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LGBTQ+ AFFIRMING EDUCATORS, STUDENTS, FAMILIES, & COMMUNITIES

TOOLKIT

OUT ®FOR

SAFE SCHOOLS X SPACES
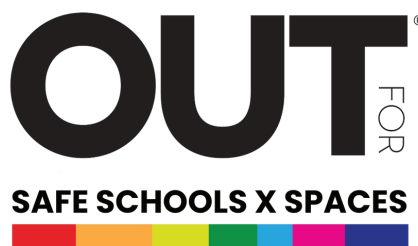
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Introduction

This past Pride season, the LGBTQ+ movement reached an inflection point. With terror threats targeting Parades, more than 500 pieces of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation on the books throughout the country, and hate-related violence on the rise, it's become clear that we need safe and affirming spaces more than ever. We've grown accustomed to the refrain "Love Wins," but now, it seems that there's a new battlefield ahead of us.

Across the country, networks of extremists are painting the LGBTQ+ community as threats to the family, or unfit for children. Examples of them have showing up at school board meetings and Drag Queen Story Hours, inciting hatred and, in some cases, fomenting violence have become all too common. Their aim is to create a culture of fear among our people—and particularly, young people.

Meanwhile, LGBTQ+ people continue to defy these attempts to silence the community and instead uplift LGBTQ+ youth and families. The kaleidoscopic lens of visibility is both a celebration and an urgent call to action. It's an opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to inclusivity, equality, and the unwavering support of every individual's right to live authentically and without fear.

However, we also acknowledge that not everyone has the safety and security to be visible in an era marked by escalating anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric and legislative attacks from the far-right. This tactic of politicizing public schools at the expense of LGBTQ+ student safety is one that the far-right is weaponizing to infiltrate school districts all over the U.S

We continue this fight to protect LGBTQ+ youth in memory of youth like Nex Benedict and Ethan Henderson. We hope you will join us.

What is out for safe schools®?

OUT for Safe Schools® works alongside K-12 school districts across the country by supporting the implementation of inclusive policies & best practices, mobilizing visible adult allies, and more to build school campuses where LGBTQ+ youth are safe & affirmed.

OUT for Safe Schools® is a national program mobilizing visible allies of LGBTQ+ students by equipping local education agencies with the tools to create schools that are safe, welcoming, and affirming to all students. Beginning in 2013, OUT for Safe Schools® grew out of a collaboration between the Los Angeles Unified School District and the Los Angeles LGBT Center and has since expanded to dozens of school districts, charter organizations, and educational agencies across the country.

In response to the catastrophic wave of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation being proposed and passed throughout the United States—much of it aimed at schools and students, especially transgender and nonbinary youth—OUT for Safe Schools® has created the following toolkit to support allies and accomplices advocating for the needs of LGBTQ+ students. Building on over a decade of working directly with school districts, we've compiled the following best practices, resources, and more to help you understand the issue areas, as well as how to best support students and families in your district. We've also included a summary of the types of legislation that are targeting our communities, as well as positive models of legislation that protects the rights of LGBTQ+ youth.

42
DISTRICTS

300,000+
BADGES

5+ MILLION
K-12 STUDENTS

Current Educational Climate

"You do not have to be me in order for us to fight alongside each other. I do not have to be you to recognize that our wars are the same." —Audre Lorde

As of the publication of this toolkit, major civil rights and pro-LGBTQ+ groups are tracking hundreds of anti-LGBTQ+ laws and policies across the United States. Too many of these anti-LGBTQ+ bills have been passed into law. While many of these laws are being challenged in courts, the impact on students is immediately felt, through decreased access to affirming education, athletics, limits on gender-affirming care, and through the negative societal messaging targeting LGBTQ+ students, teachers, and families. The Williams Institute at UCLA reports more than 90% of transgender youth live in states that have proposed or passed laws restricting their rights.

Enacting state-level anti-transgender laws increased incidents of past-year suicide attempts among TGNB young people by up to 72%.

Policy Trends

There are nearly 200 *active* anti-LGBTQ+ bills being tracked

The anti-LGBTQ+ sentiments you might hear in an educational setting are part of a larger wave of backlash to the advancement of LGBTQ+ rights. Below, are many of the types of laws that have come with this backlash.

1 Classroom Instruction

"DON'T SAY GAY," CURRICULUM CENSORSHIP, & BOOK BANS

Legislation in various states restricts classroom instruction on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression (SOGIE), initially targeting students from kindergarten through third grade, but in some cases extending these restrictions up to 12th grade. Additionally, some districts have implemented policies banning the display of Pride flags or other LGBTQ+-affirming symbols in classrooms. As part of broader curriculum censorship efforts, laws and policies also limit school content including bans on LGBTQ+ literature and topics like critical race theory. The growing trend of book bans targets LGBTQ+ books, further restricting educators' ability to offer a diverse and comprehensive education while limiting students' access to diverse history, knowledge, and perspectives.

2 Facilities Access

SCHOOL FACILITIES BANS

School facilities bans refer to policies or laws that restrict or prohibit students from accessing certain school facilities, such as bathrooms, or locker rooms based on their gender identity or sexual orientation. These bans often prevent transgender students from using facilities that align with their gender identity, requiring them to use facilities that correspond with their sex assigned at birth . Such measures can create a discriminatory, exclusionary, and even a hostile environment for LGBTQ+ students, impacting their safety, well-being, and ability to participate fully in school life.

Policy Trends, cont.

3 Identity Privacy

FORCED OUTING

Forced outing policies and laws require schools to disclose a student's sexual orientation or gender identity to their parents or guardians without the student's consent. Such legislation can put LGBTQ+ students at risk, especially if they are not in an affirming home environment, potentially leading to negative consequences such as emotional distress, family rejection, or even abuse and homelessness. Forced outing violates the privacy and autonomy of LGBTQ+ individuals.

4 Access to Medical Care

HEALTHCARE BANS

Healthcare bans limit trans youth's access to medically-supervised gender-affirming care, like puberty blockers, hormone therapy, or surgery, until they reach a certain age, often 18+. These limitations can hinder their ability to transition, leading to negative mental health, suicide attempts, and increased gender dysphoria. Access to such care is crucial for trans youth's well-being, and decisions should only involve medical professionals, the individual, and their support system, rather than being dictated by discriminatory legal restrictions. Schools frequently serve as the initial point of contact for youth and their families seeking assistance from social workers or psychologists who can guide them towards referrals for gender-affirming healthcare and mental health services.

Over 100 executive orders are anticipated this year

"The next four years will be consequential for the LGBTQ+ community, particularly those already facing the compounded impacts of racism, transphobia, xenophobia, and economic injustice."

- Joe Hollendoner, CEO of the Los Angeles LGBT Center

Policy Trends, cont.

3 Legal Definitions

REDEFINING THE TERM "SEX"

Redefinition of sex laws involve changing how "sex" or "gender" is defined in legal contexts, often by limiting it to biological characteristics and excluding gender identity. This can impact the recognition of transgender and non-binary identities, affecting folks' access to gender-affirming care, facilities, and participation in various activities. This legislation aims to effectively eliminate the acknowledgement of transgender and non-binary individuals' existence while stripping them of their rights.

4 Athletics

SCHOOL SPORTS BANS

School sports bans are policies or laws that restrict or prevent LGBTQ+ students, particularly transgender youth, from participating in school sports teams that align with their gender identity. These bans often require transgender students to compete on teams corresponding to their sex assigned at birth. Such policies can limit the inclusion and participation of transgender and non-binary students in school athletics, potentially leading to discrimination and exclusion within the broader school community.

5 Public Facilities

PUBLIC ACCOMODATIONS BANS

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and similar laws prohibit discrimination in public accommodations based on characteristics like race, disability, & nationality, and often include protections for SOGIE. These bans would allow public facilities to deny access to LGBTQ+ individuals, which would be a form of legal discrimination. Given the significant number of unhoused transgender youth and those who have survived domestic violence, a reduction in available safe spaces will likely lead to increased harm to these individuals.

Evidence-Based Research on Disparities & Protective Factors

"Neither love nor terror makes one blind: indifference makes one blind." - James Baldwin

It's important to understand that adverse mental health disparities and increased risk for negative outcomes among LGBTQ+ youth result from mistreatment, bullying, negative biases, and stigma, rather than being inherent to LGBTQ+ youth themselves. When youth hold multiple historically excluded or marginalized identities, their risks are compounded.

School Experience

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) reports that 68% of LGBTQ students reported feeling unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

LGBTQ+ Families

GLSEN reports that over two thirds of students (70.4%) — reported being verbally harassed at school at some point because of having an LGBTQ+ parent.

Harassment & Violence

The Trevor Project reports that LGBTQ+ young people who reported attending a school with at least one anti-LGBTQ+ policy reported higher rates of verbal harassment, being physically attacked, and leaving school due to mistreatment.

Fear of Outing

The Journal of Research on Adolescence reports that 44% of LGBTQ youth say they have not reported harassment to an adult at school out of fear their parents would learn their identity.

Disparities, cont.

LGBQ Mental Health

A 2021 Youth Risk Behavior Survey by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention details 69% of LGBQ+ youth reported feeling persistently sad and hopeless, and 22% of LGBQ+ students attempted suicide.

TGNC Mental Health

A 2020 Journal of Adolescent Health study finds transgender and nonbinary youth face a higher risk of depression, suicidal thoughts, and suicide attempts compared to cisgender LGBTQ+ youth.

LGBTQ+ BIPOC

According to GLSEN's 2020 report, the Experiences of LGBTQ Students of Color, over 40% of Native and Indigenous LGBTQ students face harassment targeting both their sexual orientation and racial/ethnic identities., 40-50% of AAPI LGBTQ students often feel unsafe due to their actual or perceived sexual orientation and/or their gender expression, and nearly 42% of Latinx LGBTQ+ students faced harassment or assault at school due to both their sexual orientation and race/ethnicity.

Family Relationships

The Human Rights Campaign Foundation reports that 48% of LGBTQ youth who were out to their parents say that their families make them feel bad for being LGBTQ, and 67% of LGBTQ youth hear their families make negative comments about LGBTQ people. Meanwhile, a study by the Williams Institute and True Colors Fund found that the most prevalent factor contributing to LGBTQ youth homelessness was being forced out of the home or running away from the home because of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression.

Protective Factors

01. Affinity Spaces at School

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported in 2023 that school programs promoting safe, supportive, and inclusive environments, such as GSAs, multicultural groups, and staff inclusivity training, can significantly enhance school connectedness for all students, including LGBTQ+ students.

02. Adult Support at School

The National Library of Medicine reported in 2022 that when LGBTQ+ youth perceive higher levels of adult support at school—such as social workers, teachers, and administrators—they experience fewer negative outcomes, including reduced victimization, school avoidance, & substance use.

03. Affirming Spaces

The Trevor Project's 2024 National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ Young People reports LGBTQ+ young people who had access to LGBTQ+-affirming spaces, and transgender and nonbinary youth who had access to gender-affirming spaces, reported lower rates of attempting suicide compared to those who did not.

04. Familial Support

The Family Acceptance Project reports that LGBTQ young adults with high levels of family support are half as likely to report suicidal thoughts and nearly half as likely to report suicide attempts. Talking with transgender, nonbinary, and gender questioning youth respectfully about their LGBTQ identity was associated with just over 40% lower odds of attempting suicide in the past year.

Protective Factors, contd.

05. Social Support & Connections

In The Trevor Project's 2024 Survey, they found access to an affirming school, workplace, home, online community, worship community, or community events was associated with higher rates of ID'ing an older LGBTQ+ adult role model.

06. Role Models

In addition, Trevor Project's research found that access to an LGBTQ+ adult role model is associated with higher levels of self-reported life purpose among LGBTQ+ youth which is in turn associated with lower rates of considering suicide, attempting suicide, and self-harm in the past year.

07. Law & Policy Implementation

Research from the 2022 journal on Drug and Alcohol Dependence indicates that LGBTQ youth in states with nondiscrimination protections are significantly less likely to experience bullying than those in states without and, according to the National Library of Medicine, protections have also been associated with lower levels of drug use.

08. Inclusive Curricula & Instruction

LGBTQ+ youth in environments with inclusive curricula reported hearing fewer slurs, lower levels of victimization, felt safer, missed fewer days of school, and had a higher GPA in comparison to students whose schools did not, according to GLSEN's 2020 School Climate Survey. And, the Journal of LGBT Youth reported in 2022 that inclusive sex ed helps prevent IPV, fosters the formation of healthy intimate relationships, helps prevent child sex abuse, improves social and emotional learning, and improves media literacy.

What can I do as an educator?
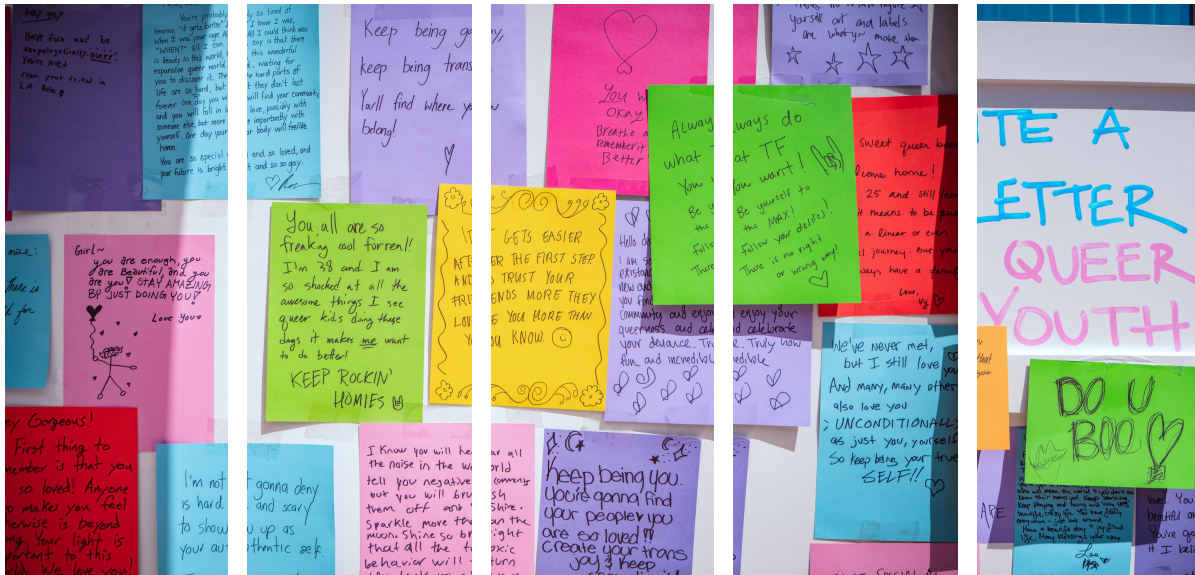
Many educators are motivated by a desire to positively impact students' lives, nurture a love of learning, and contribute to their community. In their roles, educational professionals witness firsthand the educational inequities present in our current system.

Teachers and school staff/faculty may feel unprepared or overwhelmed when confronted with anti-LGBTQ+ policies and conflicts on their campuses. This section is designed for education professionals who are committed to affirming LGBTQ+ students and seek guidance on how to best support and uplift them.

"My silences had not protected me. Your silence will not protect you."

– Audre Lorde

What can I do as an educator?, cont.

Creating Affirming Spaces

- Emphasize respect for all students and create an inclusive learning space with positive classroom décor. If your school policies state you cannot display visible allyship for LGBTQ+ students such as flags, then consider decorating with messages like "All Are Welcome in This Classroom" and "Be Yourself."

- Address anti-LGBTQ+ remarks, both collectively and individually. If the language was directed at a student, then directly speak to them at a time you feel appropriate. For more information, refer to "Speak Up at School" by Learning for Justice in Resource List ahead.

- Establish spaces where students can recharge and seek support, and encourage breaks for refreshing. This can look like a midday "brain break" and incorporating lessons that teach students self-awareness, mindfulness, and empathy.

- If you can, foster a specific space for LGBTQ+ students and allies that can serve as an community for them beyond the school's walls. This could look like advising affinity clubs, hosting meetings, and promoting supportive events and resources available after school hours/off campus, like businesses, community spaces, or online.

- Encourage students to use their personal spaces like a locker or backpack as a way to celebrate their unique identities! If flags and other distinctly LGBTQ+ elements are banned, then decorations could consist of motivational stickers with phrases such as, "You Are Enough," or posters that express their interests.

What can I do as an educator?, cont.

Teaching Inclusive Lessons

- According to the 2021 GLSEN National School Climate Survey, only 16.3% of LGBTQ+ students were taught positive representations about LGBTQ+ people, history, or events in their schools; 14.4% had been taught negative content about LGBTQ+ topics.

- Some states (California, Colorado, Illinois, Nevada, New Jersey, Oregon, and Washington) require K-12 public schools to integrate age appropriate, factual information about the roles and positive contributions of LGBTQ+ people into their social studies and history classes. OUT for Safe Schools® provides lesson plans created in partnership with the UCLA History Geography Project and ONE Institute that include vintage photos and archived media reports to showcase a spectrum of topics, events, and individuals considered to be vital parts of LGBTQ+ history.

- If you are in a state with restrictive laws and policies, you can introduce SOGIE diversity in the classroom across subjects by incorporating historical figures who are LGBTQ+ without emphasizing their identity. This exercise will normalize these figures in the classroom while still following any administrative policies. Encourage students to go to the library and seek education outside of the classroom.

- As you design lesson plans, classroom structure, and more, use inclusive language in all communications such as assignments, student groupings and group assignments, messages sent home, and events. This can be accomplished in any subject area from health sciences and math, to social sciences and literature. All classrooms can be inclusive ones.

What can I do as an educator? cont.

Providing Resources and Support

- Gently correct misinformation. Many youth, families, community members, and our peers in the education setting maintain negative biases about LGBTQ+ people because they have learned inaccurate information, stereotypes, or make assumptions about the community. See the section on Responding to Anti-LGBTQ+ Rhetoric & Misinformation for more tips and tricks.

- Affirming mental health care radically lowers rates of depression, suicidal thoughts, and suicide attempts among *all* youth. Provide referrals to confidential, culturally-responsive resources that students and families can access in different languages, through different modalities (e.g., apps, in-person, etc.), and available 24/7. Browse the RISE Warm Handoff & Referral Toolkit for best practices when referring a youth.

- Offer opportunities for parents or caregivers of LGBTQ+ and gender-expansive students to connect, linking them with providers who can provide services in their community as well as build a network of support.

- Share the following section, "What Students Can Do," with your students

Where can I find more resources for educators?

American Civil Liberties Union - National nonprofit organization defending and preserving individual rights.

CenterLink LGBT Community Center Directory - Directory of LGBTQ+ centers across the country.

Educator Amplifier - Offers free downloadable artwork and LGBTQ+ educational content.

The Family Acceptance Project's Educator Q&A – Guides educators and school providers to provide help and support for parents and caregivers of LGBTQ+ students.

Facing History & Ourselves - Equipping schools, districts, and teachers with the tools they need to shape the future by nurturing empathy, curiosity, and civic responsibility in young people.

Gender Spectrum's Gender Inclusive Schools - Materials, tools and resources to create a more gender inclusive school.

GLSEN's 2024 National School Climate Survey - Extensive, annual report focused on the experiences of LGBTQ+ youth in schools.

GSA Network – LGBTQ+ racial and gender justice organization that empowers and trains queer, trans and allied youth leaders to advocate, organize, and mobilize an intersectional movement for safer schools and healthier communities.

Lambda Legal - Civil rights organization that focuses on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities, as well as people living with HIV and AIDS.

Learning for Justice (Formerly Teaching Tolerance) – Community education program of the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) that cultivates and nurtures dialogue, learning, reflection, and action from those closest to and harmed most by injustices.

National Education Association (NEA) - Resources designed to provide educators with LGBTQ+ information, tools, and resources.

One Institute's (formerly ONE Archives Foundation) Professional Development Programs - Empowering educators to diversify their curricula and create an affirming learning environment.

Trevor Project: 2024 National Survey on LGBTQ+ Student Mental Health - Research related to LGBTQ+ youth mental health and suicide prevention.
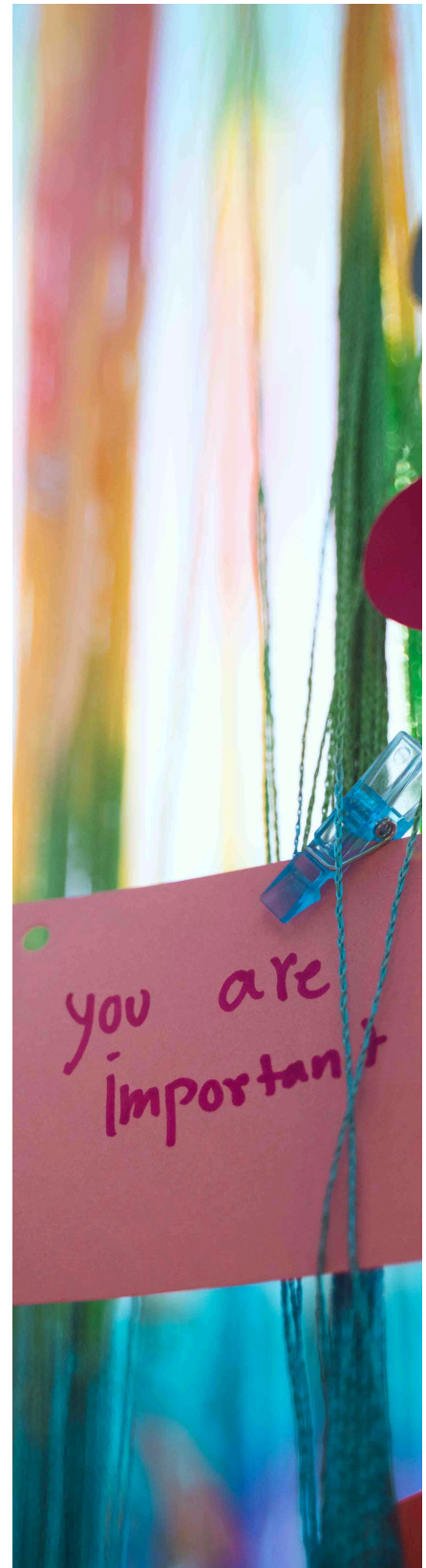
What can I do as a student?

Being a youth and a student come with enough challenges and priorities. We recognize that also having your identities and experiences politicized in and out of school can be a lot to carry. Many youth do not attend schools where it is safe to be "out" as a member of the LGBTQ+ community or an ally.

Remember, your existence is resistance. Your experiences are valid. And, who you are should be celebrated. For those wanting to mobilize, you'll find some ideas and tips on the following pages.

"I am no longer accepting the things I cannot change. I am changing the things I cannot accept."

– Angela Davis

Educating Yourself & Others

"If I wait for someone else to validate my existence, it will mean that I'm shortchanging myself." – Zanele Muholi

There are lots of ways you can increase awareness and affirmation in the school space and beyond. The following are ideas you can implement on your own or with other LGBTQ+ youth and allies.

01 ——————— Know Your Rights

All students are shielded from harassment by law in public schools. These institutions are required by the U.S. Constitution to handle any harassment directed at you in the same manner as they would any other student. Additionally, discrimination in schools on the basis of SOGIE is illegal in many states.

02 ——————— Produce Student Events and Actions

Actions and events raise visibility for LGBTQ+ youth and can help improve the climate for LGBTQ+ youth at your school while connecting folks to valuable resources.

Educating Yourself & Others, cont.

03 ——————— Organize an Awareness Campaign

There are several different methods and platforms to provide accurate information to increase representation, public awareness, support, knowledge, and access to resources for LGBTQ+ youth.

04 ——————— Share Your Story

Identify safe and supportive spaces for you to share your experience, fostering understanding, empathy, and connection within LGBTQ+ communities and beyond. This can be in partnership with LGBTQ+ organizations or community spaces.

05 ——————— Practice Radical Self-Care

Research resources and simple ways to practice self-care and community care at home, at school, and in public. This includes mental health resources, such as crisis lines, and coping strategies when feeling anxiety, sadness, and isolation.

Students: Know Your Rights!

As of publishing, the <u>Southern Poverty Law Center lists the following rights</u> of all students in public schools, though many states are seeking to undo these protections.

- **Expression of Gender**: You have the right to express your gender identity through your appearance and actions, including clothing, hair, and pronouns. Schools and peers may not harass or treat you differently because of your gender.
- **Sports and Facilities**: You have the right to participate in sports teams and use restrooms or locker rooms that align with your gender.
- **Religious-Based Discrimination**: You are protected from discrimination or harassment based on your gender identity or sexual orientation, regardless of the religious views of others.
- **Challenging "Don't Say Gay" Laws**: Laws banning teachers from discussing sexual orientations other than heterosexual & laws/policies portraying LGBTQ+ people negatively may be subject to challenge.
- **Bullying, Harassment, & Discrimination**: Report any incidents to school authorities, keep records, & seek further help if it persists.
- **Dress Code**: You have the right to wear clothing that reflects your gender, & schools can't prohibit this based on their dress code policies.
- **GSAs and Affinity Clubs**: You have the right to form and participate in GSAs or similar student-led groups if other clubs are allowed.
- **Events and Activities**: You can attend school events like prom with a same-gender date under the same rules as different-gender dates.
- **Conversion Therapy**: Conversion therapy is harmful and discredited. If a counselor or other school staff member recommends this, seek assistance from advocacy organizations.
- **Foster Care**: In foster care, you have the right to be free from discrimination & conversion therapy, & to express your gender identity.

Report any rights violations to school staff or contact advocacy organizations like <u>the American Civil Liberties Union</u> or <u>National Women's Law Center</u> if issues persist.

Starting a Peer Affinity Group

A Genders & Sexualities/Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) is a student-led club that offers a safe space for students to gather, support one another, discuss topics related to sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression, and actively work towards ending homophobia and transphobia. Clubs often go by other names such as PRIDE club, Rainbow club, etc. and are present at the elementary, middle, and high schools levels.

If you attend a public school with other clubs, you have the legal right to start a GSA or a similar LGBTQ+ club under the Federal Equal Access Act. If your school allows other student groups that aren't part of the regular curriculum to meet during non-class times, your GSA must be treated equally.

Organizations like GSA Network have resources for starting a GSA at school. They also have a handbook for your advisor(s).

Any peer affinity club can provide a welcoming and supportive space for LGBTQ+ students, while also giving everyone a chance to connect, learn, and grow. Whether it's an Anime Club, Fashion Club, STEM Club, or any other student space, these groups can help you meet others and create a place where you feel comfortable, affirmed, and safe at school.

If you don't want to form a GSA club, there are many other peer affinity clubs that can provide safe spaces for all students. Here's some examples:

- Mental Health and Wellness Club
- Art or Creative Expression Club
- Drama or Theater Club
- Social Justice Club

- Community Service Club
- Book Club
- Writing or Poetry Club
- Music Club

Where can I find more resources for students?

ACLU's "Know Your Rights" – List and explanation of K-12 public school student rights in the United States.

Advocates for Youth – Advocacy organization that focuses on topics such as youth sexual health, reproductive health, sexual violence, racial identity, and LGBTQ+ identities.

Brave Trails - Offers accredited summer camps, backpacking trips, family camps, mental health services, meet-up groups, and year-round leadership programming.

Campus Pride – Works to create safer and more inclusive college environments for LGBTQ+ students through resources, advocacy, and leadership programs; includes an index that assesses and rates colleges and universities based on their LGBTQ+ inclusiveness and policies.

imi – Guides and resources built for and with LGBTQ+ teens to help them explore their identity and support their mental health.

GLSEN – Ensuring that LGBTQ+ students are able to learn and grow in a school environment free from bullying and harassment, including providing GSA support.

GSA Network – LGBTQ+ racial and gender justice organization that empowers and trains queer, trans and allied youth leaders to advocate, organize, and mobilize an intersectional movement for safer schools and healthier communities.

LGBT National Youth TalkLine - Confidential safe space where callers of any age can speak about sexual orientation or gender identity/expression issues. Call 800-246-7743

Point Foundation - Scholarships for LGBTQ+ students applying to community colleges and 4-year universities.

Q Chat Space – Provides live, chat-based, professionally facilitated, online support and discussion groups for LGBTQ+ teens 13-19.

The Trevor Project – Suicide prevention and crisis intervention support 24/7 to young people via text, online chat, and phone call. Text 'START' to 678-678/Call 866-488-7386

Trans LifeLine - Connects trans people to the community support and resources we need to survive and thrive, including peer support hotline. Call 877-565-8860

What can I do as a family member?

Many LGBTQ+ youth often do not disclose their identity to anyone, including parents/caregivers, out of fear for their safety. They may have internalized feelings of shame about being LGBTQ+ from family, friends, or their community. As a result, LGBTQ+ youth often rely on "chosen family" as a network of support.

Well-meaning parents, caregivers, and family members may not know where to begin or may be worried about saying the wrong thing. The following tips and tricks create a foundation for support.

"A home isn't always the house we live in. It's also the people we choose to surround ourselves with."
– TJ Klune

What can I do as a family member?, cont.

01. Educating Yourself and Others

- Take time to independently learn about LGBTQ+ identities, terms, and experiences to better understand your child's identity and challenges.

- Many cities have organizations that offer workshops online and in-person on LGBTQ+ identities & experiences. These events can provide valuable information and resources, opportunities to ask questions, and space to connect with peers on a similar journey.

- Watch documentaries, films, and TV shows that provide positive insight into the lives and experiences of LGBTQ+ people. Some notable show and films include:
  - The Death and Life of Marsha P. Johnson
  - Disclosure
  - Pray Away
  - One Day at a Time
  - Heartstopper
  - Every Body

- Find a support groups, like PFLAG, for parents or caregivers of LGBTQ+ children to share experiences and advice. PFLAG chapters exist across the country, are often offered in multiple languages, and frequently meet in cultural hubs or faith-spaces you may already be accessing.

- Consult professional resources from professionals who specialize in LGBTQ+ identity. They can provide educational materials and best practices on how to support your LGBTQ+ child effectively.

What can I do as a family member?, cont.

02. Advocating for LGBTQ+ Youth

- Anti-LGBTQ+ groups have pushed for laws/policies that require schools to notify parents about any issues related to their child's SOGIE. In many cases, disclosing one's LGBTQ+ identity could lead to emotional, verbal, or physical abuse, and even being kicked out of their home if caregivers are not prepared to affirm their child's identity. Caregivers are essential in opposing these laws.
  - Forced outing occurs when a student discloses info about their SOGIE to a school staff or faculty member and that info is shared without the youth's consent. It can also apply even if the student hasn't taken action but has discussed the matter with an adult at school. Many states (Idaho, Nevada, Indiana, Tennessee, Alabama, North Carolina, and South Carolina) now require or promote forced outing of transgender and nonbinary youth.

- Work with school administrators and teachers to ensure a safe and inclusive environment. Support policies that protect LGBTQ+ students from bullying and discrimination. Check out the section on Building an Advocacy Campaign!

- Advocate for affirming healthcare for your child, including access to gender-affirming care alongside an appropriate provider, if needed.

- Be a role model for affirmation and inclusion in your community. Challenge stereotypes and prejudices when they arise in conversations or spaces.

- Celebrate your child's identity and achievements. Participate in LGBTQ+ events and pride celebrations. Find ways to reinforce your unconditional love.

- Share your story. Be an outspoken ally who can demonstrate the positive effects of family support.

Where can I find more resources for families?

COLAGE - Unites people with one or more lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and/or asexual parent into a network of peers and supports them.

The Family Acceptance Project - Focuses on promoting best practices through research, educational resources, and advocacy to improve their well-being and reduce the negative effects of rejection, including resources for families navigating conversations around the intersection of faith and LGBTQ+ identities.

Family Equality – Offers resources and support for LGBTQ+ families, including advocacy tools and community connections.

Free Mom Hugs - Network of chapters in all 50 states providing visibility, conversation, and education with the hope of reconciling relationships.

Gender Spectrum - Helping families increase their understanding of gender including support groups and resources for families of gender expansive youth.

Gender Diversity - Improving the well-being of children and adults of all gender identities and expression by providing education, increasing awareness, and offering insight into the wider range of human experience.

Human Rights Campaign – Includes resources for parents, including guides on supporting LGBTQ+ children and navigating conversations about gender and sexual orientation.

It Gets Better Project - Shares stories and resources to support LGBTQ+ youth, including guides for parents on how to be supportive allies.

InterAct - Empowering intersex youth and advancing the rights of all people with innate variations in their physical sex characteristics through advocacy, public engagement and community connection including resources for parents.

Parents' Guide to School Board Advocacy - Resource on advocating for changes in your local school district.

PFLAG - Support, education, and advocacy for LGBTQ+ individuals and their families including local support groups.

Queering Faith - Project from the National LGBTQ Task Force including resources for finding LGBTQ+ affirming communities of faith.

Strong Family Alliance - Preserving families by helping children come out and parents become informed supporters and allies.

What can I do as a community member?

Taking steps to create a brave and safe space is a powerful way to support LGBTQ+ youth and foster inclusivity in your community. Engaging with knowledgeable organizations, seeking support from allies, and educating yourself can help alleviate some fears and concerns and guide you through the process. The following suggestions are intended as best practices. It is important to adhere to the laws of your state to avoid causing any additional harm to yourself or the students you aim to assist.

"We need, in every community, a group of angelic troublemakers."

 – Bayard Rustin

What can I do as a community member?, cont.

01. **Educating Yourself and Others**

- Implement and enforce anti-discrimination policies and practices in community spaces that protect LGBTQ+ individuals from harassment and bias. Ensure these policies are communicated clearly and consistently. Explore the underline advocacy practices in the next section for guidance.

- Where it is legal and safe to do so, display symbols of support, such as LGBTQ+ pride flags, inclusive signage, and posters that promote diversity and affirmation. This creates a visual cue of support and inclusivity.

- Foster partnerships with local LGBTQ+ organizations and advocacy groups to strengthen support networks and resources available to LGBTQ+ youth.

- Identify specific areas within community centers, schools, businesses, and other facilities which are safe spaces for LGBTQ+ youth. Ensure these spaces are welcoming and inclusive, with access to resources and support.

- Promote access to resources such as counseling, support groups, and educational materials that address the needs of LGBTQ+ youth. Ensure these resources are easily accessible and inclusive.

- Solicit feedback from LGBTQ+ youth about their experiences and perceptions of safety in the broader community. Use this feedback to make continuous improvements and address any issues that arise.

- Provide public comment when issues affecting LGBTQ+ youth are brought up at your local school district, city council, etc.

What can I do as a community member?, cont.

02. Promoting Awareness and Education

- Host workshops, panel discussions, and community conversations on LGBTQ+ topics. Invite knowledgeable speakers, including LGBTQ+ advocates and experts, to provide information and foster dialogue. Ensure these events are accessible to a wide audience.

- Participate in or organize LGBTQ+ pride events, cultural celebrations, and awareness campaigns. These events help normalize LGBTQ+ identities and provide visibility, fostering a sense of community and support.

- Share informational materials that cover LGBTQ+ issues, history, and terminology. Partner with local organizations to distribute these resources in community centers, schools, libraries, etc.

- Collaborate with schools and other youth-serving organizations to integrate LGBTQ+ education into their programs. Connect with your local LGBTQ+ center to provide training for educators, staff, and volunteers to ensure they are equipped to support LGBTQ+ individuals and create inclusive environments.

Where can I find more resources for community members?

Advocates for Trans Equality - Provides advocacy resources, policy information, and support for transgender individuals and their allies.

Athlete Ally - Working to end homophobia and transphobia in sports and to activate the athletic community to exercise their leadership to champion LGBTQI+ equality.

CenterLink LGBT Community Center Directory - Directory of LGBTQ+ centers across the United States.

Lambda Legal - Civil rights organization that focuses on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities, as well as people living with HIV and AIDS.

Made, Known, Loved - Shows congregations how to create a program that affirms LGBTQ youth in their faith and their identity, accepts and welcomes diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, and equips future leaders for the church and the LGBTQ community.

The Movement Advancement Project (MAP) - Nonprofit think tank that provides research and analysis on LGBTQ+ issues to advance equality.

National Black Justice Collective - Working to end racism, homophobia, and LGBTQ/SGL bias and stigma.

National LGBTQ Task Force – Non-advocates for the civil rights of LGBTQ+ people and their families.

Power-Mapping by the Center for Nonprofit Management - Helpful tool used to build strategy and assess progress while driving change for our communities.

Straight for Equality - Empowering new allies who don't necessarily have a family connection to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) community.

Victory Fund - Supports pro-equality, pro-choice, out LGBTQ+ candidates at all levels of government.

Building an Advocacy Campaign

You may not be able to change everyone's mind, but presenting objective facts helps clarify issues for those who are still forming their opinions. It's important to acknowledge that many current anti-LGBTQ+ bills are designed to harm LGBTQ+ students, especially trans and nonbinary youth. By creating an open space for conversation, you can engage parents and caregivers in a constructive dialogue. When educational materials are labeled as "offensive" because of inclusion, emphasize the positive & affirming content, & ask thoughtful questions about the reasoning behind the ban. Focus on facts, steering the discussion away from misleading narratives.

Define the Issue

The challenges we are facing as LGBTQ+ folks and allies can seem vast. The best way to tackle a huge problem is to start small. Start by narrowing your focus to a clearly defined problem to have the best results for a successful campaign.

Example: **Your local school district is banning "inappropriate" materials, and is including LGBTQ+ inclusive and anti-racist materials in that ban.**

Define Success & Set a Goal

Setting a realistic goal allows us to address the many threats to education. Consider this as asking, "What is the best way to solve the issue?" Are there any state laws or district policies that could be made clearer to protect LGBTQ+ inclusive practices?

Example: **Lawmakers or school boards can codify requirements for instructional materials into law at the state or district level.**

Building an Advocacy Campaign, cont.

Remember that advocacy takes time. Just as today's anti-LGBTQ+ movement didn't happen overnight, our work for positive change will take perseverance and endurance. Every action we take to build power, pass LGBTQ+ inclusive laws, and block the rollback of our progress is a step toward a better future for LGBTQ+ youth.

01 ID your target, allies, and opposition

Once you've set your goals, who are the people with the most decision-making power that can help you achieve that goal? Can they be swayed in their decision? Who are the allies who share your values? How much power does the opposition actually have? Who is in the moveable middle?

These are all questions to consider when deciding who to target with your advocacy. You may want to use a power analysis to map out the players in this fight. Remember: you are not in this alone. Identify parents' and caregivers' groups, organizations, and other community groups who are potential allies.

Example: If the school board split is a narrow margin, targeting the school district makes sense. If the local school board is more conservative than the state legislature, go above them and aim for statewide legislation. This is an opportunity to build power with allies in school districts with more progressive policies and score a big win.

Building an Advocacy Campaign, cont.

02 Determine appropriate tactics

Think of this section as "What do I need to do to move this decision maker to support my proposal and how do I rally the community in the best way possible?" Who you target will determine which tactics work best for your campaign. Campaigns aimed at state legislatures often include phone banks, letter-writing campaigns, public comments, and in-district visits whereas ones aimed at school boards often involve public comments, social media, and letter-writing.

Example: Testimonial at a state board of education hearing from teachers, students, parents, and caregivers.

03 Storytelling & Sharing Lived Experience

Each person impacted by anti-LGBTQ+ policies has a powerful story to share. Stories shed light and connect to our common humanity. Sharing a personal story can demonstrate the positive impacts of LGBTQ+ inclusive policies and the destructive nature of anti-LGBTQ+ ones.

Example: Engaging current or former students, staff and faculty, or family members of both positive and negative experiences to provide context, comparison, and humanize the issue.

Building an Advocacy Campaign, cont.

Practice Exercise

Think about one person in your life whom you care about, whether it is a student, a parent, a colleague, or yourself.

Spend one minute writing or talking out loud about them: What are they like? What brings them joy? What do they value? What do you love about them? Now think about the world you want to for them: What policies have a harmful effect on them? What policies would make this world safer and more liberating for them?

Combine these into a statement and now you have a story you can use for letters, calls to public officials, public comments, and even heart-to-heart conversations with people who may not see things your way. The most powerful arguments are our lived experiences!

Building an Advocacy Campaign, cont.

Campaign Activities

Here is a list of some of the common tactics used to move decision-makers:

Media	In-Person	Remote
Op-Eds: Writing an article for your local newspaper can share your goal and story with the local community.	**Visit Representatives:** Set up a meeting with your local, state, or national elected officials to discuss policy advocacy.	**Phone Banks:** Calling community members provides a personalized way to disseminate information and provide education.
Letters to the Editor: These short responses to published articles can be used to share opposing views and opinions.	**Public Comment/ Testimony:** Share your input on laws and policies while they are being considered. Can be done in person or digitally.	**Letter/Email Writing:** Coordinating a group of people to write letters to decision makers can increase awareness and create change.
Press Conferences: Press conferences increase media interest in your advocacy initiative and can help you inform media and viewers about your advocacy issue.	**Community Gatherings:** Organized events where people come together for multiple purposes. These events can be essential in fostering relationships, sharing traditions, and reinforcing community identity.	**Petitions:** Petitions are used for exercising rights, voicing concerns, and encouraging authorities to take specific actions while demonstrating interest.
Social Media: Social media helps amplify advocacy efforts by potentially reaching more people, in more places, faster than ever before.	**Rallies/Marches:** Gatherings or organized walks of people for a common cause or shared objective, often involving speeches and community visibility.	**Email Blasts:** Email is fast, efficient, and relatively cheap. It's also a great way to make low and high bar asks from your supporters, and provide essential updates.

Responding to Anti-LGBTQ+ Rhetoric & Misinformation

"Kids are too young to understand their sexual orientation or gender identity."

The development of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity are normal processes that *all* youth go through, whether they are LGBTQ+ or not.

By ages 18 to 24 months, most children can recognize and label gender groups. Many start to develop a sense of gender identity around age three. They may begin identifying themselves as a boy, girl, or something else, based on how they feel inside.

From ages 6-12, children's understanding of their gender identity becomes more concrete. Most children explore gender through clothing, toys, and role-playing. Some may start to recognize that their gender identity does not align with their assigned sex at birth and may identify with terms like transgender or non-binary. This is an inherent sense of who they are, demonstrated by persistent and consistent insistence on their gender identity.

Between ages 6-12 is also the time period in which most children will begin to understand their sexual orientation in the sense of patterns of attraction, and many will have their first crush.

Around ages 12-18, puberty and increased social interactions can bring more clarity to sexual orientation and gender identity.

Every child's experience is unique, and some people might not fully realize or come to terms with their LGBTQ+ identity until adulthood. Language someone uses to describe their identities may change over the course of a lifetime.

Responding to Anti-LGBTQ+ Rhetoric & Misinformation

"I don't want to promote an LGBTQ+ lifestyle."

Being LGBTQ+ is related to identity, not lifestyle. Identities like sexual orientation and gender identity have been shown to be stable over time.

<u>Leading medical and psychological groups</u> recognize that LGBTQ+ identities are as valid and healthy as heterosexual and cisgender identities. Affirming LGBTQ+ youth significantly increases the likelihood that they will grow into happy and healthy adults.

Despite any personal or cultural differences, we have a duty to affirm LGBTQ+ youth through our behavior. Not doing so can lead to negative health outcomes.

"Teaching about LGBTQ+ identities and pronouns in schools will make my kid LGBTQ+."

There is no evidence-based research that supports Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity being caused by environment. These pieces of identity are inherent aspects of who you are and all people have a SOGIE.

Schools aim to create safe and inclusive spaces where all students, including those who are LGBTQ+, feel accepted and valued. Teaching about LGBTQ+ identity fosters empathy and awareness, helping to reduce bullying and discrimination and creating a safer school environment for *all* students.

LGBTQ+ students who feel recognized and supported are less likely to experience negative health outcomes.

Pronouns are the words we all use to talk about a person when we're not using their name. Learning about pronouns allows kids to acknowledge other people's identities and communicate respectfully.

Responding to Anti-LGBTQ+ Rhetoric & Misinformation

"LGBTQ+ people are a danger to children."

The misconception that LGBTQ+ individuals pose a danger to children is rooted in harmful stereotypes and misinformation. Being LGBTQ+ has no bearing on a person's morality, character, or behavior.

Statement like these conflate identity with a social and/or inappropriate behavior. We should avoid conflating identities with specific behaviors.

LGBTQ+ adults, just like any adults, can be positive role models, mentors, and caregivers. A person's gender identity or sexual orientation does not inherently make them dangerous or harmful.

"Schools are trying to take away rights by concealing student identities"

While many parents and caregivers may wish for their children to approach them first with questions about gender and sexual orientation, not all children live in safe and supportive environments. LGBTQ+ youth in unsafe homes are at risk of emotional and physical abuse, and many face the possibility of fleeing or being forced out of their homes. As a result, <u>LGBTQ+ youth are over twice as likely to experience homelessness compared to their non-LGBTQ+ peers</u>. With these potential negative outcomes, we can see that SOGIE information is a sensitive piece of information that youth have the right to share when ready.

Model Laws & Policies: Local and State Examples

California

- **FAIR Education Act (2011) -** Amended the California Education Code to include the Fair, Accurate, Inclusive, and Respectful (FAIR) reference to contributions by people with disabilities and members of the LGBTQ+ community in history and social studies curriculum.

- **California Healthy Youth Act (2016) -** Requires that students to receive sexual health education at least twice, including one time during middle school and one time during high school. It included new language about adolescent relationship abuse and sex trafficking, and reinforces a focus on healthy attitudes, healthy behaviors, and healthy relationships. It also strengthened previous requirements that instruction and materials be appropriate for students of all sexual orientations and genders and ensures that sexual health education does not promote outdated gender norms. The law also updated the existing HIV prevention education mandate to reflect the developments made in our understanding of and ability to treat and prevent HIV over the last 20 years.

- **SAFETY Act (2024) -** Support Academic Futures & Educators for Today's Youth (SAFETY) Act prevents school districts from implementing mandatory outing policies, offer resources to help parents or caregivers and students discuss gender and identity privately, and protect teachers and staff from retaliation if they decline to forcefully disclose a student's identity.

Colorado

- **HB 19-1192 -** Inclusion Of American Minorities In Teaching Civil Government (2019) - Mandates funding instruction in public schools of history and civil government of the United States and Colorado, including but not limited to the history, culture, and social contributions of American Indians, Latinos, African Americans, and Asian Americans; LGBT individuals within these minority groups; the intersectionality of significant social and cultural features within these communities; and the contributions and persecution of religious minorities.

Model Laws & Policies: Local and State Examples, cont.

Connecticut

- **HB 6619 (2021) -** Required the Department of Education and the State Education Resources Center to develop a model curriculum for K-8 education. The content of the curriculum would include Native American students, Asian Pacific American studies, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other sexual orientations and gender studies, climate change, personal financial management and financial literacy, military service and experience of American veterans, and citizenship, including digital citizenship and media literacy.

Illinois

- **HB 246 (2019) -** Requires that textbooks purchased by schools in Illinois must include the roles and contributions of all people protected under the Illinois Human Rights Act including LGBTQ+ persons.

Nevada

- **AB 261 (2021) -** Requires K-through-12 schools to teach the histories and contributions of frequently marginalized groups, such as immigrants, Native Americans, religious organizations, and the LGBTQ+ community.

New Jersey

- **A1335 (2019) -** Required boards of education to include instruction and adopt instructional materials that accurately portray political, economic, and social contributions of persons with disabilities and LGBTQ+ people.

Model Laws & Policies: Local and State Examples, cont.

Oregon

- **HB 2023 (2019) -** Directed State Board of Education to ensure that academic content standards for certain subjects include sufficient instruction on histories, contributions and perspectives of women, Native Americans, people of African, Asian, Pacific Island, Chicano, Latino or Middle Eastern descent, people with disabilities, immigrants, refugees; and LGBT people.

Local Education Agencies (LEAs)

California Department of Education
- Ensuring That Students Are Protected from Discrimination Based on Gender Identity, Gender Expression, and Sexual Orientation

D.C. Public Schools
- Transgender and Gender-Nonconforming Policy Guidance

Los Angeles Unified School District
- Gender Identity and Students – Ensuring Equity and Nondiscrimination
- Name and/or Gender Maker of Pupils for Purposes of School Records
- Restroom Accessibility

Madison Metropolitan School District
- Name and Gender Change Request Form

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
- Guidance for Massachusetts Public Schools Creating a Safe and Supportive School Environment

Model Laws & Policies: Local and State Examples, cont.

Local Education Agencies (LEAs)

NYC Public Schools
- Guidelines to Support Transgender and Gender Expansive Students
- Guidelines on Gender Inclusion
- LGBTQ+ Supports

San Diego Unified School District
- Nondiscrimination of Transgender Students
- Student Rights

San Francisco Unified School District
- Gender Inclusive Language
- Inclusive Form/Communication Guidelines
- LGBTQ Family and Gender Diversity Teaching Guide for Elementary Grades

Santa Clara County Office of Education
- LGBTQ+ District and School Policy Guide

Vermont Agency of Education
- Educational Equity Brief: Supporting LGBTQ Students
- Full Spectrum: Educators' Guide to Implementing LGBTQ+ Inclusive Sex Ed

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
- LGBTQ+ Youth in Crisis Best Practices Webinar
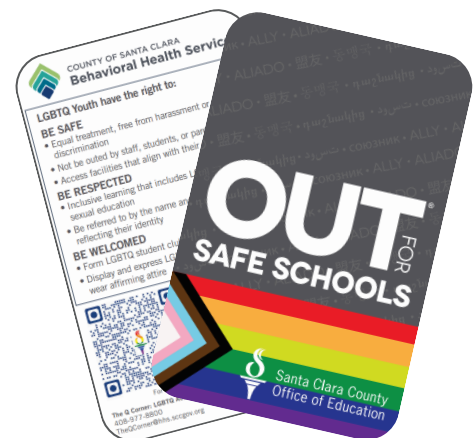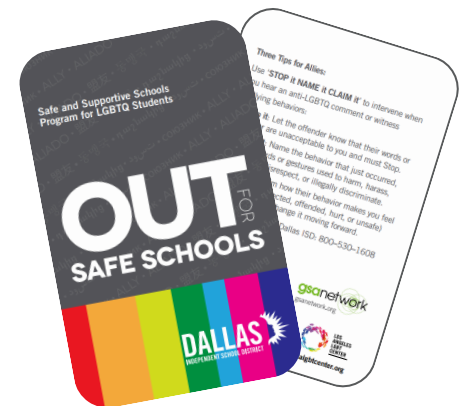
Conclusion

2025 and beyond will no doubt continue to present unprecedented challenges as the LGBTQ+ community, immigrant communities, and so many more face an onslaught of efforts intended to wear us down. Still, hope remains as the movement grows and continues.

Perseverance: LGBTQ+ youth are resilient.

- Youth are practicing community-care and seeking out resources that help support their peers.

Liberation: LGBTQ+ youth are strong.

- Youth are assembling to fight back against discrimination and advocate for change.

Joy: LGBTQ+ youth are courageous.

- Youth are embracing their identity and developing a sense of pride in their community.

"You never completely have your rights, one person, until you all have your rights."
 - Marsha P. Johnson

Acknowledgements

We are in deep gratitude and appreciation for all who have contributed to the creation of this toolkit. We recognize the tireless efforts of advocates, organizations, community members, educators, families, and youth who do the daily work of showing up and improving the climate for safe and affirming schools. We thank you for your continued support in our efforts to create a world where LGBTQ+ youth thrive as healthy, equal, and complete.

The future is filled
with all things queer.
Because that's the kind of joy
we're manifesting.
— Mercedes Lucero

Just One Affirming Adult Positively Impacts LGBTQ+ Youth

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