

Research Report

Experiences of LGBTQ+ Students and Families in Our K-12 Schools

2023

This report is a collaboration between the following organizations:

GLSEN®

GLSEN works to ensure that K-12 education is a place where all lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer and other sexual and gender minority (LGBTQ+) young people — particularly those with multiple marginalizations — can thrive at school.

Learn more at www.glsen.org

COLAGE

COLAGE unites people with one or more lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and/or asexual parent into a network of peers and supports them as they nurture and empower each other to be skilled, self-confident, and just leaders in our collective communities.

Learn more at www.colage.org

FAMILY EQUALITY

Family Equality is a national nonprofit that works to create a world where everyone can experience the love, safety, and belonging of family. Through policy, programming, storytelling and research, we advocate, support, and provide resources to LGBTQ+ families to ensure they have the freedom to find, form, and sustain their families. This work includes advocacy and programming for students with LGBTQ+ parents and caregivers.

Learn more at <https://www.familyequality.org/>

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT¹

Especially in the past three years, most of our activities are virtual and digital. We want to take a moment to consider the legacy of colonization embedded within the technology, structures, and ways of thinking we use every day. In Turtle Island, much of this infrastructure sits on stolen land acquired under the extractive logic of white settler expansion. We are using equipment and high-speed internet, not available in many Indigenous communities. The technologies we use leave significant carbon footprints, contributing to changing climates that disproportionately affect Indigenous people worldwide. As an organization, we recognize this history and uplift the sovereignty of Indigenous people, data, and territory. We commit, beyond symbolic rhetoric, to dismantling all ongoing settler-colonial practices and their material implications on our digital worlds.

Our website www.glsen.org runs on servers located on Turtle Island. To learn whose land you are on visit <https://native-land.ca/>. We invite you to read this poem out loud to yourself and to your community.

A Digital Land Acknowledgement • Existing As a Settler On Unceded Land: A Guide • By Dierdre Lee

Step one

Read this poem aloud
Ideally outside
in the sun
So the trees & the wind can listen in
If this makes you roll your eyes
Stop
Go away
Have a nap
Try again

Step two

Learn what “unceded” means
Understand that this
is just the beginning

Step three

Be present
with feelings of being uncomfortable
or embarrassed
You could probably use the practice
realizing
these feelings are not life-threatening

Step four

Locate yourself
Specifically
Geographically
Time for Q&A
Time to know
Time to say
Whose traditional territory
do you live
& breathe
& work
& love upon?
Who was here
for thousands of years
before you?

Step five

Recognize
that though
Indigenous Peoples
are ancient
We are also
still alive
Resist the urge to mythologize
Reject what
little
(if anything)
you have been taught in school
or in most mainstream media
Embrace this truth:
You have no idea

Step six

It's not your job to fix this
Or it is
But as an accomplice
You are not the boss
No matter your activist street cred
In this
you are a rookie
Let go of expectation
Of being in charge
Of being lauded
Of getting an ally cookie

Step seven

Seven generations
Seven teachings
Seven months to seventy
1752 Treaty
Elders
& youth
Are rising
Are speaking
Are you listening?
Are you learning?

Step eight

Infinity
Pace yourself on this journey
This
is not an on-off switch
This
is no magic-spell scenario
This
is more like encouraging plants to grow
Nurture your skills
& heart
Absorb
Process
Try
Fuck up
Rest
Restart

Step nine

This guide
is not permanent
Or definitive
Or chronological
There is no such thing as linear time
This work does not come with finish line

¹ We have adapted this land acknowledgement from <https://www.theatreto.com/digital-land-acknowledgement/> and <https://datasociety.net/digital-land-acknowledgement/>

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INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Hostile and discriminatory school climates pose a major threat to young people's ability to thrive at school. Students who personally identify as LGBTQ+ are not the only young people who may be subject to hostile and discriminatory climates. Students who are part of LGBTQ+ families may also bear the effects of anti-LGBTQ+ school climates, yet these students' experiences are virtually absent from research, policy, and advocacy efforts. With this report, GLSEN, COLAGE, and Family Equality aim to address a significant gap in our understanding of school climate by focusing on the experiences of harassment, bullying, discrimination, and/or hostile school climates for students who have LGBTQ+ parent(s) or caregiver(s). In legal parlance, "associational discrimination" describes when someone (e.g., a child) is discriminated against due to their association with someone who is part of a marginalized identity (e.g., their LGBTQ+ parent or caregiver). Associational discrimination creates a hostile school environment for LGBTQ+ families. Throughout this report, we take up the "associational" language to communicate these phenomena.² These experiences are a crucial part of the larger tapestry of discrimination and bias that LGBTQ+ communities face at school and may contribute to a hostile learning environment, yet the phenomena is largely erased and ignored. This erasure results in gaps in our collective responsibility to ensure that young people can thrive in school. This study seeks to redress the erasure and undercounting of experiences of harassment, bullying, discrimination, and/or hostile school climates in school based on having an LGBTQ+ parent or caregiver and to make visible the experience of LGBTQ+ families in our schools.

In the past two years, since the data for this study was collected, the country has seen an unprecedented surge in legislative and social attacks on LGBTQ+ people, resulting in communities around the country facing increased violence, harassment, discrimination, and dehumanization. For example, in the 2021-2022 state legislative session, there were over 350+ anti-LGBTQ+ bills. This was record-setting and the largest number of attacks were bills related to schools and bills targeting trans people. Two "Don't Say Gay" and trans bills passed (Florida and Alabama). During the 2022-2023 (current) state legislative session, there have been over 550+ anti-LGBTQ+ bills and over 45 "Don't Say Gay" and trans bills introduced in 12 states. Overall, more than 200 anti-LGBTQ+ schools bills were filed this year.

This anti-LGBTQ+ landscape restricts young people's autonomy in schools, narrows the definition of family, uses parental rights to erode LGBTQ+ youth rights, and creates a culture of discrimination, bias, and violence. Given that the surveys that informed this

² For readability in this report, we occasionally shortened this concept to "associational discrimination" in some sections. We note that the phenomena we are capturing likely includes the broader constructs of harassment, bullying and other indicators of hostile school climate, and is not limited to "discrimination."

This study seeks to redress the erasure and undercounting of experiences of harassment, bullying, discrimination, and/or hostile school climates in school based on having an LGBTQ+ parent or caregiver and to make visible the experience of LGBTQ+ families in our schools.

There is a dearth of studies that focus specifically on the school experiences of children who have LGBTQ+ parents or caregivers



report were conducted at the onset of the increase in attacks, this report does not reflect the impact of the bills on the current school climate. Now, more than ever, it is imperative that we prioritize our understanding of how students with LGBTQ+ parents and caregivers experience their schools in order to ensure that all students can thrive.

We know that this anti-LGBTQ+ landscape is having a major impact on LGBTQ+ families.³ In January 2023, the Williams Institute published a report that documented the negative effect that HB 1557 in Florida is having on LGBTQ+ families. That study collected surveys from 113 LGBTQ+ parents in the state and found that their children had already experienced negative impacts of the bill. For example, children experienced harassment and bullying at school because they had LGBTQ+ parents, and they reported not being able to talk about their parents or their own LGBTQ+ identities at school or outside of school. Further, many of these parents expressed major fears about continuing to live in Florida.

There is a dearth of studies that focus specifically on the school experiences of children who have LGBTQ+ parents or caregivers, representing a significant gap in our ability to understand their experiences and properly ensure that schools are safe spaces for learning and development.⁴ Further, the U.S. Department of Education and local educational agencies do not regularly receive complaints of discrimination that students face based on their parents'/caregivers' sexual and/or gender identities. However, via our community engagement work, we know that our communities regularly report that children who have LGBTQ+ parents/caregivers experience bullying, harassment, exclusion, and other mistreatment in school by association with their LGBTQ+ family.

³ <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Dont-Say-Gay-Impact-Jan-2023.pdf>

⁴ For a comprehensive summary of the extant research, see: Goldberg, A. E., & Byard, E., (2020). LGBTQ-parent families and schools. In A.E. Goldberg & K.R. Allen (Eds.), *LGBTQ-parent families: Innovations in research and implications for practice* (pp. 287-300) Springer.



In light of these major gaps in our understanding of associational discrimination and hostile school environment for LGBTQ+ families, the following research questions guided the research in this report:

1

What are students' experiences of bullying, harassment, discrimination, or hostile school climate based on having an LGBTQ+ parent or caregiver (i.e., associational)?

2

Are there differences in these experiences based on:

- Whether or not the student has a transgender parent or caregiver?;
- Whether the state that the child lives in had discriminatory, protective, or neutral policies regarding LGBTQ+ inclusion at school?;
- Whether the student identifies as a person of color versus white?

3

What are LGBTQ+ parents/caregivers experiences of both discrimination and supportive resources in their child's school (including their reports of their child's experiences of associational discrimination)?

This report demonstrates that youth in our country's schools experience discrimination, bullying, and harassment because of having an LGBTQ+ parent or caregiver. They experience harassment, discrimination, biased language, and other negative school experiences from both students and from the adults who are meant to be there to support them, such as teachers and principals.

A few key findings include:

- The overwhelming majority of student participants (96.6%) reported feeling excluded from a school or classroom activity at some point over the past 12 months because of having an LGBTQ+ parent or caregiver.
- A large majority — over two thirds of student participants (70.4%) — reported being verbally harassed at school because of having an LGBTQ+ parent, at some point.
- Qualitative responses from students made clear that associational discrimination is a problem at school. For example:
 - One student reported: “They think gay children [children who have gay parents] are gay, so they’re afraid to have more contact with me, saying I make them sick.”
 - And another: “We had to share some basic information about our family, and I said that I had two moms. The students made fun of me, and the teacher told me that I couldn’t participate in this activity anymore because I ‘spread propaganda.’”

The results of this report are intended to inform educators, policymakers, and the general public about the experiences of LGBTQ+ families, with a particular focus on discrimination and exclusion faced by children who have LGBTQ+ parents or caregivers. Results from this study demonstrate the urgent need for action to redress the underreporting, erasure, and silencing of discrimination against students with LGBTQ+ parents and caregivers. The report provides clear recommendations to ensure that schools are safe and inclusive for all students and their families.

Two examples of these recommendations include:

1. Policymakers and educational systems (such as State education agencies [SEAs], local education agencies [LEAs] and schools) should adopt clear guidelines that prohibit discrimination against students with LGBTQ+ parents, caregivers, and family members. Inclusive policy standards should address LGBTQ+ families and different family structures.
2. State education agencies (SEAs), local education agencies (LEAs), and schools should review and update their administrative materials and family engagement processes to be inclusive of LGBTQ+ families (e.g., forms which assume “mother and father”).



Literature Review

Over the past several decades, research has consistently demonstrated that LGBTQ+ young people frequently face discrimination, harassment, and violence in school⁵ and that these hostile school climates can lead to detrimental effects such as poor mental⁶ health and poor educational outcomes.⁷ Research on marginalized populations, including gender and sexual minorities, emphasize that disparities in outcomes such as mental health or educational achievement are not due to individual pathologies of LGBTQ+ people, but instead occur because of the stress associated with living in biased social contexts. The minority stress model⁸ emphasizes that environmental and contextual stressors such as structural oppression, discrimination, stigma, and violence produce and predict disparities in well-being for LGBTQ+ people. In line with the minority stress model, GLSEN's research on LGBTQ+ experiences in our nation's schools has importantly demonstrated that protective factors — such as supportive adults, supportive peer clubs, protective policies, and inclusive curricula — can buffer the negative impacts of discrimination and bias in school and can help ensure that all students thrive emotionally and academically.⁹

⁵ Espelage, D. L., Aragon, S. R., Birkett, M., & Koenig, B. W. (2008). Homophobic teasing, psychological outcomes, and sexual orientation among high school students: What influence do parents and schools have? *School Psychology Review*, 37, 202–216; Kosciw, J. G., Clark, C. M., & Menard, L. (2022). The 2021 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of LGBTQ+ youth in our nation's schools. New York: GLSEN; Robinson, J. P., & Espelage, D. L. (2011). Inequities in educational and psychological outcomes between LGBTQ and straight students in middle and high school. *Educational Researcher*, 40(7), 315–330.

⁶ Espelage, D. L. (2011). Inequities in educational and psychological outcomes between LGBTQ and straight students in middle and high school. *Educational Researcher*, 40(7), 315–330; Hatzenbuehler, M. L. (2011). The social environment and suicide attempts in lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth. *Pediatrics*, 127, 896–903; Kosciw, J. G., Clark, C. M., & Menard, L. (2022). The 2021 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of LGBTQ+ youth in our nation's schools. New York: GLSEN; Russell, S. T., Ryan, C., Toomey, R. B., Diaz, R. M., & Sanchez, G. (2011). Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender adolescent school victimization: Implications for young adult health and adjustment. *Journal of School Health*, 81, 223–230.

⁷ Birkett, M., Russell, S. T., & Corliss, H. L. (2014). Sexual-orientation disparities in school: The mediational role of indicators of victimization in achievement and truancy because of feeling unsafe. *American Journal of Public Health*, 104(6), 1124–1128; Kosciw, J. G., Clark, C. M., & Menard, L. (2022). The 2021 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of LGBTQ+ youth in our nation's schools. New York: GLSEN.

⁸ Bockting, W. O., Miner, M. H., Swinburne Romine, R. E., Hamilton, A., & Coleman, E. (2013). Stigma, mental health, and resilience in an online sample of the US transgender population. *American Journal of Public Health*, 103, 943–951; Meyer, I. H. (2003). Prejudice, social stress, and mental health in lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations: Conceptual issues and research evidence. *Psychological Bulletin*, 129, 674–697.

⁹ Kosciw, J. G., Clark, C. M., & Menard, L. (2022). The 2021 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of LGBTQ+ youth in our nation's schools. New York: GLSEN.

Importantly, the LGBTQ+ experience is not monolithic — people who experience multiple layers of marginalization based on intersecting identities, such as LGBTQ+ people of color and/or persons with disabilities, have distinct experiences that are necessary to understand.¹⁰ Individuals with more than one marginalized identity have overlapping and potentially compounding stressors of discrimination, stigma, and/or violence to navigate. Therefore, GLSEN uses an intersectional framework for assessing LGBTQ+ school experiences.¹¹

Although decades of research has highlighted the experiences of LGBTQ+ young people in school, we know very little about LGBTQ+ families in school, and how discrimination and harassment may impact them. The first iteration of the current study — *Involved, Invisible, Ignored: The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Parents and Their Children in Our Nation's K-12 Schools* — was published in 2008. The report gave a comprehensive picture of the experiences of LGBTQ+ families in our nation's schools. It demonstrated that, indeed, LGBTQ+ children in school commonly experienced hostility based on their parents/caregivers/families being LGBTQ+. For example, nearly a quarter of the students surveyed (23%) felt unsafe at school because they had an LGBTQ+ parent, and 18% reported hearing negative remarks about having an LGBTQ+ parent/caregiver often or frequently while at school. Overall, the report concluded that students with LGBTQ+ parents/caregivers may be exposed to and negatively impacted by anti-LGBTQ+ bias in schools.

The report additionally stressed that LGBTQ+ parents/caregivers were highly involved in their children's schools, while parents also reported having negative experiences with school personnel. Additional qualitative research by Abbie Goldberg and colleagues (2017) has demonstrated that lesbian and gay parents are highly engaged in their children's schooling via both school-based involvement and connections with other parents. Although school engagement can be an important protective factor in ensuring positive educational outcomes in children,¹² not all families have the economic and social supports in place to allow them to be actively engaged in school activities. Further, while this research on school involvement helps give voice to the experiences of LGBTQ+ parents, it does not help us understand how LGBTQ+ bias and discrimination may impact children in school.

¹⁰ Collins, P. H. (2000). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. New York: Routledge. (Original work published 1990).

¹¹ For example, a series of four research reports titled *Erasure and Resilience: The Experiences of LGBTQ+ Students of Color* examines the experiences of Asian American and Pacific Islander, Black, Latinx, and Native and Indigenous LGBTQ youth to illustrate the unique experiences of negative school climate and supports and resources for these young people.

¹² Fedewa, A. L., & Clark, T. P. (2009). Parent practices and home-school partnerships: A differential effect for children with same-sex coupled parents? *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*, 5, 312–339. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15504280903263736>

Fifteen years after that initial report, we still know very little about the impacts of harassment, bullying, and discrimination on students who have LGBTQ+ families; however, the studies that do exist suggest it is a crucial phenomenon to understand and address. For example, a national, longitudinal study on lesbian families found that the children of lesbian parents experienced increasing amounts of homophobic experiences as they aged into school, with almost half of mothers reporting that their children had experienced some form of homophobic teasing or discrimination by age 10.¹³ Another study, which was a small qualitative study of 14 adolescents with same-sex parents, found, among other key findings, that these adolescents experienced teasing from their peer groups, especially in middle school.¹⁴

In summary, we still know very little about the experiences of LGBTQ+ families in educational contexts. Further, the research that does exist tends to focus on the experiences of the parents and caregivers themselves, rather than directly exploring their children's experiences in school. This report begins to redress this significant gap in the literature with a focus on experiences of students with LGBTQ+ parents and caregivers. Findings of this study strongly indicate the need for more actionable research with and about students with LGBTQ+ parents and caregivers, especially those who are experiencing multiple marginalizations of race, gender expression, sexual identity, and disability.

¹³ Gartrell, N., & Bos, H. (2010). US National Longitudinal Lesbian Family Study: Psychological adjustment of 17-year-old adolescents. *Pediatrics*, 126, 28–36. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2009-3153>

¹⁴ Welsh, M. G. (2011). Growing up in a same-sex parented family: The adolescent voice of experience. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*, 7, 49–71. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1550428X.2010.537241?journalCode=wgfs20>



MEET HODDS

Methods

GLSEN, in partnership with COLAGE and Family Equality, conducted two surveys within the United States and U.S. territories for this study. One survey focused on students (young people who were at least 14 years old and who attended high school or middle school during the 2021-2022 year) who have at least one LGBTQ+ parent(s) and/or caregiver(s). The second study focused on LGBTQ+ parents and caregivers who have at least one child who attends school.

Measures

The instruments that were used were developed for the 2008 iteration of the study and modified for this study. In addition to demographic information, which was collected for both groups, the student survey used a modified version of GLSEN's National School Climate Survey (NSCS). The NSCS assesses school climate via indicators such as hearing biased language in school (i.e., homophobic, racist, and sexist remarks), and experiences of verbal and physical harassment and physical assault. In order to assess participants' experiences of experiencing such hostility at school due to having an LGBTQ+ parent/caregiver, specific questions were added to assess these phenomena. This survey additionally assessed indicators of support for LGBTQ+ issues including presence of student clubs that address LGBTQ+ issues (e.g., a Gay Straight/Gender and Sexuality Alliance club), curricula that are inclusive of the lives of LGBTQ+ persons, the presence of supportive school personnel, and the presence of a school policy which includes explicit protection based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity/expression. Additionally, open-ended questions were included on the survey which allowed students to give voice to their experiences of associational discrimination.

The parent/caregiver survey collected information about parent/caregiver experiences of discrimination and exclusion at school in general, and by specific members of the school community (e.g., principals, teachers, other parents, etc.). Additionally, the survey asked about their perceptions of indicators of support for LGBTQ+ issues in their child's school along with any negative school experiences reported by their children. When asked to report about their child's experiences, parents/caregivers with more than one school-age child were asked to answer these sections about only one child and were asked to choose the oldest of their school-age children.¹⁵ See the Methodological Appendix for more detailed information.

¹⁵ Survey protocols were similar to the 2008 report and adapted from research protocols of GLSEN Research. Both surveys included some questions that are not analyzed in this report.



Data Collection

This study used snowball sampling to recruit participants for two surveys.¹⁶ Family Equality and COLAGE collected data for this study in the summer of 2022. Survey dissemination included in-person and online recruitment (via social media and email). Partner organizations ran social media ads to spread the word, and a social media toolkit was created to assist with promotion. Additionally, the three organizations emailed their partner organizations and personal networks to widely disseminate the survey. Additionally, in-person recruitment was held in late July 2022 at an annual nationwide event titled Family Week organized by Family Equality and COLAGE in Provincetown, Massachusetts,¹⁷ where a GLSEN research team-member helped with recruitment of participating families for the surveys.

Participants

Students

In order to be eligible for the study, student participants were required to report having at least one LGBTQ+ parent/caregiver (defined as an “adult in your life who serves as a parent figure”), to have attended middle or high school at any time during the 2021-2022 school year, and to have been at least 14 years old. A total of 612 eligible participants participated in the survey; however, 157 participants filled out the screening questions only and did not respond to any additional survey items, and were therefore dropped from the study. The resulting final sample was 455 participants. Table 1 shows additional demographic information for the student survey.

¹⁶ Although ideally random sampling is better for generalizable results, snowball sampling is often used in research designed to selectively target specific populations or communities such as young people who have LGBTQ+ parents/caregivers and LGBTQ+ families.

¹⁷ Family Week is the largest global gathering of LGBTQ+ families. In 2022, over 600 families from 35 states and 9 countries attended the event.

Table 1: Demographic Characters of the Student Survey		
Sexual Orientation (n = 272)	n	%
Straight/heterosexual only	180	66.2
One or more category within the LGBTQ+ spectrum ¹⁸	92	33.8
Gender Identity (n = 265)	n	%
Gender Expansive ¹⁹	87	32.8
Cisgender ²⁰	178	67.2
Race/Ethnicity²¹ (n = 264)	n	%
“White” identified only	168	63.6
Any other race/ethnicity or combination of race/ethnicity questions from our survey ²²	96	36.4
Transgender Parent²³ (n = 279)	n	%
Yes	46	16.5
No	233	83.5
Diagnosed with a Disability (n = 251)	n	%
Yes	14	45.4
No	137	54.6

¹⁸ Participants were asked to select “all that apply” from the following categories: gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, queer, questioning, asexual, and/or other.

¹⁹ Defined as self-identifying with any of the following gender-identity categories: transgender, non-binary, genderqueer, questioning.

²⁰ Defined as not identifying with any of the above categories.

²¹ Considering the research questions that were of interest to the partner organizations and the sample sizes we had, we decided to report race/ethnicity in binary terms: White or People of Color. Although this is not an ideal strategy, because it collapses important differences between groups, we decided this was the most appropriate approach given our data because of our concerns about small sample sizes.

²² Racial/ethnic categories included: “White,” “Black or African American,” “Hispanic or Latino/Latina/Latinx,” “East Asian,” “Southeast Asian,” “South Asian,” “Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander,” “Native American, American Indian, or Alaska,” “Multiracial,” and “another race or ethnicity not listed.” Participants were asked to select “all that apply.”

²³ Having a transgender parent or caregiver was coded as “Yes” if participants reported that one or more of their parent(s)/caregiver(s) identified as “Transgender,” “Genderqueer,” or “Nonbinary.”

Region by Policies (n = 291)	n	%
Protective	147	50.5
Discriminatory	71	24.4
Neutral	73	25.1
<hr/>		
Age (n = 455)	n	%
14	64	14.1
15	61	13.4
16	52	11.4
17	69	15.2
18	101	22.2
19	28	6.2
20	7	1.5
21	9	2.0
Over 21	64	14.1
<hr/>		
Type of School (n = 331)	n	%
Public	251	75.8
Religiously-Affiliated	39	11.8
Another kind of non-public, private or independent school	41	12.4
<hr/>		
Population Type (n = 304)	n	%
Urban area or city	151	49.7
Suburban area near a city	129	42.4
Small town or rural area	24	7.9

Parents/Caregivers

In order to be eligible for the study, participants had to be an LGBTQ+ parent and/or caregiver²⁴ and had to have at least one child attend K-12 school in 2021-2022. A total of 3,640 eligible parents/caregivers participated in this survey based on the screening questions. Review of the text-based or qualitative portions of the study revealed that some participants filled out the eligibility questions in order to be able to participate in the study; however, they actually intended to use the platform to express their disgust and disdain for LGBTQ+ people. Therefore, select text-based responses were systematically reviewed and 19 participants were identified as potential trolls and were excluded from all analyses, including demographic information. The survey included more straight-identified participants (while also including low numbers of trans-identified) than expected.

For this reason, we decided to only include participants who either:

1. Chose a sexual orientation/identity for either themselves or their partner(s) that was anything other than “Straight/Heterosexual” and/or “None of these apply to me”²⁵; or who
2. Chose a gender identity for either themselves or their partner(s) as either “Transgender,” “Genderqueer,” “Non-binary,” and/or “Questioning

It is possible that some parents/caregivers may have interpreted their eligibility for the study as LGBTQ+ parents/caregivers because of their relationship with another LGBTQ+ person, rather than because of their own identity (e.g., their child, their own parent/caregiver, their partner). This was not our intended population for this study. It is also possible that people answered “yes” to screening questions in order to get the chance to take the full survey (e.g., people who wanted to say hateful or violent things about LGBTQ+ people). Only 5 of the 19 participants identified as potential “trolls” via the text-based criteria listed above were dropped after non-LGBTQ+ parents/caregivers were dropped. The final sample was 1,431 participants. Table 2 shows select demographic information from this sample. Table 2 shows additional demographic information.

²⁴ Answered “yes” to the question: “Before you begin, do personally you (sic) identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community?”

²⁵ We recognize that “None of these apply to me” could refer to people within the queer and/or trans communities; however, some participants used this option to say things like “normal” — therefore, we choose to not include this category within our sample.

Table 2: Demographic Characters of the Parent/Caregiver Survey		
Sexual Orientation (n = 1,115)	n	%
Lesbian and/or Gay only	452	40.5
Bisexual only	140	12.6
Asexual only	7	.63
Heterosexual/straight only ²⁶	27	2.4
Queer only	71	6.4
Pansexual only	41	3.7
Questioning only	19	1.7
A combination of any of the above	358	32.1
Gender: Gender Expansive vs. Not (n = 1,113)	n	%
Gender Expansive ²⁷	216	19.4
Not Gender Expansive ²⁸	897	80.6
Race/Ethnicity²⁹ (n = 1,113)	n	%
“White” identified only	879	80.0
Any other race/ethnicity or combination of race/ethnicity questions from our survey ³⁰	234	21.0
Education (n = 1,117)	n	%
Less than high school degree	15	1.3
High school degree or equivalent	51	4.6
Associate’s degree	81	7.3

²⁶ These are likely the people who either identified as trans/gender expansive or people who had partner(s) who were LGBTQ+.

²⁷ Identified with one or more of the following gender identity items: Transgender, Genderqueer, Non-binary, and/or Questioning.

²⁸ Did not identify with any of the above terms.

²⁹ Refer to footnote 20.

³⁰ Refer to footnote 21

Technical college/trade school	28	2.5
Some college but no degree	264	23.6
College degree	144	12.9
Some graduate school but no degree	64	5.7
Graduate degree	470	42.1
Household Income (n = 1,101)	n	%
Less than \$25,000	46	4.2
\$25,000 to \$34,999	67	6.1
\$35,000 to \$49,999	85	7.7
\$50,000 to \$74,999	153	13.9
\$75,000 to \$99,999	178	16.2
\$100,000 to \$149,999	242	22.0
\$150,000 to \$199,999	137	12.4
\$200,000 or more	193	17.5



RESULTS

Results

Student Survey: Experiences of Students with LGBTQ+ Parents/Caregivers

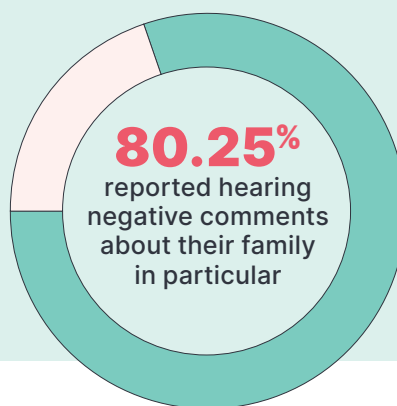
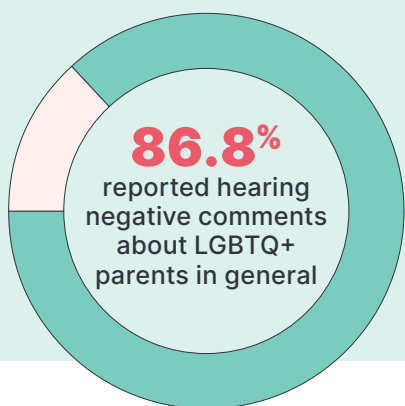
Although extensive research has documented the experiences of school climate for LGBTQ+ students, little is known about the school experiences of young people who have LGBTQ+ parents or caregivers.

The results below are organized by four crucial indicators of school climate:

1. Hearing biased or negative remarks about LGBTQ+ families,
2. Experiences of harassment and other safety concerns based on having an LGBTQ+ family,
3. Feelings or experiences of exclusion based on having an LGBTQ+ family, and
4. Supportive resources in school. Overall, results in this study suggest that many students simultaneously have supportive resources in place at school, yet still face overwhelmingly high rates of discrimination, harassment, or other forms of exclusion at school.

School Climate: Negative Remarks and Bias

One important indicator of school climate is whether or not students hear biased and negative language towards specific groups of people in school. Students in this survey were asked questions about hearing negative remarks about LGBTQ+ parents, including their own parents. The vast majority of students who participated in this survey reported hearing negative comments about LGBTQ+ parents in general (86.8%); and about their family in particular (80.25%). Of students who reported hearing negative remarks about their family due to having an LGBTQ+ parent or caregiver, 13.83% reported that this happened “frequently” or “often.”



In addition to these negative remarks, students were asked about hearing mean rumors or lies spread about them. Over two thirds of participants (67.53%) reported having mean rumors or lies spread about them in school because of having an LGBTQ+ parent or caregiver. 13% of those students reported this occurring frequently or often.

Students expressed experiences such as:

“We had to share some basic information about our family, and I said that I had two moms. The students made fun of me, and the teacher told me that I couldn’t participate in this activity anymore because I ‘spread propaganda.’”

“I shared with my friends that I had two moms. Most of them were accepting, but a couple of them don’t talk to me anymore, and spread that information before I was ready to tell everyone.”

School Climate: Harassment and Safety

Another important indicator of school climate is whether or not students experience harassment (including verbal and physical harassment), or assault at school. Students in this survey made clear they are targeted at school and experience harassment and other safety concerns at school because of having LGBTQ+ parents. For example, a large majority — over two thirds of participants (70.4%) — reported being verbally harassed at school because of having an LGBTQ+ parent, at some point. A little less than a quarter of these students (21%) reported that this verbal harassment occurred either frequently or often. In text-based responses, students were given the opportunity to provide details of their experiences of harassment at school.

One student reported an experience they had with a substitute teacher, and the emotional impacts that the substitute teacher’s comments had on them:

“[The] substitute teacher [took] up all of the class period making transphobic, homophobic, and violent comments. Many sexist comments as well. Several mentions of parenting and how some people were worse at it. Made me feel personally bad due to my own parents and myself wanting to be a parent when I grow older. It hurts to have someone say ‘these people are horrible parents’ when you know it’s not true. Even then it hurts.”

Another student’s response makes clear that the homophobic harassment that they experience due to having an LGBTQ+ parent or caregiver is part of a larger homophobic culture, wherein association with an LGBTQ+ parent is seen by others at school as an indication of the student’s perceived sexual orientation and/or gender identity, both of which result in harassment:

“They think gay children are gay, so they’re afraid to have more contact with me, saying I make them sick.”

In addition to verbal harassment experiences, the majority (64.5%) of students in this study reported experiencing physical harassment (e.g., shoving, pushing, etc.) at their school because of having an LGBTQ+ parent or caregiver at some point. Similarly, 61.8% of students reported being physically assaulted (such as being punched, kicked, or injured with a weapon) at some point in the 2021-2022 school year because of having an LGBTQ+ parent or caregiver.

64.5%

the majority (64.5%) of students in this study reported experiencing physical harassment (e.g., shoving, pushing, etc.) at their school because of having an LGBTQ+ parent or caregiver at some point



1 out of three students reported feeling excluded from a school or classroom activity at some point over the past 12 months because of having an LGBTQ+ parent or caregiver sometimes/often/frequently

School Climate: Exclusion

In addition to experiences of harassment, violence, and biased language, this study explored students' feelings and experience of exclusion at school due to having an LGBTQ+ parent or caregiver. The overwhelming majority of participants (96.6%) reported feeling excluded from a school or classroom activity at some point over the past 12 months because of having an LGBTQ+ parent or caregiver. Although the overall experience of exclusion was high, most students experienced this either rarely or sometimes: 30.6% reported feeling excluded rarely, 29.8% reported it occurred sometimes, 3.4% reported often, and 1.7% reported frequently.

Students were also asked specifically about whether or not their type of family was acknowledged at school, as an additional indicator of exclusionary experiences. About two thirds (67.5%) of students surveyed reported feeling like school personnel didn't acknowledge their type of family. However, this exclusion didn't stop at lack of acknowledgment — students also reported more active forms of exclusion at about the same rates. Namely, 68.6% reported being discouraged by a teacher, principal, or other school staff from talking about their LGBTQ+ parent(s) or family at school at some point. Of students who reported this type of experience, 13.7% reported this occurring frequently or often.



68.6%

reported being discouraged by a teacher, principal, or other school staff from talking about their LGBTQ+ parent(s) or family at school at some point

Students were additionally asked to describe their experiences of exclusion.

For example, students shared:

“An assignment where we were supposed to write a Mother’s Day letter for our moms but I was told to just work on missing work rather than send one to a dad.”

“In the case of having two fathers, activities that involve mothers are excluded.”

In these examples, students made clear that school activities which assumed heteronormative family structures — having a father and a mother — resulted in exclusion. Some students expressed more general forms of exclusion, from both students and school personnel.

For example:

“My teacher, knowing my family situation, talked to me privately and refused to let me participate in class activities.”

“My classmates often made prejudiced remarks about my family. The principal thought it was a bad thing and excluded me from every activity.”

“They all stay away from me, afraid of my family’s influence on them.”

In addition to reporting experiences of exclusion specifically about having an LGBTQ+ parent or caregiver, students reported other, more general forms of LGBTQ+ exclusion that they experienced in school. For example, when asked “In the past 12 months, have you been prevented from wearing, or told not to wear, clothing or items supporting LGBTQ+ issues (such as t-shirts or bracelets)?” 29.5% of participants answered “yes.” Table 3 includes additional survey items related to general LGBTQ+ exclusionary experiences.

Table 3: General LGBTQ+ Exclusionary Experiences

In the past 12 months, have you been prevented from...	% Yes (n)	% No (n)
...wearing, or told not to wear, clothing or items supporting LGBTQ+ issues (such as t-shirts or bracelets)?	29.5% (91)	70.5% (218)
...writing about or doing school projects about LGBTQ+ issues in classes?	28.5% (86)	71.5% (216)
...forming or promoting a Gender Sexuality Alliance, or GSA (for example, not allowed to use the intercom to announce meetings)?	29.3% (82)	70.7% (198)
...writing or talking about LGBTQ+ issues in extracurricular activities (for example, in school publications including yearbook, newspaper, and events like Day of Silence)?	28.9% (81)	71.1% (199)

Students who had at least one parent or caregiver who was transgender or gender expansive were significantly more likely to report higher rates of associational discrimination across both scales.



Associational Discrimination and Group Differences

In order to mitigate the limitation that a validated measure of associational discrimination was not available to use for this study, we performed an exploratory factor analysis on survey items.³¹ From this analysis, we determined two subscales of associational discrimination, and these subscales were used to assess group differences in students' experiences of associational discrimination in school — namely, a General Associational Discrimination scale and a scale of Associational Discrimination by Adults. Based on a 5-point Likert scale which ranged from 0 = “Never,” 1 = “Rarely,” 2 = “Sometimes,” 3 = “Often,” and 4 = “Frequently,” students were asked to report how often they experienced various indicators of discrimination, bullying, harassment, biased language, or other hostile school climate indicators because of having an LGBTQ+ parent/caregiver. The mean score of the General Associational Discrimination measure for this sample of students was 1.30 with a standard deviation of 0.93, and for the Associational Discrimination by Adults the mean score was 0.92 with a standard deviation of 0.85.

Group differences were explored keeping the primary research questions in mind; are there group differences in experiences of associational discrimination based on (1) having at least one transgender parent/caregiver, (2) living in a state with discriminatory, protective, or neutral LGBTQ+ school policies, and (3) race/ethnic identification³²

As shown in Figure 1, students who had at least one parent or caregiver who was transgender or gender expansive³³ were significantly more likely to report higher rates of associational discrimination across both scales. On the Adult Associational Discrimination scale, students with a transgender parent/caregiver reported 33% higher scores of discrimination than students who did not have a transgender parent or caregiver.³⁴ On the General Associational Discrimination scale, students with a transgender parent/caregiver reported 23% higher scores of discrimination than students who did not have a transgender parent or caregiver.³⁵

³¹ More information can be found about this process in the Methodological Appendix.

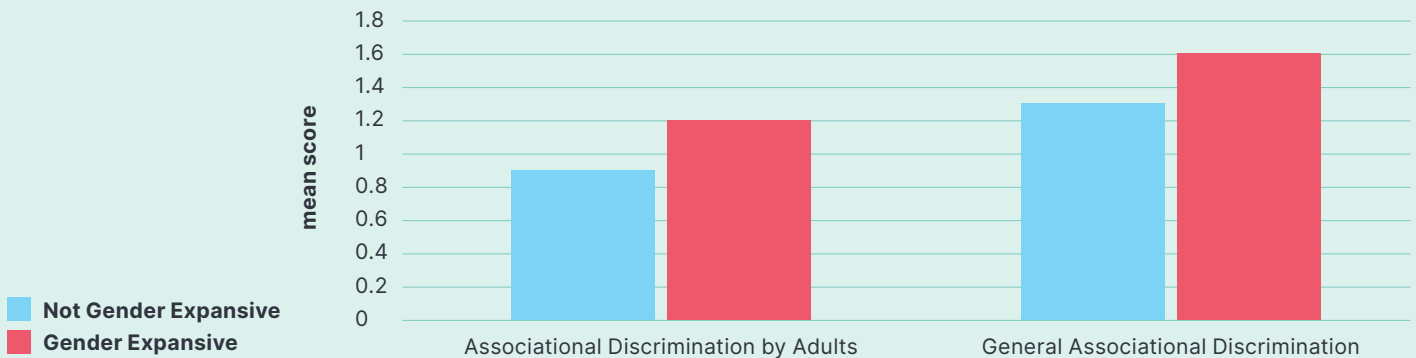
³² See the Methodological Appendix for more information.

³³ Defined as any participant who reported that they had at least one parent or caregiver who identified as “Transgender,” “Non-binary,” and/or “Genderqueer.”

³⁴ Analysis of variance was performed using the Bonferroni correction $F(1,276) = 6.64, p = 0.01$

³⁵ Analysis of variance was performed using the Bonferroni correction, $F(1, 276) = 6.13, p = 0.01$

Figure 1: Mean Differences in Associational Discrimination Based on Having a Transgender Parent/Caregiver



There were no significant differences in mean scores of associational discrimination for either sub-scale by state-type and by race/ethnic identity. We are reporting these statistical findings in alignment with research ethics and best practices. However, we also recognize that these findings are different from lived experiences of communities and advocates on the ground. Although state policies will ultimately shape the climate of schools in that state, there are also myriad other variables that could influence a student's experience of associational discrimination at school (e.g., district policies, school staff training, identities of school staff, etc.). It is possible that the effects of macro-level phenomena, such as state policies, were not large enough to produce significant results on a scale that focused on micro-level interactions and experiences at school. Further, although it is very likely that students of color who have LGBTQ+ parent(s)/caregiver(s) experience additional forms of discrimination, harassment, bullying, and/or hostile school environments because of their multiple marginalizations, it is possible that those additional forms of mistreatment did not affect their experiences of being mistreated because of having an LGBTQ+ parent/caregiver. More research is needed to explicitly explore the experiences of LGBTQ+ families that are Black, Indigenous, or people of color (BIPOC) and/or experiencing multiple marginalizations.

Supportive School Resources

Supportive school resources are essential buffers to the detrimental effects of hostile school climates.³⁶ In this survey, students were asked about supportive school resources such as adults who are supportive of LGBTQ+ topics, anti-discrimination policies, inclusive curricula, and LGBTQ+ clubs. Despite high levels of experiences of associational discrimination based

³⁶ Kosciw, J. G., Clark, C. M., & Menard, L. (2022). The 2021 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of LGBTQ+ youth in our nation's schools. New York: GLSEN.

Despite high levels of experiences of associational discrimination based on having an LGBTQ+ parent/caregiver, students in this study reported feeling like they have supportive resources and supportive adults at their schools. There is a need to systematize and further strengthen these supports.

on having an LGBTQ+ parent/caregiver, students in this study reported feeling like they have supportive resources and supportive adults at their schools. There is a need to systematize and further strengthen these supports.

The vast majority of students in this study (94.3%) had at least some adults (teachers or other school staff) at their school who were supportive of LGBTQ+ issues. Only 5.7% of participants reported that no teachers or school staff members at their school are supportive. 9.5% reported having only one supportive adult in school, 44.8% reported having between 2-5 supportive adults, 17% reported having between 6-10 supportive adults, and 23.2% reported having more than 10 adults who were supportive of LGBTQ+ issues.

Students were also asked about policies at their school. The majority (61.9%) of students reported that their school has a policy about bullying, harassment, or assault in school, 21.3% reported that their school does not, and 16.9% said that they did not know. Of the 61.9% of students who said their school did have such a policy, slightly over half (54.3%) said that this policy specifically mentioned sexual orientation and slightly less than half (47.7%) said that the policy specifically mentioned gender identity or gender expression.

Additionally, slightly over half of participants (54%) reported that during the 2021-2022 school year, they were taught positive things about LGBTQ+ people, history, or events in their classes. However, 40% of students in this survey also reported that they were taught negative things about LGBTQ+ people, history, events, or topics in their classes during the 2021-2022 school year.

And finally, slightly less than half of participants (48.4%) reported that their school has a Gender and Sexuality Alliance, a Gay Straight Alliance (GSA), or another type of club that addresses LGBTQ+ issues. However, 36% said their school did not have such a club and 15.6% said they did not know. Of the students who said their school did have a GSA or another similar club, 34.8% said that this club was “very inclusive” to students who had an LGBTQ+ parent or caregiver, 31.9% said the club was “somewhat inclusive,” 27.4% reported that the club was “somewhat not inclusive,” and 6.0% said that the club was “not inclusive.”

Parent/Caregiver Survey: Experiences of Discrimination and Support

In addition to the primary focus of this report — experiences of students who have LGBTQ+ parents/caregivers — parents/caregivers themselves were surveyed in order to help understand the experiences of LGBTQ+ families in schools.³⁷ These results help supplement the student findings by demonstrating experiences of direct (i.e., non-associational) discrimination that LGBTQ+ parents/caregivers are subject to, along with their reports of their children’s experiences in school.

³⁷ Parents/caregivers who filled out the survey were not necessarily the parents of the students who responded to the students survey.

The below results are organized into three sections:

1. Personal experiences of mistreatment and bias as an LGBTQ+ parent/caregiver,
2. Reports from their children about mistreatment and bias at school, and
3. resources in school that are supportive to LGBTQ+ parents/caregivers

Parent/Caregiver Experiences of Mistreatment and Bias

Results demonstrated that some LGBTQ+ families in our survey experience regular bias and discrimination at their child’s school. The below graphs (Figure 2 and Figure 3) report the frequencies that participants in our survey reported either hearing negative comments about LGBTQ+ people or being mistreated by various members of their school community.



Figure 2: Percentage of Parents/Caregivers Who Reported Hearing Negative Comments about Being LGBTQ+

Hearing Negative Comments (%). “In the past months, how often have you heard negative comments about being LGBTQ+ from...”

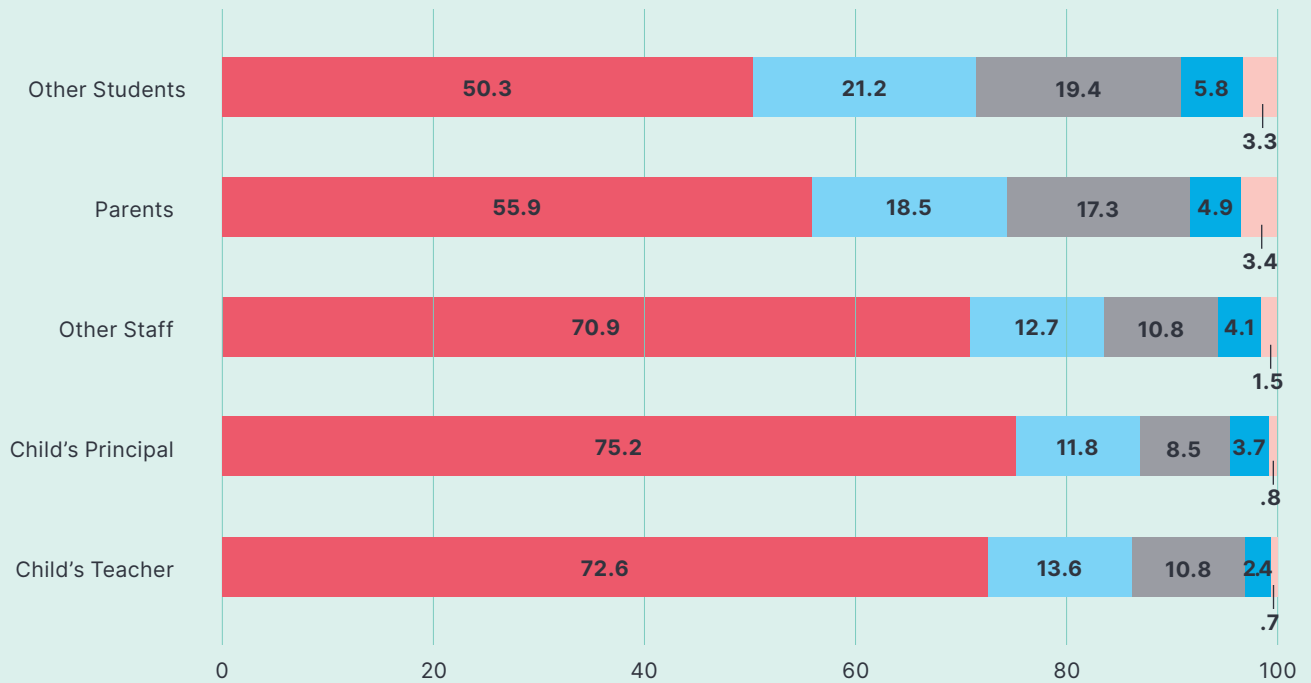
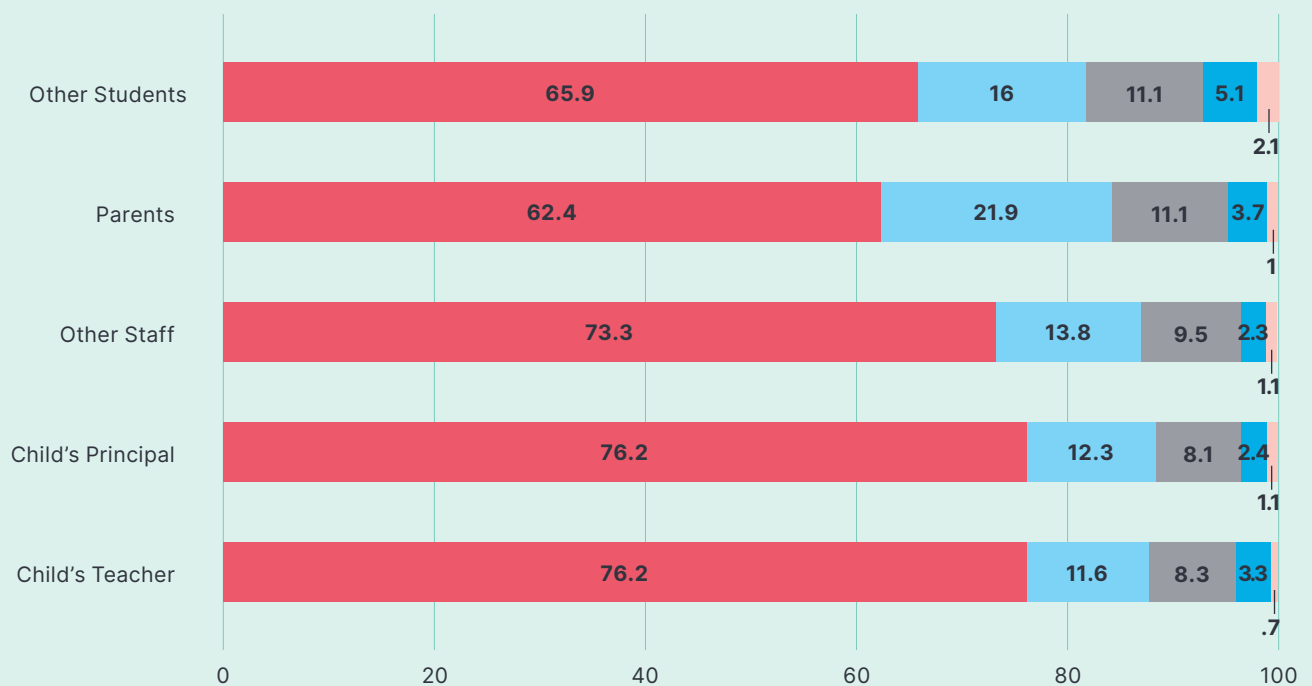




Figure 3: Percentage of Parents/Caregivers Who Reported Mistreatment

Mistreatment (%). “In the past 12 months, how often have you been mistreated because you are LGBTQ+ by...”



When asked, “In the past 12 months, how often have you felt that you are not able to fully participate in your child’s school community because you are an LGBTQ+ parent?” the majority (59.6%) reported never; however 16.5% reported rarely, 16.2% reported sometimes, 5.2% reported often, and 2.5% reported frequently. Similarly, 6.3% reported feeling like school personnel didn’t acknowledge their type of family over the past 12 months either frequently or often, while 15.4% reported sometimes, 15.4% reported rarely, and 62.9% reported never.

“It was suggested that our two daughters emancipate themselves because we had to be unfit parents because we are queer.”

“My child, who was adopted, has a trauma history and has trouble with emotional regulation. When discussing an incident of unexpected behavior that happened at school, the principal and school psychologist both, in separate calls, questioned how much my family structure has to do with my child’s behavior.”

The text-based qualitative responses that were collected help to shed light on the nature of parent/caregiver experiences of mistreatment and bias.

For example, some parents/caregivers elaborated:

- “Sports teacher said, ‘You have to look at your influence on your child as we can’t stop other kids saying nasty things about you.’”
- “It was suggested that our two daughters emancipate themselves because we had to be unfit parents because we are queer.”
- “My child, who was adopted, has a trauma history and has trouble with emotional regulation. When discussing an incident of unexpected behavior that happened at school, the principal and school psychologist both, in separate calls, questioned how much my family structure has to do with my child’s behavior.”
- “[A] group of conservative parents lobbied for my family to not be involved in volunteer activities as we ‘don’t represent Christian values.’”

Parent/Caregiver Reports of Their Child’s Experiences of Mistreatment and Bias

When parents/caregivers were asked, “Has your child ever told you about being harassed, bullied or having problems with other students at your school for any reason?” over half (57.9%) of parents/caregivers reported yes. Of those who said yes, they were additionally asked, “How often has your child reported that the bullying or harassment was because they have an LGBTQ+ parent/parents, or is from an LGBTQ+ family?” and over half (53.6%) reported this happened at least on occasion, with 3.8% reporting frequently, 7% reporting often, 18.3% reporting sometimes, and 24.5% reporting rarely.

“White supremacy club cards were handed out to students by [a] student; LGBTQ identity art was destroyed by a single student two days in a row; anti-LGBTQ+ parents have been bullying school officials, librarians, and educators. Causing all of those support outlets to fear for their career if they show support. So kids are getting bullied more as a result.”

The qualitative, text-based responses are illustrative of some participants' experiences. Parents/caregivers shared:

- “Exclusion, parents that just don’t approach you or include you or your kids, disconnection or lack of invitations.”
- “My daughter has been cut off from friends upon finding out I am trans.”
- “White supremacy club cards were handed out to students by [a] student; LGBTQ identity art was destroyed by a single student two days in a row; anti-LGBTQ+ parents have been bullying school officials, librarians, and educators. Causing all of those support outlets to fear for their career if they show support. So kids are getting bullied more as a result.”
- “They removed gay books from libraries.”

Additionally, parents/caregivers mentioned administrative or bureaucratic examples of exclusion, wherein their family structure was denied. For example:

- “Forms are formatted for Mother and Father.”
- “Registration forms assume heteronormative parental relationships.”
- “They always say mother and father, not spouse or another non-gendered term.”
- “They would not let my husband pick up my child from middle school because they said he is not his dad.”
- “In the past, the school has had events for dads. I think they have stopped this now, but it was hard on my children. Even after they stopped the events specifically for dads, they continued emphasizing that students needed to bring a ‘male role model.’”

Supportive Resources for LGBTQ+ Families

Results from the parent/caregiver survey indicated that many parents/caregivers found their child’s school to be inclusive places overall for their LGBTQ+ family. For example, when asked, “Overall, how inclusive is your child’s school of LGBTQ+ families such as yours?”

37.7% said very inclusive, 36.5% said somewhat inclusive, 19% said a little inclusive, and 6.7% said not at all inclusive. Parents/caregivers were also asked, “How many teachers or other school staff are supportive of LGBTQ+ issues (e.g., supportive of students with an LGBTQ+ parent)?” Some (8.7%) parents/caregivers reported that all teachers or other school staff were supportive of LGBTQ+ issues and 3.7% reported that no one was supportive at their child’s school. Most parents/caregivers were in the middle, with about a half (49.4%) of parents/caregivers reporting that either most or many teachers and staff were supportive, 19.3% reported a few were supportive, and 18.9% said they did not know.

The majority of parents/caregivers (83.6%) reported that their child’s school has a policy about bullying, harassment, or assault in school (8.3% said no, and 8.1% said they did not know). Of those who said yes, 58.2% said that the policy specifically mentions sexual orientation, 16.1% said it does not, and 25.7% said they did not know. Similarly, of those who said yes to a general policy existing, 51.7% said the policy specifically mentions gender identity or gender expression, 18.7% said it does not, and 29.6% said they did not know.



DISCUSSION

Discussion

Limitations

Readers should be aware of some limitations of this study. First, this study utilized purposive and snowball sampling designs in order to recruit participants in the demographic groups that were of interest to this research. This type of sampling design is appropriate to help recruit people in communities that typically get left out of research and/or that are small and insular. Notably, the insularity of marginalized communities is a consequence of our erasure. The tradeoff of this purposive/snowball sampling approach is that it is not a random sample and therefore the results are not generalizable. This means that the frequencies of experiences reported here reflect the experiences for this particular sample, and may or may not reflect the larger population of LGBTQ+ parents/caregivers and their children. That being said, this type of limitation is typical in survey research which uses recruitment methods to focus on erased communities. We believe that the results of this study demonstrate that children who have LGBTQ+ parents/caregivers experience bullying, discrimination, and/or harassment at school and that these experiences deserve our attention; however, more research with generalizable populations is needed to understand the extent of this phenomena.

Second, as demonstrated in the participants section, the sample of participants in both the student and the parent/caregiver surveys did not capture as much demographic variability as we hoped, and in some cases, certain demographic groups may have been over-represented in our sample. Both surveys had limited representation from transgender participants and participants of color which limited the analyses we were able to conduct. Considering established research and lived experiences of students of color in the K-12 education system,³⁸ study results could very well be different — and perhaps more exacerbated — with a sample of individuals who experience multiple and overlapping forms of marginalizations.

Relatedly, the number of students who identified both as LGBTQ+ themselves and who had an LGBTQ+ parent/caregiver was higher than we expected based on existing research and our collective experience working directly with children with LGBTQ+ parents. It is possible that this sample was skewed towards LGBTQ+-identified young people. Further,

³⁸ Truong, N. L., Zongrone, A. D., & Kosciw, J. G. (2020). Erasure and resilience: The experiences of LGBTQ students of color, Asian American and Pacific Islander LGBTQ youth in U.S. schools. New York: GLSEN.; Truong, N. L., Zongrone, A. D., & Kosciw, J. G. (2020). Erasure and resilience: The experiences of LGBTQ students of color, Black LGBTQ youth in U.S. schools. New York: GLSEN; Zongrone, A. D., Truong, N. L., & Kosciw, J. G. (2020). Erasure and resilience: The experiences of LGBTQ students of color, Latinx LGBTQ youth in U.S. schools. New York: GLSEN; Zongrone, A. D., Truong, N. L., & Kosciw, J. G. (2020). Erasure and resilience: The experiences of LGBTQ students of color, Native American, American Indian, and Alaska Native LGBTQ youth in U.S. schools. New York: GLSEN.



considering another eligibility criteria was to have attended either middle or high school during the 2021-2022 year, it was surprising that 14.1% of participants reported they were over 21. Although it is certainly possible that many of the participants who were 21 or over were pursuing alternative means to receive their degree and responded to the survey based on those experiences, it may also be possible that some participants filled out the survey inaccurately or that this sample over-represented older students. Finally, there was a higher percentage of students who reported having a disability than expected, and unfortunately we do not have any information on the types of disability and/or the potential of overlapping marginalizations.

Third, the items on the parent/caregiver survey which assessed their perceptions of their child's experiences at school asked parent/caregivers to focus on their eldest child. In text-based responses, a few participants mentioned that if the survey had asked about a younger child, they would have had very different answers for the survey because their younger child has experienced more bullying and harassment at school. Readers should be aware that respondents were only asked about their oldest child which does not capture the entirety of their family's experiences in school.

Finally, both surveys had over 200 questions, and many participants skipped questions or did not complete the full survey, resulting in missing data. Admittedly, the survey was lengthy and the length of the survey may have resulted in participant fatigue or lack of attention.

Conclusion

All students deserve to feel safe and included at school. The results of this report make evident that the young people who participated in our survey experience bullying, harassment, discrimination, and a hostile environment at school because their parent(s) or caregiver(s) are LGBTQ+. It is imperative that we take immediate steps to better understand the experiences of students with LGBTQ+ parents and their families within K-12 schools and to ensure that they have a safer and more inclusive environment in which to learn and thrive.

The data for the current study were collected at the beginning of a two-year period in which we have seen an unprecedented amount of attacks on LGBTQ+ communities, many of which have targeted schools. Within this rapid influx of aggressive anti-LGBTQ+ legislation, a disproportionate number of such attacks target transgender adults and youth. In addition,

we have seen a sharp increase in dangerous, anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric used against LGBTQ+ people and people who oppose anti-LGBTQ+ legislation, casting them as “groomers” or “pedophiles.” Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that the findings in this report would be exacerbated for all LGBTQ+ families — and perhaps particularly for families with one or more transgender family member — given the current anti-LGBTQ+ and specifically anti-trans climate. States that pass bills like “Don’t Say Gay and Trans” bills prohibit students from talking about their family, force students back into the closet, and remove books and curricula that include or reflect LGBTQ+ people. These legislative actions are bound to create a less welcoming, less supportive, and even hostile environment for LGBTQ+ students and students with LGBTQ+ families.

Experiences such as hearing biased language, being harassed, or otherwise facing discrimination contribute to feelings of exclusion, marginalization, and a general hostile climate. Although extensive research documents the detrimental effects of discrimination in school contexts among LGBTQ+ identified young people, there is very little research which explores the impact of discrimination, bullying, and harassment on young people who have LGBTQ+ parents/caregivers. This report is just the tip of the iceberg and should be seen as a starting point that illustrates the need for further research and reports.

Overall, it is clear from this report that young people with LGBTQ+ parents/caregivers in our survey are experiencing discrimination, bullying, and harassment at school. Many of the students in this study speak of being excluded by both school personnel and other students. The text-based responses from the student and parent/caregiver surveys demonstrate that experiences of discrimination, bullying, and harassment that young people face in school are not only coming from peer-to-peer bullying, but additionally school leaders such as teachers and principals can perpetuate this hostile environment. It is particularly alarming to find that children are being discriminated against at school by the adults who are meant to support them and facilitate their learning and growth. When adults model erasure and exclusion at school, it may send a message to other young people that this type of behavior is appropriate.

In this study, we found that students with a transgender parent/caregiver reported 33% higher scores of “associational discrimination from adults”³⁹ at their school than students who did not have a transgender parent or caregiver. Similarly, students with a transgender parent/caregiver reported 23% higher scores of “general associational discrimination”⁴⁰ than students who did not have a transgender parent or caregiver. The last two years have seen an increase in anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric used against LGBTQ+ people and those who have spoken out against attacks against our communities. This result is particularly alarming

³⁹ Please refer to the Methodological Appendix for more information on the measures we used and additional analytical details.

⁴⁰ Please refer to the Methodological Appendix for more information on the measures we used and additional analytical details.

considering these data were collected at the beginning of this influx of anti-trans legislation. Considering the aggressive anti-LGBTQ+ and specifically, anti-trans social and political landscape that has taken shape over the last two years, it is reasonable to hypothesize that if these data were collected again, the frequencies of hostile school climate experiences for LGBTQ+ families would increase.

Both student and parent/caregiver surveys in this report demonstrate that school activities may create exclusion for LGBTQ+ families. School activities that are designed with the presumption that students' parents/caregivers are a straight, cisgender couple can exclude LGBTQ+ families and families of other configurations. This erases the families of students in this survey. Worse, school staff responses compound the harm of erasure by excluding students with families that do not fit the mold they set up in the first place. Both students and parents/caregivers expressed feelings of exclusion in school because of these practices.

Research suggests that supportive school resources can help buffer some of the negative outcomes associated with hostile, unsafe, or biased school climates. Although students in the current study reported some supportive experiences in their school, they also experienced harassment, discrimination, and a hostile learning environment. Nonetheless, it is worthy to celebrate and amplify supportive resources that do exist that could help buffer the experiences of associational discrimination experienced by students with LGBTQ+ parents/caregivers.

Resources

LGBTQ+ families, parents, and youth experiencing discrimination should be in touch with organizations providing policy and programming support for LGBTQ+ families like [Family Equality](#), [COLAGE](#), and [GLSEN](#) for additional support. LGBTQ+ families can also file [Title IX complaints](#) with the Department of Education Office of Civil Rights to ensure that discrimination against them and their children receives a federal response.

Recommendations

This report makes strikingly clear that discrimination, harassment, bullying, and exclusion of students with LGBTQ+ parents and caregivers is an urgent issue that schools, educational agencies, policy makers, and advocates must address in order to keep schools safe for all students. The issue demands attention and action such as research, policy, training interventions, and additional resources.

Based on the results of this report, we offer the following recommendations:

1

Policy makers and educational systems should ensure that existing policies and guidelines prohibiting anti-LGBTQ+ nondiscrimination, bullying, and harassment expressly include students with LGBTQ+ parents or caregivers.

2

All school districts should adopt clear guidelines and policies that prohibit discrimination, harassment, and bullying of both LGBTQ+ students and students with LGBTQ+ parents, caregivers and family members. Inclusive policy standards should be inclusive of LGBTQ+ families and different family structures.

3

The U.S. Department of Education should publish guidance that Title IX prohibits discrimination against students with LGBTQ+ parents, caregivers and family members, and provide targeted outreach and resources to LGBTQ+ parents and caregivers.

4

The Department of Education should provide guidance to school districts that detail Title IX hostile environment regulations to prevent school districts from enforcing book bans, curriculum bans, and other anti-LGBTQ+ legislation in a way that creates a hostile environment for LGBTQ+ children and their families.

5

State education agencies (SEAs), local education agencies (LEAs), and schools should review and update their administrative materials and family engagement processes to be inclusive of LGBTQ+ families (e.g., forms which assume “mother and father”).

6

State education agencies (SEAs), local education agencies (LEAs), and schools should review their curricula — including special events such as Mother’s and Father’s Day — to ensure that LGBTQ+ families are represented and allowed to participate as it makes sense for them and their family and include different family structures in inclusive curricular standards.

7

School districts should implement professional development trainings and other materials to provide guidance on family diversity and inclusion.

8

Additional data is needed to fully understand the impacts of associational discrimination in school. Sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) data is essential to collect in educational research. The U.S. Department of Education should adopt measures and reporting practices to ensure that we can evaluate the school climate for the children of LGBTQ+ parents and caregivers.



Appendix: Analytical and Methodological Notes

This appendix serves as a descriptive resource for readers to better understand the analytical and methodological approaches of the current study. The current study sought to understand the experiences of LGBTQ+ families in our nation's schools. In particular, this report focuses on the experiences of harassment, bullying, discrimination, and/or hostile school climates for students who have LGBTQ+ parent(s) or caregiver(s). As noted in the original report, legal scholars and practitioners use the term "associational discrimination" to refer to discrimination that occurs because of someone's association with a marginalized group. In this study, we were particularly interested in experiences of harassment, bullying, "by association" with their parent(s) and/or caregiver(s) who are LGBTQ+. For readability in the remainder of this report, we occasionally shortened this concept to "associational discrimination" in some sections of this appendix. We note that the phenomena we are capturing is likely to include the broader constructs of harassment, bullying and other indicators of hostile school climate, and is not limited to "discrimination."

Measures

Exploratory Factor Analysis

The phenomena of experiencing harassment, bullying, discrimination, and/or other indicators of hostile school climates for students who have LGBTQ+ parent(s) or caregiver(s) is not well understood in the literature and, to our knowledge, there are no validated measures that capture this construct.⁴¹ In order to buffer this limitation and to help accurately assess whether the survey items meaningfully captured the intended construct, an exploratory factor analysis was performed on the 22 survey items on the student survey which assessed any form of perceived indicators of a hostile school climate based on having an LGBTQ+ parent/caregiver. Factor analysis is a statistical method which helps to reduce data in order to reveal the theoretical concepts or constructs that underlie a phenomena of interest, in this case, "associational discrimination" — or experiencing harassment, bullying, discrimination, and/or other indicators of hostile school climates because of having LGBTQ+ parent(s) or caregiver(s).

Three-hundred and eighteen observations or participants were included in this analysis. It was determined that the sample met the requirements of sampling adequacy based on

⁴¹ The original report has additional information about the measures that were used.

the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO), a measure which compares the magnitudes of the observed correlation coefficients with the magnitudes of the partial correlation coefficients among variables. KMO values above 0.90 are optimal.⁴² The KMO in this study was 0.943. Additionally, Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($p < .001$). The results of both of these tests indicated that proceeding with factor analysis/principle-components analysis was appropriate.

Using principal-components analysis with an orthogonal rotation, the results indicated that three factors loaded together in meaningful patterns. Factor loadings of 0.40 or greater are significant and important to interpret. Therefore, all factor loadings of 0.40 or greater were considered. Items were retained based on eigenvalues of 1.0 or greater, cross factor-loadings, and interpretability of the factor solution. Based on these criteria, three factors would have been retained; however, factor three only had two items which met retention criteria, therefore it was dropped and a two factor solution was retained.

The two factors that were retained represent distinct constructs in our dataset that were subsequently used to measure the phenomenon of associational discrimination/harassment/bullying for the purposes of later multivariate analyses within this study. The most robust pattern of results, Factor 1, was interpreted to conceptually capture associational discrimination that children faced from adults at school (e.g., hearing negative comments about or being mistreated because of having an LGBTQ+ parent caregiver by adults at school). Adults at school include teachers, principals, other school staff, and parents of other children. Factor 1 was comprised of 7 items reported on a 5-point Likert scale that explained 27.4% of the variance with factor loadings from .8376 to .7046. From here forward, Factor 1 will be referred to as the "Associational Discrimination by Adults" scale.

Factor 2 was interpreted conceptually to capture general experiences of associational discrimination at school (e.g., mean rumors, harassment, assault, and feeling excluded based on having an LGBTQ+ parent/caregiver). Factor 2 was comprised of 5 items reported on a 5-point Likert scale that explained 22.8% of the variance with factor loadings from .7947 to .5574. From here forward, Factor 2 will be referred to as the "General Associational Discrimination" scale.⁴³ Notably, these scales are only meaningful within this dataset, and are not meant to indicate any validation of a scale to be used in future research.

⁴² Kaiser, H. F. (1974). An index of factorial simplicity. *Psychometrika*, 39, 31–36

⁴³ Internal consistency reliability was measured for each subscale. For the 7-item Factor 1 scale, Cronbach's alpha was 0.93 and for the 5-item Factor 2 sub-scale, Cronbach's alpha was 0.87. These results indicate excellent reliability.

Below are two tables which show the final survey items that were retained in each factor, along with their factor loadings.

Table 1. Factor 1: Associational Discrimination by Adults	
Survey Item	Factor Loading
In the past 12 months how often have you heard negative comments about having an LGBTQ+ parent or parents from your teacher(s)?	.8034
In the past 12 months how often have you heard negative comments about having an LGBTQ+ parent or parents from the principal of your school?	.7594
In the past 12 months how often have you heard negative comments about having an LGBTQ+ parent or parents from other staff at your school?	.7046
In the past 12 months how often have you been mistreated because you have an LGBTQ+ parent(s) by your teacher(s)?	.8376
In the past 12 months how often have you been mistreated because you have an LGBTQ+ parent(s) by the principal of your school?	.7901
In the past 12 months how often have you been mistreated because you have an LGBTQ+ parent(s) by other staff at your school?	.7863
In the past 12 months how often have you been mistreated because you have an LGBTQ+ parent(s) by parents of other students at your school?	.7212

Table 2. Factor 2: General Associational Discrimination

Survey Item	Factor Loading
How often have you heard negative remarks about your family having an LGBTQ+ parent(s)?	.7091
In the 2021-2022 school year, how often have you had mean rumors or lies spread about you in school because you have an LGBTQ+ parent(s)?	.7334
In the 2021-2022 school year, how often have you been verbally harassed (name calling, threats, etc.) at your school because of having an LGBTQ+ parent or parents?	.7947
In the 2021-2022 school year, how often have you been physically assaulted (punched, kicked, injured with a weapon) at your school because of having an LGBTQ+ parent or parents?	.7681
In the past 12 months how often have you felt excluded from a school or classroom activity because you have an LGBTQ+ parent or parents (for example, being told you cannot list two mothers on your family tree for a class assignment)?	.5574

Analysis

Univariate analysis

Univariate, descriptive statistics were performed on both surveys in order to report frequencies of experiences related to discrimination and other indicators of hostile climates, as well as perceptions of supportive resources. Additionally, select demographic information was reported.

Multivariate analysis

Multivariate analyses was performed only on the student survey. Mean scores were calculated for both the General Associational Discrimination and the Associational Discrimination by Adults scales. These two measures of associational discrimination, harassment and bullying were then used in multivariate analyses to explore group differences.

Multivariate analyses focused on the student survey in order to explore students' direct experiences of discrimination, bullying, and/or harassment based on having an LGBTQ+ parent or caregiver — an area with very little attention in the extant literature.

From this analysis, two subscales of associational discrimination were determined and these subscales were used to assess group differences in students' experiences of associational discrimination in school; namely, a General Associational Discrimination scale and a scale of Associational Discrimination by Adults. Based on a 5-point Likert scale which ranged from 0 = "Never," 1 = "Rarely," 2 = "Sometimes," 3 = "Often," and 4 = "Frequently," students were asked to report how often they experienced various indicators of discrimination, bullying, harassment, biased language, or other hostile school climate indicators because of having an LGBTQ+ parent/caregiver. As reported in the main report, the mean score of the General Associational Discrimination measure for this sample of students was 1.30 with a standard deviation of 0.93; and for the Associational Discrimination by Adults the mean score was 0.92 with a standard deviation of 0.85. Additional information can be found in the main report.

Group difference analyses were driven by the primary research questions of the partner organizations.

We explored whether or not there were differences in either of the "associational discrimination" scales among the following groups:

1. Students who have at least 1 transgender or gender expansive caregiver or parent;⁴⁴
2. Students who live in states with active policies at the time of data collection that were discriminatory, protective, or neutral;⁴⁵ and
3. The student's racial/ethnic identification.

Text-based responses

In addition to the quantitative analysis, select text-based questions were explored in order to give voice to both student and parent/caregivers' experiences in school. After quantitative results were completed, text-based responses from select survey items were reviewed and analyzed for general themes. Select text-based responses were selected in this report to help make salient the overarching themes that were present in the quantitative report.

⁴⁴ Defined as any participant who reported that they had at least one parent or caregiver who identified as "Transgender," "Non-binary," and/or "Genderqueer."

⁴⁵ The GLSEN team created criteria for these categories based on legislation that was in place at the time of data collection. We explored legislation that included inclusive sexual health education curriculum, enumerated bullying policies, and non-discrimination policies. To be considered discriminatory, the state had to have at least one of the following types of anti-LGBTQ+ policies: curriculum censorship, limitations on athletic participation, or limitations to accessing school facilities. All states or territories that did not meet these criteria were coded as "neutral" states.

In this report, the qualitative voices of students come from the following two survey items:

1. "Please describe your most recent experience of feeling excluded from a school or classroom activity because you have an LGBTQ+ parent(s) or caregiver(s)" and,
2. "Please describe your most recent experience of discrimination or negative events at your school because you have an LGBTQ parent." For the parent/caregiver survey, qualitative responses in this report come from the following survey question: "Please describe your most recent experience where you felt mistreated or discriminated against because you were LGBTQ+ at your child's school."

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