

LGBT ISSUES IN THE CURRICULUM PROMOTES SCHOOL SAFETY

Does including lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) issues in the curriculum promote safer school climates? Curriculum that includes attention to LGBT people and history has been controversial. Yet, some argue that such curriculum will promote feelings of safety at school among LGBT youth – some even argue that inclusive curriculum will make all students feel safer.

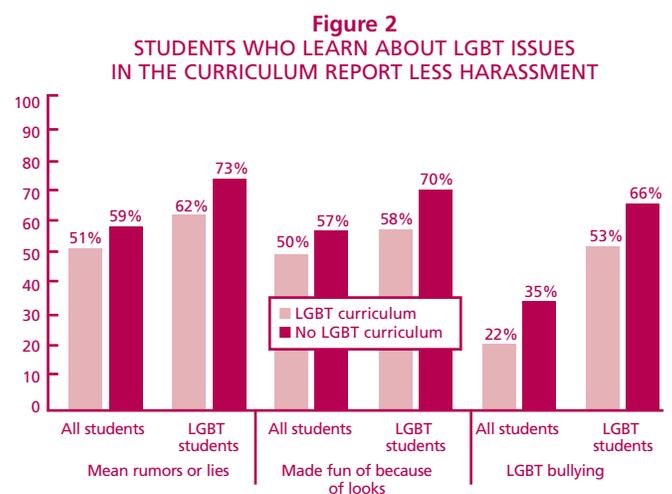
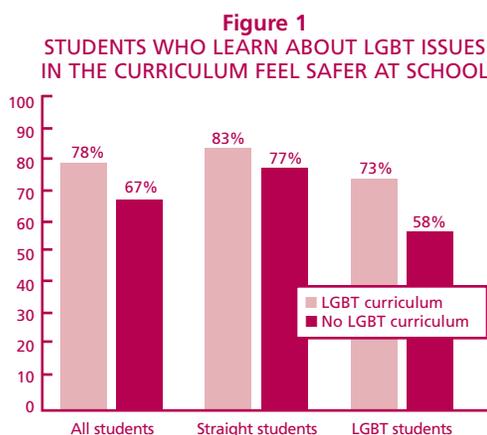
To help answer these questions about LGBT inclusion in the curriculum, we analyzed data from the Preventing School Harassment (PSH) survey, a survey of over 2,400 students in California, and the Safe Schools Policy Survey, a survey of California school districts. We focused on the relationship between LGBT inclusion in the curriculum and the experience of individual students, the overall climates of the schools, and the policies and practices of school districts.

- 1. Individual students:** Do students who learn about LGBT issues in the curriculum feel safer?
- 2. Overall school climate:** Are schools that include LGBT issues in the curriculum safer?
- 3. Policies and practices of school districts:** Are California school districts supportive of training and curriculum about sexual orientation and gender identity?

Finding 1: Individual students feel safer at school when LGBT issues are included in the curriculum; this is true for LGBT students and for their straight peers.

Students who learn about LGBT issues in the curriculum feel safer at school. Half (50.3%) of the students in the PSH survey reported learning about LGBT issues in the curriculum. We studied the links between learning about LGBT issues at school and school safety. Figure 1 shows that 78% of students who learned about LGBT issues reported feeling safe, compared to 67% who had not learned about LGBT issues. This association is particularly strong for LGBT students: 73% of LGBT students who learned about LGBT issues reported feeling safe, compared to 58% who had not learned about LGBT issues. Although the association is not as strong, it holds for straight students. More straight students report feeling safe if they learned about LGBT issues (83% compared to 77%).

In addition to feeling safer, students who report learning about LGBT issues in school also report fewer mean rumors or lies spread about them, fewer reports of being made fun of because of their looks or the way they talk, and less LGBT bullying at school. For example, Figure 2 shows that 22% of students who learned about LGBT issues reported being bullied because they were LGBT or someone thought they were, compared to 35% who did not learn about LGBT issues. These results are strongest for LGBT students.

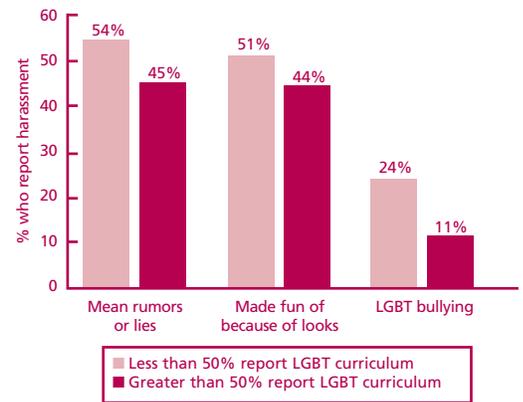


Finding 2: School climates are safer when LGBT issues are part of the curriculum.

In the PSH survey, 30 schools had more than 20 students participate; we averaged student responses within each of these schools to measure school climate. We found that there is a wide range of inclusion of LGBT issues in the curriculum: in some schools, 23% of the students reported learning about LGBT issues, while up to 90% reported learning about LGBT issues in others. Does attending a school where larger numbers of students report learning about LGBT issues in the curriculum make a difference for school safety in the overall school climate?

Figure 3 shows that in schools where the majority of students (more than 50%) report learning about LGBT issues in the curriculum, students reported fewer mean rumors or lies spread about them, fewer reports of being made fun of because of their looks or the way they talk, and less LGBT bullying at school. In fact, students were half as likely to report LGBT bullying in schools where the majority of students reported learning about LGBT issues: 24% of students report being bullied at least once in the past year in schools where less than half of the students report learning about LGBT issues in the curriculum, compared to only 11% in schools where more than half of the students report learning about LGBT issues in the curriculum.

Figure 3
STUDENTS IN SCHOOLS WHERE MORE STUDENTS REPORT LGBT CURRICULUM REPORT LESS HARASSMENT



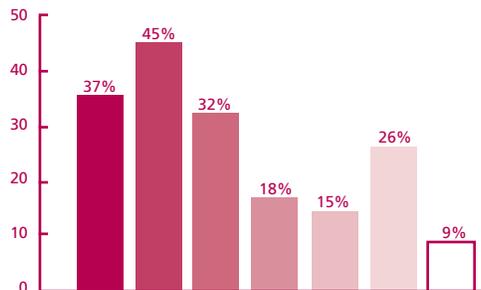
Finding 3: Many California school districts already include LGBT issues in the curriculum and many more are interested in doing so.

Over 83% of school districts report that they include LGBT issues in their tolerance curriculum for all or some of their high school students, while 64% report including LGBT issues for all or some of their middle school students and 54% report including LGBT issues for all or some of their elementary school students. Only 7% of school districts report that they do not include LGBT issues in their tolerance curriculum for high school students, 14% for middle school students, and 23% for elementary school students.

Figure 4 shows resources, expertise, and time are the greatest obstacles to providing LGBT-inclusive tolerance curriculum and education for students.

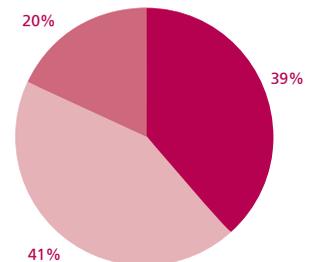
Figure 5 shows that only 20% of school districts surveyed as part of the Safe Schools Policy Survey were not interested in working with community groups to provide training and curriculum on addressing discrimination and harassment based on sexual orientation and gender identity. In fact, almost 40% of districts expressed interest in working with community groups who provide training and curriculum on addressing discrimination and harassment based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

Figure 4
OBSTACLES TO PROVIDING STUDENT ANTI-HARRASSMENT EDUCATION BASED ON SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY



- Not enough financial resources
- Not enough time/other issues are a higher priority
- Not enough district employees with the expertise to conduct trainings on these issues
- Not aware of any community groups who could provide trainings
- The issues are controversial for our community
- Our district hasn't had any incidents that require such action
- Our community doesn't have a problem with these issues

Figure 5
DISTRICT WILLINGNESS TO INCLUDE TRAININGS AND CURRICULUM



- Interested
- Not sure
- Not Interested

Recommendations for Students

- Find out if your school has curriculum that is inclusive of LGBT people; if not, consider starting a Gay-Straight Alliance or leading an existing club to work on this issue.
- Consider LGBT current events or history as a topic for a presentation or paper.
- Speak out in support of your school district including curriculum that is inclusive of LGBT people; encourage your site or district curriculum council to adopt LGBT inclusive curriculum for all core 10th grade classes like History and Social Sciences.

Recommendations for Teachers

- Stop bias-related comments when you hear them. Use bias-related comments as “teachable moments:” educate students about LGBT terminology, appropriate language, and the importance of practicing respect for all members of the school community.
- Include age- and subject-appropriate discussion of LGBT issues in your classroom curriculum (e.g., current events, history, social sciences, and literature).
- Go to www.safeschoolscoalition.org for examples of curriculum to use in your classroom.
- Invite community organizations to come to your classroom and make presentations on LGBT issues.
- Advocate for staff training on anti-LGBT bullying prevention and on strategies for implementing age- and subject-specific LGBT inclusive curricula.
- Encourage colleagues to support adoption of LGBT inclusive curriculum.

Recommendations for Local School Officials and Administrators

- Make age- and subject-appropriate LGBT issues a regular part of the curriculum (e.g., current events, history, social sciences, and literature).
- Talk to textbook industry representatives about your desire to have curriculum that includes LGBT issues and people.
- Identify and eliminate barriers to the inclusion of LGBT issues in the curriculum and support efforts to make curriculum more inclusive.
- Encourage teachers to address LGBT issues within existing statewide curriculum standards and frameworks. Arrange for staff training on age- and subject-appropriate LGBT inclusive curriculum implementation.

Recommendations for State Policy Makers

- Require inclusion of the roles and contributions of LGBT people and history in California curriculum.
- Make clear to textbook industry representatives that California curriculum should include the roles and contributions of LGBT people.
- Develop and make available sample age- and subject-appropriate LGBT inclusive curriculum for school districts.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

Data are from the 2003, 2004 and 2005 Preventing School Harassment (PSH) survey and the 2004 Safe Schools Policy Survey.

The PSH survey was designed to study the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning high school students and their straight allies, and the steps schools can take to make schools safer. The PSH survey was developed by the California Safe Schools Coalition, and administered by the Gay-Straight Alliance Network. Data from over 2,400 students were collected in schools and on the internet. Students were asked about their experiences of safety at school, and about the steps schools can take to make schools safer. Specifically, students were asked: "In your classes at school, have you ever learned about LGBTQ people, discussed LGBTQ history or current events, or received information about sexual orientation and gender identity?"

The California Safe Schools Coalition's Safe Schools Policy Survey was designed to improve understanding of successes and challenges in local efforts to create safe schools and reduce harassment in schools. In the summer of 2004 the California Safe Schools Coalition mailed surveys to every school district in the state and received responses from 359, or approximately 36% (out of 1219) of the districts in California, representing 3,478,000 students or 56% of the students in California schools.

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