

# POLICY PRIORITIES TO CREATE SAFE AND INCLUSIVE K-12 SCHOOLS FOR ALL LGBTQ+ STUDENTS

We believe, and our research has found, that if schools are supportive of LGBTQ+ students, schools can be safer for all students. We must reinvigorate our efforts to ensure that K-12 schools everywhere understand their responsibility to protect LGBTQ+ students, educators, and school staff from discrimination, and to advocate for equity and inclusion and fair treatment in all aspects of school life. We also know that such environments cannot be created unless **educators and school leaders are holistically supported** and there is truly **adequate and equitable funding for public** education – especially for our schools in communities that experience the greatest marginalization and students who are most impacted by the widening equity gap in K-12 education.

We understand that equitable outcomes will not be possible unless **grounded in racial justice**. Our nation's educators need additional resources to support innovations that will reduce the equity gap and create equal educational opportunities for all students regardless of who they are or where they live. The COVID-19 pandemic and the uprisings against systemic racism underscore the imperative to **center the needs and experiences of LGBTQ+ students, particularly those who are transgender, nonbinary, Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC), English learners, and/or people with disabilities**. GLSEN is committed to that purpose, and to supporting the next Secretary of Education in addressing the needs of LGBTQ+ students with multiple marginalized identities and those whose wellbeing and educational opportunity are increasingly at risk due to systematic discrimination.

Building upon our decades-long partnership with federal leaders we offer the following recommendations to the White House and U.S. Department of Education on **how to safeguard and affirm the next generation of students**, including those who are LGBTQ+.

## 1. Establish interagency efforts to ensure safe and inclusive schools for all students in K-12 learning communities

We urge the White House to take significant and courageous action to address the needs of diverse LGBTQ+ communities in all aspects of their lives and to respond to a national call for systemic change that eliminates white supremacy and advances racial justice for Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) communities. Specifically, the White House should convene an interagency task force that includes the U.S. Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, Justice, and Housing and Urban Development that will be charged with addressing the unique challenges and needs of LGBTQ+ students. We also urge the incoming Administration to issue an interagency Memorandum on implementation of the *Bostock v. Clayton County, Ga.* decision that will help address the need to enforce civil rights protections for students and educators.

## 2. Promote equity and reduce gaps in educational opportunity in K-12 learning communities

The federal response to the COVID-19 pandemic should include LGBTQ+ students and educators. The U.S. Department of Education should include goals for supporting LGBTQ+ students and educators in federal plans and resources for continued response to the pandemic, with special emphasis on those facing multiple forms of marginalization. Federal funding proposals should ensure a maintenance of equity that will require emergency relief funds are allocated to communities where there is the greatest need. The U.S. Department of Education should increase funding for programs that provide school-based wraparound support services, such as the Full Service Community Schools Program. Federal surveys can better illustrate the experiences of students and inform program evaluation and design when they include measures on sexual orientation and gender identity. We support strengthening the Civil Rights Data Collection, the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance survey, and other federal surveys by including additional questions on sexual orientation and gender identity.

## 3. Remove barriers to educational opportunity and equity that are caused by anti-LGBTQ+ bias and discrimination in K-12 learning communities

To address barriers to student wellbeing and educational opportunity caused by ongoing experiences of discrimination, bullying, and harassment the U.S. Department of Education should convene a broad range of stakeholders that include LGBTQ+ students and educators who can help identify ways the Department can better enforce civil rights and make schools safer for all. This priority that intersects multiple marginalized communities should be supported by a fully staffed Office of Civil Rights and led by a Secretary of Education and Assistant Secretary who will prioritize robust enforcement of civil rights that will help advance racial, gender, and disability justice in K-12 learning communities.

## 4. Affirm LGBTQ+ students in K-12 learning communities

Research has shown that an [affirming school climate leads to improved behavioral, academic, and mental health outcomes](#) for all students. Not surprisingly, in schools with LGBTQ+ inclusive and affirming learning environments [students report fewer absences and greater improvements](#) in academic achievement across grade levels. We call upon the U.S. Department of Education to wield its full influence to ensure that federal resources are used to help create inclusive and affirming learning environments. Specifically, we urge the Department to focus on teacher preparation programs, implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), and creation of new resources for educators and administrators on supporting LGBTQ+ students.

GLSEN builds evidence-based practices and programs that support the creation of affirming, inclusive learning communities for all students. Each year, GLSEN programs and resources reach millions of students and educators in K-12 learning communities in every part of the country, via action at the national, state, and local level, including through a national network of 41 state and local volunteer GLSEN Chapters. Over three decades of advancing our mission, GLSEN has improved conditions for LGBTQ+ students across the United States and launched an international movement to address LGBTQ+ issues in K-12 education and promote respect for all in schools. For more information on GLSEN's recommendations contact the Public Policy Office at [policy@glsen.org](mailto:policy@glsen.org).