

GLSEN's Educator Advisory Council's Guide for Rising Up & Taking Action for Day of (No) Silence 2024

An Action Guide for Educators in Hostile School Communities



This year, GLSEN's Day of Silence takes place Friday April 12, 2024. With more than 800 anti-LGBTQ+ bills introduced last year, we must rise up and take action. GLSEN's Day of (No) Silence is a student-led demonstration where LGBTQ+ students and their allies protest the discrimination of LGBTQ+ people in schools.

Protest comes with risks. Effective advocacy requires assessing these risks to ensure principled solidarity. We aim to equip educators for context-specific action. This action guide was created by GLSEN's Educator Advisory Council (EAC), a group of educators leading LGBTQ+ inclusion work in communities across the country. The unique experiences of EAC members teaching in both LGBTQ+ supportive and hostile climates have shaped the guidance offered here.

The actions highlighted are centered around **GLSEN's Four Supports**: *Supportive Educators, Comprehensive Policies, Inclusive Learning, and Student-led Organizations*. When these Four Supports are in place, LGBTQ+ students experience less harassment and discrimination, do better in school, and experience a better school climate (GLSEN 2022).

Be a Supportive Educator

LGBTQ+ affirming educators, including you, are a crucial support for changing outcomes for LGBTQ+ youth. Your presence is life-changing and often life-saving in schools. In hostile communities advancing "Don't Say Trans / Don't Say Gay" legislation, enforcing book bans, blocking medically-necessary care for trans and nonbinary people, and stripping protections for LGBTQ+ students and staff, your commitment to education justice is critical. We know certain environments can pose significant threats to the well-being of supportive educators. Two things are true at the same time: your visibility as an LGBTQ+ supportive educator is crucial for students, and simultaneously, your safety matters.

- **Sign up** for Day of (No) Silence updates and resources!
- Connect with LGBTQ+ supportive educators in your area on GLSEN's secure digital platform: Educator Spaces. Email educators@glsen.org for details.
- Explore Professional Development opportunities for LGBTQ+ inclusion. If your school is receptive, suggest GLSEN's **Intentional Inclusion** to your leadership. If not, inquire with your union or other professional organizations for learning opportunities.
- Use gender inclusive language. Binary terms like "boys and girls" and "ladies and gentlemen" exclude many gender-expansive and nonbinary people. Instead, use inclusive terms like "class," "everyone," and "esteemed guests."

Incorporate Inclusive Learning

While inclusive curricular standards empower local educators to respond effectively to efforts to censor instruction, there are still important ways to incorporate inclusive learning in your school. In light of state-sponsored erasure in our curriculum, we must remember: youth are not passive recipients of their instruction. Youth direct their own education in many ways. Leaning into student-driven learning is one strategy for navigating hostile environments.

- For student-choice reading lists, include books featuring LGBTQ+ characters. When designing student-selected research topics on historical figures, list LGBTQ+ advocates, thinkers, and artists. Take care to include LGBTQ+ folks with differing intersecting identities!
- Incorporate inclusive images and characters in your students' learning materials such as slide decks, worksheets, and word problems.

- **Request a Rainbow Library!** In *Case v Unified School District*, a federal court reversed a ban on a book featuring a same-sex romance. In *Island Trees Union Free School District v Pico*, the Supreme Court emphasized that school boards can't remove books based on their "dislike [of] the ideas contained in those books". Remember, you can host a Rainbow Library in your classroom, counselor's office, or with your school's GSA if placing the collection in the main library might trigger censorship efforts. Already have a Rainbow Library? **Expand it with three more books!**

Encourage Student-led Clubs & Advocacy

Even in the most hostile places, if a public school allows any extracurricular student-led clubs, they must allow students to start an LGBTQ+ focused club as well. The Equal Access Act of 1984 guarantees students the right to form a GSA (Gay Straight Alliance or Gender Sexuality Alliance) or any other type of LGBTQI+ student-initiated club and have it be recognized and treated the same as any other non-curricular student clubs.

- If your school already has a GSA, ask student leaders how you can support their group, foster their advocacy skills, & share about the Day of (No) Silence day of action with them!
- If your school doesn't have a GSA, consider becoming a sponsor. Sponsoring a GSA in a hostile environment may come with risks — ask other supportive colleagues to co-sponsor alongside you.
- If your school refuses to recognize a student-initiated GSA, consider sharing **this letter from the ACLU** with school leadership. The ACLU has **several relevant letters** to use when fighting LGBTQ+ discrimination in school.

Champion Comprehensive Policies

At schools with policies that explicitly protect students based on actual or perceived race, color, national origin, sex, disability status, sexual orientation, gender identity, and religion, LGBTQ students report experiencing less bullying and feeling safer overall. They also report that teachers are more likely to intervene when bullying occurs (GLSEN, 2022). Inclusive policies reduce the likelihood that an LGBTQ+ person's rights are violated and make clear what someone can do to remedy the situation if there is a violation. In hostile environments without clear, inclusive protective politics, LGBTQ+ educators and students are still protected by Title IX in U.S. public schools.

- If you have experienced harassment or other **discrimination at work** — or if you witnessed or heard about discrimination against a coworker — you can file a complaint. Ask administrators or local union leaders to post in work spaces how employees can file a discrimination complaint with the federal government
- If you witnessed or heard about **discrimination against a student**, you can file a complaint with your school or district's Title IX Civil Rights Coordinator, or directly with the **U.S. Department of Education**.
- Every educator has the power to make their school more inclusive for BIPOC youth, LGBTQ+ youth, and disabled youth. Keep in mind that there is strength in numbers: Leverage your network to advance change! Find supportive families, organizers, and local organizations who will fiercely advocate for inclusive policies in your school. Review your school & district policies with these advocates, especially those relevant to bullying, bathroom/locker room access, and dress code.

As a final note, we would urge any educator in a hostile environment to have an action plan in the event they experience retaliation for their LGBTQ+ solidarity.

- Create documentation of times, dates, locations, and witnesses. Build a file for notes and evidence, and keep it secure.
- Remember: time is of the essence. In many cases, a complaint must be filed within 180 days of when the bullying, harassment, or discrimination occurred.
- For legal advice, contact the ACLU's National LGBTQ Project (help-lgbtq@aclu.org) or **Lambda Legal**.