



# CHANGING

THE

GAME

GLSEN<sup>®</sup>

Game Plan for  
**Parents, Caregivers  
and Families**

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# Introduction

All students have a right to feel a sense of belonging, inclusion, and safety 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.

Students who attend schools with comprehensive anti-bullying and harassment policies experienced less anti-LGBTQ victimization and were more likely to report that school staff intervened when hearing anti-LGBTQ remarks, compared to those with a generic policy or no policy.<sup>1</sup>

Participation in sports positively impacts students' overall school experience and academic success. For LGBTQ+ students, participation in school sports supports their overall well-being and increases their feeling of connection to their school. And in those schools with transgender-inclusive policies, transgender and nonbinary students were less likely to skip school due to safety concerns.

## LGBTQ+ Youth Benefit from Sport

### ↑GPA<sup>2</sup>

**On a 4.0 scale, LGBTQ+ student athletes have a GPA that is 0.2 points higher than students who did not participate in athletics. LGBTQ+ team leaders have a GPA that is 0.4 points higher than their peers who did not participate in athletics.**

### ↑Sense of Belonging<sup>3</sup>

**Sixty-six percent of LGBTQ student team leader athletes and 55.8% of LGBTQ student team member athletes competing in high school sports report a positive sense of belonging at school, compared to 43.9% of LGBTQ student non-athletes who report a positive sense of school belonging.**

Despite the benefits of participation in sports, many LGBTQ+ students continue to experience discrimination because of their gender identity or sexual orientation. In the 2019 GLSEN National School Climate Survey, more than half of transgender students say they are prevented from using bathrooms (58.1%) or locker rooms (55.5%) that align with their gender identity.<sup>4</sup> Even when schools do have transgender-inclusive policies, less than half of transgender and nonbinary students (41.7%) have policies that allow these students to participate in sports that align with their gender identity.

Gender-discriminatory policies that discriminate or discourage students from participating in sports hurt trans students and has been reported as an underlying reason why nearly one-third of LGBTQ youth (30.1%) reported they did not plan to graduate high school or were unsure if they will graduate high school.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 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.

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

<sup>3</sup> GLSEN (2013). *The Experiences of LGBT Students in School Athletics (Research Brief)*. New York: GLSEN

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> 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.

This guide is meant to help parents, caregivers, and family members be the best advocate for your child. By knowing your child's rights you will be better able to advocate for the inclusive policies and practices that can help ensure that LGBTQ+ students feel safe, welcomed, and encouraged to learn and play.

**“My son began his transition almost three years ago while still in high school. As he embarked on this journey, I frequently worried about his safety while transitioning in a school with peers who knew him before he came out. I didn't know if he was going to be bullied, if teachers were going to try to invalidate his lived experience as a trans teen, or if he was going to be able to play sports. As a parent, my hope is always for my child to feel happy and safe in every environment they're in, and I felt a responsibility to ensure that was true for my son.”**

— Angelle Maua (she/they/elle), parent, California

## LGBTQ+ Students Have Rights

Harassment and discrimination against LGBTQ+ students is against the law. The recent U.S. Supreme court decision in *Bostock v. Clayton County, Georgia* affirmed what many education and civil rights advocates have long known: Discrimination against people on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity has been and still is prohibited under federal civil rights laws that ban sex discrimination. The Biden Administration reaffirmed this decision with a recent **executive order**.

All LGBTQ+ students have the right to participate in physical education class and in extracurricular sports. If you're unsure about your child's rights, GLSEN's **LGBTQ+ Student Rights** resource provides a helpful overview. If your child is experiencing discrimination, bullying, or harassment at school you can file a complaint with your local school district, state education agency, or the U.S. Educational Department. For information on how to file a complaint, see the **Claim Your Rights** resource.

### Know Your State's Laws

Many states already have laws, regulations, and guidance that affirm nondiscrimination protections for LGBTQ+ students. Knowing your state's policies can be a powerful prevention tool that you can use to advocate for compliance with state laws. You can find out if your state has policies protecting LGBTQ+ students by checking the **GLSEN Policy Maps**.

### Access Local Resources

School districts and individual schools craft and implement many policies that directly impact students every day. You can work with your local **GLSEN Chapter** or **PFLAG chapter** to advocate for policies to create a safe and LGBTQ+ inclusive climate in your child's school.



# Schools Have Responsibilities

As a parent, caregiver, or family member you can help hold your child's school accountable to ensure that they are providing affirming, inclusive access to facilities, physical education and sports. By knowing what responsibilities schools have, you can advocate for these policies and practices to be implemented.

## Access to Inclusive Facilities

Schools are responsible for ensuring that all students have access to the locker rooms and bathrooms they feel safest using and to decide which spaces are most comfortable for them. For many LGBTQ+ and especially trans and non-binary students, locker rooms can be vulnerable spaces, so school staff must ensure they have measures in place to ensure their safety.

Below are some key questions you can ask your child's school administration to ensure they are providing safe, and inclusive access to facilities for LGBTQ+ students.

### Key Questions to Ask

- Ask if your school has a safety plan for LGBTQ+ students who request private changing areas. If not, ensure that they make spaces available for students who request privacy when changing.
- Ask if your school has an anti-bullying and harassment policy.
- Ask about your school's privacy policy. Ensure your child's privacy is protected. Your child has a right to their privacy. Their identity should not be shared among school staff without their permission.
- Ask about your school's policy on bullying. Notify your school immediately if you discover your child is being bullied or harassed in the locker room or restroom.

For more information about how schools can make their facilities more inclusive, see the Game Plan for Administrators and Athletic Directors

## Physical Education

Too many LGBTQ students may be missing out on a critical aspect of their education because they feel unsafe or uncomfortable in their physical education or gym classes.<sup>6</sup>

Knowing what your child needs will help you be the best advocate for them to enable them to participate fully at school. LGBTQ+ students feel barriers to participating in physical education classes for a number of reasons. By asking them some key questions, your child will know that you care and are willing to help find solutions to the issues they are facing.

<sup>6</sup> 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.



### Key Questions to Ask

- Do you feel safe and included in your physical education class?
- Do you feel your P.E. teacher is supportive of LGBTQ+ students?
- Is anyone saying anything negative to you or about you?
- Do you feel safe using the locker room?
- Does your P.E. teacher ever stop others from saying mean things?
- How can I best support your participation in P.E. class?
- Does your school offer LGBTQ+ training for staff?

For more information about how teachers can make their physical education classes more inclusive for LGBTQ+ students, check out the [Game Plan for P.E. Teachers](#).

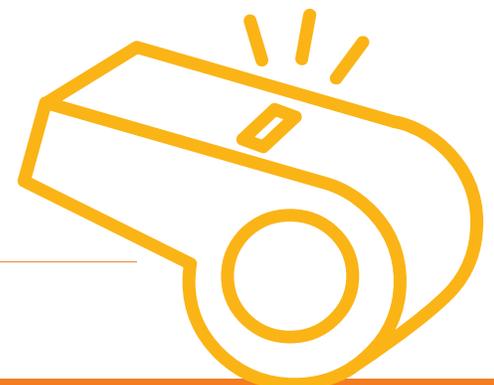
## Extracurricular Sports

Every student should feel empowered to participate in the activities that make them feel included in their school community. Being part of a team builds social and emotional skills along with other benefits that support physical and mental well-being. LGBTQ students who participated in school athletics had higher GPAs, higher self-esteem, and higher feelings of belonging at school, compared to those who did not participate in school athletics.<sup>7</sup>

### Key Questions to Ask

- Do your child's coaching staff and volunteers receive LGBTQ+ training?
- Does your child's team have an LGBTQ+ inclusive code of conduct?
- Does your child's team offer uniform options that make them feel safe and comfortable?
- Does your school have a gender-inclusive travel and overnight policy?

For more information about how coaches can make their teams more inclusive for LGBTQ+ athletes, check out the [Game Plan for Coaches](#).



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<sup>7</sup>GLSEN (2013). *The Experiences of LGBT Students in School Athletics* (Research Brief). New York: GLSEN

# 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!

- Enlist the support of other LGBTQ+ affirming parents, families, and caregivers by initiating a PTA-style focus group of other supportive adults in your school, school district, or community who could work with the athletics department.
- Reach out to GLSEN's partner **PFLAG** — they offer resources and guidance on creating family support.
- Volunteer for your child's athletic team by helping out at practices or attending overnight trips or away games and tournaments.
- Take action. Bring in advocacy groups to do LGBTQ+ training, LGBTQ+ guest speakers to share their stories, or organize LGBTQ+ Pride-related activities, and advocate for inclusive policies in areas where LGBTQ+ students experience discrimination.

Your advocacy is powerful and necessary to ensure inclusive sports for LGBTQ+ students and athletes. 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 and LGBTQ+ identities. 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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