

2022 Public Policy Agenda

About GLSEN

GLSEN was founded over thirty years ago by educators and is the leading national organization on LGBTQ+ issues in K-12 education systems. Our research on LGBTQ+ youth over the past two decades has identified four core supports that schools can implement to encourage positive school transformation: comprehensive nondiscrimination and anti-bullying policies, affirming educators, inclusive curriculum, and access to GSAs (gender and sexuality alliances or gay-straight alliances) and other peer support networks.

We know that in order to learn, youth must be safe in their minds, hearts and bodies. We know that safety is not just about the important absence of harm. Safety requires the presence of affirmation and the conditions each learner needs to thrive in their classroom, hallways and school communities. Efforts to achieve equitable outcomes for LGBTQ+ youth in K-12 education systems must be grounded in racial, gender, and disability justice. When these **Four Supports** are in place, LGBTQ+ students, particularly those who are transgender, nonbinary, intersex, Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC), and people with disabilities, experience less discrimination and bullying, greater academic achievement, such as higher GPAs, report better mental and emotional well-being, and experience more positive and welcoming school climates overall.

We have learned that when schools are safe, affirming and inclusive for the most marginalized, every student does better. A core part of our work is centering those most impacted by discriminatory learning environments. To say it simply — when a school is safer, more inclusive and more affirming for a Black transgender girl, it truly is safer, more inclusive and more affirming for all students.

About GLSEN's Public Policy Agenda

GLSEN works at the federal, state, and local levels to advance intersectional equity for LGBTQ+ youth in K-12 education systems through policies that:

- Remove barriers experienced by LGBTQ+ young people and educators, including bullying, harassment, and discriminatory policies and practices.
- Affirm LGBTQ+ identities through supportive actions, including positive representations in curriculum and professional development for educators and all staff.
- Advance equity for LGBTQ+ students and educators who have multiple intersecting marginalized identities and lived experiences, including those who are transgender and nonbinary, Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC), and people with disabilities.

To align and fulfill the purpose of our mission it is critical that our public policy agenda center the priorities that young people have identified as crucial to their ability to thrive in K-12 learning communities and beyond. The 2022 Public Policy Agenda is informed by several youth-led policy platforms, including GLSEN's **National Student Council**, the platform adopted by **A New Deal for Youth**, and the Southern Coalition for Social Justice's **Liberate to Educate Policy Platform**, developed within the Coalition's Youth Justice Project.

Young people are calling out for transformative change that liberates and decriminalizes our youth by supporting economic justice and opportunity, healing and wellbeing, justice and safe communities, democracy and civic engagement, environmental justice, and immigration justice.¹

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Transformative change includes:

- Support for “legislation that would greatly affect the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, nonbinary, queer, intersex, asexual, women/femme, undocumented, non-monogamous, disabled/neurodivergent, religiously marginalized, gender marginalized, class marginalized, color marginalized, incarcerated/justice involved, HIV affected, housing disprivileged, and BIPOC Americans.”²
- Liberated school environments that put an end to harmful and exclusionary discipline practices and curricula that erases the contributions and lives of people who are LGBTQ+, BIPOC, people with disabilities, or who hold other marginalized identities. They demand inclusive and culturally relevant curriculum, mental health supports and safe spaces, and restorative practices that ensure that youth do not end up in the school-to-prison or foster-care-to-prison pipeline.³

GLSEN’s public policy agenda is intended to help answer these calls with the following federal, state, and local advocacy priorities.

Federal

Legislation

- Pass the **Safe Schools Improvement Act of 2021 (SSIA)** to require states to adopt a proven strategy to prevent and address bias-based bullying in schools by enumerating of race, color, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, and religion in locally-tailored anti-bullying policies and strengthening data collection on bias-based bullying.
- Pass legislation that strengthens nondiscrimination protections.
 - The **Equality Act**, which would provide essential civil rights protections to all LGBTQ+ youth and educators across multiple dimensions of their lives and experiences.
 - The **Do No Harm Act of 2021** clarifies that protections for religious freedom codified in the Religious Freedom Restoration Act do not create a safe haven for discrimination.
- Pass a suite of comprehensive legislation to replace punitive practices with restorative and trauma-informed practices and staff that support positive school climates.
 - The **Counseling Not Criminalization in Schools Act of 2021** supports evidence-based, trauma informed staff and restorative practices by reallocating federal dollars that currently promote law enforcement presence in schools despite evidence of their disparate and negative impact on LGBTQ+ students, particularly those who are BIPOC and people with disabilities.
 - The **Protecting our Students in Schools Act of 2021** will prohibit corporal punishment and establish a federal grant program to assist states and school districts in improving school climates.
 - The **Ending PUSHOUT Act of 2021** will provide grants to support states and schools transitioning away from unfair and discriminatory school discipline practices, strengthen Civil Rights Data Collection for LGBTQ+ students, and establish a taskforce to better understand the problem of student pushout, especially as it impacts girls of color, including lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer girls.

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- Pass the **LGBTQ Data Inclusion Act of 2021** so that the experiences of all Americans, including LGBTQ+ students and educators, are accurately represented in federal data collection efforts and research can continue to inform best practices and effective, efficient uses of federal funding.
- Pass the **STOP Bullying Act** to establish a grant program that will support efforts at the State level to establish anti-bullying task forces to study, address, and reduce bullying in elementary and secondary schools, and for other purposes.
- Pass the **Full-Service Community School Expansion Act of 2021** to provide additional wraparound supports, including mental and emotional health programs, that are accessible to LGBTQ+ students and their families.
- Pass a suite of bills to strengthen our core democratic right to vote and improve access to voting, including for young people.
 - The **For the People Act of 2021** and the **Freedom to Vote Act** provide a comprehensive set of reforms that expand opportunities to vote in-person and by mail and prevent voter suppression tactics, including false or misleading messaging.
 - The **John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2021** which restores and modernizes critical protections again racial discrimination in established by the landmark Voting Rights Act of 1965.
 - The **Students Voicing Opinions in Today's Elections (VOTE) Act** would establish a grant program for school districts to provide information on registering to vote to secondary school students in the 12th grade.
 - The **Next Generation Votes Act** enables young people aged 16 to 17 to pre-register to vote.
- Build support and awareness of GLSEN's mission and priorities by increasing the number of Members of Congress who co-sponsor GLSEN resolutions, such as the **Day of Silence** resolution.

Funding and Administrative Priorities

GLSEN advocates for intersectional, LGBTQ+ inclusive equity in federal funding, data collection, and rules that detail how laws will be applied.

For example, GLSEN supports:

- Increasing funding for the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights (OCR) and DOJ's Educational Opportunities Section, to enable them to expand their staff and enforcement capacities.
- Improved federal guidance on how federal funds can advance intersectional, LGBTQ+ inclusive equity (for example, see **GLSEN's recommendations regarding the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and Covid-19 relief funds**).
- Grant programs that use or prioritize an LGBTQ+ inclusive lens (for example, see our comments on the U.S. Department of Education's programs for **Effective Educator Development** and **American History and Civics Education**).
- Data collection on the experiences of LGBTQ+ students and educators (for example, see our **comments regarding data collection on federally-funded afterschool programs**).
- Data collection on federal programs and uses of federal funds to identify and address LGBTQ+ students' needs (for example, see our **comment on the U.S. Department of Education's collection on uses of COVID-19 relief funds**).

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- A **comprehensive Title IX rule** that enumerates sexual orientation and gender identity.
- Strong federal resources and outreach regarding student non-discrimination protections, such as those made available at the **U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights** in 2021.

States & Territories

Legislation

- Pass inclusive curricular standards legislation that supports creation of inclusive curriculum at the local level that will help strengthen educational attainment, mental health outcomes, and feelings of connectedness to school communities for LGBTQ+ students who see their full identities reflected in the classroom.⁴
- Pass enumerated anti-bullying and harassment legislation that prohibits bullying and harassment based on a student's actual or perceived race, color, national origin, sex, disability, sexual orientation, and gender identity, thereby reducing barriers to educational access and opportunity.⁵
- Pass a suite of comprehensive legislation to support positive school climates and student safety, addressing the need to end restraint, seclusion, corporal punishment practices, maintaining adequate and accessible facilities, closing the digital divide, restoring disparate impact remedies, and increasing trauma-informed supports for students' emotional, mental, and physical health.⁶
- Build support and awareness of GLSEN's mission and priorities by increasing the number of state legislators who co-sponsor GLSEN resolutions, such as the **Day of Silence** resolution.
- Oppose all discriminatory legislation, including any bills that seek to target and create barriers to educational opportunities for transgender and nonbinary students, legislation that limits LGBTQ+ inclusive and other historically accurate curriculum, legislation routing public funds into private school programs that can sanction discrimination against LGBTQ+ students and educators, and any other proposals that will negatively impact LGBTQ+ student's wellbeing and educational opportunities.

Funding Priorities

- Provide students equitable access to technology with a primary focus on students from low-income and rural communities.
- Provide high-quality, culturally affirming, and accessible professional development opportunities, materials, and resources for educators and mental health providers to address heightened traumas that students, including LGBTQ+ and other marginalized students, may be facing because of the pandemic, and barriers they may face in distance learning and returning to school buildings. This should include how educators can ensure positive, culturally affirming experiences for young people; how educators can identify signs of abuse, cyberbullying, and mental health needs of students; how to identify currently available resources to support students; and how to connect students to resource providers during distance learning.
- Coordinate the sharing of high-quality resources and practices across local education agencies especially those practices and resources related to social, emotional, and academic development of students, addressing cyberbullying, and maintaining connectivity to students.

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- Address situations that may arise during the pandemic, such as Zoom bombing and other forms of cyberbullying, and ensuring adequate follow-up and supports for students who have been bullied, harassed, or who may be isolated from social support or at risk of harm.
- Promote the use of federal funds to support the activities and programs listed above, including through strengthened state guidance to local education agencies on authorized uses of funds (for example, see GLSEN's report, **States' Use of ESSA to Advance LGBTQ+ Equity**, and our factsheet, **Advancing LGBTQ+ Inclusive Equity through COVID-19 Relief Funds**).

School Districts & School Boards

Policies

- Adopt enumerated anti-bullying and harassment policies that prohibit bullying and harassment based on a student's actual or perceived race, color, national origin, sex, disability, sexual orientation, and gender identity, thereby reducing barriers to educational access and opportunity.⁷
- Adopt policies on the treatment of transgender and nonbinary students, that address key issues including nondiscrimination protections, privacy and confidentiality, school records and pronouns, and training and professional development for educators.⁸
- Adopt a suite of comprehensive policies to support positive school climates and student safety, addressing the need to end restraint, seclusion, and corporal punishment practices, maintaining adequate and accessible facilities, closing the digital divide, restoring disparate impact remedies, and increasing trauma-informed supports for students' emotional, mental, and physical health.⁹
- Build support and awareness of GLSEN's mission and priorities by increasing the number of School Board Members who co-sponsor GLSEN resolutions, such as the **Day of Silence** resolution.
- Oppose all discriminatory policies including any proposals that seek to target and create barriers to educational opportunities for transgender and nonbinary students, routing public funds into private school programs that can sanction discrimination against LGBTQ+ students and educators, legislation that limits LGBTQ+ inclusive and other historically accurate curriculum, and any other policies that will negatively impact LGBTQ+ student's wellbeing and educational opportunities.

Funding Priorities

- Ensure focused outreach and follow-up to address the unique needs of LGBTQ+ students who are also low-income, students with disabilities, English language learners, experience ing homelessness, or who have been placed in foster care.
- Conduct adequate follow-up to ensure marginalized students have and can use technology for distance learning and afterschool programs.
- Retain, hire, and contract as needed with additional school counselors and psychologists to address the heightened level of mental and behavioral health needs of students.

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- Provide high-quality, culturally affirming, and accessible professional development for educators and mental health providers to address heightened traumas that students, including LGBTQ+ and other marginalized students, may be facing because of the pandemic, and barriers they may face in distance learning and returning to school buildings.
- Support and encourage the virtual continuation of afterschool programs, including GSAs (Gay Straight Alliances or Gender and Sexuality Alliances), during distance learning.
- Promote the use of federal funds to support the activities and programs listed above (for example, see GLSEN's report, **States' Use of ESSA to Advance LGBTQ+ Equity**, and our factsheet, **Advancing LGBTQ+ Inclusive Equity through COVID-19 Relief Funds**).

GLSEN's Public Policy Advocacy

GLSEN national staff provide technical assistance and support to a broad coalition of grassroots partners. Our network of community-based Chapters and advocates inform our policy priorities and are leaders in increasing our impact at the state and local level. In addition, our National Student Council and Educator Advisory Council shape and are critical advocates in advancing our public policy agenda.

This policy agenda presents a non-exhaustive list of public policies GLSEN supports. If you would like to request GLSEN's endorsement of legislation or other public policy proposal, please contact us at policy@glsen.org.

¹A New Deal For Youth. (2021). New Deal For Youth Policy Platform. <https://newdealfor youth.org/our-issues/>.

²GLSEN National Student Council. (2021). Policy Committee Platform.

³Southern Coalition for Social Justice Youth Justice Project. (2021). Liberate to Educate. <https://southerncoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/LiberateToEducate-YJP-Policy-Platform.pdf>.

⁴GLSEN. (2022). Inclusive Curricular Standards: Representation of LGBTQ+ and Other Marginalized Communities Promotes Student Achievement and Wellbeing. <https://www.glsen.org/activity/inclusive-curriculum-standards>.

⁵GLSEN. (2020). Model State Anti-Bullying & Harassment Legislation. <https://www.glsen.org/activity/model-state-anti-bullying-harassment-legislation>.

⁶Dignity in Schools Campaign. (2019). Model Code on Education and Dignity. <https://dignityinschools.org/toolkits/model-code/>. Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights. (2019). Civil Rights Principles for Safe, Healthy, and Inclusive School Climates. <http://civilrightsdocs.info/pdf/education/School-Climate-Principles.pdf>.

⁷GLSEN. (2020). Model Local Education Agency Bullying and Harassment Prevention Policy. <https://www.glsen.org/activity/model-district-anti-bullying-harassment-policy>.

⁸GLSEN and the National Center for Transgender Equality. (2020). Model Local Education Agency Policy on Transgender and Nonbinary Students. <https://www.glsen.org/activity/model-local-education-agency-policy-on-transgender-nonbinary-students>.

⁹Dignity in Schools Campaign. (2019). Model Code on Education and Dignity. <https://dignityinschools.org/toolkits/model-code/>. Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights. (2019). Civil Rights Principles for Safe, Healthy, and Inclusive School Climates. <http://civilrightsdocs.info/pdf/education/School-Climate-Principles.pdf>.