



Research Brief: Anti-Bullying Policies in School and LGBTQ+ Young People

School policies that specifically prohibit all forms of anti-LGBTQ+ bullying were associated with lower rates of in-person bullying at school and lower past-year suicide attempts among LGBTQ+ youth.

October 2025

Key Findings

- 38% of LGBTQ+ students ages 13-18 reported being bullied at school in the past year.
- LGBTQ+ young people who reported that their school had an anti-LGBTQ+ bullying policy reported the highest rates of feeling that their school affirmed their LGBTQ+ identity (69%).
- LGBTQ+ young people who reported that their school had an anti-LGBTQ+ bullying policy reported the lowest rates of being bullied at school (28%).
- Past-year suicide attempts were lowest for those reporting a policy prohibiting anti-LGBTQ+ bullying (10%) and those who did not know their school's policy (11%).

Background

LGBTQ+ young people report higher rates of bullying than their straight, cisgender peers.¹⁻³ Experiences of bullying are associated with higher rates of suicide attempts,⁴ which are already disproportionately high among LGBTQ+ young people.^{5,6} In recent decades, advocates have pushed K-12 schools to adopt LGBTQ+-inclusive anti-bullying policies to protect LGBTQ+ students.^{7,8} Indeed, LGBTQ+ young people who attend schools with LGBTQ+-inclusive anti-bullying policies report lower rates of attempting suicide compared to their peers at schools without such policies.⁹ Yet the degree of LGBTQ+ inclusiveness in anti-bullying policies varies widely across local communities and jurisdictions, with some policies including explicit protections based on sexual orientation and gender identity, some only including sexual orientation, and some not explicitly naming any LGBTQ+ protections. The situation is further complicated by differences in state-level policy, with twenty states and the District of Columbia currently prohibiting bullying on the bases of sexual orientation and gender identity by state law, and two states preventing schools or school districts from adding LGBTQ+-specific protections to anti-bullying policies.¹⁰ Using a detailed question about the status and inclusiveness of schools' anti-bullying policies and data from The Trevor Project's [2024 U.S. National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ+ Young People](#), this brief

examines the relationship between school anti-bullying policies and experiences of bullying, affirmation, and suicide risk among school-attending LGBTQ+ youth ages 13 to 18 using data from 10,463 survey respondents.

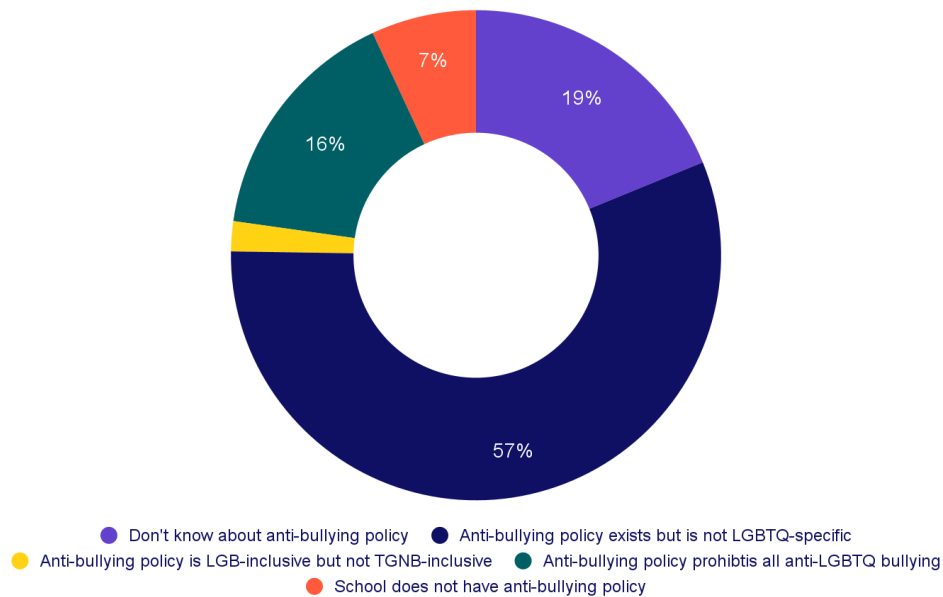
Results

A majority (93%) of LGBTQ+ young people ages 13-18 reported being currently enrolled in school at the time of survey administration; among those students, 38% reported having been bullied in person at school in the past year. Transgender and nonbinary young people reported higher rates of experiencing in-person bullying at school compared to their cisgender LGB peers (42% vs. 32%, $p < 0.001$). LGBTQ+ young people of color reported lower rates of in-person bullying at school in the past year compared to their White LGBTQ+ peers (33% vs. 41%, $p < 0.001$). Differences were also observed among socioeconomic groups, with LGBTQ+ young people who struggle to meet their basic economic needs reporting higher rates of experiencing in-person bullying at school compared to their LGBTQ+ peers who have more than enough to meet their basic needs (44% vs. 36%, $p < 0.001$). Bullying rates by gender, race, sexual orientation, and region can be found in the data table below.

LGBTQ+ young people were also asked about anti-bullying policies at their schools: 57% of school-attending LGBTQ+ young people reported that their school had a policy but it was not LGBTQ+-specific, 19% reported that they did not know their school's policy, 16% reported that their school's policy prohibited all anti-LGBTQ+ bullying, 7% reported that their school had no anti-bullying policy, and 2% reported that their school's anti-bullying policy was LGB-specific but did not include measures for transgender or nonbinary students.

Rates of School Anti-Bullying Policies

Most LGBTQ+ young people attend a school with an anti-bullying policy that is not LGBTQ+-specific

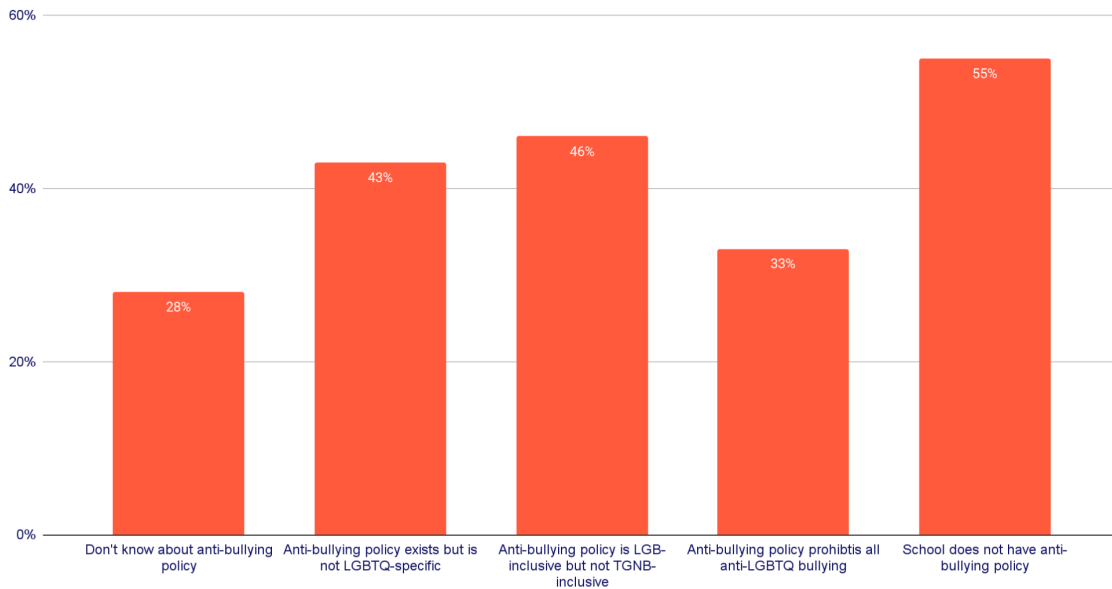


The inclusiveness of a school's anti-bullying policy was related to whether LGBTQ+ young people reported their school as an **LGBTQ+-affirming space**. Students in schools with a policy prohibiting all anti-LGBTQ+ bullying were most likely to report their school as LGBTQ+-affirming (69%), whereas those in schools with no policy were least likely (30%). Intermediate estimates were 51% (did not know the policy), 46% (LGB-specific policy but not TGNB-specific), and 45% (not LGBTQ+-specific; $p < 0.001$).

The presence of a school's anti-bullying policy was associated with the likelihood of experiencing **in-person bullying** at school. LGBTQ+ young people who did not know their school's policy reported the lowest rates of experiencing in-person bullying at school in the past year (28%), followed by those who reported that their school's anti-bullying policy prohibits all anti-LGBTQ+ bullying (33%), those who reported their school's anti-bullying policy was not LGBTQ+-specific (43%), those who reported their school's policy was LGB but not TGNB-specific (46%), and LGBTQ+ young people who reported their school had no anti-bullying policy (55%, $p < 0.001$). However, post hoc analyses indicated that bullying rates did not differ significantly from one another in the LGB-specific but not TGNB-specific, not LGBTQ+-specific, and no-policy groups, while the overall association was driven by lower bullying rates in the policy prohibiting all anti-LGBTQ+ bullying and don't-know groups.

Rates of In-Person Bullying at School in the Past Year, by Anti-Bullying Policy

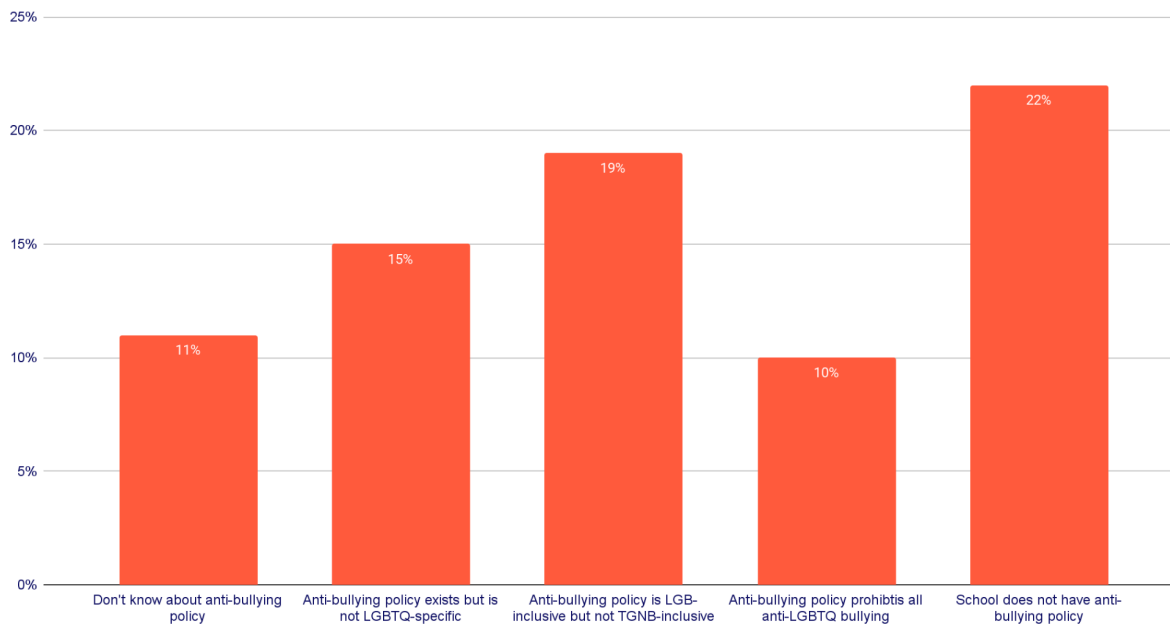
LGBTQ+ young people who reported that their school had an anti-LGBTQ+ bullying policy reported the lowest rates of being bullied at school



The presence of a school's anti-bullying policy was also associated with lower rates of **suicide attempts** in the past year. LGBTQ+ young people who reported that their school's anti-bullying policy prohibits all anti-LGBTQ+ bullying (10%) and those who did not know their school's anti-bullying policy (11%) reported the lowest rates of attempting suicide in the past year, followed by those who reported their school's anti-bullying policy was not LGBTQ+-specific (15%), those who reported their school's policy was LGB but not TGNB-specific (19%), and those who reported their school had no anti-bullying policy (22%, $p < 0.001$). Post hoc analyses revealed no statistically significant difference in rates of past-year suicide attempts between those attending schools with a policy prohibiting anti-LGBTQ+ bullying and those who did not know their school's policy.

Rates of Suicide Attempt in the Past Year, by Anti-Bullying Policy

Past-year suicide attempts were lowest for those reporting a policy prohibiting anti-LGBTQ+ bullying and those who did not know their school's policy



Looking Ahead

These findings align with prior literature documenting high rates of school bullying among LGBTQ+ young people.¹⁻³ Transgender and nonbinary young people reported higher rates of bullying at school compared to their cisgender LGB peers. The data also describe the presence and inclusiveness of school anti-bullying policies, with most (57%) LGBTQ+ young people reporting that their school had an anti-bullying policy that was not LGBTQ+-specific, and only 16% reporting that their school's policy prohibited all anti-LGBTQ+ bullying.

These findings also show relationships between anti-LGBTQ+ bullying school policies and affirmation of LGBTQ+ identity, experiences of bullying, and suicide attempts. LGBTQ+ young people who reported that their school's policy prohibits all forms of anti-LGBTQ+ bullying reported high rates of feeling that their school affirmed their LGBTQ+ identity (69%), relatively low rates of bullying at school (33%), and low rates of suicide attempts in the past year (10%). Conversely, LGBTQ+ young people who reported that their school has no anti-bullying policy reported the lowest rates of feeling that their school affirmed their LGBTQ+ identity (30%) and the highest rates of bullying at school (55%) and suicide attempts in the past year (22%). Anti-bullying policies, especially those which include specific protections for LGBTQ+ students, may help prevent bullying and suicide attempts among LGBTQ+ students. Given the high rates of bullying and suicide risk among LGBTQ+ young people,^{1-3,5,6} these data highlight the urgent need for policies that

protect LGBTQ+ students from bullying and harassment at school. These policies can be passed at the local, state, and federal levels, with twenty states and the District of Columbia currently prohibiting bullying on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity by state law.¹⁰ While these findings focus on in-person bullying at school, schools must also consider the impact of online bullying and how to best protect all students.

Interestingly, LGBTQ+ young people who did not know their school's anti-bullying policy reported relatively low rates of bullying and suicide risk, as well as relatively high rates of feeling that their school affirmed their LGBTQ+ identity. Because the data are cross-sectional and the policy measure reflects student awareness, this 'don't know' category is difficult to interpret. It may indicate a lower need to seek policy information among youth not experiencing bullying. It is also possible that the most effective anti-bullying policies may go unnoticed by students, similar to how other successful public health prevention interventions have resulted in a population largely unaware of their benefits.¹¹ Accordingly, we interpret the 'don't know' finding as a context marker rather than a protective factor per se, and recommend testing these explanations in adjusted models and future data. It is also important to note that all variables in this analysis are self-reported, assessing LGBTQ+ students' perceptions of both bullying and school policies rather than assessing the policies themselves. Inconsistent understandings of bullying may cause over or underreporting of experiencing bullying and youths' perception that anti-bullying policies did not exist or excluded transgender and nonbinary students may be prone to recollection bias. Finally, although this brief has focused on primary prevention of bullying, future research should explore how these policies influence LGBTQ+ students' experiences of seeking help for anti-LGBTQ+ bullying when it occurs. It is also important to note that these data were collected in 2023 and do not reflect local, state, or federal policy changes in the last two years.

The Trevor Project is committed to supporting LGBTQ+ young people's access to supportive school environments and good health through crisis intervention, research, and advocacy initiatives. Our 24/7 crisis services—available by phone, chat, and text—ensure that LGBTQ+ youth can connect with trained counselors whenever they need support. Our education team equips school professionals with the tools needed to support LGBTQ+ youth across diverse identities and experiences. Meanwhile, our advocacy team works at the state and federal level to promote policies which protect LGBTQ+ young people at school. We remain committed to publishing research that explores the nuanced mental health experiences of LGBTQ+ youth, especially those impacted by structural inequities, to drive informed policy and life-saving intervention. Additionally, The Trevor Project provides [resources for both LGBTQ+ young people and their allies](#), such as [Creating Safer Spaces in Schools for LGBTQ+ Young People](#).

Methods

Sample

Data were collected through The Trevor Project's [2024 U.S. National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ+ Young People](#). In total, 18,663 LGBTQ+ young people between the ages of 13 to 24 were recruited via ads on social media. These analyses included 10,463 LGBTQ+ young people ages 13 to 18 who were enrolled in school at the time of survey administration.

Measures

Current school enrollment was assessed via the survey item: "Are you currently enrolled in school (either online, in person, or a combination of both)?" Prompts included are listed below. Any answer starting with a "Yes" was counted as current school enrollment.

- 1) No, I graduated high school
- 2) No, I graduated from college
- 3) No, I dropped out of high school
- 4) No, I dropped out of college
- 5) No, I was expelled
- 6) No, I obtained my GED
- 7) Yes, and I attend always or almost always
- 8) Yes, and I attend sometimes
- 9) Yes, and I'm suspended

Experiences with in-person bullying were assessed via the survey item: "During the past 12 months, have you ever been bullied by someone in person? Please select all that apply." Prompts are listed below. Youth were coded as "Yes" if they selected "Yes, at school."

- 1) No
- 2) Yes, at school
- 3) Yes, on my way to or from school
- 4) Yes, at work
- 5) Yes, at a party
- 6) Yes, at a family event
- 7) Yes, at or near my house
- 8) Yes, in another in-person way (please specify)

Access to an LGBTQ+-affirming school was assessed via the survey item: "Where, if anywhere, are you able to be in spaces that affirm your LGBTQ identity (let you be you)?" Prompts are listed below. Youth were coded as "Yes" if they selected "School."

- 1) School
- 2) Work
- 3) Home
- 4) Online communities
- 5) A place of worship
- 6) Community events
- 7) Somewhere not listed above (please specify)
- 8) Nowhere

The status of school anti-bullying policies were assessed via the survey item: “Is there an anti-LGBTQ bullying policy at your school?” Prompts included:

- 1) There is an anti-bullying policy, but not LGBTQ-specific
- 2) There is an anti-bullying policy, but it only specifically prohibits LGBQ bullying and not transgender or nonbinary bullying
- 3) Yes, there is an anti-bullying policy that specifically prohibits all LGBTQ bullying
- 4) There is no anti-bullying policy at my school
- 5) I don’t know

Suicide attempts in the past year were assessed using questions from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Youth Risk Behavior Survey.⁶

Analysis

Chi-square tests were run to examine differences between groups. Unless otherwise noted, all analyses are statistically significant at $p < 0.05$, meaning observed differences would be expected less than 5% of the time if there were no true difference (i.e., under the null hypothesis).

Data Tables

Rates of Bullying at School Among LGBTQ+ Young People Ages 13-18, by Participant Characteristics

LGBTQ+ Young People ages 13-18 (n = 10,463) Who Experienced Bullying at School		p-value
Gender identity		p<0.001
Cisgender Boy / Man	36.5%	
Transgender Boy / Man	29.6%	
Cisgender Girl / Woman	48.9%	
Transgender Girl / Woman	35.9%	
Nonbinary	39.6%	
Gender Questioning	38.9%	
Race/ethnicity		p<0.001
Asian American / Pacific Islander	28.4%	
Black / African American	28.8%	
Hispanic / Latinx	31.5%	
Middle Eastern / Northern African	44.4%	
Native / Indigenous	51.9%	
More than one race/ethnicity	38.5%	
White	41.0%	

Socioeconomic status		p<0.001
Struggle to meet basic needs	43.8%	
No struggle to meet basic needs	35.8%	
Sexual orientation		p=0.19
Gay / Lesbian	36.4%	
Bisexual	37.0%	
Queer	38.5%	
Pansexual	42.2%	
Asexual	31.9%	
Heterosexual	38.7%	
Questioning	38.6%	
Census region		p=0.97
Northeast	37.1%	
Midwest	38.5%	
South	42.9%	
West	33.9%	

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