

Supporting Transgender and Gender Diverse Students in Schools

Key Recommendations for
School Health Personnel



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

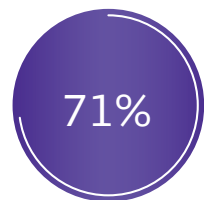
Key Terms and Concepts in Understanding Gender Diversity and Sexual Orientation among Students

● Pamphlet 03

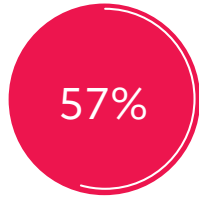
Supporting Transgender and Gender Diverse Students in Schools: Key Recommendations for School Administrators

Sobering Statistics

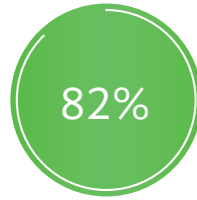
A national survey (Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer, 2012) finds that gender diverse and sexual minority youth:



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).



Terminology



Key terminology used in this resource is briefly defined and has been primarily derived from the APA 2011 publication (see References). For more information, please access the Resources and References listed in the last sections of this document.

- **Transgender:** An umbrella term that may be adopted by individuals whose gender identity, gender expression, or behavior is different from what is typically associated with the sex assigned at birth.
- **Gender identity:** A person’s internal sense of being male, female, or something else.

- **Gender expression:** The way a person communicates gender identity to others through behavior, clothing, hairstyles, voice, or other body characteristics.
- **Gender diverse:** The extent to which a person’s gender identity, expression, or behavior differs from the cultural norms prescribed for people of a particular sex. It is an alternative and less stigmatizing term for gender nonconformity and gender variant.
- **Intersex:** The term refers to a range of conditions associated with atypical development of physical sex characteristics.

Introduction

Transgender students report a hostile schooling environment and pervasive harassment on school grounds at an alarmingly high rate (Greytak, Kosciw, & Diaz, 2009; McGuire, Anderson, Toomey, & Russell, 2010). Although many sexual minority students report high levels of victimization in school, transgender students report the highest levels of verbal and physical harassment and the lowest connection with their school community. In addition, transgender students are more likely than their peers to experience harassment and fear at school because of their gender expression, gender, and sexual orientation (Greytak et al., 2009). Further, students whose gender

expression does not conform to traditional norms are at higher risk of victimization, feeling unsafe at school, and absenteeism when compared to their peers (Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewics, Boesen, & Palmer, 2012).

School health personnel are in a unique position to provide support, advocacy, and resources that will help create safe, inclusive and welcoming educational climates for transgender and diverse students (Case & Meier, 2014). School staff under this umbrella term may include school psychologists, school nurses, school counselors, school social workers, and other health and mental health professionals working in

educational settings. Experiencing a positive connection with adults at school has been identified as a protective factor that benefits a sense of belongingness and safety at school for transgender and gender diverse students (Kosciw et al., 2012; McGuire et al., 2010).

Key actions and recommendations for school health personnel in this document focus on practices related to Advocacy, Support, and Resources

Advocacy

ADVOCATE FOR THE RIGHT TO PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY REGARDING SEXUAL ORIENTATION, GENDER IDENTITY, AND TRANSGENDER STATUS. In light of their experience working with sensitive and confidential information, school health personnel

can help advocate for the development and implementation of policies that respect the right to privacy for students, staff, and family members with regard to sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or transgender status. School health personnel can help educate school

administrators, school staff, students, and faculty, on the importance of respecting privacy and confidentiality in creating safe school climates for gender diverse, intersex, and transgender students.

Specifically, school health personnel can help draft and implement policies that communicate an expectation for school personnel to maintain confidentiality regarding student, parent, or school employee information about sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, intersex or transgender status. Such policies should be explicit in stating that school personnel will not share information about an individual's sexual orientation, gender identity, intersex condition, or transgender status without an individual's permission (including minors).



ADVOCATE FOR COMPREHENSIVE ANTI-BULLYING/ANTI-DISCRIMINATION SCHOOL POLICIES THAT INCLUDE PROTECTION ON THE BASIS OF GENDER IDENTITY, GENDER EXPRESSION, AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION.

School health personnel can advocate for district-wide initiatives to develop policies that are inclusive of transgender, intersex, and gender diverse students and communicate a commitment to safety for LGBTQI individuals. In addition, school health personnel can model appropriate intervention and education if bullying, discrimination, or harassment does occur, as there is evidence that only a minority of school staff appropriately respond to bullying on the basis of gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation. As leaders in the school setting, school health personnel should work closely with school administrators to address these goals.

ADVOCATE FOR SAFE AND INCLUSIVE SCHOOL SPACES AND ACTIVITIES FOR TRANSGENDER, INTERSEX, AND GENDER DIVERSE STUDENTS.

School health personnel can help advocate for inclusive and safe spaces for transgender, intersex, and gender diverse individuals. First and foremost, students should have access to bathroom and locker rooms consistent with their gender identity. School health personnel also can help advocate for the availability of gender neutral bathroom and locker room facilities. Such spaces provide additional privacy that may support a range of students with unique needs. Access to other sex-segregated facilities and activities should be granted in a manner consistent with the student's gender identity. School health professionals can educate school staff, students, and community members about the full range of gender expression, gender identity, sex development, and sexual orientation that are normal and positive variations of the human experience.

CONSIDER THE MULTIPLE DIMENSIONS OF AN INDIVIDUAL'S IDENTITY AND SUPPORT ACCORDINGLY.

When working with transgender, intersex, and gender diverse students, school health personnel should consider the diversity within this student population. This diversity includes membership in all racial and ethnic groups, religious traditions, socio-economic status, physical and mental abilities, and geographic location, among other characteristics. Students with multiple diverse identities may face additional minority stress as a result of discrimination and prejudice associated with their intersecting identities. Student groups that may be at heightened risk for bullying, victimization, prejudice, and discrimination include transgender, intersex, and gender diverse students from ethnic/racial minority groups, and individuals with an identified mental or physical disability. School health professionals should consider the uniqueness and multiple dimensions of identity present in this student population.

Support

SUPPORT THE SOCIO-EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS OF TRANSGENDER AND GENDER DIVERSE STUDENTS.

Transgender, intersex, and gender diverse students may be at greater risk of depression, anxiety, self-harm, and other health risk behaviors when compared to their cisgender and gender-normative peers. School health professionals can support this group of students by providing counseling (when appropriate) to enhance healthy coping skills, build resiliency, and facilitate positive socio-emotional development.



SUPPORT STUDENTS AND FAMILIES AS THEY MAKE DECISIONS REGARDING SOCIAL AND PHYSICAL TRANSITION.

School health professionals are in a position to facilitate students' self-acceptance and self-exploration with regard to their gender identity and gender expression. When students and families make decisions regarding social and/or physical transition, school health professionals can work with other school staff to affirm the student's gender identity respecting the right to privacy and confidentiality. Educating school staff about the need to address students by the name and pronoun that corresponds to their gender identity is an important component of supporting students as they make decisions regarding social and physical transition. School health personnel also can serve as liaisons with community-based professionals as they work with students and families to facilitate social and physical transition.

Resources

NATIONAL AND ONLINE RESOURCES



APA's Division 44 (apadivision44.org) and Office of LGBT Concerns (<http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/>)

National Association of School Psychologists (NASP)
Position Statement on Safe Schools for Transgender and Gender Diverse Students
http://www.nasponline.org/about_nasp/positionpapers/Transgender_PositionStatement.pdf
NASP-GLBTQ Committee - <http://www.nasponline.org/advocacy/glb.aspx>

GLSEN (glsen.org) and National Center for Transgender Equality's Model Policy
http://www.transequality.org/PDFs/Trans_ModelPolicy_2013.pdf

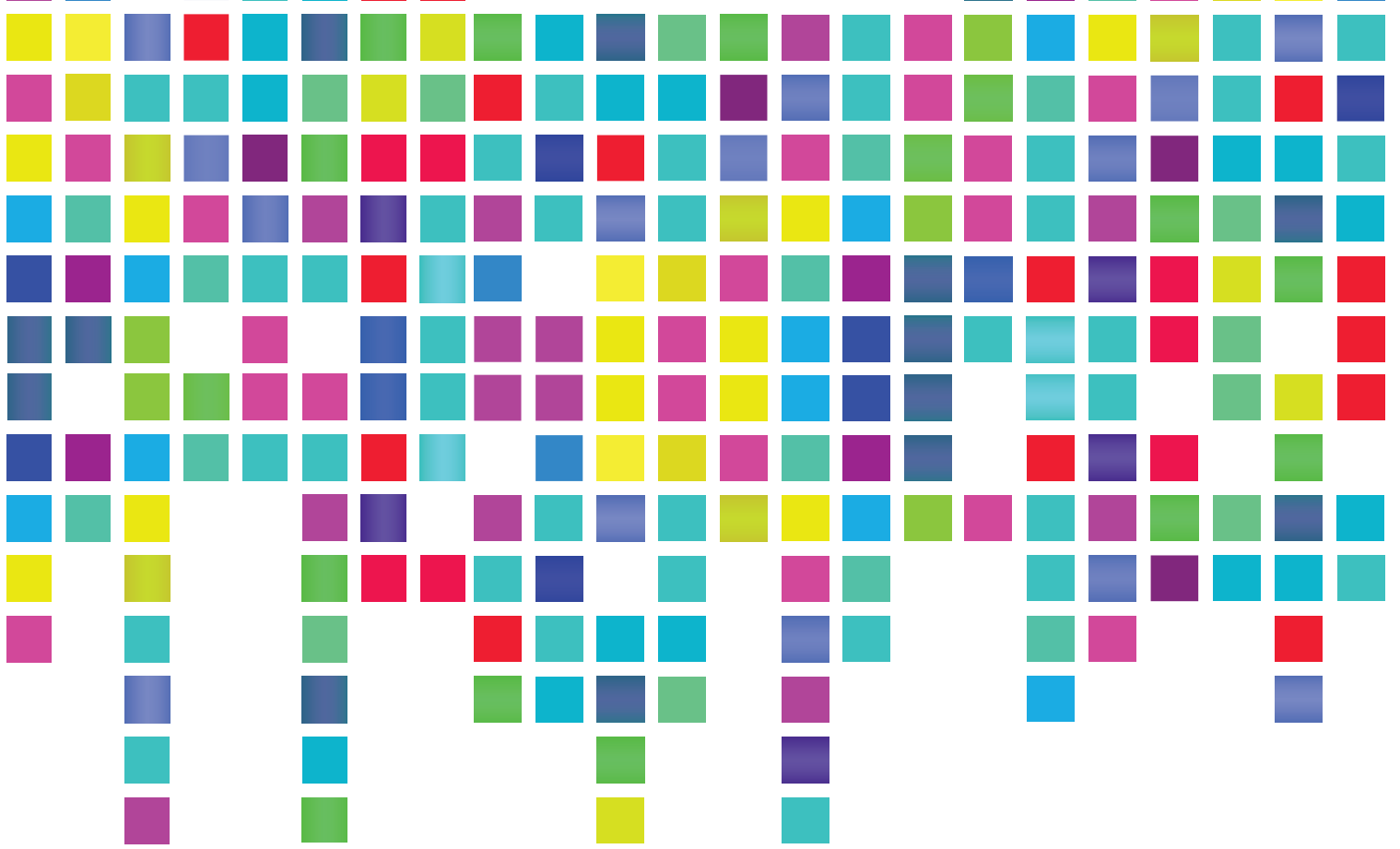
Gender Spectrum (<https://www.genderspectrum.org/>)
PFLAG (pflag.org),
Trans Youth Family Allies (<http://www.imatyfa.org/>).
Intersex issues: <http://oii-usa.org/> and <http://oii-usa.org/intersex-links/>

LOCAL/REGIONAL/STATE COMMUNITY RESOURCES TO SHARE WITH STUDENTS, FAMILIES, AND OTHER SCHOOL STAFF.

School health personnel are strongly encouraged to gather information on local and state community groups, organizations, and agencies that provide affirming services and supports to transgender, intersex, and gender diverse individuals and share this information with those who are in need of these resources.

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