

# Supporting Transgender and Gender Diverse Students in Schools

Key Recommendations for School Administrators



## INFORMATIONAL GUIDE



# About this Series

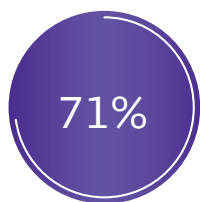
This resource is part of a series of informational guides from Division 16 (School Psychology) and Division 44 (Society for the Psychological Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Issues) of the American Psychological Association. This series, "Promoting Resiliency for Gender Diverse and Sexual Minority Students in Schools," sets out best practices for educators, school counselors, administrators and personnel, based on the latest research on the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, gender diverse, questioning and intersex students. The series includes topics such as gender diversity among students, helping to support families with LGBT children and youth, risk factors and resiliency factors within schools around health and wellbeing of LGBT youth, and basic facts about gender diversity and sexual orientation among children and youth.

## SERIES INCLUDES:

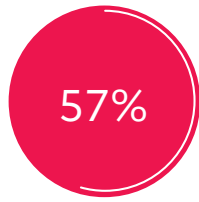
- Pamphlet 01**  
How Educators Can Support Families With Gender Diverse And Sexual Minority Children and Youth
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Key Terms and Concepts in Understanding Gender Diversity and Sexual Orientation among Students

## Sobering Statistics

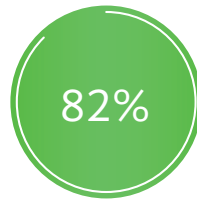
A national survey (Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer, 2012) finds that gender diverse and sexual minority youth:



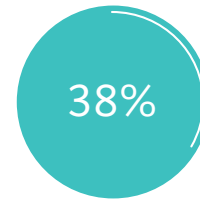
Hear peers make negative remarks about sexual orientation (71%) and gender expression (61%)



Hear teachers make negative remarks about sexual orientation (57%) and gender expression (57%)



Are verbally harassed because of sexual orientation (82%) or gender expression (64%)



Are physically harassed because of sexual orientation (38%) or gender expression (27%)

64% of students feel unsafe at school because of sexual orientation prejudice, and 44% feel unsafe at school because of gender expression. When gender diverse and sexual minority youth experienced harassment or assault, over 60% did not report the incident to school staff, often because they believed that little action would be taken or that the situation would be made worse by reporting (Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer, 2012).

# Introduction



A major responsibility shared by all school administrators – superintendents, principals, and others -- is the obligation to ensure that a safe, respectful, and supportive learning environment is provided for all students. This responsibility is especially important with regard to transgender students and others whose gender expression differs

from the norm, because a growing body of evidence indicates that these children and youth are often targets of harassment, discrimination, bullying and violence in school settings.

## Key Recommendations

Create an inclusive, welcoming school environment for all students. School administrators, especially the school principal, are responsible for fostering a school climate that supports the learning and healthy development of all students. This is done in part by having strong anti-bullying and anti-discrimination policies and ensuring that these are enforced. It is at least as important to take a more pro-active stance by communicating regularly with all staff and students about how to build a positive school culture and how to create a shared school community where individual differences are accepted and celebrated and where all students feel included and respected, regardless of their gender expression. School administrators should be aware that the U.S. Department of Education advises that transgender and gender non-conforming students are covered by Title IX, the federal law that prohibits discrimination based on sex in schools.

## Support individual transgender and gender diverse students.

Transgender is an umbrella term for anyone diverging from the roles associated with the sex they were assigned at birth. Some transgender children and youth persistently and insistently express a cross-gender identity and assert that their gender, or inner sense of self as being male or female, is different from their assigned sex. Some youth will assert that their gender is fluid or it is non-binary, not male or female. During their school years, they may transition from living and identifying as one gender to living and identifying as another. In supporting these students, it is helpful to:

**1. INFORM AND EDUCATE YOURSELF** and your staff about transgender issues in general and the

concerns and situation of the student in particular. School support staff such as school psychologists and counselors may be key resources, especially if they have had specific training related to sexual development and gender identity. Talking with other school administrators whose schools have successfully worked with a transitioning student can also be helpful.

**2. WORK CLOSELY WITH THE STUDENT** and, to the extent possible, with the student's parents/ guardians. Social transitioning goes more smoothly when the school, student and family work together and maintain regular communication. It may be useful to have a designated school health staff member, such as the

school psychologist or counselor, who is available to check in with the student on a regular basis or is just made known to the student as the person to contact in case of difficulties. This may be especially important if the student is undergoing a social or medical gender transition during the school year. School health staff (counselors, school psychologists, social workers, nurses) can also be of great assistance to school administrators in thinking through how best to support the student

**3. DEVELOP A COMMUNICATION PLAN** that spells out who needs to know what information, when, and how it will be communicated. All students have the right to privacy, including the right to keep information private about transgender status, gender assigned at birth, medical or mental health treatment of any kind, or other information of a similar nature. It may be that no one needs to be told about a student's transgender status, or that only key staff need to be told on a need-to-know basis. On the other hand, when a student's gender transition is or will be public, as would be the case for a social transition

during the school year, thoughtful communication with the students' classmates, school staff, and even the public can help build support for the transgender student and ensure successful integration into the school community.



## Ensure that all students' basic rights are upheld.

For students who are transgender or gender diverse, this may involve addressing several key issues.

### **Bathrooms and locker rooms.**

All students are entitled to have access to restrooms, locker rooms and changing facilities that are safe, sanitary, and adequate. Students should have access to all restrooms that correspond to their gender identity. Providing gender neutral bathroom and locker options is an option, although in most settings this raises concerns about limiting access or resources for the trans\* student. Access to sex-segregated facilities in a manner consistent with the student's gender identity is the preferable option.

### **Physical education and sports participation:**

Physical education classes are required in most schools, and sports participation is valued by many students. In the case of coeducational physical education or other physical activities, issues of gender diversity should not be a problem. Where there are sex-segregated classes or athletic activities, students should be allowed to participate in a manner consistent with their gender identity

### **Names and pronouns.**

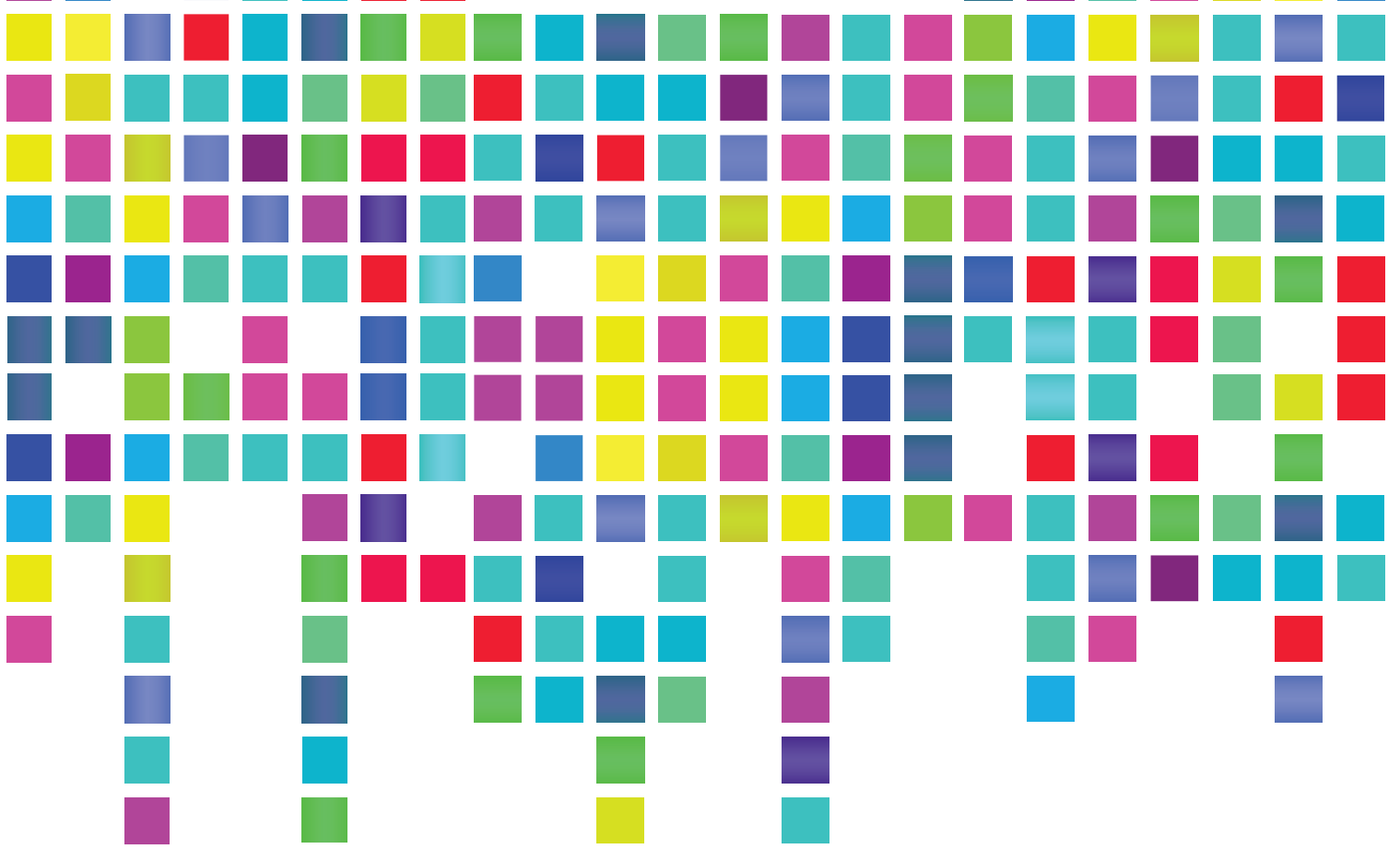
All students have the right to be addressed by the name and pronoun that corresponds to their gender identity. A legal change of name or gender designation is not required. Administrators should work with staff, students, and others to make sure that names and pronouns aligned with a student's gender identity are used consistently.

Work with others to establish a written district-wide policy on transgender and gender diverse students. Having a written policy in place, training staff on the policy, and disseminating the policy to all members of the school community can help ensure that supportive treatment of transgender students is not reliant on the good will and efforts of individual administrators, but that it can be sustained over time regardless of changes in staff. GLSEN's Model District Policy on Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Students is an excellent resource. Other examples of laws, policies, or policy guidance have been adopted by California, Massachusetts, New York City Department of Education, Minneapolis Public Schools, and Seattle Public Schools

## Resources

GLSEN ([www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org))  
Gender Spectrum (<https://www.genderspectrum.org>)  
PFLAG (<http://www.pflag.org>)

Welcoming Schools  
(<http://www.welcomingschools.org>)



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