

SCHOOL CLIMATE FOR LGBTQ STUDENTS IN VIRGINIA

Findings from the GLSEN 2019 National School Climate Survey demonstrate that Virginia schools were not safe for most lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) secondary school students. In addition, many LGBTQ students in Virginia did not have access to important school resources, such as an LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum, and were not protected by supportive and inclusive school policies.

FACT: The vast majority of LGBTQ students in Virginia regularly (sometimes, often, or frequently) heard anti-LGBTQ remarks (Fig. 1). Some also regularly heard school staff make homophobic remarks (14%) and negative remarks about someone's gender expression (31%).

FACT: Most LGBTQ students in Virginia experienced anti-LGBTQ victimization at school (Fig. 2). They also experienced victimization at school based on disability (36%), religion (25%), and race/ethnicity (23%). Nearly two-thirds never reported the incident to school staff (63%). Only 25% of LGBTQ students who reported incidents said it resulted in effective staff intervention.

Figure 1. Hearing Anti-LGBTQ Remarks from Students in Virginia Schools
(percentage of LGBTQ students hearing remarks regularly)

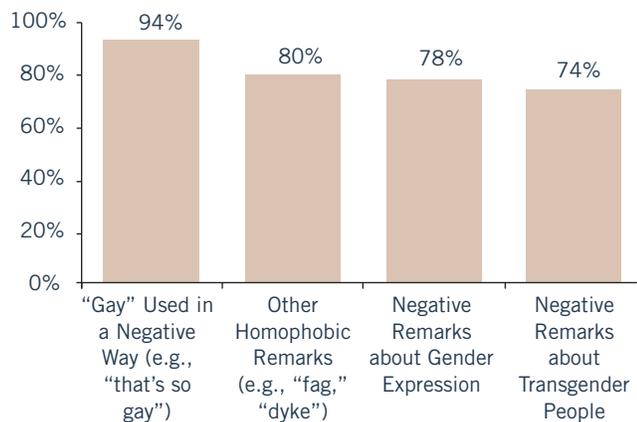
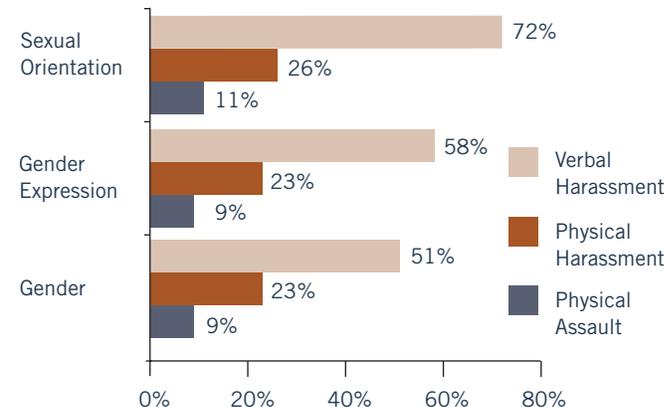


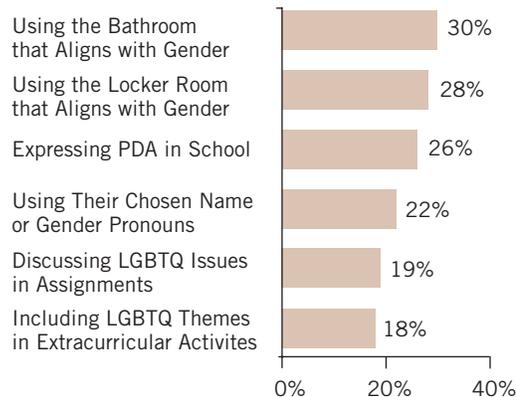
Figure 2. Anti-LGBTQ Harassment & Assault in Virginia Schools
(percentage of LGBTQ students harassed or assaulted in the past year based on...)



FACT: Many LGBTQ students in Virginia reported discriminatory policies or practices at their school (Fig. 3). Over half (59%) experienced at least one form of anti-LGBTQ discrimination at school during the past year.

- In Virginia, 30% of LGBTQ students, and 68% of transgender students, were unable to use the school bathroom aligned with their gender. Additionally, 22% of LGBTQ students, and 46% of transgender students, were prevented from using their chosen name or pronouns in school.
- A quarter of LGBTQ students in Virginia (26%) were disciplined for public displays of affection (PDA) that did not result in similar action for non-LGBTQ students.
- LGBTQ students in Virginia experienced other forms of school discrimination, not shown in Fig. 3: being unable to form or promote a GSA (17%), being prevented or discouraged from wearing clothes deemed "inappropriate" based on gender (17%), being prevented or discouraged from playing school sports due to an LGBTQ identity (12%), being unable to wear LGBTQ-supportive apparel (11%), being unable to bring a same-gender date to a school dance (7%), and being disciplined at school for identifying as LGBTQ (3%).

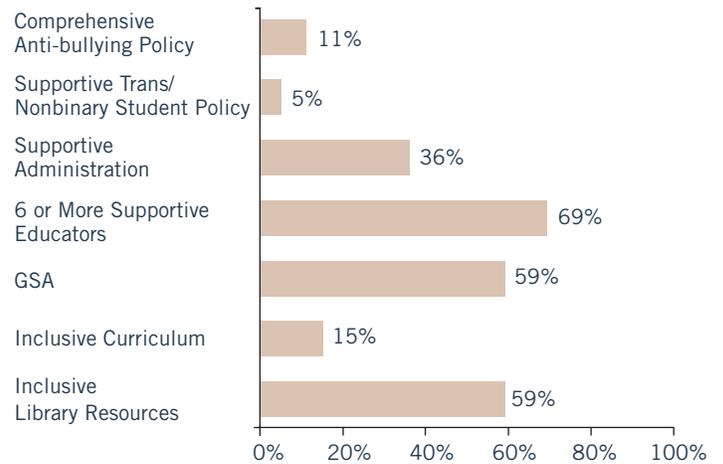
Figure 3. Anti-LGBTQ Discrimination Most Commonly Reported in Virginia Schools
(percentage of LGBTQ students that were prevented from...)



FACT: Many LGBTQ students in Virginia did not have access to in-school resources and supports (Fig. 4).

- Only 11% attended a school with a comprehensive anti-bullying/harassment policy that included specific protections based on sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. Only 5% had a policy or official guidelines to support transgender and nonbinary students.
- Only 36% reported that their school administration was somewhat or very supportive of LGBTQ students.
- The vast majority of LGBTQ students (96%) could identify at least one school staff member supportive of LGBTQ students, but only 69% could identify 6 or more supportive school staff.
- Just over half (59%) had access to a GSA or similar student club which provides a safe and affirming space and promotes a more welcoming school climate for LGBTQ students.
- Only 15% were taught positive representations of LGBTQ people, history, or events (“inclusive curriculum”). Only 5% reported receiving LGBTQ-inclusive sex education at school.

Figure 4. Availability of LGBTQ-Related Resources & Supports in Virginia Schools



RECOMMENDATIONS

School-based supports such as supportive and inclusive school policies, school personnel who are supportive of LGBTQ students, GSAs, and LGBTQ-inclusive curricular resources can positively affect school climate for LGBTQ students. Findings from the 2019 National School Climate Survey demonstrate that students attending schools with these resources and supports report more positive school experiences, including lower victimization and absenteeism and higher academic achievement.

Given the high percentages of LGBTQ students in Virginia who experience harassment at school and the limited access to key resources and supports that can have a positive effect on their school experiences, it is critical that Virginia school leaders, education policymakers, and other individuals who are obligated to provide safe learning environments for all students take the following steps:

- Implement supportive and inclusive school policies, such as comprehensive anti-bullying/harassment and supportive transgender and nonbinary student policies;
- Support GSAs;
- Provide professional development for school staff on LGBTQ student issues; and
- Increase student access to LGBTQ-inclusive curricular resources.

These actions can move us toward a future in which all students in Virginia will have the opportunity to learn and succeed in school, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

To learn more about GLSEN and to get involved, visit [glsen.org](https://www.glsen.org) or contact info@glsen.org.

To get involved in the GLSEN Northern Virginia chapter, visit [glsen.org/chapter/northern-virginia](https://www.glsen.org/chapter/northern-virginia) or contact chapter@nova.glsen.org.

To get involved in the GLSEN Richmond chapter, visit [glsen.org/chapter/richmond](https://www.glsen.org/chapter/richmond) or contact chapter@rva.glsen.org.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH In 2019, GLSEN conducted the eleventh National School Climate Survey, a biennial survey of the experiences of LGBTQ youth in U.S. secondary schools. The national sample consisted of 16,713 LGBTQ students from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, American Samoa, and Guam. A total of 480 respondents were attending schools in Virginia. The Virginia sample was 72% White, 10% multiracial, 10% Latinx, 4% Black, 2% Arab American/Middle Eastern/North African, 2% Asian American/Pacific Islander, and <1% Native and Indigenous. The gender composition was 54% cisgender, 27% transgender, 15% nonbinary or genderqueer, and 5% questioning. Most (93%) attended public schools. The school community makeup was 56% suburban, 25% rural/small town, and 19% urban. The results reported for Virginia had a margin of error of +/- 4%.

For the full 2019 National School Climate Survey report or for any other GLSEN research, go to [glsen.org/research](https://www.glsen.org/research).

Follow @GLSENResearch on Twitter.

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