4% of students reported that they themselves were disciplined when they reported being victimized (see also Table 1.4).

Failing to intervene when harassment is reported, punishing students for their own victimization, and other inappropriate responses to reports of harassment and assault are unacceptable, and potentially harmful to students who experience them. Staff members that do not address reports of

student victimization may not only fail to help the victimized student, but may also discourage other students from reporting when they are harassed or assaulted at school.

Effectiveness of Staff Responses to Harassment and Assault

In our survey, Puerto Rico LGBTQ students who said that they reported incidents of harassment and assault to school staff were also asked how effective staff members were in addressing the problem. As shown in Figure 1.20, just over a third of these students (37.2%) believed that staff responded effectively to their reports of victimization.

School personnel are charged with providing a safe learning environment for all students. In this survey, the most common reason students gave for not reporting harassment or assault was because they feared reporting would make the situation worse. And, as discussed above, even

Table 1.4 LGBTQ Students’ Reports of School Staff’s Responses to Reports of Harassment and Assault
(n = 54)

	Students Reporting Specific Response*	
	%	number
Staff Did Nothing/Took No Action and/or Told the Student to Ignore It	70.4%	38
Staff Attempted to Educate Students about Bullying	48.1%	26
Staff Talked to Perpetrator/Told Perpetrator to Stop	46.3%	25
Incident was Referred to Another Staff Person	38.9%	21
Filed a Report of the Incident	27.8%	15
Told Reporting Student to Change Their Behavior	25.9%	14
Parents were Contacted (parents of perpetrator and/or victim)	20.4%	11
Used Peer Mediation or Conflict Resolution Approach	14.8%	8
Reporting Student and Perpetrator were Separated from Each Other	13.0%	7
Perpetrator was Disciplined (e.g., with detention, suspension)	11.1%	6
Reporting Student was Disciplined (e.g., with detention, suspension)	7.4%	4
Other Responses (e.g., student was discouraged from reporting, threats of discipline)	5.6%	3

*Because respondents could select multiple responses, categories are not mutually exclusive.

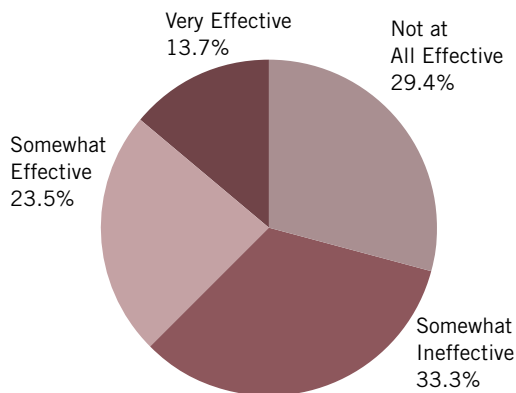
when students did report incidents of victimization, the most common staff responses were to do nothing or merely to tell the student to ignore it. By not effectively addressing harassment and assault, students who are victimized are denied an adequate opportunity to learn. It is particularly troubling that a quarter of victimized students (25.9%) were told by school staff to change their behavior for reasons such as their sexual orientation or gender expression (see Table 1.4), which implies that they somehow brought the problem upon themselves for simply being who they are. This type of response may exacerbate an already hostile school climate for LGBTQ students, and may deter them from reporting other incidents of harassment or assault in the future.

When students reported incidents of harassment or assault to staff members, the interventions had varying degrees of effectiveness. Our prior research has indicated that general training about bullying

and harassment may not be enough to equip educators with the ability to effectively address anti-LGBTQ victimization.³⁵ School or district-wide educator professional development trainings on issues specifically related to LGBTQ students and bias-based bullying and harassment may better equip educators with tools for effectively intervening in cases of bullying of LGBTQ students. In addition, such trainings may help educators become more aware of the experiences of LGBTQ students, including incidents of harassment and bullying, which could play a vital role in improving LGBTQ students' school experiences overall.

“I only told the teachers I could trust (about 3) and they told me to talk more about my problems to them and they gave me helpful advice. It made me feel better afterwards.”

Figure 1.20 LGBTQ Students' Perceptions of Effectiveness of Reporting Incidences of Harassment and Assault to School Staff (n = 51)



Experiences of Discrimination at School

Hearing homophobic and negative remarks about gender expression in the hallways and directly experiencing victimization from other students clearly contribute to a hostile climate for LGBTQ students. Certain school policies and practices may also contribute to negative experiences for LGBTQ students and make them feel as if they are not valued by their school communities. In our 2015 survey, we asked students in Puerto Rico about a number of specific LGBTQ-related discriminatory policies and practices they experienced. Nearly 8 in 10 students (79.0%) indicated that they had personally experienced at least one form of discrimination in school (see Figure 1.21).

Restricting LGBTQ Expression in School

Several of the questions about policies and practices were related to efforts to restrict students from being identified as LGBTQ, from being themselves in the school environment, and from expressing support for or interest in LGBTQ issues (see Figure 1.21). Not only do these policies stifle students' expression, but they also serve to maintain a silence around LGBTQ issues that could have the effect of further stigmatizing LGBTQ people.

Half of students (50.0%) said that their schools had disciplined them for public affection that is not similarly disciplined among non-LGBTQ students. One out of five LGBTQ students (20.0%) were prevented from attending dances with their chosen date. A quarter of students (24.6%) said they were prevented from discussing or writing about LGBTQ topics in class assignments and projects. In addition, nearly a quarter of students (23.8%) indicated that their schools had prevented them from wearing clothing or items supporting LGBTQ issues (e.g., a t-shirt with a rainbow flag). Furthermore, 13.1% of students reported being disciplined more harshly than their peers, simply because they were LGBTQ.

Limiting LGBTQ Inclusion in Extracurricular Activities

Students in our survey indicated that some schools also maintained policies and practices that limited LGBTQ content in extracurricular activities and/or restricted LGBTQ students' participation in these activities. Over a tenth of LGBTQ students (16.5%)

reported that they were prevented from forming or promoting a GSA or official school club supportive of LGBTQ issues. And nearly a quarter of students (23.3%) said that their school prevented them from discussing or writing about LGBTQ issues in other extracurricular activities.

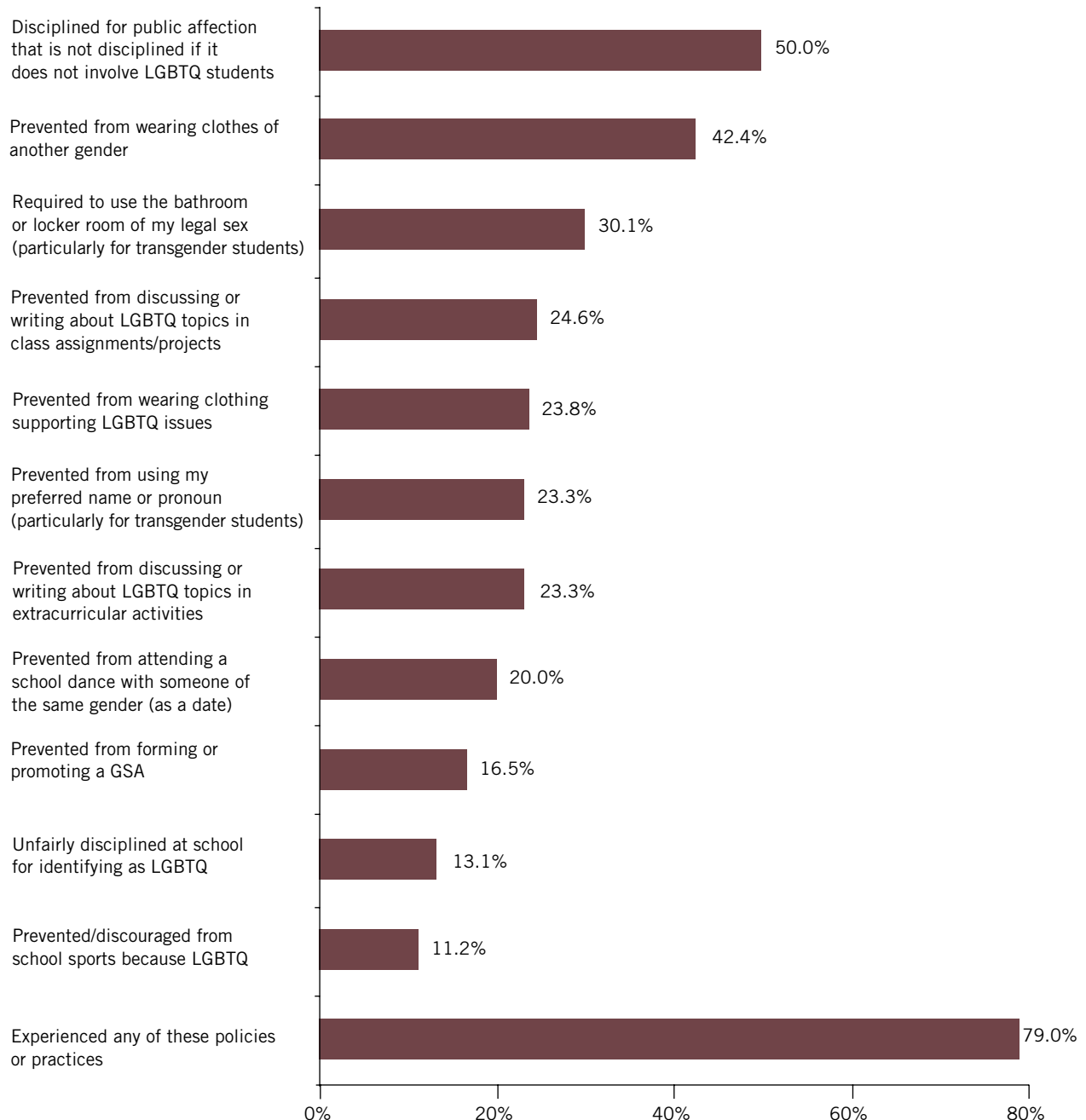
“I’ve been trying to form a GSA in my school with the support of many, many classmates and even some teachers, but they would not let me create the club. This next school year, I’ll try again to create this club.”

We also asked LGBTQ students about their experiences with school sports, specifically whether school staff or coaches had prevented or discouraged students from playing sports because they were LGBTQ. One-tenth (11.2%) indicated that this happened in their school. This finding corroborates research from the *School Safety* section of this report citing that the school spaces associated with sports, PE/Gym class and athletic fields/facilities, were some of the spaces most commonly avoided by LGBTQ students. This survey's findings on the barriers that LGBTQ students face when participating in school athletics also corroborates our previous research on the general secondary student population, in which we found that LGBTQ students were half as likely as their peers to participate in interscholastic or intramural sports.³⁶

Clearly, some schools are sending the message that LGBTQ topics, and in some cases, even LGBTQ people, are not appropriate for extracurricular activities. By marking official school activities distinctly as non-LGBTQ, these types of discrimination prevent LGBTQ students from participating in the school community as fully and completely as other students.

“A transgender student can’t use the uniform that they feel comfortable with.”

Figure 1.21 Percentage of LGBTQ Students who Have Experienced Discriminatory Policies and Practices at School



Enforcing Adherence to Traditional Gender Norms

Other policies appeared to target students' gender in ways that prescribed certain rules or practices based on students' sex assigned at birth, regardless of their gender identity or preferred gender expression (see Figure 1.21). Over two-fifths (42.4%) of students reported that their school prevented them from wearing clothing deemed "inappropriate" based on their gender (e.g., a boy wearing a dress).

Nearly a quarter of students (23.3%) said that they were prevented from using their preferred name or pronoun, and 30.1% said they had been required to use the bathroom of their legal sex in school.

PART TWO: SCHOOL-BASED RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS

There are several key resources that may help to promote a safer climate and more positive school experiences for students by providing formal processes and structures for addressing LGBTQ-related issues in schools: LGBTQ-inclusive curricular materials, school personnel who are supportive of LGBTQ students, school policies for addressing incidents of harassment and assault, and student clubs that address issues for LGBTQ students.³⁷ Thus, we examined the availability of these resources and supports among LGBTQ students in Puerto Rico, as well as the relationship between these related school supports and school climate.

Inclusive Curricular Resources

Many experts in multicultural education believe that a curriculum that is inclusive of diverse groups — including culture, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation — instills a belief in the intrinsic worth of all individuals and in the value of a diverse society.³⁸ Including LGBTQ-related issues in the curriculum in a positive manner may make LGBTQ students feel like more valued members of the school community, and it may also promote more positive feelings about LGBTQ issues and persons among their peers, thereby resulting in a more positive school climate.³⁹

Students in our survey were asked whether they had been exposed to representations of LGBTQ

people, history, or events in lessons at school, and more than half of respondents (53.6%) said that their classes did not include these topics (see Figure 2.1). Of those that did report being taught about LGBTQ topics, most were actually covered in a negative way (see also Figure 2.1), indicating that less than one-fifth of all Puerto Rico students in our survey (16.3%) were taught positive things about LGBTQ topics (i.e., LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum), and more than a third (37.8%) were taught negative things about LGBTQ topics. Among the students who had been taught positive things about LGBTQ-related topics in class, Health and History/Social Studies were the classes most often mentioned as being inclusive of these topics.

We also asked students about their ability to access information about LGBTQ issues that teachers may not explicitly teaching in class, such as additional reading materials featuring information about LGBTQ issues. These types of LGBTQ-related curricular resources were not available for most LGBTQ students in our survey. As Figure 2.2 illustrates, 13.1% of students reported that they could find books or information on LGBTQ-related topics, such as LGBTQ history, in their school library. In addition, less than a quarter (22.9%) of students with Internet access at school reported being able to access LGBTQ-related information via school computers. Furthermore, only 14.0% reported that LGBTQ-related topics were included in textbooks or other assigned class readings.

Figure 2.1 Representations of LGBTQ-Related Topics Taught in Any Classroom Curriculum

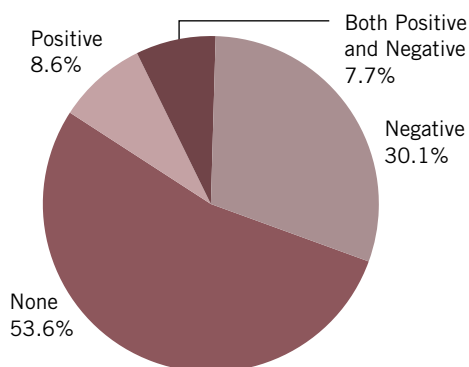
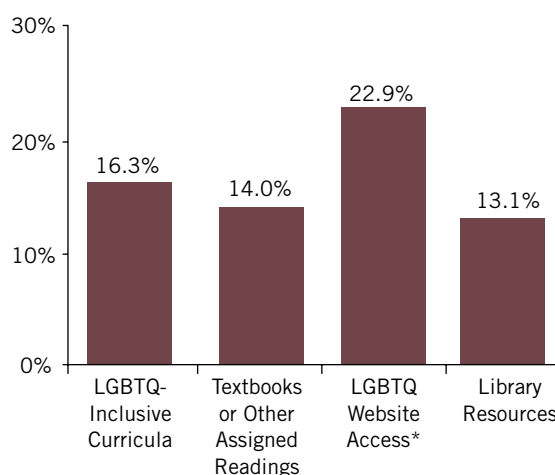


Figure 2.2 Availability of LGBTQ-Related Curricular Resources



*Among LGBTQ students able to access the Internet on school computers

Inclusive Curriculum and School Climate

Among the LGBTQ students in our survey, attending a school that included positive representations of LGBTQ topics in the curriculum was related to a less hostile school climate. LGBTQ students in schools with an inclusive curriculum heard homophobic remarks less frequently. For instance, 47.2% of students in schools with an inclusive curriculum reported hearing “gay” used in a negative way often or frequently, compared to 71.4% of students in schools without an inclusive curriculum (see Figure 2.3).⁴⁰ LGBTQ students in schools with an inclusive curriculum also heard negative remarks about gender expression and transgender people less frequently. For example, five in ten students (52.7%) in schools with an inclusive curriculum heard negative remarks about gender expression often or frequently, compared to seven in ten (72.4%) of those in schools without an inclusive curriculum (see also Figure 2.3).⁴¹ Inclusion of positive portrayals of LGBTQ topics in the classroom may also help educate the general student body about LGBTQ issues and promote respect and understanding of LGBTQ people in general. Overall, only about a third of LGBTQ students (37.2%, see Figure 2.4) reported that their peers were accepting of LGBTQ people (“very accepting” or “somewhat accepting”). However, students who attended schools with an LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum were twice as likely to report that their classmates were somewhat or very accepting of LGBTQ people (66.6% vs. 31.3%).⁴²

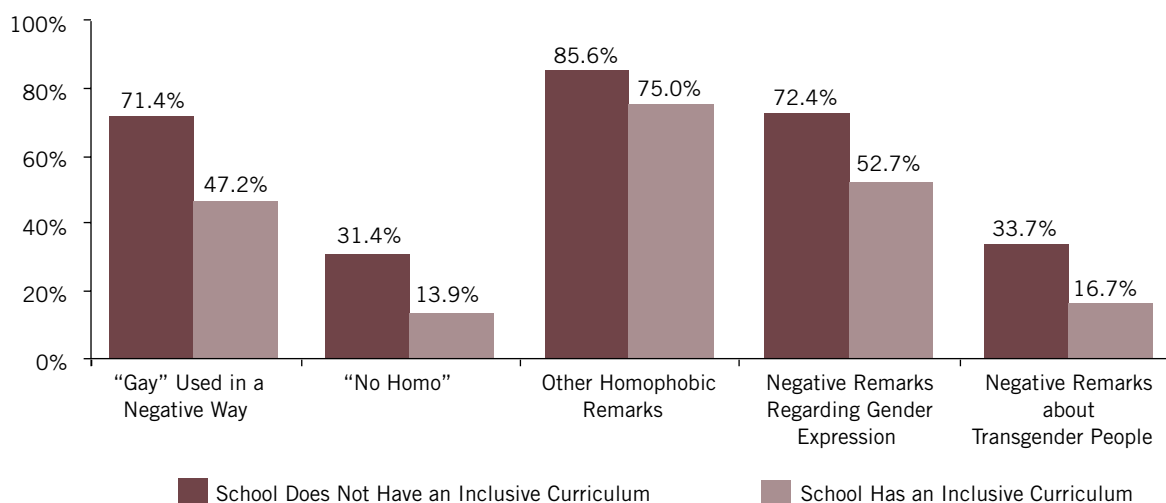
When educators include LGBTQ-related content in their curriculum, they may also be sending a message that they are open to discussing LGBTQ-related issues with their students. As depicted in Figure 2.5, students in schools with an inclusive curriculum were more likely to have had a positive or helpful conversation with a teacher about LGBTQ issues at least once (74.2% vs. 45.6%).⁴³ They were also much more likely to say they felt comfortable discussing these issues with their teachers than students in schools without an inclusive curriculum (66.7% vs. 38.5%; see also Figure 2.5).⁴⁴

Given that an inclusive curriculum is related to more positive interactions with teachers and more accepting peers, it is not surprising that LGBTQ students in schools with an inclusive curriculum felt more connected to their school.⁴⁵

Supportive School Personnel

Having supportive teachers and school staff can have a positive effect on the educational experiences of any student, increasing student motivation to learn and positive engagement in school.⁴⁶ Given that LGBTQ students often feel unsafe and unwelcome in school, having access to school personnel who provide support may be critical for creating better learning environments for LGBTQ students.⁴⁷ Therefore, we examined the availability of supportive staff, as well as the

Figure 2.3 LGBTQ-Inclusive Curriculum and Frequency of Hearing Anti-LGBTQ Remarks
(Percentage of LGBTQ Students Hearing Remarks Often or Frequently)



“I only have one teacher that I would say has a more open mind and she talks to us more like a mother would, teaches us about sexuality and helps us understand that we are all the same.”

relationships between the presence of supportive staff and feelings of safety and absenteeism.

In our survey, almost all students (95.8%) could identify at least one school staff member whom they believed was supportive of LGBTQ students at their school, and a third (33.0%) could identify six or more supportive school staff (see Figure 2.6).

As the leaders of the school, school administrators may play a particularly important role in the school experiences of LGBTQ youth. They may serve not only as caring adults to whom the youth can turn, but they also set the tone of the school and determine specific policies and programs that may affect the school's climate. As shown in Figure 2.7, less than a fifth of LGBTQ students (15.7%) reported that their school administration (e.g., principal, vice principal) was very or somewhat supportive of LGBTQ students, yet two-fifths of students (43.2%) said their administration was very or somewhat unsupportive.

To understand whether certain types of educators were more likely to be seen as supportive, we asked LGBTQ students how comfortable they would feel talking one-on-one with various school personnel about LGBTQ-related issues. As shown in Figure 2.8, students reported that they would feel most comfortable talking with teachers and school-based mental health professionals (e.g., school counselors, social workers, or psychologists): 43.2% said they would be somewhat or very comfortable talking with a teacher, and 42.7% said they would be somewhat or very comfortable talking about LGBTQ issues with a mental health staff member. Fewer students in our survey said they would feel comfortable talking one-on-one with a school librarian, athletics coach/Physical Education (P.E.) teacher, school nurse, principal or vice principal, or school safety officer about these issues (see also Figure 2.8).⁴⁸

Figure 2.4 Degree to which LGBTQ Students Say Their Peers are Accepting of LGBTQ People

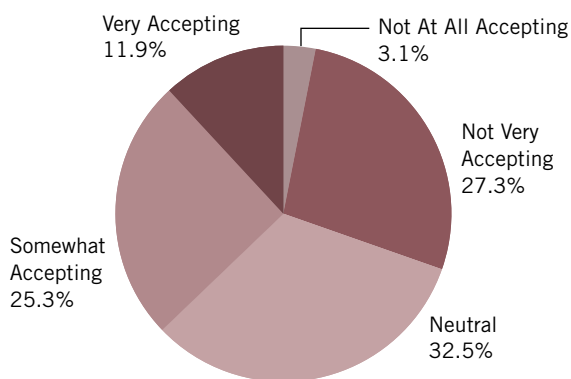
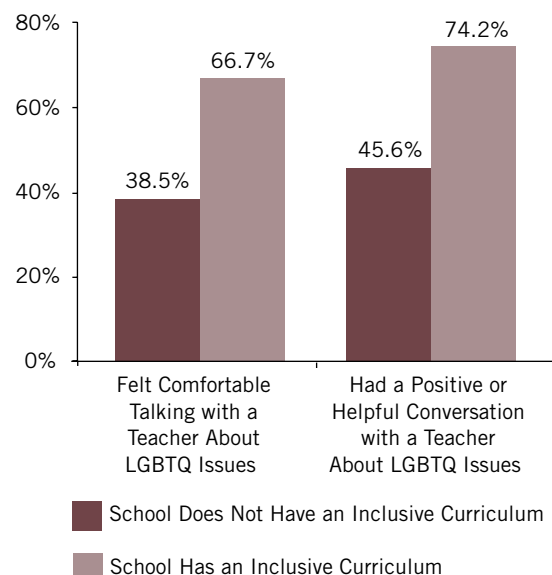


Figure 2.5 LGBTQ-Inclusive Curriculum and LGBTQ Students' Conversations with Teachers About LGBTQ Issues



In addition to comfort level, students were asked how frequently in the past school year they had engaged in positive or helpful conversations with school personnel about LGBTQ-related issues. About half of LGBTQ students (50.3%) spoke with a teacher about LGBTQ issues at least once in the past year (see Figure 2.9), yet only a minority of students reported ever having had conversations about LGBTQ-related issues with other types of school staff. Students reported higher levels of comfort talking to teachers and school-based mental health professionals about LGBTQ issues compared to other school staff,

therefore it is not surprising that they were more likely to speak with teachers and school-based mental health professionals about these issues.⁴⁹ However, students were most likely to speak with teachers about these issues, even when compared to school-based mental health professionals. Because students spend more time with teachers than other types of school staff, they may have more opportunity for discussion on any topic. It may be that students have less daily interaction with school staff other than teachers, and thus fewer opportunities for positive conversations about LGBTQ issues than they have with their teachers.

Figure 2.6 LGBTQ Students' Reports on the Number of Teachers and Other School Staff who are Supportive of LGBTQ Students

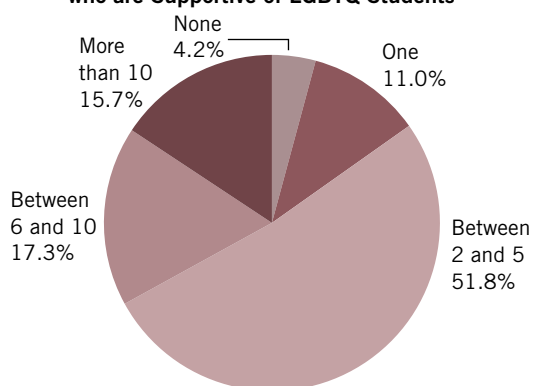


Figure 2.7 LGBTQ Students' Reports on How Supportive Their School Administration is of LGBTQ Students

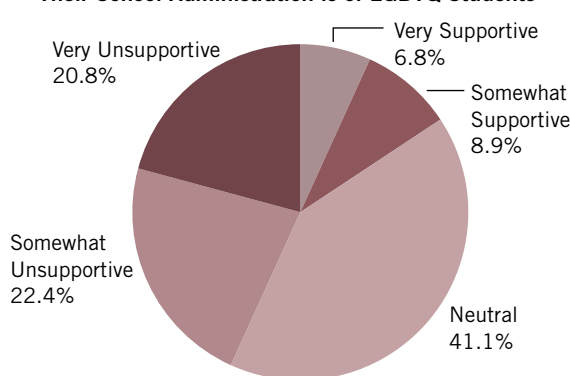
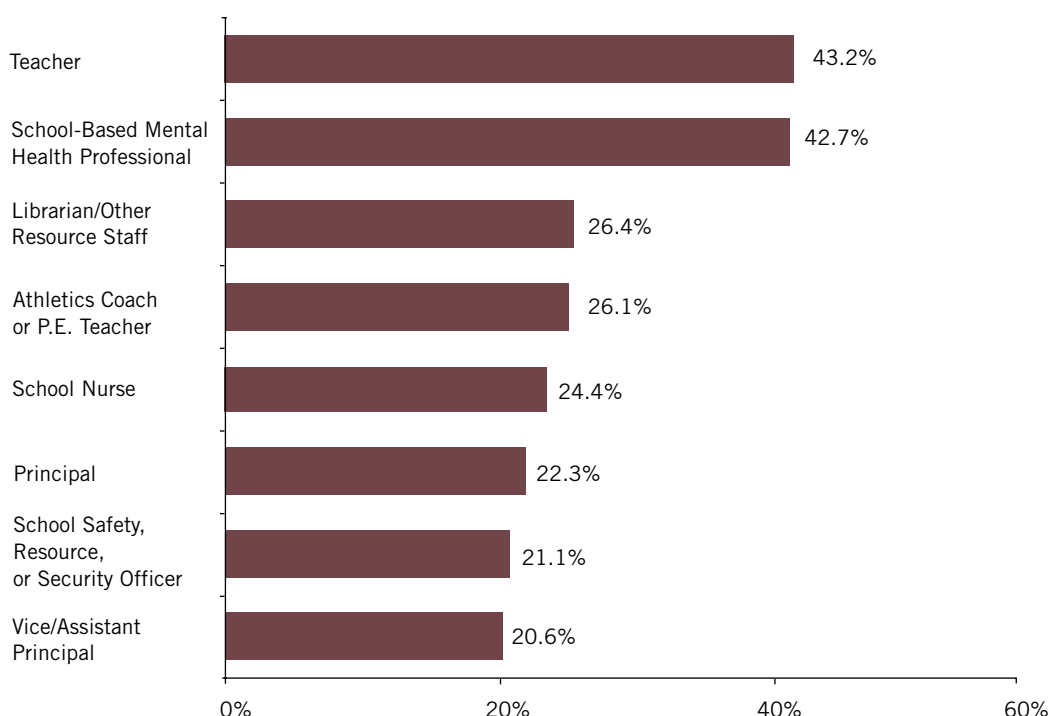


Figure 2.8 Comfort Talking with School Personnel about LGBTQ Issues
(Percentage of LGBTQ Students Reporting That They Would Be Somewhat or Very Comfortable)



However, it may also be that LGBTQ students perceive that these other staff members are less willing to support LGBTQ students, especially given that they report low levels of comfort with these staff members, with the exception of school mental health professionals.

The presence of LGBTQ school personnel who are out or open at school about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity may provide another source of support for LGBTQ students. In addition, the number of out LGBTQ personnel may provide a sign of a more supportive and accepting school climate. Over two-fifths (41.9%) of students in our survey said they could identify at least one out LGBTQ staff person at their school (see Figure 2.10).

Supportive Educators and Feelings of Safety and Missing School

Having staff supportive of LGBTQ students was related to feeling safer in school and missing fewer days of school. As shown in Figure 2.11, students with more supportive staff at their schools were less likely to feel unsafe due to their

sexual orientation or gender expression, as well as much less likely to miss school because of feeling unsafe or uncomfortable.⁵⁰ For example, 24.1% of students with 11 or more supportive staff reported missing at least one day of school in the past month because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable, compared to 62.5% of students with no supportive staff.

School Policies for Addressing Bullying, Harassment, and Assault

School policies that address in-school bullying, harassment, and assault can be powerful tools for creating school environments where students feel safe. These types of policies can explicitly state protections based on personal characteristics, such as sexual orientation and gender identity/ expression, among others. In this report, we refer to a “comprehensive” policy as one that explicitly enumerates protections based on personal characteristics, including both sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. When a school has and enforces a comprehensive policy, especially one which also includes procedures for reporting

Figure 2.9 Frequency that LGBTQ Students Talked to School Staff about LGBTQ Issues in the Past School Year

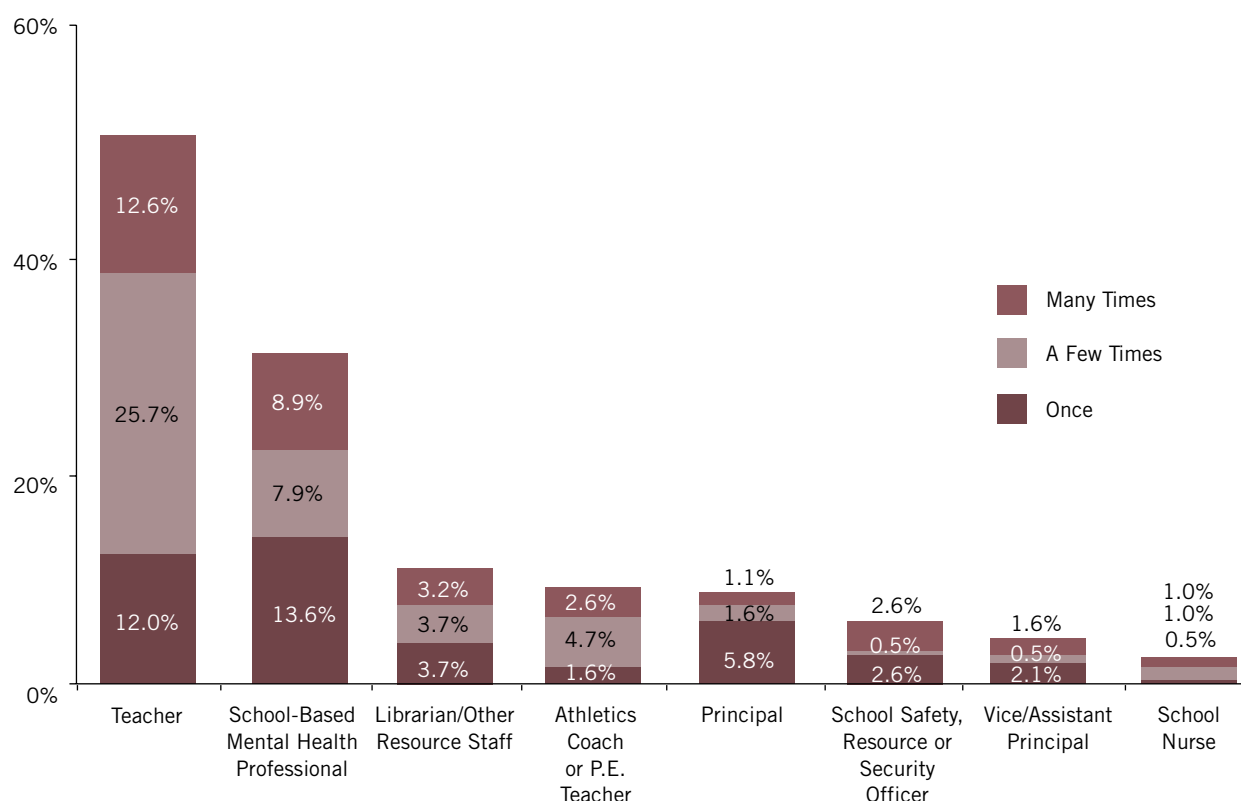
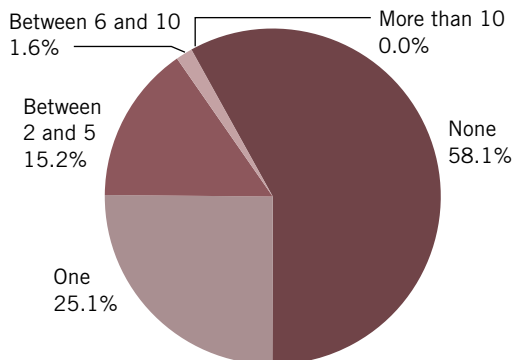


Figure 2.10 LGBTQ Students' Reports on the Number of Openly LGBTQ Teachers or Other School Staff



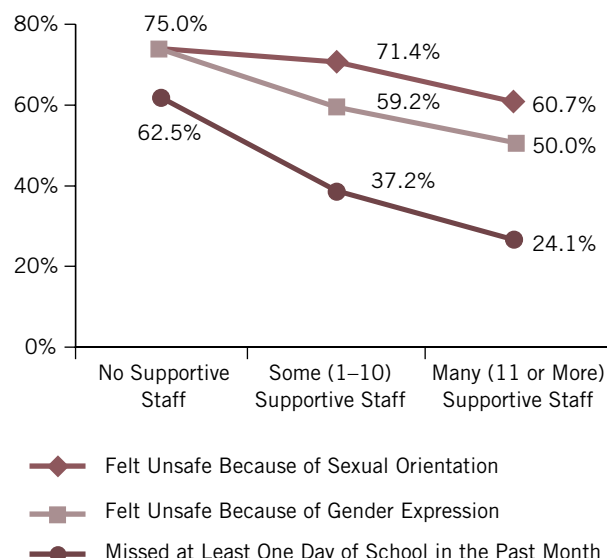
incidents to school authorities, it can send a message that bullying, harassment, and assault are unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Comprehensive school policies may also provide students with greater protection because they make clear the various forms of victimization that will not be tolerated. They may also demonstrate that student safety, including the safety of LGBTQ students, is taken seriously by school administrators. “Partially enumerated” policies explicitly mention sexual orientation or gender identity/expression, but not both, and may not provide the same level of protection for LGBTQ students. “Generic” anti-bullying or anti-harassment school policies do not enumerate sexual orientation or gender identity/expression as protected categories.

LGBTQ students in our survey were asked whether their school had a policy about in-school bullying, harassment, or assault, and if that policy explicitly included sexual orientation and gender identity or expression. Overall, many students (51.7%) reported either that their school/district did not have any type of anti-bullying or harassment policy, or, that they were unaware of such a policy — whereas, 48.3% of LGBTQ students in our survey reported that their school had some type of policy (see Table 2.1), and 4.7% of students reported that their school had a comprehensive policy that specifically mentioned both sexual orientation and gender identity/expression (see also Table 2.1).

School Policies for Addressing Bullying, Harassment, and Assault, and Staff Intervention

Research from our National School Climate Survey of LGBTQ students in the 50 United States and the District of Columbia demonstrates that

2.11 Supportive School Staff and LGBTQ Students' Feelings of Safety and Missing School



comprehensive anti-bullying/harassment policies provide school staff with the guidance needed to appropriately intervene when students use anti-LGBTQ language and when LGBTQ students report incidents of harassment and assault.⁵¹ However, given the small percentage of LGBTQ students who reported having a comprehensive policy in their school, we were unable to examine the relationship among students in schools with a comprehensive policy and school climate. Therefore, we examined the relationship between students who had either a partially enumerated policy or a comprehensive policy and school climate. In fact, students in schools with partially enumerated or comprehensive policies reported that staff intervened more frequently in homophobic remarks compared to students in schools with a generic anti-bullying policy or no policy.⁵² For example, over a third of students (38.4%) in schools with a partially enumerated or comprehensive policy reported that school staff intervened most of the time or always when hearing homophobic remarks compared to a little over 10% of students in schools with a generic policy (14.6%) or no policy at all (13.3%). No differences were found between students in schools with a generic policy and schools with no policy, with regard to teacher intervention.

Supportive Student Clubs

For all students, including LGBTQ students, participation in extracurricular activities is related to a number of positive outcomes, such as academic achievement and greater school engagement.⁵³ Supportive student clubs for LGBTQ students, often known as Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) or sometimes as Queer Student Alliances or Gender and Sexuality Alliances, can provide LGBTQ students in particular with a safe and affirming space within a school environment that they may otherwise experience as hostile.⁵⁴ GSAs may also provide leadership opportunities for students and potential avenues for creating positive school change. In our survey, only 1.9% of LGBTQ students in Puerto Rico reported that their school had a GSA or similar student club. Given the value of GSAs and their prevalence in schools in the US states and the District of Columbia (D.C.) it is somewhat surprising that these supportive student clubs seem virtually absent in Puerto Rico's schools. Perhaps students in Puerto Rico face greater resistance from school staff and the school administration in starting a GSA. As we saw in the section on *Experiences of Discrimination at School*, 16.5% of LGBTQ students in Puerto

Rico reported that they had been prevented from forming or promoting a GSA at their school. Clearly, further research is needed to better understand the potential barriers to implementation of supportive student clubs in Puerto Rican schools. In addition to not having access to GSAs in school, over three-fourths of LGBTQ students in Puerto Rican schools (76.6%) reported that they were unaware of an LGBTQ youth group or program in their community. Therefore, many LGBTQ youth in Puerto Rico may feel isolated without other LGBTQ youth or identifiable supportive peers or adults to turn to. Thus, increasing the availability of GSAs and similar supportive clubs may be extremely critical for Puerto Rican schools.

Due to the overwhelming absence of GSAs in Puerto Rico's middle and high schools, we were unable to examine differences in school climate for students who reported having a GSA compared to those who did not. However, other research from the 50 states and D.C., including our National School Climate Survey, has demonstrated that LGBTQ students in schools with GSAs report more positive school experiences, including lower victimization and more positive connections with school staff and peers.⁵⁵

Table 2.1 LGBTQ Students' Reports of School Bullying, Harassment, and Assault Policies

No Policy/Don't Know	51.7%
Any Policy	48.3%
Generic (enumerates neither sexual orientation nor gender expression/ unsure if policy includes enumeration)	33.6%
Partially Enumerated	10.0%
<i>Sexual orientation only</i>	8.1%
<i>Gender identity/expression only</i>	1.9%
Comprehensive (enumerates both sexual orientation and gender identity/expression)	4.7%

Discussion

Limitations

The methods used for our survey resulted in a diverse sample of LGBTQ students in Puerto Rico. However, it is important to note that our sample is representative only of youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (or another non-heterosexual sexual orientation and/or non-cisgender gender identity) and who were able to find out about the survey in some way, either through a connection to LGBTQ or youth-serving organizations that publicized the survey, or through social media. As discussed in the *Methods and Sample* section, we conducted targeted advertising on the social networking site Facebook in order to broaden our reach and obtain a more representative sample. Advertising on Facebook allowed LGBTQ students who did not necessarily have any formal connection to the LGBTQ community to participate in the survey. However, the social networking advertisements for the survey appeared only to youth who gave some indication that they were LGBTQ on their Facebook profile.⁵⁶ LGBTQ youth who were not comfortable identifying as LGBTQ in this manner would not have been shown the advertisement about the survey. Thus, LGBTQ youth who are perhaps the most isolated — those without a formal connection to the LGBTQ community or without access to online resources and supports, and those who are not comfortable indicating that they are LGBTQ in their Facebook profile — may be underrepresented in the survey sample.

We also cannot make determinations from our data about the experiences of youth who might be engaging in same-sex sexual activity or experiencing same-sex attractions, but who do not identify themselves as LGBTQ. These youth may be more isolated, unaware of supports available to them, or, even if aware, uncomfortable using such supports. Similarly, youth whose gender identity is not the same as their sex assigned at birth, but who do not identify as transgender, may also be more isolated and without the same access to resources as the youth in our survey. Although we include these youth (e.g., genderqueer) in our survey, the survey was primarily advertised as being for LGBTQ students, and therefore non-cisgender students (as well as non-heterosexual students) who did not identify as LGBTQ may have been less likely to participate in the survey.

It is also important to note that our survey only reflects the experiences of LGBTQ students who were in Puerto Rican schools during the 2014–2015 school year. Although our sample does allow for students who had left school at some point during the 2014–2015 school year to participate, it still does not reflect the experiences of LGBTQ youth who may have already dropped out in prior school years. The experiences of these youth may likely differ from those students who remained in school, particularly with regard to hostile school climate and access to supportive resources.

Lastly, the data from our survey are cross-sectional (i.e., the data were collected at one point in time), which means that we cannot determine causality. For example, although we can say that there was a relationship between students in schools with an inclusive curriculum and hearing homophobic remarks, we cannot say that one predicts the other.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Puerto Rico School Climate Survey shows that schools are often unsafe learning environments for LGBTQ students. Hearing biased or derogatory language at school, especially sexist remarks and homophobic remarks, was a common occurrence. However, teachers and other school authorities did not intervene frequently when anti-LGBTQ remarks were made in their presence, and, as such, students' usage of such language remained largely unchallenged. Perhaps even more troubling is the fact that the majority of students reported that they heard teachers or other school staff make homophobic remarks or negative remarks about gender expression. The vast majority of students in our survey also reported feeling unsafe at school because of at least one personal characteristic, with sexual orientation and gender expression being the most commonly reported characteristics, as well as frequently reported avoiding spaces in their schools that they perceived as being unsafe, especially bathrooms, school athletic fields, and P.E. classes. Many LGBTQ students reported that they had been verbally harassed at school because of their sexual orientation and their gender expression. In addition, many students reported experiencing incidents of physical harassment and assault related to their sexual orientation or gender expression, as well as incidents of sexual harassment, deliberate property damage, cyberbullying, and relational aggression at school. The majority of LGBTQ students also

faced discriminatory policies and practices at their schools. Schools prohibited LGBTQ students from expressing themselves through their clothing or their relationships, limited LGBTQ-inclusion in curricular and extracurricular activities, and required different standards based on students' gender. Furthermore, there is a great deal of evidence in the empirical literature demonstrating that negative indicators of school climate, discussed above, can have serious consequences on the well-being and educational outcomes of LGBTQ students, including lower achievement and higher truancy rates.⁵⁷

However, even though our results demonstrate that school climate is dire for many LGBTQ students in Puerto Rico, they also highlight the important role that institutional supports can play in making schools safer for these students. Students in Puerto Rico with supportive educators were less likely to feel unsafe and less likely to miss school due to safety concerns. Students in Puerto Rico who reported that their classroom curriculum included positive representations of LGBTQ issues heard anti-LGBTQ remarks less often and were more likely to have classmates that were accepting of LGBTQ people. Students in schools with harassment/assault policies that included protections for sexual orientation or gender identity/expression reported a greater frequency of school staff intervention when hearing homophobic remarks.

Unfortunately, these LGBTQ-related resources and supports were often not available to LGBTQ students in Puerto Rico. Although a majority of students did report having at least one supportive teacher or other staff person in school, only a third could identify six or more supportive educators. Curricular resources, such as curricula that teaches positive representations of LGBTQ topics and LGBTQ-inclusive textbooks and readings, were even less common. Furthermore, the majority of students reported that they were not aware of any anti-bullying or harassment policy at their school. Given that Puerto Rico mandates that all schools have an anti-bullying policy, and inform students and parents about this policy, it is surprising that so few students reported that they were aware of their school having such a policy. This may speak to the lack of their implementation at the school level — either the schools have failed to enact this required policy at all or they failed to ensure that students were informed of it. Consideration

should be given as to how schools can better notify students, parents, and educators about students' rights and protections according to school policy. Of the students in Puerto Rico who stated that their school had such a policy, few reported that this policy contained protections for students based on sexual orientation and gender identity/expression, which is perhaps unsurprising given that policies do not mandate these protections. It is clear that there is an overall lack of education and awareness about the content of anti-bullying policies in Puerto Rico's schools.

Lastly, Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs), or similar supportive clubs for LGBTQ students were virtually non-existent in Puerto Rico's secondary schools. This is troubling in that we know GSAs can provide a safe space for LGBTQ youth and their allies, as well as have a broader positive impact on school climate. As reported previously, some LGBTQ students faced challenges when attempting to implement a GSA at their school. Further research is needed examining the types of barriers that students face in forming GSAs in order to provide guidance about how to best provide support and advocacy to students interested in starting one at their school. In schools without GSAs, LGBTQ students in Puerto Rico may have other extracurricular spaces where they feel comfortable and supported (e.g., drama club, diversity club), and future research should also explore these other potential avenues for peer support and leadership. Given that more than three-quarters of LGBTQ students in Puerto Rico reported not having access to LGBTQ youth groups in their communities, this lack of supportive student clubs may result in LGBTQ youth having very little opportunity to gain peer support, making other school-based supports even more critical.

The results of the Puerto Rico School Climate Survey show that more work is needed to create safer and more affirming learning environments for LGBTQ students. It is clear that there is an urgent need for action to create safer and more inclusive schools for LGBTQ students. There are steps that concerned stakeholders can take to remedy the situation. Results from the Puerto Rico School Climate Survey demonstrate the ways in which the presence of supportive educators, comprehensive anti-bullying/harassment policies, and other school-based resources and supports can positively affect LGBTQ students' school experiences in Puerto Rico. Therefore, we recommend the following measures:

- Equip teachers to effectively address LGBTQ issues and support LGBTQ students in their schools by enhancing their awareness of students' experiences, increasing their knowledge of best practices, and providing them with relevant resources and training around preventing and intervening in anti-LGBTQ behaviors.
- Increase the number of supportive teachers and other staff available to LGBTQ students. Resources in how educators can help support LGBTQ students can be found at glsen.org/safespace (English and Spanish).
- Increase student access to curriculum that incorporates LGBTQ people, history, and topics. Provide resources for teachers of all subjects to integrate LGBTQ issues into their curriculum and effectively address bias in their classroom. Resources to help educators create an LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum in their classrooms are available at glsen.org/educate/resources (English).
- Review school policies and practices to ascertain whether there are those that disproportionately affect LGBTQ students, such as dress code policies. Consider alternatives such as gender-neutral dress codes. Provide training and monitoring to ensure policies are enforced fairly and equitably. Find information on how to assess school policies and implement comprehensive policies in GLSEN's Safe Space Kit at glsen.org/safespace (English and Spanish).
- Adopt and implement anti-bullying/harassment policies at the school level that explicitly enumerate sexual orientation and gender identity/expression as protected categories alongside others such as race/ethnicity, religion, and disability. Ensure fair and appropriate enforcement of these policies. Make certain that members of the school community are aware of the existence and content of such policies. Model policies are available at glsen.org/policy (English).
- Support the implementation of student clubs such as Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) that provide support for LGBTQ students and address LGBTQ issues in education. Resources to support GSAs and similar student clubs are available at glsen.org/gsa (English). There is also some information available about how educators can support these clubs in GLSEN's Safe Space Kit at glsen.org/safespace (English and Spanish).
- Support the implementation of school-wide programs to support the inclusion and representation of LGBTQ issues such as GLSEN's Days of Action:
 - Ally Week, which includes activities for students to engage in conversations about what being an ally means and actions that can be taken to support LGBTQ friends or family members.
 - Day of Silence, which is a student-led action that raises awareness about the silencing effect of anti-LGBTQ bullying, harassment, and discrimination.
 - No Name-Calling Week, which focuses on creating safe schools free of name-calling, bullying, and bias of all kinds, including based on sexual orientation and gender identity/expression.

Visit glsen.org/participate/programs for more information in English about these Days of Action.

Taken together, such measures can move us towards a future in which all students in Puerto Rico have the opportunity to learn and succeed in school, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

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Statistical significance was determined using $p < .05$ by comparing heterosexual youth to gay, lesbian, or bisexual youth. Differences were analyzed through the CDC website.
- 15 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2015). Puerto Rico 2015 Results [Data file]. Retrieved from <https://nccd.cdc.gov/youthonline/App/Results.aspx?LID=PR>
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- 17 Sexual orientation was assessed with a multi-check question item (i.e., gay, lesbian, straight/heterosexual, bisexual, questioning, and queer) with an optional write-in item for sexual orientations not listed. Students in the categories Queer, Another Sexual Orientation, and Questioning or Unsure did not also indicate that they were gay/lesbian, bisexual, or pansexual.
- 18 Gender was assessed with a multi-check question item (i.e., male, female, transgender, transgender male-to-female, transgender female-to-male, and genderqueer) with an optional write-in item for genders not listed in combination with an item that asked respondents their sex assigned at birth. Participants in the Transgender Female category selected "male-to-female" and/or selected "female," "transgender," and indicated that they were assigned male at birth; the category Transgender Male was calculated similarly. Participants were categorized as having a Non-Binary Transgender Identity if they selected only "transgender" and provided no other information about their gender identities, if they selected both "male-to-female" and "female-to-male" transgender options, or if they selected both "male" and "female" and also indicated "transgender," regardless of birth sex.
- 19 Bisexual identity is commonly described as either experiencing attraction to some male-identified people and some female-identified people or as experiencing attraction to some people of the same gender and some people of different genders.
- 20 Pansexual identity is commonly defined as experiencing attraction to some people, regardless of their gender identities.
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- 23 We use $p < .05$ in determinations of statistical significance for our analyses, unless otherwise indicated. Mean differences in the frequencies across types of biased remarks were examined using a repeated measures multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), and percentages are shown for illustrative purposes. The multivariate effect was significant. Pillai's Trace = .77, $F(9, 199) = 72.45$, $p < .05$. Resulting univariate effects were considered at $p < .05$. Differences were significant with the exceptions of: Hearing "that's so gay" and negative remarks about gender expression and negative ability remarks; hearing "no homo" and negative remarks about transgender people; hearing other homophobic remarks

- and sexist remarks; hearing negative ability remarks and negative gender expression remarks and hearing “that’s so gay.”
- 24 When students heard homophobic remarks being made, school staff were present: Always = 4.3%; Most of the time = 22.3%; Some of the time = 51.2%; Never = 22.3%.
 - 25 Mean differences in the frequencies between types of biased remarks based on gender expression were examined using a paired samples t-test. The difference was not significant, $p > .05$.
 - 26 When students heard negative remarks about gender expression being made, school staff were present: Always = 4.5%; Most of the time = 19.8%; Some of the time = 51.0%; Never = 24.8%.
 - 27 Mean differences in the frequencies of intervention in homophobic remarks and negative remarks about gender expression were examined by paired t-tests; differences were not significant for student intervention nor teacher intervention, $p > .05$.
 - 28 See endnote 23.
 - 29 Mean differences in the frequencies of verbal harassment across types were examined using repeated measures multiple analysis of variance: Pillai’s Trace = .55, $F(4, 199) = 60.94$, $p < .05$. Pairwise comparisons were considered at $p < .05$. Differences were significant with the exceptions of: verbal harassment based on sexual orientation and gender expression; and verbal harassment based on race and disability.
 - 30 Mean differences in the frequencies of physical harassment across types were examined using repeated measures multiple analysis of variance: Pillai’s Trace = .23, $F(4, 198) = 14.44$, $p < .05$. Pairwise comparisons were considered at $p < .05$. All pairwise comparisons were significantly different.
 - 31 Mean differences in the frequencies of any type of verbal harassment, physical harassment, and physical assault were examined using repeated measures multiple analysis of variance: Pillai’s Trace = .67, $F(2, 205) = 209.66$, $p < .05$. Pairwise comparisons were considered at $p < .05$.
 - 32 Mean differences in the frequencies of physical assault across types were examined using repeated measures multiple analysis of variance: Pillai’s Trace = .09, $F(4, 201) = 5.08$, $p < .05$. Pairwise comparisons were considered at $p < .05$. Differences were significant with the exceptions of: physical assault based on sexual orientation and gender expression; and physical assault based on disability and race and gender.
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 - 41 To test differences in hearing biased remarks about gender identity or gender expression by presence of an inclusive curriculum, these variables were included in the MANOVA described above. The univariate effects for inclusive curriculum presence was significant in hearing negative remarks about gender expression: $F(1, 207) = 10.37$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$. The univariate effect for inclusive curriculum presence in hearing negative remarks about transgender people was significant: $F(1, 207) = 10.30$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$. Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.
 - 42 To test differences in level of acceptance of students by presence of an inclusive curriculum a t-test was run. Effect was significant: $t(192) = -4.14$, $p < .05$. Percentages are given for illustrative purposes.
 - 43 To test differences in talking to school staff about LGBTQ issues by presence of an inclusive curriculum, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted, with inclusive curriculum presence as the independent variable, and talking to teachers and feeling comfortable talking to teachers about LGBTQ issues as the dependent variables. The multivariate effect was significant: Pillai’s trace = .09, $F(2, 174) = 8.26$, $p < .05$. Both univariate effects were significant – Having a positive or helpful conversation about LGBTQ issues: $F(1, 175) = 14.41$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$; feeling comfortable talking with a teacher about LGBTQ issues: $F(1, 175) = 11.09$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$. Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.
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 - 49 Mean differences in talking with school staff across type of school staff member were examined using repeated measures multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) and percentages are shown for illustrative purposes. The multivariate effect was significant, Pillai’s Trace = .46, $F(7, 176) = 21.42$, $p < .001$. Univariate analyses were considered significant at $p < .05$. Mean differences were only significant between all other school staff and teachers and school-

- based mental health professionals. Means in frequency for teachers were significantly higher compared to school-based mental health providers.
- 50 The relationships between number of supportive staff and feeling unsafe at school and missing school due to feeling unsafe were examined through Pearson correlations. Feeling unsafe because of sexual orientation: $r(183) = -.15, p < .05$; Feeling unsafe because of gender expression: $r(183) = -.21, p < .05$; Missing school: $r(190) = -.23, p < .05$.
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- 52 Given the small sample size and the small number of students who reported that their school had a comprehensive policy, for the following analysis we combined students who reported having a partially enumerated policy and students who had a comprehensive policy into one category.
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New York, NY 10038
Ph: 212.727.0135
Fax: 212.727.0254
www.glsen.org

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