

# School-Based Risk and Protective Factors for Gender Diverse and Sexual Minority

Improving School Climate



## 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

### ● Pamphlet 04

School-Based Risk and Protective Factors for Gender Diverse and Sexual Minority Children and Youth: Improving School Climate

### ● Pamphlet 02

Supporting Transgender and Gender Diverse Students in Schools: Key Recommendations for School Health Personnel

### ● Pamphlet 05

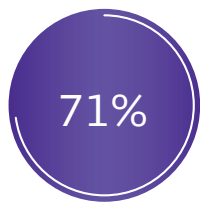
Key Terms and Concepts in Understanding Gender Diversity and Sexual Orientation among Students

### ● Pamphlet 03

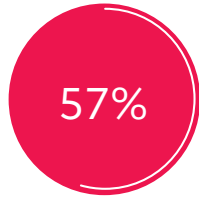
Supporting Transgender and Gender Diverse Students in Schools: Key Recommendations for School Administrators

## Sobering Statistics

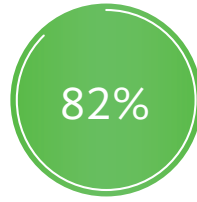
A national survey (Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer, 2012) finds that gender diverse and sexual minority youth:



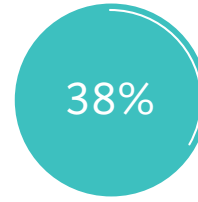
Hear peers make negative remarks about sexual orientation (71%) and gender expression (61%)



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).

## Purpose of the Resource



Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning and intersex (LGBTQI) students often experience a hostile school climate due to harassment, bullying, and victimization based on their actual or perceived sexual orientation and/or gender identity. These factors may contribute to a number of negative outcomes for LGBTQI youth at school, including missing school, lower academic achievement, increased isolation, lowered self-esteem, substance use/abuse, and increased suicidality. As educators consider school climate for LGBTQI youth, it is critical that they keep in mind that being LGBTQI does not necessarily put youth at increased risk for negative outcomes; rather, being LGBTQI in hostile, unsafe, and unsupported environments puts youth at increased risk.

The school classroom has been described to be “the most homophobic of all social institutions” (Mufioz-Plaza, Quinn, & Rounds, 2002, p. 53).

These experiences contribute to a hostile school climate for LGBTQI. Students who reported higher levels of victimization at school, also reported (Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer, 2012):

- Increased absenteeism
- Lower academic achievement
- Fewer plans for post-secondary education
- Poorer psychological well-being (i.e., higher levels of depression and lower self-esteem)

A growing body of research (e.g., Ameida, Johnson, Corliss, Molner, & Azrael, 2009; D’Augelli, 2003; Savin-Williams & Ream, 2003) has found various detrimental psychological outcomes of recurring bullying and victimization based on one’s sexual orientation and/or gender identity, such as, higher instances of depression, suicides, and suicidal ideation among LGBTQI youth in comparison to their heterosexual peers.

## School-Based Protective Factors for LGBTQI



Educators can help create a safe school climate for LGBTQI youth by (Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer, 2012):

- Creating, implementing, and enforcing a comprehensive bullying/harassment policy that specifically addresses bullying based on sexual orientation and gender identity/expression.
- Supporting a Gay-Straight Alliance or similar club
- Developing inclusive curriculum that includes positive images of LGBTQI individuals, history, and events.
- Identifying themselves as supporters and allies of LGBTQI youth

Federal and State policies (i.e., The Student Nondiscrimination Act) can provide a solid foundation for school interventions (Heck, Flentje, & Cochran, 2011) by:

- Prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity within public schools and providing efficient legal solutions (i.e. legal action and/or loss of federal funding) if schools do not include sexual orientation and gender identity in their non-discrimination policy
- Allowing for inclusive curriculum that affords LGBTQI youth a sense of futurity and sex education policies that give voice to LGBTQI students’ experiences and challenge structures of heteronormativity (Mayo, 2006)
- Allowing students to form Gay-Straight Alliances, and having equal access to hold meetings on school property, and preventing them from being monitored any differently than other school organizations/clubs (Cahill & Cianciotto, 2004)



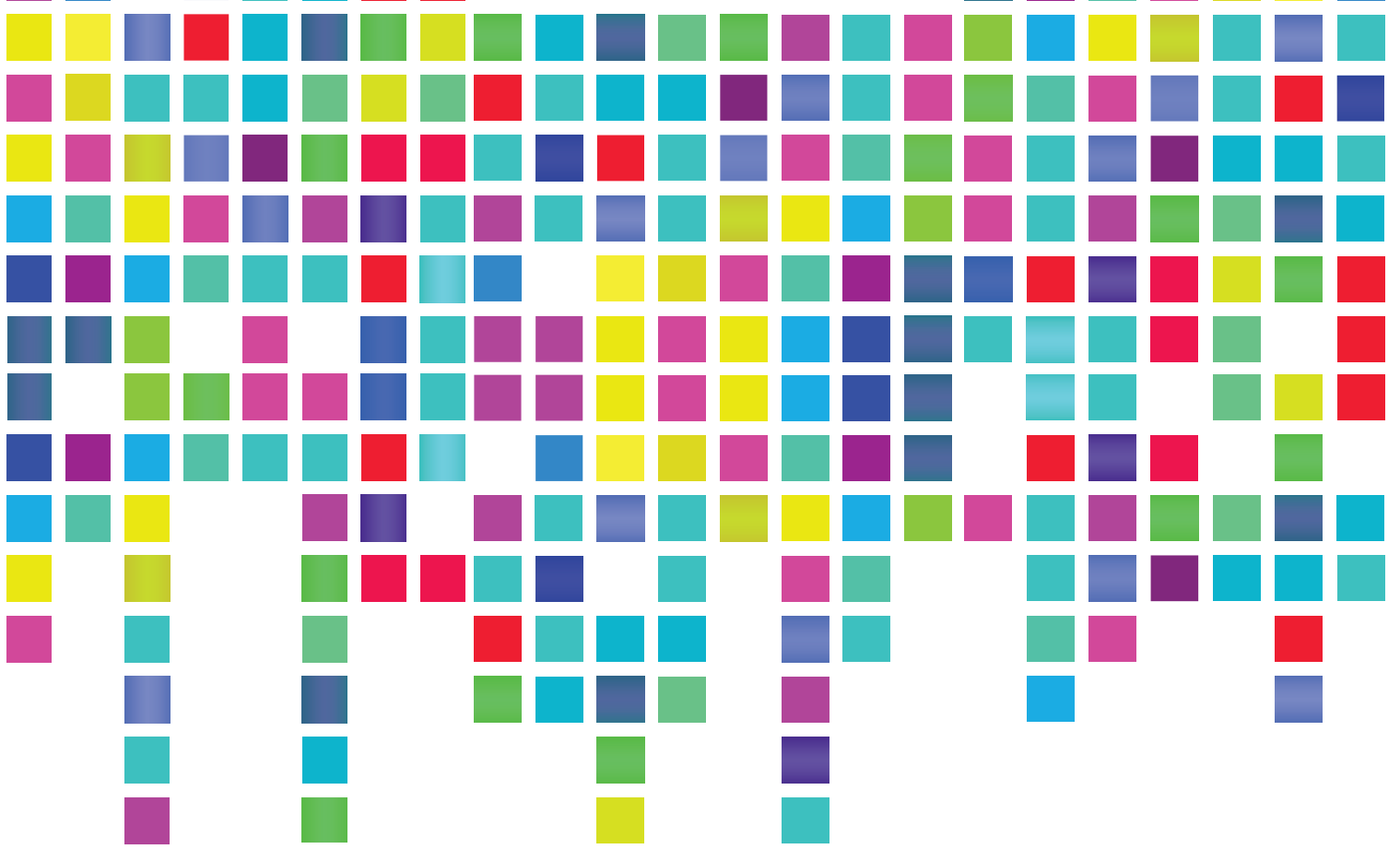
## Other School & Community Factors Impacting LGBTQI Youth

- LGBTQI youth living in the Southern and Midwestern United States report higher overall victimization and less access to LGBT-related resources.
- LGBTQI youth in schools in rural areas and small towns report greater victimization at school and less access to LGBT-related resources or supports at school.
- LGBTQI youth in middle schools report higher levels of harassment and fewer school-site support services than youth in high schools.



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