



CHANGING THE GAME

GLSEN®

Game Plan for Physical
Education Teachers:
**Creating Safe and
Inclusive Classrooms
for LGBTQ+ Students**

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Introduction

All students have a right to feel safe and included at school. Whether in physical education class or in competitive sports, all students, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, have a right to play and feel like they belong.

LGBTQ+ affirming athletic policies can make a difference in students' lives. When LGBTQ students are able to play sports, and are accepted as classmates, teammates, and competitors, they gain access to the same physical, social, and emotional benefits extended to all who participate in sports. Participation in school sports also increases LGBTQ+ students' overall well-being and feeling of connection to their school.¹

40.2% LGBTQ students

59.4% trans students

41.2% nonbinary students

Avoid gym classes because they feel unsafe or uncomfortable²

Despite the benefits of participation in sports, too many LGBTQ, transgender, and nonbinary students may still be missing out on a critical aspect of their education because they feel unsafe or uncomfortable in their physical education or gym classes.³ And with regard to school staff and personnel, LGBTQ+ youth reported feeling the least comfortable talking to their physical education teacher or coach about LGBTQ+ issues.

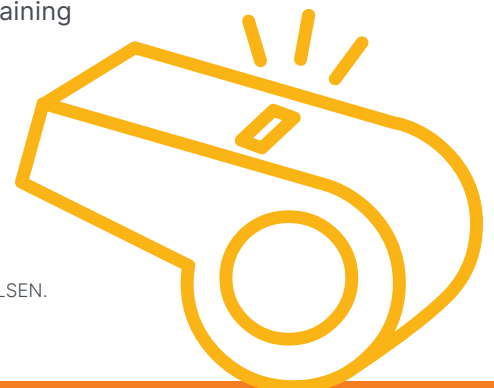
As a P.E. teacher, you have the opportunity to make a significant impact on the LGBTQ+ students in your classes. This resource will provide you with some of the best practices and tools to ensure that your classroom is a safe and affirming space for LGBTQ+ students.

Best Practices

The following are some best practices you can follow to become a better advocate and support the LGBTQ+ students in your classes.

Get Educated

As a P.E. teacher you can increase your knowledge and awareness of the experiences and challenges that LGBTQ+ students experience. Taking LGBTQ+ inclusion training and implementing an inclusive curriculum are two ways that you can create a supportive and inclusive classroom.



¹ <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/lgbtq-rights/reports/2021/02/08/495502/fair-play/>

² GLSEN (2013). *The Experiences of LGBT Students in School Athletics* (Research Brief). New York: GLSEN

³ Kosciw, J.G., Clark, C.M., Truong, N.L., & Zongrone, A.D. (2020). *The 2019 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth in our nation's schools*. New York: GLSEN.

LGBTQ+ Inclusion Training

One in 10 students report that school staff or coaches had either prevented or discouraged them from playing sports because they were LGBTQ.⁴

Training can be a helpful way to diminish anti-LGBTQ+ bias and promote more inclusive classroom spaces where all students can thrive. If your school isn't currently offering LGBTQ+ training, ask your school administrators or contact your local GLSEN chapter for training.

Adopt an LGBTQ+ Inclusive Curriculum

An inclusive curriculum benefits all students. Whether or not you have LGBTQ+ students in your class, you can promote diversity by teaching your students about the multiplicity of experiences across student identities and communities.

- **Include positive representations of LGBTQ+ people, history, and events related to the class.** LGBTQ+ athletes and activists have been working to make sports more inclusive for many years. By including positive representations of these athletes into your class modules, you can actively show you support LGBTQ+ athletes.
- **Avoid gender-segregated activities.** Gender-segregated activities can be harmful to students and reinforce gender stereotypes that have lasting effects on students' mental health. Many P.E. Teachers have already stopped splitting up their classrooms by "boys" and "girls" and instead use co-ed neutral options like colors or mascots. Other ideas include allowing students to organize themselves based on numbers instead of gender.
- **Incorporate inclusive language.** Anytime you are addressing students, use inclusive and gender-neutral language such as "Welcome, everyone" as an alternative to "Welcome, boys and girls" or "ladies and gentlemen."
- **Always empower students with positive language.** Instead of "Suck it up" or "Man up, use phrases like "Try your best" or "You've got this!"
- **Provide gender-neutral clothing options.** All students should be given the option to wear the gym uniforms they feel most comfortable and safe in.
- **Respect individual education plans.** In collaboration with partner organizations, GLSEN helped produce **Advocating for LGBTQ Students with Disabilities** which provides recommendations on how to best support LGBTQ+ students with disabilities that include ways to successfully develop an Individualized Education Program (IEP) and 504 plan for students. To learn more about best practices, please watch GLSEN's webinar, **LGBTQ+ Advocacy in Special Education**.

For more information, check out **GLSEN's Inclusive Curriculum** guide to find places to increase LGBTQ+ representation in your classes.



⁴ Kosciw, J.G., Clark, C.M., Truong, N.L., & Zongrone, A.D. (2020). *The 2019 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth in our nation's schools*. New York: GLSEN.

Know Your State and Local Policies

LGBTQ+ students have **rights**. Discrimination against people on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity has been and is still prohibited under federal civil rights laws that ban sex discrimination.

Research has shown that LGBTQ+ students in schools with comprehensive bullying and harassment-prevention policies were more likely to report that staff intervened when hearing anti-LGBTQ remarks and experienced less anti-LGBTQ victimization, compared to those with a generic policy or no policy.⁵

- Find out what states already have policies protecting LGBTQ+ students by checking **GLSEN Policy Maps**.
- School districts and individual schools can create and implement the majority of policies that directly impact students every day. If your school doesn't already have such policies, you can reach out to your administration or local **GLSEN Chapter** for support.

Support Transgender and Nonbinary Students

As a teacher, there are a number of ways you can support transgender and nonbinary students in your physical education classes.

Respect Your Students' Privacy

Maintaining your students' privacy is critical. A student's gender identity should not be disclosed to classmates, staff, or parents without their permission. Disclosing a student's gender identity could put them at risk and is a potential violation of **FERPA**.

Respect Your Students' Names and Pronouns

Respect your students by using the name and pronouns they choose to go by at all times. The most inclusive practice is to ask ALL students which names and pronouns they use, not just those students you suspect might be trans or nonbinary. If you single out a particular student in front of the rest of the class, you could potentially be putting them at risk for harassment from other students. When collecting necessary information, make sure to leave a space on paperwork to ask ALL students what pronouns they use.

NOTE: Pronouns are not a preference. When someone shares with you the pronouns they want you to use for them, you must respect this.

For more guidance on pronouns and how to use them, see **GLSEN's Pronoun Guide**.

Gender Dysphoria

Some students experience gender dysphoria. Gender dysphoria is often described as the "discomfort, pain, and unhappiness that is experienced by many transgender people in relationship to the commonly gendered parts of their body (physical dysphoria), and/or to the way people interact with them (social dysphoria), and/or to how they are legally required to fill out documentation (social dysphoria enforced by the legal system)."

⁵Kosciw, J.G., Clark, C.M., Truong, N.L., & Zongrone, A.D. (2020). *The 2019 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth in our nation's schools*. New York: GLSEN.

Not all transgender and nonbinary students have gender dysphoria, but some do. Students can experience gender dysphoria in physical education class in many ways. If a student has a menstruation cycle, the student could experience severe stress and anxiety. It is not appropriate to ask questions about a student's body. A helpful way to support a student who may be experiencing gender dysphoria is to ask questions such as "Is there anything specific you are struggling with in this class?" or "How can I support you to do your best in this class?" Give the student time to answer, they may need to think about it or they may not be ready to converse directly about what they are going through.

Alternative Coursework

Providing optional alternative coursework for transgender students, including nonbinary students experiencing gender dysphoria, will help keep them on course to finish the class and stay in school. LGBTQ+ and gender nonconforming students who are experiencing bullying based on of their sexual orientation and expression should also be given access to alternative coursework if they feel unsafe or unable to attend class. Despite resolution of a bullying incident, the student may still be struggling with feeling unsafe in the general area where the incident took place. Work with the student, teacher, and counselor to explore an appropriate alternative activity. This should only be offered if the student is requesting this option or if it is suggested based on a student's unique needs.

Ensure Inclusive Facility Access

Nearly 60% of transgender students say that they avoided gym class. Almost 70% of transgender students said they avoided school locker rooms, and a staggering 82.1% said they avoid bathrooms at school due to safety concerns.⁶

Creating a safe and inclusive gym or physical education class means ensuring that all students have access to the locker rooms and bathrooms they feel safest using. If you have transgender or nonbinary students in your class, ask them what they need to feel safe and comfortable. If any student requests privacy when changing, spaces should be made available to them.

For more information about ways you can ensure your school has inclusive facilities for LGBTQ+ students, see GLSEN'S Game Plan for Administrators and Athletic Directors.

Prepare for Travel and Overnights

Have a plan in place to ensure the safety of transgender and nonbinary students. Understanding your district and state level policies regarding transgender and nonbinary athletes and participation is crucial for preparing yourself, the team, and the athletes for any adversity you may face. Not knowing the rulebook or policies for the site of an event can result in falsely disqualifying or forcing the athlete to miss their chance to compete because of a dispute. Have the inclusive policies printed and on your clipboard should there be a challenge.

Check [here](#) for additional guidance on best practices and safety plans for overnight trips.

⁶ Kosciw, J.G., Clark, C.M., Truong, N.L., & Zongrone, A.D. (2020). *The 2019 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth in our nation's schools*. New York: GLSEN.



Take Action Against Anti-LGBTQ+ Behaviors

“On the wrestling team I would hear transphobic, homophobic, and racist comments within 10 feet of my coaches, who would never say anything”

— Eric (he, him, his) Senior, Alabama

As a teacher, your job is to create a safe space for all students in your classroom. One of the most effective ways you can show solidarity is to respond to anti-LGBTQ+ behavior. By taking action and intervening when you hear anti-LGBTQ+ bullying and harassment, you set the example for your students that this behavior will not be tolerated.

- **Address name-calling, bullying, or harassment immediately.** Create a classroom culture that recognizes that each student is a valuable member of your learning community. This means that there is no place for name-calling, bullying, or harassment. Too often these forms of intimidation are excused as locker room behavior but such words and actions create an unsafe and unwelcoming environment for all students.
- **Concentrate on Stopping the Behavior in That Moment**
 - Sometimes all it takes is a simple response like, “That language is unacceptable in this class” when you hear a derogatory term.
 - Make sure everyone in the immediate area can hear you.
 - Even if it feels uncomfortable, it is important to interrupt the behavior.
 - If you choose to overlook an incident, it implies that you are willing to accept hateful and harmful behavior in your classroom.
- **Name the Behavior**
 - Describe what you heard, saw, or what was reported to you. Let the person who said the slur or anti-LGBTQ+ phrase know that it is unacceptable and that it breaks the class rules.
- **Get to the Root of the Intention**
 - Meet with the person who caused the harm privately and ask them what their intentions were when they chose to cause harm. This conversation can help you determine whether there is a larger issue you need to address.
- **Support the Targeted Student**
 - Meet with the student who has been the target of anti-LGBTQ+ bullying, name-calling, or harassment.
 - Don’t make assumptions about what the student is experiencing.
 - Ask them what they need or want.
- **Ensure Accountability**
 - Check with your administration about the school’s anti-LGBTQ+ policy and impose the appropriate consequences.



- Make sure disciplinary actions are progressive and focus on restoration while providing opportunities for all students to continue to learn, regardless of the type of name calling, bullying, and harassment.

Check out GLSEN’s [Replacing Punitive Discipline with Restorative Policies and Practices](#) for further guidance.

Be a Game Changer

Join the team and become a Changing the Game ambassador!

We are all at different stages of our inclusion journey. No matter where you are or have been on this journey to greater LGBTQ+ inclusion, the important thing is that you are starting. Ambassadors are committed to speaking out about anti-LGBTQ+ behavior and celebrating LGBTQ+ student athletes, and supporting inclusive LGBTQ+ policies. That’s not all! Receive the Changing the Game quarterly newsletter, training and webinars, swag giveaways, and more!

As a P.E. teacher, you can create a safe, affirming, and inclusive classroom for LGBTQ+ students. If your school doesn’t already provide training or resources, you can enlist a community-based organization such as a GLSEN chapter to provide training. You don’t have to do this work alone, you can also connect with other P.E. teachers in your district who are already doing this work to share resources and best practices. Consider reaching out to supportive parents, caregivers, and families of LGBTQ+ students. They are some of the fiercest advocates and supporters, and can provide additional resources.

Your advocacy is powerful and necessary to ensure inclusive sports for LGBTQ+ students. Bring GLSEN’s Changing the Game program and resources to your school and support students, physical education teachers, administrators, coaches, and families.

Key Terminology

Transgender and nonbinary students may use different terms to describe their lives and experiences of gender. Terminology and language differ and evolve based on region, language, race or ethnicity, age, culture, and many other factors. Some examples of terms used by some youth include: trans, trans girl, trans boy, nonbinary, genderqueer, gender fluid, demi girl, demi boy, Two Spirit (amongst Native American, American Indian/Alaska Native, First Nation, or Indigenous communities), and many more. Some trans youth prefer simply to be referred to as boys or girls except when their trans status is specifically relevant. These terms often mean different things or refer to different experiences of gender. Staff and educators should reflect and use the terms that students use to describe themselves, and avoid terms that make these students uncomfortable.

These definitions are provided not for the purpose of imposing labels, but rather to assist in understanding this guide. Students may or may not use these terms to describe themselves or their experiences.

GENDER IDENTITY: A person’s deeply held knowledge of their own gender, which can include being a man, woman, another gender, or no gender. Gender identity is an innate part of a person’s identity. One’s gender identity may or may not align with society’s expectations with the sex they were assigned at birth (male, female, or intersex).

GENDER EXPRESSION: Expression of gender, whether through hair styles, makeup, or personal fashion, changes over the course of a person's lifetime.

TRANSGENDER/TRANS: An adjective describing a person whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. A trans woman is a woman whose sex was assigned male when she was born. A trans man is a man whose sex was assigned female when he was born. Some transgender people are not male or female, and may use terms like nonbinary to describe their gender (see below).

GENDER NONCONFORMING: A term sometimes used to describe people whose gender expression differs from social expectations, such as "feminine boys," "masculine girls," and people who are perceived as androgynous in some way. Being gender nonconforming is distinct from being transgender, though some trans people may consider themselves to be gender nonconforming. For example, a cisgender woman who has short hair and likes sports might consider herself gender nonconforming, but may not identify as transgender.

NONBINARY: A term used to refer to people whose gender identity is not exclusively male or female, including those who identify with a different gender, a combination of genders, or no gender. Nonbinary may be considered a subset of transgender or a distinct identity. Other similar or more specific terms may include genderqueer, gender fluid, agender, or Two-Spirit (for Native American students).

CISGENDER: An adjective describing a person whose gender identity corresponds with the gender society typically associates with the sex they were assigned at birth. The majority of people are cisgender, while a minority are transgender. For example, a cisgender woman was assigned female at birth and identifies as female her gender as a woman.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION: A person's romantic and/or sexual attraction to other people. This includes being straight, gay, bisexual, queer, asexual, or many other terms used to describe sexual orientation. This is different and distinct from gender identity. Transgender and nonbinary people may be straight, gay, lesbian, asexual, or any other sexual orientation.

TRANSITION: The process in which a person begins to live according to their gender identity. Transition is a process that is different for everyone, and it may or may not involve specific medical treatments or changes to official documents. There is no one step or set of steps that an individual must undergo in order to have their gender identity affirmed and respected.

QTBIPOC: This is an acronym for Queer/Trans, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.

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