

gender identity.³⁴

Nonbinary: An adjective describing a person who does not identify exclusively as a male or female. Nonbinary people may identify as being both a female and a male, somewhere in between, or as falling completely outside these categories. While many also identify as transgender, not all nonbinary people do. Nonbinary can also be used as an umbrella term encompassing identities such as agender, bigender, genderqueer, or gender fluid.³⁵ In New York State, state agencies provide an option for individuals to mark their gender or sex as a nonbinary “X.”

Queer: A term used to express a spectrum of identities and orientations. Queer is often used as a catch-all to include many people, including those who do not identify as exclusively straight and/or people who have nonbinary or gender-expansive identities. This term was previously used as a slur but has been reclaimed by many in the LGBTQ movement.³⁶

Sexual orientation: An emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction to other people. Note: An individual's sexual orientation is independent of their gender identity.³⁷

Transgender (umbrella term): An inclusive term for people whose gender identity is different from the sex they were assigned at birth. This term encompasses people who identify with the gender binary, such as transgender women and transgender men, as well as people who are gender-expansive and non-binary. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation. Therefore, transgender people may identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, etc. For more information, see the section “Understanding Gender Identity.”

Transgender (person): A transgender person is an individual who has a gender identity different from the sex assigned to that individual at birth. For example, someone who was assigned male at birth and grew up to be a female, might describe herself as transgender, a transgender female, or a female. Someone who was assigned female at birth and grew up to be a male, might describe himself as transgender, a transgender male, or a male.³⁸ Sometimes this is shortened to “trans.” For more information, see the section “Understanding Gender Identity.”

Transitioning: A series of processes that some transgender people may undergo in order to live more fully as their true gender. An umbrella term that includes social transition, such as changing name and pronouns; medical transition, which may include hormone therapy or gender affirming surgeries; and legal transition, which may include changing legal name and sex on government identity documents. Transgender people may choose to undergo some, all, or none of these processes.³⁹ For more information, see the section “Understanding Gender Identity.”



Understanding School Climate, Transgender and Gender Expansive Students

Schools are not only places of learning, but also “miniature societies,” the climate of which directly affects how well students learn and how well they interact with their peers.⁴⁰ Since school is where students spend the majority of their time, their experiences in school have a critical impact on their overall health and well-being.⁴¹ Although teachers and administrators work hard to make their classrooms welcoming places where every student feels recognized and included, quite often TGE students continue to face hostility and physical violence while at school.⁴²

56%

OF LGBTQ STUDENTS SURVEYED
REPORTED
HARASSMENT
BASED ON THEIR
GENDER
EXPRESSION.

In a 2019 national survey, most LGBTQ students in New York reported having had experienced anti-LGBTQ victimization at school. 56% of students surveyed reported harassment based on their gender expression and more than half of the LGBTQ students surveyed reported having had experienced at least one form of anti-LGBTQ discrimination at school during the prior school year.⁴³ These high rates of bullying, whether based on the actions of peers, teachers and administrators, or an overall hostile school climate, correspond to adverse health and educational consequences for TGE students.⁴⁴ A large body of research provides evidence that the ongoing stigma, stress, and systemic discrimination—which is being experienced by the majority of LGBTQ students in schools—undermines their sense of safety and has lifelong detrimental psychological, social, medical, and epigenetic effects.^{45,46}

Studies have shown that LGBTQ youth experience much higher rates of depression, anxiety, alcohol and drug use, and lower self-esteem as compared to their non-LGBTQ peers.^{47,48} In addition, LGBTQ students who experienced victimization due to their sexual orientation and gender expression achieved lower grade point averages than students who were less often harassed, were nearly three times as likely to have missed school in the past month, and reported a decreased sense of school belonging.⁴⁹

The mental health disparities evidenced in the data are explained by the Minority Stress Model, which suggests that LGBTQ youth are not inherently prone to negative health outcomes but are placed at higher risk because of LGBTQ-based victimization. The internalization of these experiences and anti-LGBTQ messages can produce and exacerbate negative mental health outcomes. LGBTQ youth who hold additional marginalized identities based on race, ethnicity, and/or ability face further victimization that compounds discrimination based upon their sexual orientation or gender identity.⁵⁰

Adverse Consequences for TGE Students who Experience Harassment, Assault, and/or Unjust Treatment at School

- Adverse Educational Consequences
 - Lower GPAs
 - Increased truancy
 - Increased likelihood of dropping out
 - Decreased likelihood of attending post-secondary education
- Adverse Social Consequences
 - Avoiding school functions
 - Feeling unwelcome and disconnected from others
 - Lower self-esteem
 - Increased risk of contact with the juvenile justice system
- Adverse Health Consequences
 - Higher rates of anxiety
 - Higher rates of depression
 - Higher rates of alcohol and drug use



A LOT OF TEACHERS DON'T SHUT DOWN NEGATIVE OR TRANSPHOBIC CONVERSATIONS.

SOME TEACHERS ENABLE THE TRANSPHOBIA.

TEACHERS DON'T SAY MUCH OF ANYTHING WHEN "LITTLE" MICROAGGRESSIONS HAPPEN.

TAKING A NEUTRAL GROUND IS NOT INHERENTLY A GOOD THING.

NYS Student

Disparities in the application of school discipline policies to LGBTQ students are also well documented. Emerging data shows that LGBTQ students experience disproportionate disciplinary consequences, both exclusionary and non-exclusionary, as compared to their heterosexual and/or cisgender peers. For example, studies show that LGBTQ students are often disciplined for public displays of affection that do not result in similar action against non-LGBTQ students.⁵¹ According to a national report by the Government Accountability Office, LGBTQ students are also disproportionately affected by school dress codes targeting clothing, hair styles, and head coverings.⁵²

It has also been reported that when students try to protect themselves from LGBTQ bullying, teachers seldom intervene, and when they do, it is often the LGBTQ students who are punished and blamed for their own victimization.⁵³ The 2021 GLSEN National Survey noted that teachers/staff usage of anti-LGBTQ remarks has increased since 2019 and that they appeared less supportive and less likely to intervene when anti-LGBTQ remarks were made by others.⁵⁴

It is important to note that the disparate use of exclusionary discipline practices has been associated with a variety of negative outcomes including, but not limited to, decreased academic achievement, increased truancy, increased dropout rates, and increased risk of contact with the juvenile justice system.^{55,56}

According to a 2022 national survey, nearly 1 in 5 transgender and nonbinary youth attempted suicide last year and more than half seriously considered attempting to do so, with rates being even higher for youth of color when compared to their white peers. However, schools can play an important role in student wellbeing by creating a supportive school culture that establishes school as a safe space for all students.



LGBTQ youth who found their school environment to be LGBTQ affirming reported lower rates of attempted suicide.⁵⁷ LGBTQ youth who reported having at least one accepting adult in their lives were 40% less likely to attempt suicide.⁵⁸ Accepting and safe school environments and supportive adults in the school community can make a real difference in a student's wellbeing.

There are several supports schools should implement to improve the lives and academic futures of LGBTQ students. Based on the 2021 GLSEN National School Climate Survey, students expressed strong desire for the following resources and supports to provide a safer and more affirming school environment:

- school personnel that provide safe and affirming relationships and environments;
- staff that respond effectively and consistently to anti-LGBTQ behaviors;
- supportive school administration;
- inclusive and supportive school policies and practices;
- policies to address bullying, harassment, and assault;
- policies that specifically address TGE students;
- student-centered supportive clubs such as Gender-Sexuality Alliances/Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs), Queer Straight Alliances, Gender and Sexuality Networks;
- access to LGBTQ instruction and inclusive curricula and materials; and
- visible displays of support (Safe Space stickers, Pride flags, posters).

