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Iowa City Community School District LGBTQ Student Experiences Multi-Stakeholder Task Force Report

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Contents

| | |
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| Author Bios | 4 |
| Acknowledgements | 5 |
| Executive Summary | 6 |
| Top Recommendations of the Task Force | 6 |
| Introduction | 7 |
| LGBTQ Student Experiences Multi-Stakeholder Task Force | 9 |
| Specific Recommendations | 12 |
| Supporting Students | 13 |
| Identify and Support Adult Advocates | 14 |
| Ensure Access to Specialized Supports and Mental Health Resources | 15 |
| Identify and Support Student Ambassadors | 16 |
| Supporting Student Groups | 17 |
| Support GSA Members and Activities | 17 |
| Increase Visibility of GSAs in Schools | 19 |
| Build connections with larger LGBTQ Community | 21 |
| Enhancing the Inclusiveness of the Curriculum | 22 |
| Invest in the integration of an LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum | 23 |
| Adapt Current Content | 24 |
| Making Libraries More LGBTQ-Inclusive | 26 |
| Incorporate Inclusive Teaching Practices | 26 |
| Improving Educator Knowledge and Skills | 28 |
| Safe Zone Training | 30 |
| Anti-Bullying and Bystander Intervention Training | 31 |
| Student-led Training | 32 |
| Creating Supportive and Inclusive School Environments | 33 |
| Increase Accessibility of Harassment and Bullying Complaint Process | 35 |
| Gender Inclusive Restrooms | 36 |
| Make All School Activities Inclusive | 37 |
| Strengthening District Policies and Practices | 38 |
| Inclusive Student Records | 38 |

Informational Resources for LGBTQ Students, Parents, and Educators40

Conclusion41

District Commitment41

Accountability and Consistency42

Keep the Process Inclusive43

Next Steps44

Appendices45

Appendix A: Task Force Email Invite45

Appendix B: Task Force Recruitment Poster46

Appendix C: Application Survey47

Appendix D: LGBTQ Task Force Member Affiliations51

Endnotes and References52



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Tessa Heeren is a Research Associate at the University of Iowa Public Policy Center. Tessa began working in the research-practice partnership as a Master of Social Work student at the University of Iowa in 2015 and brings experience in community engagement and service provision to the research team. Tessa's involvement in the project stemmed from a desire to inform education policies through community-based research. Along with her work in the Public Policy Center's Social and Education Policy Program, Tessa has an appointment in the Health Policy Research Program, where she contributes to the evaluation of state health policies and programs.

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This report relies most centrally on the generous contributions of the Task Force members who committed their time, energy, and expertise, adding invaluable insight, pragmatism, and momentum behind the recommendations.

Executive Summary

This report details the results of a multi-stakeholder Task Force convened to gather feedback and prioritize recommendations directed at supporting Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) students and creating safe and LGBTQ-inclusive schools. The convening of the Task Force was motivated by the finding of systematic and patterned disparities between LGB and non-LGB, and between non-binary gender identified and male and female identified students in the 2017 Assessing Student Experiences of School Report. The ICCSD Board of Education supported the assembly of a Task Force to assess and prioritize potential strategies to promote greater equity in student experiences and ensure all students are able to thrive in ICCSD schools.

Members of the multi-stakeholder Task Force reviewed four general strategies: supporting students and student groups; addressing school climate and community; improving educator knowledge and skills; and ensuring inclusive curriculum. The multi-stakeholder Task Force represented diverse viewpoints including students, parents, teachers, and administrators in the ICCSD as well as community members. The Task Force met on four occasions to consider recommendations, deliberate options, and provide an assessment for the Board.

The Task Force provided concrete, actionable recommendations for the District to improve the experiences and outcomes of LGBTQ students. Each of the strategies considered by the Task Force received positive support. However, five recommendations stood out as priorities.

Top Recommendations of the Task Force

- 1) Support students and student groups by ensuring access to adult advocates in every school.
- 2) Enhance the inclusivity of class materials and discussions by updating the curriculum review process.
- 3) Improve educator knowledge and skills by offering LGBTQ-specific training.
- 4) Create supportive and inclusive school environments by establishing gender inclusive bathrooms in every school.
- 5) Strengthen district policies and practices and ensure student administrative records are LGBTQ-inclusive.



Introduction

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ) students face many of the same challenges in school as other students, however, they also face some challenges that are unique. And, while all students can be resilient to many of these challenges, schools and districts can also adopt programs and practices that eliminate or reduce some of these challenges and help to create more inclusive and supportive school environments.

In 2016-17, lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) students comprised 8% of the Student Experiences of School Climate survey sample, and non-binary gender identified students (including transgender, gender queer, and gender nonconforming) comprised 2% of the sample of students.¹⁻⁴

LGB and non-binary students in the Iowa City Community School District (ICCSA) are significantly less likely to report:

- They feel they belong in school
- Their teachers seem to understand where they are coming from
- School staff is supportive of them
- Students in their school respect each other’s differences
- They feel that their contributions are valued in the classroom

LGB and non-binary students in the Iowa City Community School District are also significantly more likely to report:

- They feel unable to share their views in class due to their gender
- They have heard hurtful comments about gender and sexual orientation from students and teachers

These findings, highlighted in the 2017 Assessing Student Experiences of School Report, documented systematic and patterned disparities in experiences for LGB and non-binary gender identified students in the ICCSD.⁵

Throughout this report, we use the acronym “LGBTQ” which refers to Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning or Queer. We recognize that this acronym does not explicitly include the entire scope of sexual orientation and gender identity diversity, however, we use it in part because it is the most common and intend for our usage to be inclusive of all sexual orientation and gender identity diversity. For more information about LGBTQ terminology, visit the Human Rights Campaign website.⁶

Non-binary students who reported feeling that they belong in their school

48%

Non-binary students who reported that they feel unable to share their views in class due to their gender

36%

LGB students who reported that they feel that their contributions are valued in the classroom

55%

LGB students who reported that that they have heard hurtful comments about sexual orientation from teachers

30%

Equity Implemented Partnership

1 CONCEPTUALIZATION



Researchers from the Public Policy Center and the ICCSD Director of Equity determined District needs and strategic direction, with a focus on student experiences and school climate, with flexibility to explore areas of interest and student subgroups.

2 NEEDS ASSESSMENT



Student and teacher surveys are administered each year to assess experiences of school climate.

3 FOCUS AREAS



Survey results are analyzed to identify areas of focus. Focus areas have included dimensions of school climate (specifically, teacher and mentor relationships, inclusive community, and disciplinary environment), and student subgroups, specifically, LGBTQ students.

4 TASK FORCE



A multi-stakeholder task force convenes to discuss strategies to improve student experiences and reduce disparities. The task force ensures that diverse stakeholder perspectives are used in the decision-making process.

5 IMPLEMENTATION



The ICCSD implements equity initiatives across selected schools, in alignment with task force recommendations. Programming includes implicit bias and restorative justice professional development.

6 EVALUATION



Equity programming initiatives are evaluated using results from surveys given to students, teachers, and professional development participants. Evaluation results are used to improve programming initiatives and inform District decision-making.

To assist the District in determining how to address these disparities, create safe and LGBTQ-inclusive schools, and support LGBTQ students, the Equity Implemented Partnership research team developed an LGBTQ Policy Brief in August 2017.⁷ The Policy Brief drew on relevant academic and education policy research to answer **four questions:**

- 1) Why is it important to understand the experiences of LGBTQ students?
- 2) How do LGBTQ students experience school climate in the ICCSD?
- 3) What strategies have been proven effective at improving school experiences and outcomes for LGBTQ students?
- 4) What are the evidence-based recommendations that can inform the ICCSD decision-making process in addressing disparities for LGBTQ students?

The LGBTQ Policy Brief provided direction, background, and context to convene a multi-stakeholder Task Force that included representation from a diverse set of stakeholders. The ICCSD LGBTQ Task Force began in September and met regularly through November 2017. The Task Force was charged with providing input regarding different strategies, policies, and practices that could be implemented or changed to better support LGBTQ students in the District.

The assessment of District needs (in terms of how students are experiencing schools in the District), the identification of focus areas or groups, the convening of multi-stakeholder Task Forces, and the implementation and evaluation of equity programming initiatives represent the iterative process that the Equity Implemented Partnership follows in assisting the District achieve its equity goals.

LGBTQ Student Experiences Multi-Stakeholder Task Force

This section of the report describes the recruitment, selection, composition, and format of the Task Force. The LGBTQ Task Force is the second Task Force convened by the Equity Implemented Partnership to collect and synthesize input from diverse sets of stakeholders to inform District decision-making on equity-related topics. The first Task Force, convened in September 2016, focused on the systematic and patterned racial disparities in 1) academic achievement and attainment outcomes, 2) behavior and discipline outcomes, and 3) self-reported experiences of students (collected in the 2015-16 Student Experiences of School Climate survey). The recommendations and suggestions for addressing these disparities were described in the 2017 Multi-Stakeholder Task Force Report. All three of the top recommendations of the Task Force were agreed upon by the Board of Education, and have since been implemented through two new program initiatives (implicit bias training and a restorative justice pilot program) and through an updated Affirmative Action plan for the hiring and retention of staff and teachers.

In the past year, the District has also convened two additional task forces to address specific concerns related to immigrant students, and the use of seclusion rooms. Similar to the first Equity Implemented Partnership Task Force, the recommendations of the task forces focused on seclusion rooms and immigrant students have been taken into consideration by the Board of Education in decision-making. This practice demonstrates the District's commitment to gathering input from key stakeholders regarding crucial policy decisions for the District. This practice is also aligned with the second objective of the District's Equity Plan:

The District shall increase community engagement and community awareness of District initiatives—and specifically to the goals of “engag[ing] the community and parents effectively across multiple platforms, especially underrepresented and underprivileged groups and establish[ing] program, policies, and practices to create and foster a relationship with parents and the community, especially underrepresented and underprivileged groups.”

Task Force Recruitment

The research team recruited Task Force members by announcing the creation of the Task Force through outlets in the school district and community. All parents and students in the ICCSD were invited to participate in the Task Force via Blackboard (Appendix A), the District's secure communications platform. Community members were recruited through e-mails to community groups, with targeted recruitment of organizations who provide services or resources specifically to LGBTQ populations or who have experience working with LGBTQ populations (especially students). Posters with information about the Task Force and how to apply were displayed on the University of Iowa campus and on public bulletin boards in downtown Iowa City and Coralville (Appendix B). School staff and teachers were invited to participation via an email solicitation from the Director of Equity and Engagement.

People interested in participating in the Task Force were asked to provide basic demographic and contact information as well as respond to a prompt asking about their interest in participating in the Task Force (Appendix A). The application information was obtained via a survey link which was closed in early September.

Prior to the selection process, the research team identified several key stakeholder groups to include in the Task Force recruitment, including: teachers, administrators, student and family advocates, other ICCSD staff, representatives from District Parents' Organization, Equity Committee representatives, students, parents, and community members.

Task Force Selection Process

The following steps outline the selection process for Task Force members:

- 1) A committee of representatives from the following groups assisted in the selection process:
 - University of Iowa Public Policy Center
 - University of Iowa College of Education
 - Iowa City Community School District Equity Committee
 - Iowa City Community School District
 - Administrator
 - Teacher
 - School Counselor
 - United Action For Youth
- 2) Names of Task Force applicants were removed from the selection process.
- 3) Applicants were divided into three key stakeholder groups:
 - (1) ICCSD Staff
 - (2) District Liaisons and Community Members
 - (3) Students and Parents
- 4) Each applicant's essay was reviewed and weighted against the others in their groups.
- 5) The desire to achieve a diverse taskforce with majority-LGBTQ representation was taken into consideration.

A total of 63 completed applications were reviewed and considered during the committee's selection process. From the 63 completed applications, 41 people were selected to represent the various stakeholder positions. Selection of applicants was based on a number of criteria, including ability to represent one of the key stakeholder groups, interest in the promotion of equity in the District, experience with schools and students, and commitment to the process (including meeting attendance). Because the Task Force focused on improving experiences for LGBTQ students, Task Force members were purposefully recruited to reflect a range of identities and backgrounds. A majority of the Task Force identified as LGB or Non-Binary, and included people who had not been actively involved with the school district previously.

While the research team was purposeful in its selection of Task Force members, during the Task Force meetings, several members of the Task Force commented on the relative homogeneity of the group, noting that "there are very few men," and that the Task Force was a "very white group" with a few questioning "how we could do better to improve inclusivity to people of color?" These deficits in diverse representation are a limitation of the Task Force composition, and should be appropriately redressed in future efforts in the District. To bolster student participation in the Task Force, interested students were invited to join the Task Force without completing a formal application.

Along with representatives from the groups previously described, the multi-stakeholder Task Force included members affiliated with various community organizations, advocacy groups, local businesses, non-profit organizations, government, and universities. (See Appendix D for a full list of community groups represented on the Task Force)

Task Force Format and Process

In a welcome letter distributed to selected applicants, guidelines for participation were outlined. Expectations for the Task Force included: regular attendance at meetings, preparation for meetings (participants were asked to read the LGBTQ Policy Brief), confidentiality (participants were asked to refrain from relaying any personal information—including opinions shared by other Task Force members—to outside parties), and respectful communication.

There were four meeting dates in September, October, and November, with specific topic areas for each meeting:

| Date | Topic |
|--------------|---------------------------------------|
| September 27 | Supporting Students & Student Groups |
| October 18 | Addressing School Climate & Community |
| October 25 | Professional Development for Teachers |
| November 8 | Inclusive Curriculum |

Each meeting was attended by 20-35 Task Force members, and small group composition was shuffled each meeting. Task Force meetings were structured in the following way:

- 1) The full group reviewed key findings, strategies and recommendations.
- 2) Small groups discussed the recommendations, including strengths, weaknesses, and additional considerations (e.g. prerequisites to implementation, unintended consequences, capacity to execute, availability of resources, etc.).
- 3) Small groups shared preliminary thoughts with the full Task Force.
- 4) Small groups prioritized recommendations.
- 5) Individuals provided written feedback.

The individual written feedback was used to provide participants with a confidential outlet for input. At the end of each meeting, the research team asked Task Force members to answer the following questions, specifically:

- 1) In your opinion, what is the most important takeaway from the discussion today?
- 2) What do you recommend the district should do to address this issue?
- 3) Do you have any suggestions for improving the Task Force meetings?

Task Force meeting discussions were captured in two ways. First, each small group recorded their perceptions of each recommendation, including strengths, weaknesses, and other considerations, on poster board paper. Second, two members of the research team took notes during the small group presentations and discussions. These sources, along with the individual written feedback, were used to identify themes that summarized the views of the Task Force and its members.



Specific Recommendations

This section of the report details the specific recommendations of the LGBTQ Task Force. The section is organized into five areas:

- Supporting Students and Student Groups
- Enhancing the Inclusiveness of the Curriculum
- Improving Educator Knowledge and Skills
- Creating Supportive and Inclusive School Environments
- Strengthening District Policies and Practices

Within each sub-section, there are multiple recommendations for policy or practice changes. Each section also provides the current context in the District for these recommendations and reviews resources related to the recommendations.



Supporting Students

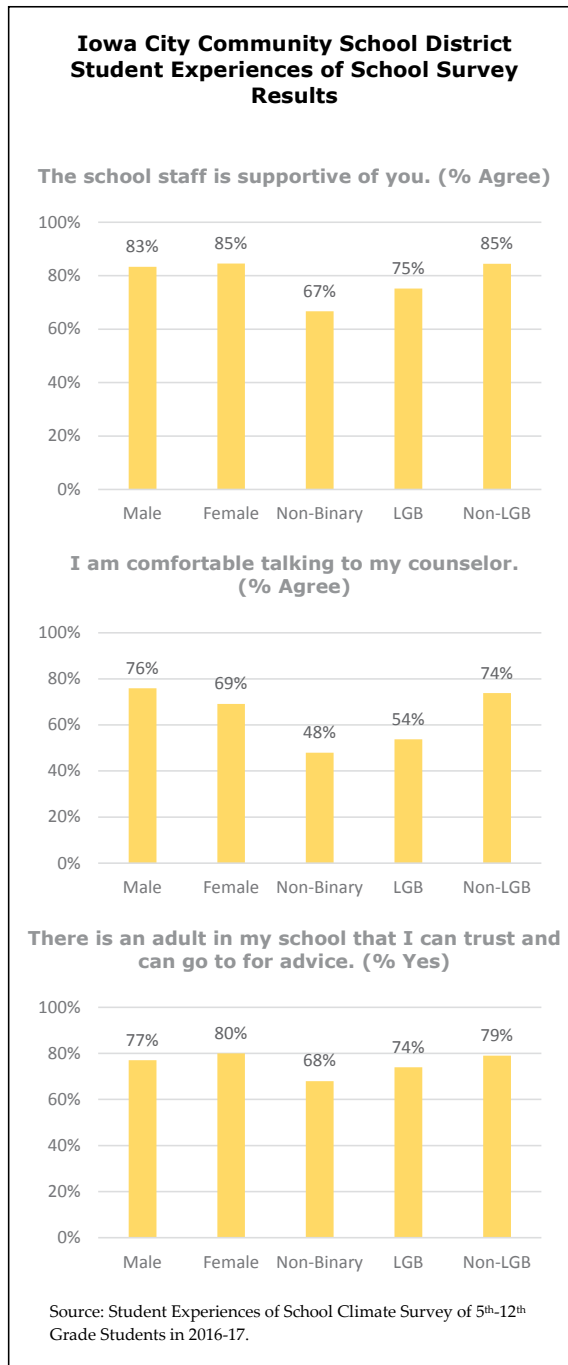
Nationwide, LGBTQ students have higher rates of suicide, depression, and drug and alcohol use compared to non-LGBTQ students.^{8, 9} Research suggests that this is due in part to being more likely to experience bullying and harassment from peers and unsupportive school and community environments.^{10, 11} As one group of scholars recently described, “The stress of having to come to terms with their own sexuality in early adolescence while simultaneously negotiating their school environment’s heterosexism and homophobia may place many LGB and questioning students at-risk for depression, suicidality, drug use, and school problems.”¹²

Fortunately, recent research has found that LGBTQ youth who report knowing supportive teachers and staff have more positive outcomes including increased perceptions of safety,¹³ fewer suicidal thoughts,¹⁴ and better school adjustment.¹⁵

One of the most comprehensive studies of the positive impacts of school supports found that the greater number of school staff and teachers an LGBTQ student identified as supportive of LGBTQ students, the lower rates of victimization, greater self-esteem, higher student achievement (grades), and fewer days absent from school. In a study of more than 2,500 middle school students in California, researchers found that it is not only important to have supportive adults in the school, but additional positive effects emerged when adults took action to reduce harassment.¹⁶

Iowa City Community School District Context

In the ICCSD, there are substantial differences in LGB and non-binary students reporting that the school staff is supportive of them, that they feel comfortable talking to their counselor, and that they have an adult in the school that they can trust and go to for advice (see sidebar). These findings suggest that there is a need for providing additional supports for LGBTQ students.



Recommendations

Task Force members emphasized the importance of each individual student being supported in their education and development. Task Force members saw many opportunities to proactively support LGBTQ students in ways that use existing resources within the District and provide empowering experiences for students. They identified three primary ways the District could enhance support offered to students:

- 1) Identify and support LGBTQ-specific adult advocates in each school
- 2) Ensure LGBTQ students have access to specialized supports and mental health resources
- 3) Identify and support student ambassadors

Identify and Support Adult Advocates

The Task Force recommended that the District further support LGBTQ students by adopting the practice of designating an “adult advocate” in each school.

“Each building should have a designated safe adult to contact if LGBTQIA+ issues come up.”

Task Force members saw this person as being accessible for students looking to go through administrative processes, such as submitting bullying or harassment complaints or changing gender identity in school records. Members believed that adult advocates could provide proactive support through regular check-ins with students, in addition to other reactive approaches.

“Besides complaint process via SFA or online reporting, check-ins should be offered... All kids can discuss their thoughts and concerns and identify problem areas or times before someone gets hurt.”

In addition to directly supporting students, adult advocates were seen as a good avenue through which to encourage inclusive practices with colleagues and ensure teachers have the resources they need to continue their inclusive practices. These adult advocates would be a single point of contact to coordinate within the school, but also across schools, and with the District.

One of the current District support structures in schools are Student Family Advocates (SFAs) who “provide individual student support, promote parent engagement and act as a liaison between school, parents and community resources in order to enhance student learning.”¹⁷ Task Force members discussed the advantages and disadvantages of having Student Family Advocates (SFAs) serve as LGBTQ adult advocates. Some Task Force members felt SFAs would be well positioned to offer support to students because of their training in providing mental health services to students. Others worried that SFAs are overextended and might not have the capacity to take on an additional role.

“We need visible advocates for LGBTQ students and their families. Hire LGBTQ+ advocates (SFAs are too taxed).”

Task Force members also described the importance of having the adult advocate or any representative of LGBTQ students be a person who self-identifies as LGBTQ, or be trained as an ally.

“Have LGBTQ adult advocates who can connect students to resources and help advocate for their needs in each building.”

Task Force members noted that the cost of hiring an additional staff to provide this support to students would be costly, but that allocating part of an existing educators’ time might be more feasible.

Ensure Access to Specialized Supports and Mental Health Resources

Task Force members discussed a need for providing specialized support to LGBTQ students, and ensuring that health and nursing staff, as well as Student Family Advocates (SFAs) and counseling staff, are prepared to provide such support. For example, they mentioned that transgender students have particular health needs and school staff should be educated on meeting those needs and managing medications related to gender transitions.

“If a student is transitioning and taking hormones, the nurses should know how to handle it and what to do.”

Task Force members discussed a need for SFAs and counseling staff to engage proactively with students, to be on the lookout, and provide mental health services to LGBTQ students.

“We aren’t sure how to provide more relationships for kids – can’t mandate connection, but it’s critical for the personal level change.”

The Task Force discussed at length the importance of ensuring that LGBTQ students are aware of resources whether they already exist, such as SFAs, or resources that are added in the future. There was concern that not all students are aware of their SFA and the services they provide. Without dissemination and awareness of current resources, student access to resources is limited, and existing resources are underutilized.

Further, the Task Force discussed the mental health problems stemming from LGBTQ youth due to bullying and harassment, and the urgency the District should take in connecting students to existing mental health resources, and creating new resources as necessary. Task Force members felt that providing mental health support to students would ensure accessibility and confidentiality for students. They also suggested that mental health screenings be available to LGBTQ students. The Task Force believed addressing these problems can also help increase academic success for LGBTQ students.

Task Force members also noted the importance for all staff that engage in counseling or providing mental health services to be competent in being able to identify and help LGBTQ students with mental health problems, as well as having conversations with students about these issues. Several professional associations have produced resources specifically for social workers, psychologists, and school counseling professionals to learn about the specific needs of LGBTQ youth.¹⁸⁻²³

BE IT RESOLVED that the American Psychological Association and the National Association of School Psychologists

- Encourage school-based mental health professionals to serve as allies and advocates for gender and sexual orientation diverse children and adolescents in schools, including advocacy for the inclusion of gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation in all relevant school district policies, especially anti-bullying and anti-discrimination policies;
- Encourage school staff to support the decisions of children, adolescents, and families regarding a student’s gender identity or expression, including whether to seek treatments and interventions, and discourage school personnel from requiring proof of medical treatments as a prerequisite for such support;

Excerpt from the American Psychological Association and National Association of School Psychologists Resolution on Gender and Sexual Orientation Diversity in Children and Adolescence in Schools

"We need more on-site resources at schools. I am a student and I had no idea that SEAs even existed and I think they sound like an incredibly important thing for students to have."

Identify and Support Student Ambassadors

Another strategy the Task Force identified for supporting students is to have an LGBTQ student ambassador in each school. The student ambassador would be a volunteer role which would be held by an LGBTQ student that can advocate for the interests of LGBTQ students in the building while also acting as a resource for peers. As one teacher put it, *"the people who know what these students need the most are the students themselves."* The student ambassador position would give LGBTQ students a direct voice to communicate needs with school staff and resource for students in each building.

"Offering education to students to be able to advocate in schools so they don't have to rely on adults that are overworked already."

"Train students in self-advocacy, pair these students with staff who can help advocate."

The student ambassador would be able to guide fellow LGBTQ students through the school environment, connect fellow students to teachers who are allies, and assist LGBTQ students when dealing with complaints, bullying, and other administrative processes. The Task Force highlighted the impact a student can have in this role, as other students might feel more comfortable reaching out to a student ambassador. The ambassador would also represent the identity and interests of the LGBTQ student body of the school to the administration, teachers, and Board of Education.

"The school board likes to hear from students – rally students to go to the meeting – they give priority to the kids of the District."

Additional advantages the Task Force enumerated were that sponsoring the student ambassador position creates a leadership and skill-building opportunity for LGBTQ students in each building, and that the presence of these ambassadors would improve the consistency and access to LGBTQ student support across schools.

Supporting Student Groups

Student groups can provide students with social, emotional, and health support. Gender-Sexuality or Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) are student-led and adult-sponsored organizations in schools that support and celebrate LGBTQ students through social and educational programming, and in many cases, also promote social inclusion and justice for LGBTQ students and allies.²⁴ There is a great deal of variation in how GSAs are organized and comprised. For example, GSAs vary tremendously in terms of their composition (ranging from more open membership policies that allow gender conforming and heterosexual students, and allies, to more restrictive membership policies that limit membership to students identifying as LGBTQ), their program focus, and their function in a school.²⁵

GSAs have emerged as one of the most promising evidence-based strategies for supporting LGBTQ students, and more generally promoting a positive school climate. Several recent research studies have provided evidence that students in schools with GSAs have more positive outcomes, such as greater perceived safety at school, better school attendance, and lower levels of psychological and behavioral concerns.²⁶⁻²⁹ In one recent study on 45 Wisconsin schools, researchers found that in schools that had GSAs students had better attendance, engaged in less deviant behaviors (such as smoking drinking, and having sex with casual partners), and also had lower rates of self-reported suicide attempts. This study also found that while these positive effects were found among all students, the impacts were stronger for LGBTQ compared to heterosexual youth.³⁰ In another recent study in Colorado, researchers compared the experiences and outcomes of LGBTQ students who attended schools with and without GSAs. They found that LGBTQ students who attended schools with GSAs reported higher grades, greater perceptions of safety, and better awareness of a safe adult at the school.³¹ There are also a number of studies that show particularly positive impacts for students who are regularly involved in GSAs. For example, in one study, straight allies that participated in a GSA were more likely to confront LGBTQ-based inequities in school.³² The positive impacts of GSA participation is generally attributed to the increased social and emotional support that students receive when they participate in GSAs. However, the positive school-wide impacts are likely attributable to changes in overall school diversity climate as students learn and observe inclusive practices.³³

As of 2014, there were GSAs in approximately 37% of high schools, 17% of middle schools, and 5% of elementary schools across the country.³⁴ In the Iowa City Community School District, 100% of high schools and junior high schools have GSAs while none of the elementary schools have these groups.

Recommendations

The Task Force saw promise in strengthening GSAs as a way for the District to support LGBTQ students and their education. Task Force members believe that strengthening GSAs will provide LGBTQ students a safe and comfortable place to express themselves and be supported, as well as provide a collective platform to better enable self-advocacy.

Task Force members highlighted three strategies related to GSAs:

- 1) Support the development of the groups and their members
- 2) Increase the visibility of student groups in schools
- 3) Build connections between the student groups and the larger LGBTQ community

Support GSA Members and Activities

The Task Force members described three specific ways that District educators could further support GSAs: improve GSA programming, increase District funding for GSA activities, and encouraging the development of GSAs in District elementary schools.

Improve GSA Programming

Task Force members encouraged improving GSA programming to include regular social events such as movie nights. These events would likely have two direct positive impacts. They would be fun, casual settings for current members to relax, get to know each other, and bond. They would also have the potential to increase participation in the GSA and their events by non-members and potentially

enhance GSA membership over time. Having these kinds of events could also provide a venue for non-LGBTQ students to become more knowledgeable about LGBTQ issues and potentially become allies.

Increase District Funding for GSA Activities

Several Task Force members noted that one of the most valuable activities GSAs have been involved with is attending the annual Iowa Governor's Conference on LGBTQ Youth which takes place each spring. The Governor's Conference is an exceptional opportunity for ICCSD GSAs to learn about issues relevant to the LGBTQ community and network with other students and educators. However, the ability of GSA members to participate in this opportunity is limited by the lack of funding provided by the District administration and schools. The Task Force noted that while student interest in attending the event has increased over the years, funding has not increased.

"GSAs should be supported, financially and through promotional materials, because they are an important resource for students."

The Task Force unanimously agreed that LGBTQ student groups cannot meet full potential without adequate funding from the District, which may need to be supplemented by building level funds to accommodate varying membership levels and activity.

"I've paid for a lot of the things we have done in the GLOW club [Gay, Lesbian, or Whatever GSA] out of my own pocket. I'm fine with that because I want my peers to have a sense of community... So when it comes down to it, we need more support and resources." – ICCSD student

Increased District funding of GSAs is one of the clearest ways that the District could support the GSAs in achieving their goals and supporting LGBTQ students.

Encourage the Development of GSAs in Elementary Schools

Task Force members also suggested establishing GSAs in elementary schools, noting both the need to support younger LGBTQ students and wanting the opportunity to increase the inclusivity of the school climate through GSA programming. In a recent national study of elementary teachers and students, researchers found large percentages of teachers and students reporting negative or stereotypical comments about gender or sexual orientation and other forms of harassment and bullying.³⁵ For example, almost 50% of students and teachers in this study reported that they heard comments like "that's so gay" or "you're so gay" from students often or all of the time.

GSA Membership

When discussing recommendations related to supporting GSAs, Task Force members described two important considerations. First, the Task Force debated the extent to which GSAs should include LGBTQ allies (people who are supportive of LGBTQ people and issues). On the one hand, having greater membership can enhance the work the GSA is able to do, and so actively seeking and welcoming allies to join groups could have positive impacts. However, as one Task Force member noted, ***"We don't need straight people to be legitimate."*** Having GSAs as groups that provide a safe place for LGBTQ students to express identity and be with others with shared identity can provide unique positive impacts as well. This sentiment was expressed by another Task Force member, ***"This is a really safe space with other kids like them...I don't want straight kids around when I'm trying to do my queer thing."*** It was also emphasized by many members that it is important to foster GSA spaces in which students do not feel pressured to disclose their status or identity.

“I miss hearing kids of double vulnerability (African American and gay or lesbian) they have different perspective from GLBTQ who are from the white majority. They suffer more harassment, achievement gap, and suicide tendency.”

The Task Force noted that the needs of LGBTQ students of color do not appear to be met by the current way GSAs are organized. And, they suggested that GSA leaders make clear that the GSAs are welcoming to students of diverse backgrounds.

“Support the whole community, especially queer students of color.”

Increase Visibility of GSAs in Schools

The presence of GSAs in schools is an important first step in creating a safer and more LGBTQ-inclusive school climate. However, visibility amongst the school community is equally important. The Task Force emphasized that recognizing and appreciating LGBTQ students and their identities is one of the most important and effective ways to increase inclusivity within schools. Ensuring that GSAs are given adequate, genuine attention creates a more affirming school environment for LGBTQ students and raises awareness of LGBTQ issues. One of the most common strategies that GSAs around the country have used to increase visibility in their schools is participating in national awareness campaigns.³⁶ The Task Force noted that these types of activities can be promoted by GSAs and celebrated throughout the school.

The Task Force identified a number of current practices in schools that limited the visibility of GSAs. They also pointed to substantial differences in social recognition that certain student groups and sports teams receive.

“There is a need for more broad-based and unapologetic visibility and support beyond just allowing them [LGBTQ students] to exist.”

The Task Force identified two concrete ways to increase GSA visibility: inclusion in all school materials and events, and celebration of LGBTQ student achievements.

Inclusion in All School Materials and Events

The Task Force noted that many students and educators do not know about the GSAs currently in the District, and/or don't know or understand their goals or activities. To ensure that all students and educators know about these LGBTQ student groups, Task Force members recommend including information about GSAs in student handbooks, school orientation materials, and school and District websites. The Task Force also advocated for inclusion of LGBTQ student groups in all-school assemblies and other school events, and for schools and the District to actively promote GSA activities. As a student member of the Task Force emphasized, actions like this show the school community “we're queer and we're here.”

National Awareness Campaigns

- No Name Calling Week
- Day of Silence
- Ally Week
- National Coming Out Day
- Transgender Day of Remembrance
- Transgender Day of Visibility
- International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, and Transphobia
- Stonewall Riots Anniversary
- Pride Charlotte and Charlotte Black Gay Pride
- Bisexual Awareness Week
- Spirit Day
- Intersex Awareness Day
- Ace Visibility Day
- LGBTQ Homeless Awareness Month
- LGBTQ History Month (October)
- Pansexual Awareness Day

“Equitable visibility at all schools should be a priority”

“More support and visibility for GSAs – both monetary and moral support. Welcoming LGBTQ+ students and allies with meetings/ events to foster friendships and support.”

Celebration of LGBTQ Student Achievements

The Task Force also recommended that the District promote and recognize LGBTQ students and GSA members for their successes. The District can do this by encouraging educators to nominate LGBTQ students for awards, and encouraging LGBTQ students to apply for scholarships, such as Iowa’s Matthew Shepard Scholarship. The District can also do this by announcing when these students receive awards or scholarships, or have other significant achievements.



Build connections with larger LGBTQ Community

According to the Human Rights Campaign Municipal Equity Index, the City of Iowa City scores very high in terms of having LGBTQ-inclusive laws, policies, services and law enforcement programs.³⁷ Our local community and the State of Iowa have a number of groups, organizations, and resources that could be accessed or utilized in some way by LGBTQ students and GSAs (see sidebar).

Task Force members discussed the importance of LGBTQ student groups in offering a sense of community to many students, and saw potential to connect these groups within and between districts, and with broader community LGBTQ groups. Task Force members advocated supporting GSAs in reaching out to make connections with other LGBTQ student groups such as those at the University of Iowa or in other school districts around Iowa. Building these connections would

provide students with positive role models, and opportunities to share ideas, and collaborate on projects or events. Task Force members also described several ways that LGBTQ student groups could contribute and participate in the local Iowa City Pride Parade and corresponding events. The Task Force believed that building these connections would provide positive experiences for the LGBTQ community by connecting LGBTQ students in the ICCSD to people who may have had similar experiences. Making these types of connections is also something that is advocated by GSA Network which is an organization of transgender and queer youth uniting for racial and gender justice.³⁸

Iowa LGBTQ Community Groups, Organizations, and Resources

- University of Iowa LGBTQ Clinic
- University of Iowa LGBTQ Resource Center
- University of Iowa student organizations (e.g. Trans Alliance UI Spectrum)
- University of Iowa Gamma Gamma Chapter of Delta Lambda Phi Social Fraternity
- Iowa Safe Schools
- One Iowa
- Iowa City Pride

“More community outreach for students...reaching out to university level organizations and community orgs for volunteers/mentors.”

Task Force members also believed that these local resources could be used to enhance the educational opportunities for all students in the ICCSD. For example, inviting LGBTQ speakers to talk in classes and schoolwide assemblies to highlight contributions of LGBTQ community members, and provide models of LGBTQ people in professional and leadership roles. Potential partners include organizations such as United Action for Youth alumni, the University of Iowa Alumni LGBTQ Affinity Group, and LGBTQ student organizations at the University of Iowa including Spectrum UI and the UI Trans Alliance.

“The district should work at making sure members of the queer community are brought into the classroom discussions, and these members should include people of color.”

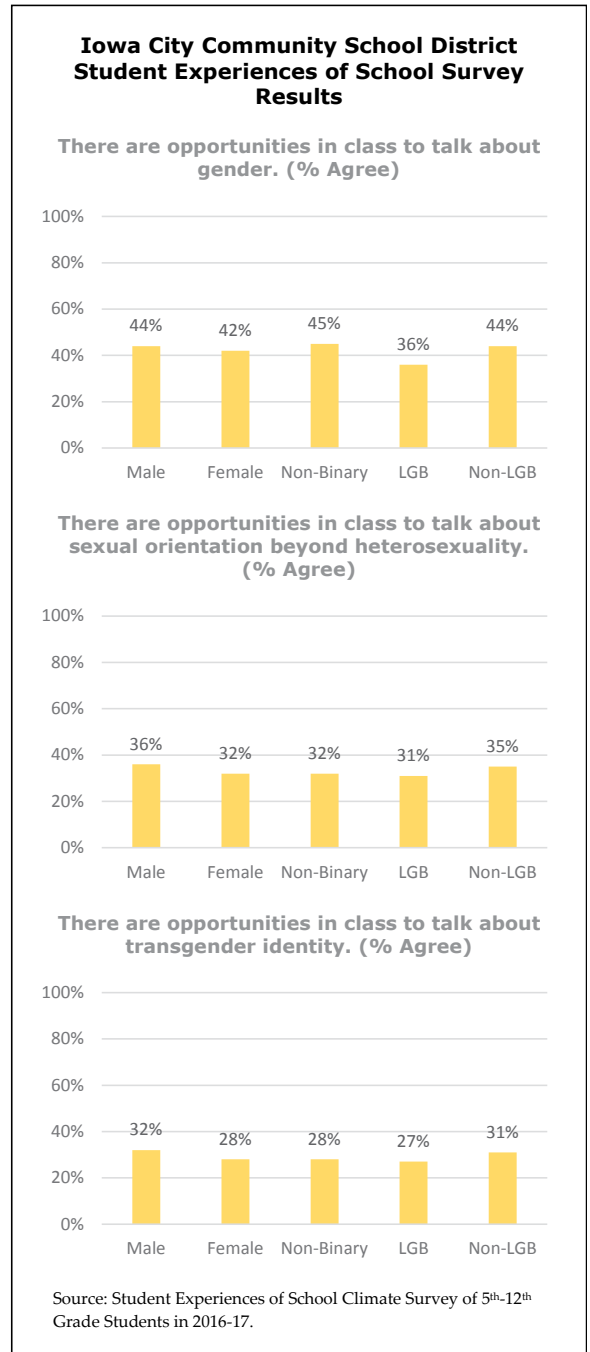
Enhancing the Inclusiveness of the Curriculum

One of the essential components of any effort to create safe and LGBTQ-inclusive schools and support LGBTQ students is having an inclusive curriculum. Ensuring curriculum is diverse in perspectives and content, and utilizing teaching practices and pedagogy that are culturally responsive is an effective way to support the achievement and positive development for all students. The benefits of inclusive curriculum have been described in education literature through a metaphor of providing students with windows and mirrors. Meaning, a balanced curriculum introduces opportunities to understand experiences and perspectives of people different from oneself (window), and reflects one's own experiences and identity (mirror).³⁹

Recent research has found that practicing culturally responsive instruction improves student achievement and positively influences overall school culture.⁴⁰ These positive effects of culturally responsive instruction practices are based on the fact that for students to learn, they need to feel safe, appreciated, and respected. Although there is limited research showing measurable impacts of having an LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum specifically, there is some research that shows including positive representation of LGBTQ-related topics in the curriculum positively affects LGBTQ students. In one recent study, researchers found that having positive representation of LGBTQ-related topics was associated with less victimization of LGBTQ students, lower rates of anti-LGBTQ comments made by students, and greater perceptions of safety reported by LGBTQ students.^{41, 42} In another study, researchers found that when schools included LGBTQ issues in their curriculum, students were more likely to report that their school was safer for gender nonconforming peers.⁴³

Iowa City Community School District Context

In the ICCSD, there are substantial percentages of students that report that there are not opportunities in class to talk about gender, sexual orientation beyond heterosexuality, and transgender identity (see sidebar). What is striking is that there is a great deal of consistency in students reporting the lack of opportunities to discuss these topics. In other words, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation, students in the District are all similarly likely to report there are not opportunities to talk about these topics in class. These findings suggest that there are clear opportunities for enhancing the inclusiveness of the curriculum.



Recommendations

The Task Force saw enhancing the inclusiveness of the curriculum in the ICCSD as a necessary step for the District to take in order to support LGBTQ students and educate all students about LGBTQ-related topics. Task Force members identified several ways the District could leverage existing resources and practices in new ways, and also proposed new strategies to create equitable and inclusive classrooms for all students.

- 1) Invest in the integration of an LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum
- 2) Adapt Current Content
- 3) Make libraries more LGBTQ-inclusive
- 4) Incorporate inclusive teaching practices

Invest in the integration of an LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum

The strategy that garnered the most support from the Task Force was to invest in LGBTQ-inclusive curricula, resources, textbooks, literature, and exercises into every grade and subject area.

The Task Force identified three concrete, actionable components. First, having the District invest in the purchase of new materials to be added to existing District resources. Second, updating the process through which curriculum is reviewed and updated. And, third, support for educators in adapting existing materials.

Purchasing New Materials

One of the best ways to ensure that curricular materials are inclusive of gender identity and sexual orientation diversity is to purchase recently developed materials that reflect advances in knowledge and societal awareness related to the LGBTQ issues. The lack of inclusion in curriculum materials and content can be a clear signal to students that people similar to themselves, who share their characteristics or identities are not important enough to be included. As one student Task Force member questioned, *“Why isn’t my history being talked about with everyone else’s?”* While the Task Force encouraged the District to allocate resources to purchase new materials, they also recognized that the cost of purchasing new materials may be high. Therefore, the Task Force recommended that the District develop both short and long-term visions to make the curriculum more LGBTQ-inclusive by allocating some funds for purchasing new materials as well as updating the curriculum review process and adapting current materials.

Updating the Curriculum Review Process

Adopting a more LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum is a process that involves identifying materials and content that are not inclusive, revising curriculum to include more inclusive materials and content, and distributing the updated curriculum to educators across the district. Currently, the District conducts a districtwide K-12 evaluation of a curricular area (e.g. science, social studies, health) on an eight-year cycle.⁴⁴ Districtwide curriculum reviews are led by a self-study committee, which provides recommendations to the Board of Education.⁴⁵

The Task Force recommended that this existing District process be used strategically to make the curriculum across all subjects more LGBTQ-inclusive. Specific ways to do this are to ensure that the curriculum review self-study committee members represent diverse perspectives, and include input from content specialists, individuals who identify as LGBTQ, and students.

Adapt Current Content

Members saw potential in uncovering existing themes within course materials already being used in a way that highlights LGBTQ perspectives and accomplishments. The District's Multicultural, Gender Fair Education (MCGF) Program has already begun making incremental changes to curriculum and materials. Currently, the MCGF program is incorporating curriculum constructs from the Teaching Tolerance Anti-Bias Framework.⁴⁶ In addition, the MCGF program provides a list of highly recommended fiction and picture books that cover a variety of topics including immigration, gender expression, gender roles, stereotypes, race and culture, family structures, and disability. The list also provides tips for application, such as suggested grade levels and potential curriculum ties for each book. One component of the strategy to adapt classroom materials is to ensure that teachers are aware of these resources and are supported in implementing inclusive materials.

LGBTQ-Inclusive Curriculum Guides and Resources

GLSEN. LGBT-Inclusive Curriculum Guide for Educators

GLSEN. Unheard Voices

Advocates for Youth. The Nuts and Bolts: Lesson Plans for Building Allies for GLBTQ Youth

Resources for LGBT History Month

Gender Spectrum Bibliographies of Children's Books and Books for Teens

"Efforts are all over the place in the district, and there is a big need to unite them."

The Task Force also recommended that the current cultural competency team include specific goals, practices, and materials for LGBTQ topics and issues.

Task Force members were certain that LGBTQ inclusivity could be applied at all grade levels and across all subjects. They saw potential for including LGBTQ material into the Common Core structure, through the use of existing scaffolding in a developmentally appropriate way. For example, adapting curriculum for kindergarteners about family structure to include same-sex parents and other diverse family structures.

"Maybe getting all new textbooks is a long-term goal, but teachers can definitely adapt this [curriculum] on the fly"

A strength of this strategy is that existing resources are available, often at no cost. Many organizations offer free online guides to guide the development of inclusive curriculums (e.g. materials for activities and gender, sexuality, and LGBTQ history lessons) (see sidebar).⁴⁷⁻⁵⁰

"Ultimately, the District needs to shop wisely for new LGBTQ+ inclusive curriculum, but in the meantime, we need tools/skills/training on how to adapt our current curriculum"

There was a focus on repurposing existing structures and resources within the District to increase inclusivity. Task Force members discussed the possibility of repurposing Instructional Design Strategists (IDS) to have release time specifically to support teachers in embracing more inclusive curriculum. Members also suggested using Teacher Leadership positions to support teachers with a focus on cultural competence and adapting curriculum.

"Using existing resources – IDS – would help support teachers as they push out more gender inclusive curriculum"

Inclusive Health Education

According to current syllabi, ICCSD Health classes cover “human sexuality including male and female reproductive systems.”⁵¹ Task Force members discussed the importance of including information about diverse sexualities and genders in health and sexual education classes, emphasizing that LGBTQ issues and needs should be included in safe sex and self-care practices. Task Force members specifically emphasized the need to clarify the difference between sex and gender in class (i.e. teaching that gender is a social construct). This Task Force recommendation is in alignment the Center for Disease Control’s recommendations for having an LGBTQ-inclusive health curriculum: “Ensure that health curricula or educational materials include HIV, other STD, and pregnancy prevention information that is relevant to LGB youth” (such as ensuring that curricula or materials use language and terminology.)⁵² Task Force members suggested that health classes could be enhanced by focusing more on developing healthy relationships, including consent and intimate partner violence. Additionally, Task Force members suggested starting health education before high school. One local resource identified by Task Force members is the University of Iowa LGBTQ Health Clinic, which could provide guidance on curriculum and related LGBTQ-specific health resources.

Diversify Course Offerings

Task Force members discussed diversifying course offerings by offering classes on LGBTQ history or race, class, and gender. The District currently has course offerings which include some of these recommended subject areas, including U.S. Humanities, Communication Studies, and World History for Tomorrow. Members suggested that students want to talk about these topics and would engage in the material. They also stressed that these courses would be available to all students, serving the dual purpose of representing and validating the experiences of LGBTQ students, and educating non-LGBTQ students. Prerequisites for adding more inclusive courses would include teacher training in empathy, anti-bullying, and LGBTQ terminology and experiences, and clear District support.



Making Libraries More LGBTQ-Inclusive

There was also an interest in integrating books that have LGBTQ characters and themes throughout school libraries. Task Force members emphasized the importance of integrating (i.e. not a dedicated section) LGBTQ inclusive books in the library, to reinforce the idea that the materials are for all students, and not exclusive or targeted to students who identify as LGBTQ. The District's library program is in alignment with this Task Force strategy, and embraces resources that reflect diversity as part of its belief statement. In addition to ensuring that the books and resources available in the library are inclusive and affirming of LGBTQ students, librarians can also ensure that the library space is safe and affirming for all students.⁵³⁻⁵⁶

Incorporate Inclusive Teaching Practices

Task Force members anticipated that the fidelity of implementing an inclusive curriculum would vary by individual teachers, depending on factors such as differing levels of efficacy and comfort discussing LGBTQ topics, or conflicting personal ideologies. Therefore, Task Force members emphasized the importance of clear District support and teacher training to facilitate the implementation of curriculum changes. Specifically, teacher training would be needed to ensure that all teachers are equipped to:

- 1) Be comfortable using LGBTQ related language effectively
- 2) Be familiar with LGBTQ concepts and issues
- 3) Understand rationale for inclusion in class materials, and
- 4) Moderate classroom discussions stimulated by inclusive content in a culturally competent way.

The Task Force also emphasized the importance of clear support from leadership at the District and building levels. Task Force members suggested that teacher hesitation to incorporate an LGBTQ inclusive curriculum is related to perceptions of unfavorable reception from certain parents or community members. District support for an inclusive curriculum is aligned with its core goals and mission statement, and the emphasis on equity in classrooms should be communicated with all District stakeholders.

“Staff cannot opt out of curriculum components, and should be supported and trained to teach this material.”

Task Force members suggested developing a plan to ensure accountability as inclusive curriculum strategies are implemented. Some examples include: observing classrooms and collecting student feedback about the curriculum through the annual Student Experiences of School Climate Survey.

“Students should feel safe in every classroom. In health class, I didn't feel like I was a human being.” – Former ICCSD student

American Library Association's Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Round Table has a toolkit and several bibliographies for children and teens.

- Toolkit to help library staff better understand gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) library users, how to best serve their needs, and how to manage challenges that often arise.
- Rainbow Book List
- Seeing Myself in the Mirror: An LGBTQ Literature Annotated Bibliography with Diverse Characters
- Soldier Girls and Dancing Boys: Gender Exploration in Resources for Children, Teens, and Caring Adults
- LGBTQ+ Graphic Novels

Assess Current Content

Task Force members suggested each teacher in the District undergo an individual reflection of classroom content, with the goal of assessing current content, and generating strategies to avoid bias and include positive representations of diverse identities. Members emphasized the need to assess current curriculum in terms of LGBTQ inclusivity, and consider specific concepts, such as heteronormativity (the view that heterosexuality is the only natural sexuality), and gender stereotypes (assumptions about how each gender should look or behave). In order for this suggested practice to be effective, Task Force members emphasized the need for all teachers to have basic competency regarding LGBTQ terminology and issues.

The Cornell University's Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) offers two major reflective questions to guide creation of inclusive curricula:

- 1) What are your own cultural influences and personal ways of teaching and learning and how might these influence your choices in course design?
- 2) What are your students' cultural influences and personal ways of learning and how might these influence motivation and course expectations?

Encourage critical thinking and discussion

Some Task Force members suggested that teachers use critical lens theory as a way to promote inclusivity and critical thinking of class materials. That is, to encourage students to think about whose voices are represented in readings, and whose are missing. They saw this as an immediate, cost-effective approach to making curriculum more inclusive. Members stressed that inclusivity can be taught no matter the textbook assigned, and that small changes can be impactful. A concern was expressed that if teachers do not have a foundational understanding of social justice, ensuring the implementation quality and consistency of this strategy would be difficult. A prerequisite of this approach would be to provide empathy and LGBTQ terminology training and support to teachers.

The Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) also recommends collectively setting standard ground rules in the classroom at the beginning of the year, so conversations about stereotypes and other diversity subjects remain civil and productive.⁵⁷



Improving Educator Knowledge and Skills

One of the most common ways to improve education and educational environments is to improve the knowledge, skills, and capacities of educators. When it comes to creating safe, LGBTQ-inclusive school environments, and supporting LGBTQ students, many educators are unsure about how to achieve these goals.⁵⁸ Therefore, increasing educator awareness, knowledge, and skills is an essential component of these efforts. “From students to district administrators, everyone has a role to play in creating an inclusive school climate. Proper training gives all school community members a thorough understanding of the part they play in making their school an environment that welcomes all students.”⁵⁸ Strategies include activities such as engaging in structured professional development or training, providing resources, and supporting professional learning communities or peer coaching.

Professional development workshops and trainings include opportunities such as Safe Zone Trainings, which are designed to teach participants about LGBTQ+ identities, gender and sexuality, and unlearn prejudice. For example, the University of Iowa Safe Zone Project is a campus-wide program that offers a visible message of inclusion, affirmation, and support to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) people in the university community. Participants attend up to two educational workshops to learn about the LGBTQ experience and campus/community resources. After completing the second workshop, participants may choose to become a recognized Safe Zone ally and receive a Safe Zone symbol to display in their work space.⁵⁹ There are also comprehensive programs such as the Human Rights Campaign’s Welcoming Schools program which provides training and resources to elementary school educators to help them create LGBTQ and gender inclusive schools, prevent bias-based bullying, welcome diverse families, and support transgender and non-binary students.⁶⁰ Organizations such as the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) provide workshops for K-12 schools and individual educators. GLSEN workshops are designed to provide information, best practices, user-friendly tools and skill building.⁶¹

Although many educators engage in these types of professional development programs, trainings, and webinars, there are only a handful of studies evaluating their effectiveness. In one recent evaluation of a program designed by the Massachusetts Department of Education, educators who had received the Safe Schools Program for Gay and Lesbian Youth Training were more likely to report greater tolerance and lower sexual prejudice, and were also more likely to report being personally aware of appropriate community resources related to LGBTQ issues.⁶² This same evaluation also found that students in schools with educators who had been trained were more likely to report feeling supported by teachers and counselors. Another evaluation of a two-day training component of the Respect for All initiative of the New York City Department of Education also found positive results. The goal of Respect for All is training educators to support lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) students and combat all forms of bias-based bullying and harassment, particularly bias-based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.⁶³ Among the over 800 participants, researchers found an increase in knowledge of appropriate terms, awareness of how their own practices might have been harmful to LGBTQ students, and belief in the importance of intervening in anti-LGBTQ remarks.

In addition to more formal training and professional development, many educators are able to improve their awareness, knowledge, and skills using resources that are made available to them. Many organizations provide free resources, guides, and toolkits for teachers to learn more about

Workshops, Webinars, and Trainings

GLSEN Webinars on Topics Including:

- Gender Identity and Expression
- Experiences of LGBT Youth in U.S. Schools
- Elementary School Climate and Resources
- From Teasing to Torment, School Climate Revisited
- School Push Out of LGBTQ Youth

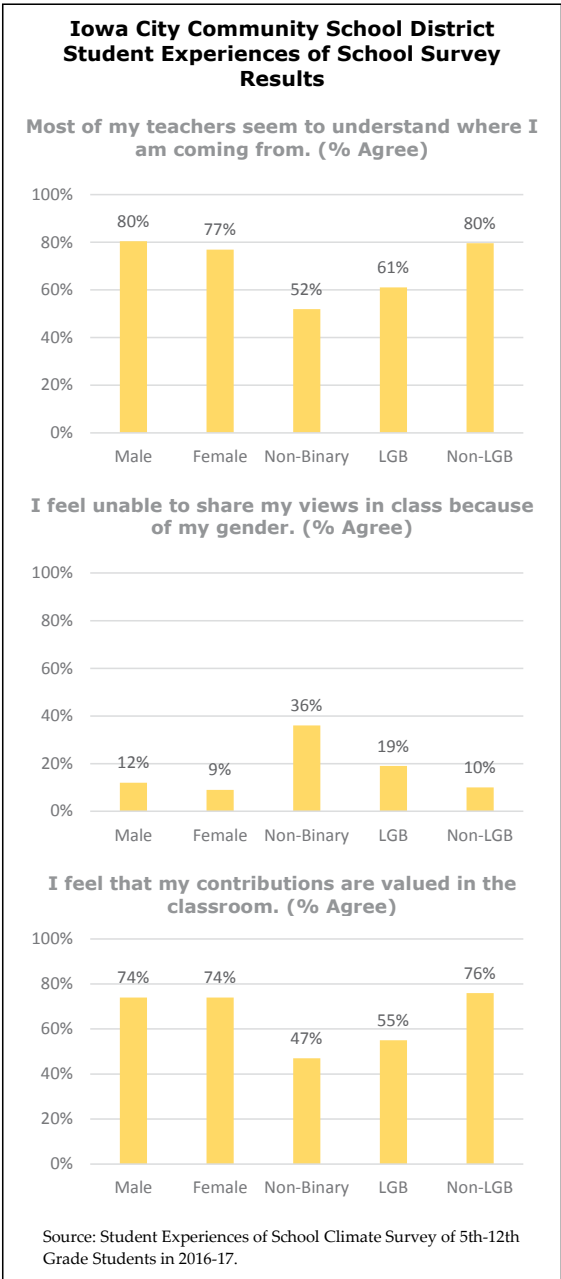
Welcoming Schools Training Modules:

- Creating LGBTQ-Inclusive Schools
- Embracing Family Diversity
- Preventing Bias-Based Bullying
- Creating Gender-Inclusive Schools
- Law and Policy Review
- Supporting Transgender and Non-Binary Students

LGBTQ issues and students (see sidebar). In a recent evaluation of GLSEN’s Safe Space Toolkit, researchers found that almost 95% of educators agreed that it helped increase their knowledge and skills related to LGBTQ topics with many noting specifically that it helped them to better understand the experiences of LGBTQ students and that it increased their ability to use correct, respectful terminology.⁶⁴

Iowa City Community School District Context

In the ICCSD, there are substantial disparities between LGB and non-LGB and between male and female and non-binary gender identified students in terms of whether they agree that most of their teachers understand where they are coming from (see sidebar on page 30). LGB and non-binary gender identified students are also less likely to report that their contributions are valued in the classroom. There are also substantial percentages of students that report hearing hurtful comments about gender and sexual orientation from teachers (see sidebar on page 31). These findings suggest that increasing educator awareness, knowledge, and skills related to LGBTQ-inclusivity is one strategy for supporting LGBTQ students and creating inclusive schools and classrooms.



Recommendations

Task Force members concluded that it was important to ensure that staff, teachers, and administrators in the District were equipped in LGBTQ specific cultural competency.

The Task Force identified several strategies that could be used to improve staff and teacher awareness and capacity related to LGBTQ topics.

- 1) Safe Zone training
- 2) Anti-bullying and harassment training and bystander training
- 3) Student-led training
- 4) Peer coach training

“Teacher, administrator, and community learning opportunities are a must for successful implementation.”

Safe Zone Training

Members of the Task Force persistently advocated for providing Safe Zone training for all ICCSD employees, and making it available to students, parents, and community members. Safe Zone trainings are “opportunities to learn about LGBTQ+ identities, gender and sexuality, and unlearn prejudice” (Safe Zone, n.d.). The trainings are currently offered through Iowa City’s Rape Victim Advocacy Program and are underway at some ICCSD schools. Task Force members want this training for employees because they feel it makes people more comfortable with using LGBTQ terms and students feel comfortable coming to a Safe Zone trained teacher. They felt very strongly that the training should be mandatory.

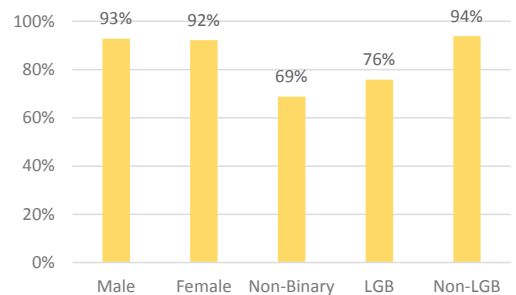
Further, it is important to the Task Force that anyone who holds an advocacy position must first be trained through Safe Zone training and on the resources they will be providing to the rest of the LGBTQ student body.

“District mandate/ commitment to all staff receiving appropriate PD [professional development], use of inclusive language, practices and policies that support LGBTQ students and families, curriculum, education, and outreach.”

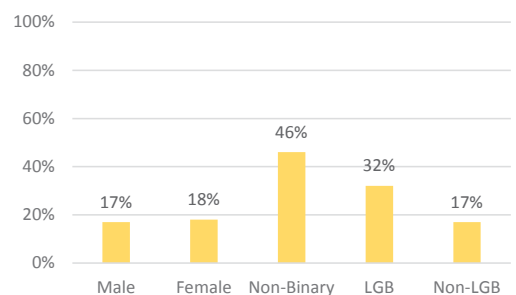
Additionally, they expressed that Safe Zone training for teachers would be a foundational

Iowa City Community School District Student Experiences of School Survey Results

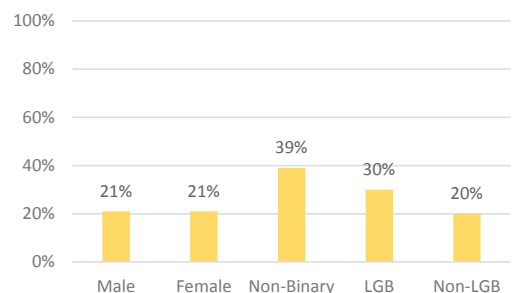
Teachers treat students of gender identities with respect. (% Agree)



During this year at school, how often have you heard hurtful comments about gender from teachers? (% Ever)



During this year at school, how often have you heard hurtful comments about sexual orientation from teachers? (% Ever)



Source: Student Experiences of School Climate Survey of 5th-12th Grade Students in 2016-17.

step before pursuing other changes. Members strongly suggested that the training be made available online and that it be free of cost to teachers and employees. There were concerns that if they training were available online that it would be easier to skip or be overlooked. Members also expressed that ideally the training would take place on an annual basis. They said that trainings should not just focus on teachers as so many other adults interact with students, such as coaches, paraeducators, counselors, etc. Finally, they felt it was very important that the District provide funding for Safe Zone training.

"I know from experience that one misgendering incident can have a negative impact on a student's entire day."

Anti-Bullying and Bystander Intervention Training

Another way Task Force members suggested improving outcomes for LGBTQ students is by providing District employees with anti-bullying and bystander training. They felt this would continue skill building and awareness, and build compassion and empathy.

Task Force members also shared experiences of educators failing to take appropriate action when bullying or harassment occurred.

"Students don't feel they have a platform to voice their complaints about lack of inclusivity at school, bullying, or staff disrespect."

Members of the Task Force suggested that ideally these trainings would be provided annually. Currently, bystander training is offered at every secondary school except Northwest Junior High. These trainings are provided by RVAP, and initiated by teacher request. Student Task Force members reported that they had either experienced harassment or that friends had experienced harassment in the presence of school adults who did not assist them or address the incident. These reported experiences are consistent with the Student Experiences of School Climate Survey results; in which 84%-85% of male, female, and non-LGB students agreed that "the school would take appropriate action if an incident was reported to them." Non-binary and LGB students reported substantially lower rates of agreement (61% and 73%, respectively).

Task Force members also advocated for policy-aligned inclusive conversations with students and parents. One member suggested on a weekly or monthly basis as part of announcements have the speaker say "this week, we are thinking about (health, bullying, gender, home, lunch, etc.) and we want to know what you think. Your three questions

Resources, Guides, and Toolkits

GLSEN Resources for Educators

- Safe Space Toolkit
- Ready, Set, Respect Toolkit
- Educator Guide: Working with LGBTQ Students of Color
- Pronouns: A Resource for Educators

Welcoming Schools Resources

- Responding to Some Concerns About Being LGBTQ Inclusive
- Bias, Bullying and Bystanders: Tips for Educators
- Developing a Welcoming Classroom
- Be Prepared for Questions and Put-Downs on Gender
- What Do You Say to "That's So Gay" and Other Anti-LGBTQ Comments
- What Does Gay Mean?
- Who Can Marry Whom? Inclusive Conversations About Marriage
- Definitions to Help Understand Gender and Sexual Orientation for Educators and Parents/Guardians
- Defining LGBTQ Terms for Children

Gender Spectrum Resources

- Understanding Gender
- Sex? Sexual Orientation? Gender Identity? Gender Expression?
- Supporting Our Gender Expansive Youth

Teaching Tolerance Resources

- Six Ways to Stand Behind Your LGBT Students
- Being There for Non-binary Youth
- Let's Talk! Discussing Gender in the Classroom

are... please have your submissions in via email by (day of the week). They felt this would be a good way to understand what needs should be addressed. This is an example of how student involvement and engagement with administration can create change and connect student experiences and stories with teachers.

Student-led Training

“Student panels should educate teachers on their lives – gives first hand insight into LGBTQ issues.”

The Task Force envisioned having opportunities to build compassion and empathy among peers and teachers by hosting panels for teacher enrichment on LGBTQ issues. They suggested that when you connect a face to a problem, it would encourage teachers to make changes. One member reported that GLOW Club students at South East Junior High are working with their principal in order to host an ally workshop for teachers. Task Force members also suggested sponsoring student-made videos on LGBTQ identity information to be shared with the student body during homeroom. *“This is what I am, and what it means to me”*. The task force saw this as a way to make short-term impact while pursuing longer-term changes.

“The contribution of students is of immense importance, include student panels and presentations about their experiences sufferings, and what they see as supportive (and protecting) measures that should be implemented by schools”

“Stories coming from kids themselves have the greatest impact on teachers wanting to enact a change to their practice.”

Peer Coach Training

Members also described having clear support from the District and fellow colleagues as playing a large role in their ability to implement changes. They suggested pairing teachers who are more comfortable and experienced in working with LGBTQ students with teachers who need more support, as a sort of mentorship relationship. Task Force members also suggested cultivating a receptive professional community through existing structures such as professional learning communities (PLCs). They believed the District should encourage teachers to have conversations with students and other staff about these topics and experiences. One member proposed using roleplaying to engage teachers in simulated situations as a way to prepare for addressing certain issues and situations.

Creating Supportive and Inclusive School Environments

Around the nation, LGBTQ students are more likely to report experiencing bullying and harassment at their schools.⁶⁵ In a 2015 nationwide survey of LGBTQ students, fully 85% reported experiencing verbal harassment at school, almost 60% report being sexually harassed, almost 50% report being electronically harassed, and 27% report being physically harassed. LGBTQ students are also less likely to report feeling safe while they are at school.^{66, 67} In the same nationwide survey, almost 60% of LGBTQ students reported feeling unsafe at school, and a third reported that they avoided gender-segregated spaces in school, such as bathrooms, because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable.

Schools are an important environment where students develop academically as well as socially and emotionally. A growing body of scholarship shows that safe, supportive, and inclusive school environments are associated with positive outcomes for students and educators.⁶⁸ The National School Climate Center⁶⁹ identifies several characteristics of schools that have a positive climate including:

Norms, values, and expectations that support people feeling socially, emotionally and physically safe

- People are engaged and respected
- Students, families, and educators work together to develop and contribute to a shared school vision
- Educators model and nurture attitudes that emphasize the benefits and satisfaction gained from learning
- Each person contributes to the operations of the school and the care of the physical environment
- Norms and values about gender and sexuality are significant pieces of the school's normative environment.⁷⁰ Having norms and values that support LGBTQ students requires that schools have gender and sexuality inclusive norms that
- Avoid distinguishing roles according to student's or educator's sex or gender
- Do not reinforce the gender binary (the classification of sex and gender into two distinct, opposite, and disconnected forms of masculine and feminine)⁷¹
- Do not reinforce heteronormativity (the belief that people must be either male or female and that heterosexuality is the only or should be the only sexual orientation).⁷²

Guides and Resources for Creating LGBTQ-Inclusive School Climates

Teaching Tolerance (2017) Guide for School Leaders on Creating an LGBTQ-Inclusive School Climate

GLSEN. Back-To-School-Guide for Creating LGBT Inclusive Environments

GLSEN. Safe Space Kit, Guide to Being an Ally to LGBT Students

GLSEN. Ready, Set, Respect Toolkit

Gender Spectrum. Gender Inclusive Schools Framework.

Scholars have identified several strategies to create safe and supportive schools, such as having a LGBTQ-inclusive anti-harassment and bullying policy; having LGBTQ student groups (GSAs); and having gender inclusive bathrooms. There are also a number of activities and programs that educators can use to foster respect and inclusivity for LGBTQ issues and students. While some programs focus specifically on LGBTQ issues and students, others are more general approaches to creating safe, supportive, and inclusive school environments. For example, the Human Rights Campaign's Welcoming Schools program provides training and resources to elementary school educators to help them create LGBTQ and gender inclusive schools, prevent bias-based bullying, welcome diverse families, and support transgender and non-binary students. There are also several resource guides from different organizations that describe best practices for creating an LGBTQ-inclusive school.⁵⁸

There is a growing body of research that examines the positive impact of programs and policies that create more supportive and inclusive school environments for LGBTQ students.^{73, 74} When LGBTQ students attend schools that they rate as having positive school climates, they are less likely to experience depression or engage in drug use, less likely to have suicidal thoughts, and are more likely to have better school attendance and academic achievement.⁷⁵⁻⁷⁸

Iowa City Community School District Context

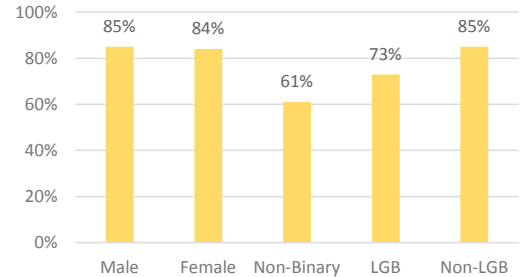
In the ICCSD, there are substantial disparities between LGB and non-LGB and between male and female and non-binary gender identified students in terms of whether they agree that the school would take appropriate actions if an incident were reported to them (see sidebar). LGB and non-binary gender identified students are also less likely to report that their school is welcoming and safe or that students in their school respect each other's differences (see sidebar). Finally, LGB and non-binary students are much less likely than non-LGB and male and female students to report always feeling safe in their classes or in the hallways and bathrooms of their school (see sidebar on page 36). These findings suggest that creating a more supportive and inclusive school environment is a good strategy for supporting LGBTQ students and creating inclusive schools and classrooms.

"Many of our kids are feeling unsafe, underrepresented, and isolated."

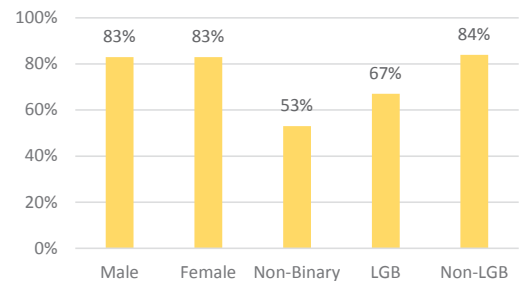


Iowa City Community School District Student Experiences of School Survey Results

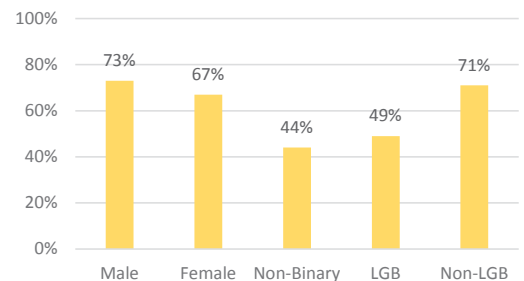
The school would take appropriate action if an incident was reported to them. (% Agree)



This school is welcoming and safe. (% Agree)



Students in this school respect each other's differences. (% Agree)



Source: Student Experiences of School Climate Survey of 5th-12th Grade Students in 2016-17.

Recommendations

Task Force members identified three concrete strategies for the District to pursue in order to make the school environments more supportive and inclusive for all students.

- 1) Increase accessibility of harassment and bullying complaint process
- 2) Create gender inclusive restrooms
- 3) Make all school activities inclusive

ICCSA Non-Discrimination Policy

It is the policy of the Iowa City Community School District not to discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, religion, creed, age, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity and socioeconomic status in its educational programs, activities, or employment practices.

ICCSA Anti-Harassment/ Bullying Policy

The Board prohibits harassment, bullying, hazing, or any other victimization, of students, school employees, applicants, vendors, visitors, and/or volunteers, based on any of the following actual or perceived traits or characteristics, including but not limited to, age, gender, color, creed, national origin, race, religion, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, veteran status, physical attributes, physical or mental ability or disability, ancestry, political party preference, political belief, socioeconomic status, or familial status.

Increase Accessibility of Harassment and Bullying Complaint Process

According to a report examining the anti-bullying policies of 13,181 school districts around the country, only 10% of districts in the country are list protections for both gender identity and sexual orientation. However, Iowa as a state has the second highest percentage of districts that have LGBT-inclusive anti-bullying policies (83%, second only to Hawaii in which 100% of their districts have LGBT-inclusive policies.⁷⁹ The ICCSD anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies both include gender identity and sexual orientations as protected classes (see sidebar).

Recent research has also provided evidence that these LGBT-inclusive policies have positive impacts on LGBT students.⁸⁰⁻⁸¹ For example, one recent study found that LGBT students who attend schools in districts with anti-harassment policies that include specific protections for gender identity and sexual orientation had higher perceptions of safety and fewer experiences of victimization.⁸²

"We need to do more about the teachers and other students who are making the LGBTQ community feel like crap."

While the District has an LGBTQ-inclusive anti-harassment policy, Task Force members recommended that the process for reporting harassment or bullying be easier for students. Current ICCSD policy encourages students who have experienced harassment or bullying to tell a teacher, counselor, principal or other District employee or to fill out a form online which is available on the ICCSD website.⁸³ Task Force members noted that many times students will not report being harassed or bullied due to the onerous nature of the complaint process. Therefore, Task Force members suggested making the process more streamlined or simpler. Task Force members also suggested making the complaint process anonymous so that students would not fear retaliation or punishment for reporting experiences of harassment or bullying.

"A streamlined process for reporting/ investigating/ following up complaints and making students and teachers aware of it."

Along these lines, in fall 2017, the ICCSD began to roll out an anonymous online platform for students to submit incidents of harassment and bullying. To report incidents, students send a text

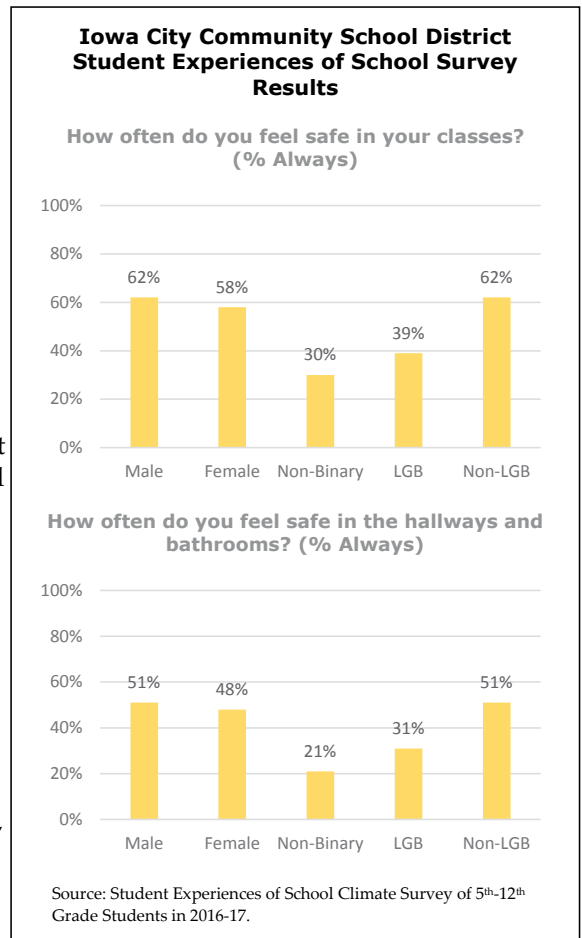
and instantly receive a link to brief form that allows them to enter information about the incident and submit an anonymous report. The report is immediately received by district administrators. While this anonymous reporting system is new, it is providing an accessible and safe avenue for students to express concerns about harassment and bullying in schools, and it is providing the District with a way to monitor, respond, and improve the school experience of students surrounding harassment and bullying incidents.

“Give students a very easy way to report concerns. Don’t make it hard to offer feedback, since the students may feel reluctant to ‘Turn someone in.’”

Gender Inclusive Restrooms

Task Force members overwhelmingly advocated for the establishment of gender inclusive bathrooms at each school in the District. They felt that this is a very important step to take, because it would let students express their identity and feel safe at school. This recommendation is also in line with the American Psychological Association and the National Association of School Psychologists that recommend “administrators create safer environments for gender diverse, transgender, and intersex/DSD students, allowing all students, staff, and teachers to have access to the sex-segregated facilities, activities, and programs that are consistent with their gender identity, including, but not limited to, bathrooms, locker rooms, sports teams, and classroom activities, and avoiding the use of gender segregation in school uniforms, school dances, and extracurricular activities, and providing gender neutral bathroom options for individuals who would prefer to use them.”⁸⁴

According to the 2017 Student Experiences of School Climate Report, 31% of LGB ICCSD students reported feeling safe in hallways and bathrooms compared to 51% of non-LGB students. Additionally, 21% of non-binary students reported feeling safe in hallways and bathrooms compared to female (51%) and male (48%) students.⁵



A consideration for the process of installing gender inclusive bathrooms is to have appropriate messaging accompanying the change. Members discussed the importance of describing the restroom as “gender inclusive,” as opposed “gender neutral.” In addition to language considerations, Task Force members wanted to ensure that non-binary students weren’t segregated, stigmatized, or exposed for using a gender inclusive restroom, by setting clear expectations that the bathrooms are meant for universal use amongst the student body. Task Force members acknowledged that the installation of gender inclusive bathrooms would particularly benefit students who are transgender, gender fluid, or gender nonconforming, by providing a safe, non-binary option aligned with the spectrum of gender identities in the student body, while demonstrating institutional support for all students.

Members described City High School as a preliminary model for other schools to adopt this practice, which created a gender inclusive bathroom in the fall of 2017. Task Force members suggested that City High incurred unnecessary expense by converting a male restroom and adding private stalls, a decision which was in contrast to the recommendation from the student senate to change signage outside a female restroom.⁸⁵ Task Force members added that converting an existing bathroom, especially a women’s room, would save costs, because stalls are already individual

and feminine hygiene disposal units would remain intact. Task Force members from City High felt that the implementation of their gender inclusive bathroom was successful because it was in a central location, which meant that many students used it and it was not perceived as “the trans kid restroom.” Task Force members considered potential cost as a barrier to implementing inclusive bathrooms at every school in the District (converting the men’s restroom at City High came with an estimated cost of \$1,516).⁸⁵ The District should consider these lessons and standardize the process for adding gender inclusive restrooms throughout the District.



Make All School Activities Inclusive

The Task Force members also talked extensively about making events, extracurricular activities, and sports more inclusive for LGBTQ students. For example, the Task Force believes the District should discontinue the separation of activities like homecoming court by gender and avoid gender-specific language in promotions for school activities for sports. This recommendation also appears in the Teaching Tolerance list of best practices for creating an LGBTQ-inclusive school climate as they note, “LGBT students and students who do not conform to gender norms can easily feel excluded from extracurricular events like proms if care is not taken to implement inclusive practices and language.”⁵⁸

“Foster inclusivity in all clubs and sports, not just GSAs (But keep supporting GSAs).”

Strengthening District Policies and Practices

One of the essential components of any effort to create safe and LGBTQ-inclusive schools and support LGBTQ students is having LGBTQ-inclusive policies and practices. To encourage districts around the country to have policies and practices supporting LGBTQ students, in 2016 the U.S. Department of Education issued a “Dear Colleague Letter” describing the civil rights protections of transgender students, and released a resource report providing examples of policies and emerging practices for supporting transgender students.^{86, 87} The National Education Association has also put together a guide that provides legal guidance on transgender students’ rights which includes recommendations regarding documentation of gender, athletic programs, access to sex-segregated facilities, harassment and bullying, and dress codes.⁸⁸

In a recent study on the experiences of LGBTQ students with school policies, researchers found that:⁸⁹

Over 40% of transgender students were prevented from using their authentic name.

- Almost 60% of transgender students had unwillingly been required to use the bathroom or locker room of their legal sex.
- Over 50% of LGBTQ students who had experienced high levels of victimization based on their sexual orientation or gender had been disciplined at school, suggesting that these students are likely being disciplined even when they are the victims of harassment or bullying.
- LGBTQ students who experienced discrimination at school were more likely to have received school discipline (detention, suspension, or expulsion) than LGBTQ students who had not experienced discrimination.

Recommendations

Task Force members discussed several changes to current District policies and practices to be more inclusive of LGBTQ students. There are two specific changes recommended by the Task Force.

- 1) Make administrative student records more LGBTQ-inclusive
- 2) Provide informational resources to LGBTQ students, parents, and educators

Inclusive Student Records

Task Force members strongly advocated for adjusting current administrative processes to be inclusive of LGBTQ student identities and experiences. One such adjustment is the use of authentic names, gender identities and pronouns in student records. It is important for student records to represent the student in an inclusive and accurate way. Schools also have obligations specified by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) to protect the privacy of their students and maintain educational records that accurately represent the student.

The Iowa City Community School District maintains a cumulative folder for all student records, and also uses an education technology platform called PowerSchool to house a variety of student-related administrative data, such as attendance and grades. Two issues were raised by the Task Force in relation to current student record keeping practices. First, Task Force members wanted to be sure that all District record keeping be in compliance with the FERPA regulations. The Task Force recommended that the District provide clear guidance to educators about how to ensure FERPA compliance with regard to LGBTQ students.

Second, currently in the PowerSchool platform, the only name and gender identities and pronouns that are visible are those reported by the students’ parents/guardians when the student was enrolled. While reliance on this initial information works for some students, it not inclusive for all students. In order to be fully inclusive, the process for making changes to PowerSchool records should be accessible and student names and pronouns should match their gender identities. Task Force members recommend that the District request that Pearson (the local company which manages the PowerSchool software for the District) add customization capabilities, so that PowerSchool records can represent authentic names and gender identities of students.

“Connect with PowerSchool tech assistance about what is possible to improve student access/ autonomy and including pronouns of reference as something for everyone – use student name field instead of legal name for teachers.”

Task Force members advocated that a student’s authentic name and pronouns should be the default name displayed for any situations (i.e. class roster, student ID card) that do not require a legal name. Task Force members specifically discussed how using the phrases ‘preferred pronouns’ or ‘preferred name’ while well-intentioned, is not fully supportive of students because it implies that a students’ gender identity is a choice. Task Force members advocated for making these changes in order to validate students’ identity, and ensure that they are represented by the appropriate gender and name. This sentiment is bolstered by research which has shown that transgender students’ mental health outcomes are comparable to their non-transgender peers when teachers use their authentic names and pronouns.³⁹

Guides and Resources for LGBTQ-Inclusive Policies and Practices

U.S. Department of Education. 2016. Examples of Policies and Emerging Practices for Supporting Transgender Students.

GLSEN Discriminatory School Policies and Practices Webinar

American Psychological Association and National Association of School Psychologists. 2014. Resolution on Gender and Sexual Orientation in Children and Adolescents in Schools.

New York City Department of Education. 2017. Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Student Guidelines.

Saint Paul Public Schools. 2015. Gender Inclusion Policy.

“Students should be able to put their names and pronouns on PowerSchool/ IDs, and teachers need to be educated and held accountable.”

“Ensure that PowerSchool, school IDs and teacher rosters give students the power to have them changed.”

Within the District, Task Force members shared that there are instances in some schools where teachers have begun to ask students for their authentic names and pronouns. Task Force members suggested normalizing the use of authentic pronouns and names by having teachers ask about them during an ice breaker at the beginning a trimester, or using other relatively simple modifications to existing teacher practices.

In addition to making PowerSchool more inclusive and supportive of students by including authentic names, gender identities and pronouns, Task Force members also recommended that family are records be made more inclusive. Currently, families that have two similar gendered parents are not able to both be listed as “mother” or “father” but instead must be referred to as “guardian.” This type of simple change in PowerSchool would make the data administration infrastructure more inclusive of diverse family structures.

“Change PowerSchool to be inclusive of all families”

In discussing potential changes to student records, Task Force members raised two concerns that should be taken into account. First, there are legal issues related to the balancing of authority and rights

between students and parents. Determining who has the authority to change and know students' authentic name and pronouns is both highly personal and sensitive, but is also a legal issue. For instance, accommodations might need to be made for a student who wants to change their name or pronouns in their student records, but also wishes to keep that information confidential from parents or guardians. The second related concern is the balance between FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act) guidelines which prohibit transgender status to be disclosed or accessible in student records, and staff or teacher access to information on PowerSchool that would disclose this information.⁹⁰

“Give students more power over what they are called, what pronouns are used. Recognize these preferences in school records.”

Both of these concerns highlight the highly personal and sensitive, but also legal issues related to student and administrative record-keeping. While the District must comply with federal and state law, the Task Force recommends that the District investigate any legal constraints or obstacles to the above mentioned recommended changes to making PowerSchool more inclusive for all students. Other districts around the country have dealt with these challenges and can provide examples. In addition to using other districts as examples, there are guides that have been assembled by reputable organizations which describe best practices in regard to these types of legal issues as well as how to work with unsupportive parents or parents who disagree about the appropriate response to their child's expressed gender identity are available (see resource sidebar on page 39).⁹¹⁻⁹⁵

Informational Resources for LGBTQ Students, Parents, and Educators

In the 2016-17 Student Experiences of School Climate survey, 2% of students reported a non-binary gender identity. While there are no national estimates of the size of the non-binary gender identified child or student population, there are local estimates based on school or county surveys that suggest estimates that range from 1% to 3%.⁹⁶

The Task Force highlighted two limitations in the District's current policies and practices in relation to LGBTQ students. First, there is a lack of information or resources on LGBTQ issues and students for educators, parents, and students. Having information readily available through multiple channels was emphasized as a relatively simple, but extremely useful way for the District to help students, parents, and educators. As one Task Force member noted,

“Including information about district policy and protocol regarding LGBT, especially transitioning students, for parents would be so helpful and appreciated.”

Second, the Task Force noted that the District currently has no institutional structure or policies for gender inclusive practices related to gender expansive or transitioning students. Having structure, policies, and guidelines for schools and educators to follow would reduce the ambiguity of the way that different issues are handled. For example, several Task Force members described the current process for students undergoing a transition as varied, depending on the students/families and District /school representatives involved. Task Force members suggested that currently, accommodating a transitioning student largely relied willingness of parents and students to be persistent and self-advocate. Task Force members were concerned that this inconsistent process disproportionately affected the most marginalized students and a more consistent and accessible process should be implemented. Specific ideas for how to create a more transparent process that could be more consistently implemented across schools would be to provide each school with a set of basic resources and guidelines to follow for different circumstances such as during a gender transition. This set of resources and guidelines could include information sheets that provides instructions for the school, parent, or student, and preferences to discuss (e.g. which people in school would be able to see student's authentic name/ pronouns). Moving forward with this suggestion, the ICCSD could look at examples from other districts around the country, and/or could use reference materials provided by organizations such as Gender Spectrum which has Gender Support Plans and resources on how to use it.^{90, 97}

Conclusion

The Task Force provided concrete, actionable recommendations for the District to support LGBTQ students and create safe and LGBTQ-inclusive schools. Each of the strategies considered by the Task Force received positive support. However, five recommendations stood out as priorities.

Recommendations

- 1) Support students and student groups by ensuring access to adult advocates in every school.
- 2) Enhance the inclusivity of class materials and discussion by updating the curriculum review process.
- 3) Improve educator knowledge and skills by offering LGBTQ-specific training.
- 4) Create supportive and inclusive school environments by establishing gender inclusive bathrooms in every school.
- 5) Strengthen district policies and practices and ensure student administrative records are LGBTQ-inclusive.

The District already has many supports and resources in place to support all students. Many of the recommendations of the Task Force are opportunities to build on existing District supports and resources. In many cases, the recommendations of the Task Force are ideas for how to activate and/or re-organize existing structures in a way that builds capacity for District efforts to support LGBTQ students and create safe and LGBTQ-inclusive schools.

District Commitment

In addition to specific recommendations for changes to current policies and practices and/or the introduction of new policies and practices, the Task Force strongly emphasized the need for an overall increase in the District's commitment to LGBTQ issues and support for LGBTQ students. Demonstrating District commitment to existing policies and inclusive practices for LGBTQ students was seen by the Task Force as essential. The theme of demonstrated commitment to equity was also prevalent in the 2016 Student Experiences Task Force, which focused on improving experiences for students of color.⁹⁸ This consistency across years suggests that District leadership should clearly support and prioritize equity-related policies and initiatives for students marginalized on any bases.

Task Force members emphasized that the District's commitment be unequivocal and visible. As one Task Force member explained,

"The school district needs to mandate and enforce the practices and recommendations as part of a comprehensive strategy / effort."

A second Task Force member similarly noted,

"The ICCSD needs to implement a formal mandate on LGBTQ+ inclusivity and make it public."

Task Force members pointed to the example of the District's recent statement of support and informational resources made available for students of undocumented and immigrant families as a potential model that could be emulated to make a strong visible message of support LGBTQ students, parents, staff, and community members and distribute information resources related to LGBTQ issues and students.

“Include a visible section on District and school websites indicating that LGBTQAI+ students/ staff/ community are welcomed and a part of the community as a group.”

Many Task Force members described the District as needing a “**mandate**” or needing to “**mandate**” current and future policies regarding LGBTQ issues and students. As one Task Force member expressed, *“We need a district-wide mandate to make all student forms, organizations, teams inclusive and visible.”* The importance of the District mandating LGBTQ inclusive policies and practices was stressed because many Task Force members described instances of current policies or practices being ambiguous or unenforced, and being seen as optional. Task Force members underlined that the District needs to make it clear that LGBTQ inclusivity is not opt-in, it is not an add-on, and it is not advocacy. Rather, they see LGBTQ inclusivity is a fundamental commitment that should be required for the District and all its educators. Task Force members thought that one good way to making this a reality would be to make public a clear statement describing in detail the District’s commitment to LGBTQ inclusivity and support.

“We need a district-wide mandate to make all student forms, organizations, teams inclusive and visible.”

Task Force members also emphasized the need for the District to use **inclusive language** that does not stigmatize LGBTQ issues or students. The importance of not stigmatizing or marginalizing LGBTQ issues or students through language is one way the District can visibly display its commitment to inclusivity.⁹⁹ Members also advised that the District avoid using deficit based and “tolerance” motivations in statements and materials related to LGBTQ issues and students. As one Task Force member said,

“While the district currently supports the LGBTQ+ community, they need to go further in enforcing that support. It is not enough to simply say the community is ‘tolerated.’”

The Task Force’s advocacy for explicit support is in line with a widespread shift in perspectives and expectations among educators that not addressing or even acknowledging LGBTQ issues or students (silence) is no longer acceptable.¹⁰⁰ This shift in perspective reflects changes in awareness of the importance of creating safe, supportive, and inclusive school environments for all students. It reflects increased understanding of the importance of inclusive curriculum and teaching practices that are affirming to all students. And, it reflects a greater appreciation for the necessity of providing specific resources and supports for students with particular needs. As Teaching Tolerance notes in its guide for school leaders on how to create an LGBTQ-inclusive school, *“Any educator, regardless of personal beliefs, can be a resource for LGBT students.”*⁵⁸

Accountability and Consistency

Although the District has LGBTQ-inclusive anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies, Task Force members shared experiences that made clear that the implementation and enforcement of these policies varied considerably across schools. Therefore, Task Force members recommend that the District work to have these new practices and policies more consistently implemented and applied. As one Task Force member described, *“The district needs to be unified and issue mandates about curriculum, student groups, and building information”* Another member also pleaded, “Create policies and present research to back up the decision. Do not leave this to buildings or individuals to implement.” The importance of consistency was raised in relation to all aspects of creating a safe and inclusive school environment and supporting LGBTQ students.

“The district needs to be unified and issue mandates about curriculum, student groups, and building information” Another member also pleaded, “Create policies and present research to back up the decision. Do not leave this to buildings or individuals to implement.”

Accountability and consistency were common themes in the 2016 Student Experiences Task Force, as is shown in this excerpt from the report: ***“Task force members also spoke about accountability during implementation, which included consistency across trainings and districtwide administration (including leadership). Task force members described the need for a clear, ongoing evaluation plan with specific measures.”***⁹⁸ As the District moves forward with trainings, changes to policies, or new programming, Task Force stakeholders insist on tracking progress of programs and the people responsible for implementing them.

Similarly, the issue of accountability was raised in regard to all the strategies for creating a safe and inclusive school environment and supporting LGBTQ students. Task Force members discussed the importance of holding both educators and students accountable for being supportive and inclusive. As one member described, ***“Policy isn’t effective unless it is consistently implemented and students, staff, teachers, SFAs, paras, administration are all held accountable.”*** Another member also highlighted the importance of evaluating implementation of any changes to practice or policy. ***“Develop specific LGBTQ policy and ways to implement visibility and adherence to policy with ways to evaluate implementation.”*** Another noted the importance of this specifically for health curriculum. ***“There needs to be a concrete accountability process for teachers implanting inclusive curricula – especially health/ personal development class.”*** One specific suggestion Task Force members described for creating accountability around implementing changes was to conduct routine ‘temperature checks’ as a way to solicit feedback from students. They felt that tracking this feedback would help with consistency and accountability of proposed changes.

“Policy isn’t effective unless it is consistently implemented and students, staff, teachers, SFAs, paras, administration are all held accountable.”

“Develop specific LGBTQ policy and ways to implement visibility and adherence to policy with ways to evaluate implementation.”

“There needs to be a concrete accountability process for teachers implanting inclusive curricula – especially health/ personal development class.”

Keep the Process Inclusive

Task Force members appreciated being given an opportunity to share their experiences, perspectives, and knowledge, and be included in the decision-making process of the District. They believed that the District will be able to make more inclusively-informed decisions regarding LGBTQ issues and students because the process was deliberative and included diverse stakeholder voices. Moving forward, Task Force members hoped that the District will continue to seek out the perspectives and knowledge of diverse stakeholders.

Members of the Task Force also emphasized the importance of having LGBTQ students involved in the process, and encouraged the District to include LGBTQ students in future decision-making processes. In terms of school-based decisions, Task Force members suggested that students of diverse identities be intentionally included in student senate. In terms of district-wide decisions,

members suggested that students could be advisory members of committees related to curriculum development or discipline.

The recommendation to include stakeholders at all levels in decision making echoes the recommendation from the 2016 Student Experiences Task Force, which stated, *“Members advised that any future District initiatives should incorporate input from a variety of stakeholders. Representative and shared decision making increases ownership, diminishes resistance, and can guide strategic direction by identifying potentially advantageous or unfavorable options which leadership alone might overlook.”*⁹⁸ To be most effective, the District should assess decision-making processes to ensure that diverse voices are considered while developing equity policies and programs.

Next Steps

The Equity Implemented Partnership has followed a successful community partnership model, working collaboratively to identify and address systematic issues in educational settings in ways that are beneficial, impactful, and sustainable for the District. From the existing survey and administrative data in the District, we have identified systematic and patterned disparities for LGBTQ students and provided research-based strategies for the Task Force and District to consider. Receiving the feedback and recommendation of the Task Force now represent a clear imperative for the District to act.

The ICCSD is well-positioned to take meaningful, concrete action to work toward achieving their goal “that all students can achieve at high levels and that equitable classrooms are essential to their success.”

“By assembling this Task Force, the district is showing a commitment to working on the problems revealed in the climate survey. Now the district needs to follow through with the recommendations.”

We urge the District to identify which of the recommendations provided by the Task Force can be implemented now, and use this Task Force report as a guiding document for future decisions related to LGBTQ issues and students.

We also urge the District to support evaluations of the current LGBTQ-related policies and practices, as well as any changes or new programs or practices. To do this, we recommend that the District continue conduct the Student Experiences of School Climate survey annually, along with additional forms of data collection to inform the District in making data and evidence-based decisions to further their mission and goals regarding educational equity. Using evidence-based strategies and evaluating their success in the ICCSD is crucial for achieving long-term success in creating safer and more inclusive school environments and supporting all students so that they can thrive.

Appendices

Appendix A: Task Force Email Invite

Good Afternoon,

The analysis of the 2017 Iowa City Community School District Student Experiences of School Climate Report revealed a consistent pattern of disparities in student experiences for non-binary gender and LGB students. In July 2017, the Board agreed with the Report's recommendation to convene a community stakeholder Task Force focused on LGBTQ student experiences to make recommendations based on the report findings. This Task Force will include administrators, teachers, staff, students, parents, and community members.

Task Force meetings will take place on Wednesdays from 5:30pm-7:30pm. The first meeting will be announced to participants selected for the Task Force by September 11, 2017. Members of the committee need to make a commitment to be at all the meetings in order to efficiently and effectively meet our November deadline to the School Board. Below is a link to apply to become a part of the committee. Applications are due by **Wednesday, September 6, 2017 at 5:00pm.**

Please forward this information to anyone who might be interested in participating and apply at the following link (paper applications are available upon request): https://uiowa.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_5AbrtMOJ1SMTNPL.

Thank you for your consideration and your time in this effort! Please send any questions to the contact information below.

Kingsley Botchway
Director of Equity and Engagement
Iowa City Community School District
(319) 688-1000

Botchway.kingsley@iowacityschools.org

LGBTQ Student Experiences Task Force

The Iowa City Community School District and University of Iowa Public Policy Center are seeking community members, parents, and students to convene a task force.

The task force will discuss policy and programming recommendations regarding the experiences of LGBTQ students in ICCSD schools.

**Wednesday Nights
Coralville Public Library
5:30 to 7:30 PM**

**September 20
September 27
October 18
October 25**



If you are interested in applying, or would like to know more information, e-mail Kingsley Botchway at

Botchway.Kingsley@iowacityschools.org

by September 6 at 5:00PM



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COMMUNITY
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THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA
Public Policy Center
Social & Education Policy Research Program

LGBTQ Task Force
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LGBTQ Task Force
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Appendix C: Application Survey

10/3/2017

Qualtrics Survey Software

Default Question Block

You have expressed interest in participating as a member of the Iowa City Community School District's LGBTQ Student Experiences task force. This short survey serves as the application process for membership on the task force.

The deadline for submitting this application is **September 6, 2017 at 5:00 PM**. Applications submitted after this date will not be considered. As we complete the selection process, you will be contacted when decisions are made.

This project is part of a collaboration between the Iowa City Community School District's Equity Department, and the University of Iowa Public Policy Center. For more information about the project, you can find reports and updates [here](#)

Meetings for the task force will be held at Coralville Public Library on Wednesday nights from **5:30 to 7:30 PM** on

September 20

September 27

October 18

October 25

Are you comfortable committing to meeting during these dates and times?

- Yes, I can be counted on to attend meetings regularly
- No, my schedule will interfere with regular meeting attendance
- I am unable to participate in the task force, but would like to share input
- My schedule for these dates is uncertain

Please share any feedback or input you have about LGBTQ student experiences in the Iowa City Community School District

<https://uiowa.qualtrics.com/ControlPanel/Ajax.php?action=GetSurveyPrintPreview>

1/5

Are you affiliated with the Iowa City Community School District (ICCSA)? If so, in what way?

- Currently enrolled as a student in the ICCSD
- Former student at the ICCSD, year of graduation or transfer
- A member of your family is a student at the ICCSD, please indicate your relationship with the student (parent, grandparent, sister, uncle, etc.)
- Employed by the ICCSD, please describe your position
- Community Member within ICCSD, no direct connections to the school district
- Other, please describe

What makes you a good candidate for participating in the task force?

For example, what are your thoughts on the current policies and practices at the school district? How do these policies impact LGBTQ students? What experience do you have working with LGBTQ groups? What experience do you have working on equity and diversity issues?

Please do not exceed 250 words

Demographics

The next set of questions will ask you about your identity. Part of the goal with the task force is ensuring that the members offer diverse or underrepresented perspectives. Please feel free to skip any questions you do not want to answer.

What is your race? Select all that apply

- African American or Black
- American Indian or Alaska Native or Indigenous
- Arab or Middle Eastern
- Asian or Asian American
- Hispanic or Latina or Latino
- Multiracial or Biracial
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- White or Caucasian or European American
- Prefer not to answer
- Other racial identity

Please indicate the **highest level** of education you have completed

- Less than a high school diploma (includes currently enrolled)
- High School diploma
- Associate's degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Doctorate degree (PhD, JD, MD)
- Prefer not to answer

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Transgender Male
- Transgender Female
- Genderqueer/Gender-Nonconforming

- Different Gender Identity
- Prefer Not to Answer

What is your sexual orientation?

- Gay
- Lesbian
- Bisexual
- Pansexual
- Asexual
- Heterosexual
- Different Sexual Orientation
- Prefer Not to Answer

We will need to contact you after the selection process, what is the best way to reach you?

- First and Last Name
- Primary Phone
- E-mail
- Mailing address

Powered by Qualtrics

Appendix D: LGBTQ Task Force Member Affiliations

Gender Sexuality Alliances in the secondary schools (City High GLOW, West High COLORS)

Rape Victim Advocacy Program

ICCSA Student government representatives

University of Iowa departments (School of Social Work, Office of Diversity, College of Education, Baker Teacher Leader Center)

Local church groups (Zion Lutheran Church, Sanctuary Community Church, Young Life, and Unitarian Universalist Society)

Safe Zone Trainers

Sexual Health Alliance of Eastern Iowa

Studio 13

University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics

Iowa City Bruisers roller derby club

Grant Wood Area Education Agency (GWAEA)

Johnson County Coalition for Consent Culture

University of Iowa student groups (Trans Alliance, OSTEM, Spectrum)

Girl Scouts

Parent-Teacher Organizations

Iowa Tech Chicks

ICCSA Equity Board

Dreamwell Theater

United Action for Youth

American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors and Therapists (AASECT)

Endnotes and References

- 1) Students who selected any of the following gender options were grouped into a Non-binary gender group: Transgender male, Transgender female, Gender queer/ Gender-nonconforming, or Different identity (2% of the student body). Students identified their sexual orientation by responding to this question, “Do you identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, or asexual?” The response choices were yes, no, and prefer not to answer. Students who selected “yes” make up the LGB student group (8% of the student body).
- 2) The 2016-17 Student Experiences of School Climate survey was the first year that included self-identification of sexual orientation and non-binary gender identity response categories. The inclusion of these items was motivated by several factors including: alignment with the District Equity, Anti-Discrimination, and Anti-Harassment/Bullying Policies which all list sexual orientation and gender identity as protected classes; and a substantial research base of evidence from around the country that LGBTQ students have disparate experiences in schools, and that this negatively affects their academic, social, mental, and emotional outcomes (Olson et al. 2016; Lowry et al. 2017).
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