Great Public Schools for Every Student

Creating Safe Spaces Inclusive of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning/Queer Students

Educator creates a safe space for LGBTQ youth in their school(s).

**Key Method**

The educator creates a safe and affirming learning environment inclusive of LGBTQ students by examining issues for LGBTQ students; identifying the needs of students within their school setting; designing curricular lessons inclusive of LGBTQ students; and advocating for school-wide programs on bias, harassment, and bullying.

**Method Components**

(Data taken from the 2015 National GLSEN 2015 National School Climate Survey (NSCS))

**Hostile School Climate:**

Schools nationwide are hostile environments for a distressing number of LGBTQ students, the overwhelming majority of whom routinely hear anti-LGBT language and experience victimization and discrimination at school. As a result, many LGBTQ students avoid school activities or miss school entirely.

57.6% of LGBTQ students felt unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation, and 43.3% because of their gender expression.

31.8% of LGBTQ students missed at least one entire day of school in the past month because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable, and a tenth (10.0%) missed four or more days in the past month.

Over a third avoided gender-segregated spaces in school because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable (bathrooms: 39.4%, locker rooms: 37.9%).

Most reported avoiding school functions and extracurricular activities (71.5% and 65.7%, respectively) because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable.

**Harassment and Assault at School**

The vast majority of LGBTQ students (85.2%) experienced verbal harassment (e.g., being called names or threatened) at school based on a personal characteristic, most commonly sexual orientation (70.8% of LGBTQ students) and gender expression (54.5%).

** Effects of Victimization**
LGBTQ students who experienced higher levels of victimization because of their sexual orientation:

Were more than three times as likely to have missed school in the past month than those who experienced lower levels (62.2% vs. 20.1%);  
Had lower grade-point averages (GPAs) than students who were less often harassed (2.9 vs. 3.3);  
Were twice as likely to report that they did not plan to pursue any post-secondary education (e.g., college or trade school) than those who experienced lower levels (10.0% vs. 5.2%);  
Were more likely to have been disciplined at school (54.9% vs. 32.1%); and  
Had lower self-esteem and school belonging and higher levels of depression.

**Effects of Discrimination**

LGBTQ students who experienced LGBT-related discrimination at school were:

More than three times as likely to have missed school in the past month as those who had not (44.3% vs. 12.3%);  
Had lower GPAs than their peers (3.1 vs. 3.4);  
Were more likely to have been disciplined at school (46.0% vs. 27.9%); and  
Had lower self-esteem and school belonging and higher levels of depression.

**Inclusive Curricular Resources**

LGBTQ students who have LGBTQ-related school resources report better school experiences and academic success. Compared to LGBTQ students who did not have a GSA in their school, students who had a GSA in their school:

Were less likely to hear “gay” used in a negative way often or frequently (59.3% compared to 77.1% of other students);  
Were less likely to hear homophobic remarks such as “fag” or “dyke” often or frequently (51.0% vs. 68.0%);  
Were less likely to hear negative remarks about gender expression and transgender people often or frequently (gender expression: 59.6% vs. 66.8%, transgender people: 35.9% vs. 46.0%);  
Were more likely to report that school personnel intervened when hearing homophobic remarks compared to students without a GSA – 20.6% vs. 12.0% said that staff intervene most of the time or always;  
Were less likely to feel unsafe because of their sexual orientation than those without a GSA (50.2% vs. 66.3%), and less likely to miss school (26.1% vs. 38.5% missed one day of school in past month because of safety concerns);  

Experienced lower levels of victimization related to their sexual orientation and gender expression – for example, 21.5% of students with a GSA experienced higher levels of victimization based on their gender expression, compared to 34.0% of those without a GSA;  

Reported a greater number of supportive school staff and more accepting peers; and  

Felt more connected to their school community than students without a GSA.

**Supportive Educators**

Providing professional development for school staff to improve rates of intervention and increase the number of supportive teachers and other staff available to students; Taken together, such measures can move us toward a future in which all students have the opportunity to learn and succeed in school, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. Compared to LGBTQ students with no supportive school staff, students with many (11 or more) supportive staff at their school:

Were less likely to feel unsafe (40.6% vs. 78.7%);  
Were less likely to miss school because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable (16.9% vs. 47.2%);  
Had higher GPAs than other students (3.3 vs. 2.8);  
Were less likely to say they might not graduate high school (1.7% vs. 9.5%) and were less likely to not plan on pursuing
post-secondary education (4.5% vs. 14.7%); and
Felt more connected to their school community.

Students who had seen a Safe Space sticker or poster in their school were more likely to identify school staff who were supportive of LGBTQ students and more likely to feel comfortable talking with school staff about LGBTQ issues.

Wraparound Services and Support

Wraparound supports are necessary for the support and safety of LGBTQ students. Educators should make themselves aware of various school and community services. They also need to know how to connect with them when needed to support a student in crisis. These services include but are not limited to:

Gay-straight alliances (GSAs) or similar student organizations in schools
Social services, legal counsel, and physical and mental health services providers experienced in serving LGBTQ youth
Suicide hotline numbers
Supports for LGBTQ youth in crisis such as The Trevor Project (examples of crisis are suicidal thoughts, homelessness, HIV/AIDS diagnosis)

Supporting Research

2015 National GLSEN 2015 National School Climate Survey (NSCS)

https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.3102/0034654316669821


https://psycnet.apa.org/search/display?id=8075ba7c-e792-c19b-a37d-e7518ce07d46&recordId=1&tab=PA&page=1&display=25&sort=PublicationYear%20Sort%20asc&sr=1


https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.3102/00346543070003323

Kann L, Olsen EO, McManus T, et al. Sexual Identity, Sex of Sexual Contacts, and Health-Related Behaviors Among Students in Grades 9–12 – United States and Selected Sites, 2015. MMWR Surveill Summ 2016;65(No. SS-9):1–202. DOI:
http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.ss6509a1


Resources
Submission Guidelines & Evaluation Criteria

To earn the micro-credential, you must receive a passing evaluation for Parts 1 and 3, and “Proficient” for each component in Part 2.

Part 1. Overview Questions

400-600 words

Describe your school’s current climate with regards to addressing LGBTQ issues.
Include:
- Barriers or supports in creating a safe space for all students.
- Safety issues for LGBTQ students.
- School/district/state policy considerations inclusive of LGBTQ students.
- Resources and strategies needed or used for creating safe schools.
- Educator and student awareness of support services for students

- **Passing:** Responses clearly address all four points using personal examples and supportive evidence that clearly illustrates the educator’s current school climate with regards to LGBTQ issues. Writing is organized and easy to understand.

Part 2. Work Examples / Artifacts

**Artifact 1: School Climate Survey**

Create and administer a school climate survey for students and/or staff. The survey should include questions regarding student/staff perceptions of their school climate with regards to LGBTQ issues, including biased language, harassment, and the availability of resources and supports.

Submit a report of your findings. (400 to 600 word limit)

Include:

1. charts and/or graphs to support your findings.
2. a reflection on whether the data confirms or contradicts your initial views regarding your current school climate.

**Artifact 2: Lesson/Activity**

Design a lesson or activity for students. The lesson or activity could include:
Examining school safety issues with regard to LGBTQ issues.

Issues facing students who identify as LGBTQ.

Bullying and/or harassment

School/district/state policy considerations when addressing LGBTQ issues

Discussions about bullying of LGBTQ students

Develop empathy for others

Think about the underlying prejudice and bias that foster bullying

Develop tangible skills for coping with bullying

Learn how to become an ally and intervene successfully

Provide artifacts from the lesson with a reflection of the lesson (200 to 300 word limit). This could include:

- Student work examples
- 2- to 10-minute video of the lesson being taught
- Photo slideshow with captions of the lesson implementation

**Artifact 3: Promotional Project**

Create a classroom, school, or district-wide PSA for your safe space inclusive of LGBTQ students that illustrates the holistic network of supports for LGBTQ students (i.e., the establishment of a GSA chapter, or community mentorship program through the guidance office). This could be in the format of a poster or video (2-10 minutes).

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<td>The survey does not assess the safety and overall environment of the local schools, inclusive of LGBTQ-related issues.</td>
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<td>Appropriate artifacts were submitted with the lesson/activity, including the reflection.</td>
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<td><strong>Artifact 3:</strong> Promotional Project</td>
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Reflection

400-600 words

Submit a reflection on the development and implementation of a safe space for your school. Make sure to include:

Reflections on this plan: What was the impact of the implemented survey and lesson? Note the successes, challenges, and opportunities.

Reflections on self and others: What did you learn about yourself? Where were you, and where are you now? How do you know the lesson selected to implement was effective in helping achieve the desired goal?

- **Passing:** Reflections include thoughtful analysis of the impact of the implemented plan and the challenges and successes. Reflections also include thoughtful self-analysis and provided clear descriptions of how the lesson was effective in achieving the desired goal.

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