



Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs

Recommendations for Supporting LGBTQIA+ Students in Maryland's K-12 Schools

Introduction

The [Maryland Commission on LGBTQ Affairs](#) is tasked with assessing challenges facing our LGBTQIA+ communities and recommending best practices for inclusion. Numerous reports, including the [2021 GLSEN National School Climate Survey](#), the [2021 Maryland State Snapshot of the GLSEN National School Climate Survey](#) and the [2021 Maryland High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#) present worrisome data about the experiences of LGBTQIA+ youth in Maryland's schools.

These data are clear: Maryland's K-12 schools often are unsafe, hostile places for LGBTQIA+ students. LGBTQIA+ students are experiencing high levels of bullying, harassment, assault and discrimination in our schools. The violence comes from multiple directions, including fellow students, teachers, administrators, family members, and other adults. The effects are dire; LGBTQIA+ students who are victimized in school suffer lower GPAs, lower school attendance and lower post-secondary aspirations. The damage is not limited to school achievement; anti-LGBTQIA+ hostility in school also leads to severely impacted overall health and wellness. According to the GLSEN National School Climate Survey, LGBTQIA+ youth who are victimized in school suffer higher rates of depression, lower self-esteem and higher rates of suicidal ideation. According to the 2021 Maryland High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey, gay, lesbian and bisexual youth are participating in unsafe, unhealthy behaviors at much higher rates than their heterosexual counterparts. This is due to the anti-LGBTQIA+ environment in our society, and its negative impact on our young people.

Transgender, nonbinary, and gender-expansive students are especially at-risk. [National results](#) from the 2019 CDC Youth Risk Behavior Survey, in which Maryland participated, show that transgender students are more than twice as likely to report having been bullied at school than cisgender students. Nearly half (45%) of these transgender students had considered suicide at least once in the previous year and 29% actually attempted suicide. It is important to note that the majority of anti-LGBTQIA+ policies introduced in state legislatures and local school districts across the country specifically target and endanger the health, safety and well-being of transgender, nonbinary and gender-expansive youth.

LGBTQIA+ youth of color, including Black, Latine, Asian American, Pacific Islander, Native and Indigenous youth experience increased victimization related to both their race and LGBTQIA+ identity. Approximately 2 in 5 LGBTQIA+ youth of color experience both anti-LGBTQIA+ and racist harassment at school.

Anti-LGBTQIA+ groups are on the rise in Maryland and across the United States, spreading harmful misinformation, introducing anti-LGBTQIA+ legislation and policies, and blocking attempts to support LGBTQIA+ youth. Urgent action is needed to support our LGBTQIA+ youth in our schools.

Additional Supporting Data

According to the [2021 Maryland State Snapshot of the GLSEN National School Climate Survey](#):

- 96% of LGBTQ+ students in Maryland report regularly hearing “gay” used in a negative way and 87% regularly heard other homophobic remarks in school.
- 76% of LGBTQ+ students in Maryland regularly heard negative remarks about transgender people in school.
- Approximately 1 in 2 LGBTQ+ students in Maryland report being verbally harassed due to their sexual orientation (gay, lesbian, bisexual or other) or gender identity (transgender, nonbinary or other).
- Transgender and nonbinary students in Maryland experienced gender-based discrimination in school, specifically being prevented from:
 - using their chosen name or pronouns (31.7%)
 - using the bathroom that aligns with their gender (28.2%)
 - using the locker room that aligns with their gender (25.1%)
 - wearing clothing deemed “inappropriate” based on gender (14.6%), and;
 - playing on the school sports team that was consistent with their gender (11.4%)
- Only 16.6% of LGBTQ+ students attended a school with a comprehensive anti-bullying/harassment policy that included specific protections based on sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. Only 15.3% had a policy or official guidelines to support transgender and nonbinary students.
- Only 26.7% were taught positive representations of LGBTQ+ people, history, or events.

According to the [2021 Maryland High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#):

(Note: these data do not clearly reflect the experiences of transgender, nonbinary and gender expansive youth, however, many of these youth may also identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual)

| Question | % gay, lesbian or bisexual | % heterosexual |
|---|----------------------------|----------------|
| did not go to school because they felt unsafe at school or on their way to or from school | 15.0 | 7.5 |
| felt sad or hopeless almost every day for 2 or more weeks in a row so that they stopped doing some usual activities | 64.6 | 31.7 |
| bullied on school property | 19.8 | 11.2 |
| carried a weapon on school property | 6.1 | 3.2 |
| reported that their mental health was most of the time or always not good | 53.9 | 21.9 |
| seriously considered suicide | 42.1 | 13.9 |

| Question | % gay, lesbian or bisexual | % heterosexual |
|--|----------------------------|----------------|
| made a plan about how they would attempt suicide | 32.2 | 10.1 |
| actually attempted suicide | 24.9 | 14.6 |

Recommendation #1

Develop and enact a statewide policy which protects transgender, nonbinary and gender-expansive students from sex and gender-based discrimination in schools.

A comprehensive, statewide policy is needed to support and protect our transgender, nonbinary and gender-expansive students. The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) published [guidelines](#) in 2015, however these guidelines are not implemented uniformly across the state, and there are no consequences for schools and districts that choose not to implement. Districts with strong implicitly biased opposition groups are not likely to adopt supportive guidelines unless mandated by policy.

According to the 2021 GLSEN National School Climate Survey, only 8.2% of LGBTQ+ students reported that their school or district had official policies or guidelines to support transgender or nonbinary students. In schools where such a policy exists, transgender and nonbinary students reported that they were (compared to their peers who attend a school without such a policy):

- less likely to be prevented from using their name or pronoun of choice in school,
- less likely to be prevented from using bathrooms aligned with their gender,
- less likely to be prevented from using locker rooms aligned with their gender ,
- less likely to be prevented from wearing clothes thought to be “inappropriate” based on gender,
- less likely to be prevented from playing on the school sports team that is consistent with their gender,
- less likely to miss school because of feeling unsafe, and
- more likely to feel a part of their school community.

At minimum, a comprehensive policy should address the following:

- **Name and pronoun usage.** Allowing students to use and be addressed with their chosen name and pronouns in school, without a legal name or gender marker change, and without parent or guardian permission.
- **Bathrooms and gender-segregated facilities.** Allowing students to use all gender-segregated facilities consistent with their gender identity. If such a facility does not exist, students should be given the choice to use the facility where they feel most comfortable, and should not be required to use certain separate facilities. All new school construction should include plans for gender-neutral facilities.
- **Athletics and physical education.** Allowing students to participate in athletics and physical education programs consistent with their gender identity. Nonbinary and other gender expansive youth should be given a choice as to which athletic program makes them feel most comfortable.
- **Overnight field trips.** Allowing students to be housed according to their gender identity. Nonbinary and other gender expansive youth should be given a choice as to which housing assignment makes them feel most comfortable.
- **Student privacy.** Allowing students the right to determine when, how and to whom

information about their gender identity, gender expression or sexual orientation is shared.

- **Affirmation and support.** Allowing teachers to, if asked, engage in supportive conversation with students about their individual needs as it relates to their gender identity, gender expression or sexual orientation. Allowing and encouraging teachers to discuss gender diversity with the school community.
- **Nondiscrimination.** Affirming that transgender, nonbinary and gender-expansive students are protected under Title IX and the Equal Protection Clause of the U.S. Constitution. Prohibiting other forms of sex-based discrimination as codified in Title IX, including dress codes, educational programming and curricula, and student activities.
- **Training and professional development.** Requiring that all public school educators receive annual training on the needs and experiences of transgender, nonbinary and gender-expansive students.
- **Application to faculty and staff.** Where appropriate, the same gender-affirming protections for students shall apply to all teachers, administrators and staff, specifically name and pronoun usage and gender-segregated facilities.

Additional resources:

- a. [GLSEN Model Policy](#)
- b. [Guidelines to Support Transgender & Nonbinary Students--NYC Dept of Education](#)
- c. [Schools in Transition--Gender Spectrum](#)
- d. [Policy 443 - Frederick County Public Schools](#)
- e. [Policy JBB - Baltimore City Public Schools](#)
- f. [Guidelines for Student Gender Identity - Montgomery County Public Schools](#)
- g. [Examples of Policies and Emerging Practices for Supporting Transgender Students--US Dept. of Education](#)
- h. [Press Release: U.S. Department of Education Confirms Title IX Protects Students from Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity](#)

Recommendation #2:

Require all public school educators to receive at least six (6) hours of live, annual professional development training about the needs and experiences of LGBTQIA+ students and families. Training should be delivered by facilitators with extensive personal and professional experience with educating about gender, sexuality and identity.

It is imperative that educators have the confidence, skills and resources to contribute to positive outcomes for LGBTQIA+ students in school. More knowledge about gender, sexuality and identity, particularly among school-aged youth, would contribute to better strategies, awareness, responsiveness and proactiveness when dealing with situations where LGBTQIA+ identity is involved. Furthermore, all students, including heterosexual and cisgender students, require accurate information and support regarding gender and sexuality. Anti-LGBTQIA+ language and actions harm everyone.

Teachers and administrators should be empowered to be vocal, visible, and bold with their support of LGBTQIA+ students and families. According to findings from the 2021 GLSEN National School Climate Survey, supportive educators have a powerful effect on the safety, health and wellbeing of LGBTQIA+ youth.

LGBTQIA+ students who attend schools with an increasing number of supportive educators

report experiencing:

- Increased feelings of safety related to gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation,
- Fewer missed school days due to feelings of insecurity,
- Higher levels of self-esteem,
- Lower levels of depression,
- Lower likelihood to consider suicide,
- Increased feelings of school belonging,
- Lower levels of victimization, and
- Higher GPAs.

Professional development regarding LGBTQIA+ inclusion should include the following:

- **Terminology and usage.** Common terms and concepts related to gender, sexuality and identity, including guidelines for proper usage.
- **Data and experiences.** Current research regarding the needs and experiences of LGBTQIA+ youth in school, as well as infusions of real-life stories from LGBTQIA+ youth.
- **Connection to racial justice and other systems of oppression.** Understanding anti-LGBTQIA+ bias is often exacerbated by racism and vice versa. Understanding the unique experiences of Black and Brown LGBTQIA+ people. Examining the intersection of anti-LGBTQIA+ bias with racism, misogyny, ableism and other systems of oppression.
- **Personal and interpersonal best practices.** Guidance regarding how to discuss gender, sexuality and identity with ourselves and others, including how to use affirming language, how to honor chosen names and pronouns, and how to address harmful language.
- **Instructional and institutional best practices.** Systemic interventions such as LGBTQIA+-inclusive curricula, specific policy protections, student clubs, administrative protocols, classroom procedures, data and evaluation.
- **Legal considerations.** An overview of federal, state and local policy regarding nondiscrimination, curriculum, climate and culture, safety and other topics relevant to LGBTQIA+ inclusion in school.
- **Supporting transgender, nonbinary, and gender-expansive students.** A specific look at the school's role in supporting the health, safety and wellbeing of transgender, nonbinary and gender-expansive students.
- **Family and community engagement.** Guidelines and resources for building strong partnerships with families, caregivers and local organizations and agencies, where appropriate. Providing support for families who are struggling with supporting their LGBTQIA+ student. Legal and ethical responsibilities to both the family and the student.
- **Elementary and Early Childhood settings.** A specific look at LGBTQIA+ inclusion in the early elementary grades.
- **LGBTQIA+ History and Culture.** An overview of the LGBTQIA+ Rights Movement, including appreciating the monumental impact LGBTQIA+ people have made on the nation's history, including civil rights and popular culture.
- **Case studies and roleplays.** An opportunity to practice and grapple with real-time situations involving LGBTQIA+ students.
- **Open Q&A.** A brave, open space for questions.
- **Additional resources.** How and when to access local or online resources for LGBTQIA+ inclusion in schools.

Additional resources:

- [GLSEN Professional Development](#)
- [GLSEN Safe Space Kit](#)
- [Supporting LGBTQ Youth of Color - GLSEN](#)
- [Creating Safe Schools for LGBTQ+ Youth - CDC](#)
- [Welcoming Schools - Human Rights Campaign](#)
- [Respect Workshop - American Psychological Association](#)

Recommendation #3:

Require an LGBTQIA+-inclusive curriculum to be taught as part of the state social studies and sexual education curriculum, and provide resources for developing LGBTQIA+-inclusive curricula for all other content areas and grade levels. Outlaw book bans in school libraries and classrooms.

According to the Maryland State Department of Education, the [vision](#) for social studies reads:

“Social studies in Maryland will produce students with the knowledge and skills necessary to be empowered, informed, and socially responsible participants in our nation’s democracy.”

The most recent Maryland [State Standards and Frameworks in Social Studies](#) dictates that social studies curricula should include, among other standards (COMAR [13A.04.08.01](#)):

- concepts and processes of authority, power, and influence.
- historically grounded, multidisciplinary approach in order to recognize multiple narratives and acknowledge the diversity and commonality of the human experience.
- decisions made by individuals and groups using economic reasoning.
- significant events, ideas, beliefs, and themes to identify patterns and trends and to analyze how individuals and societies have changed over time to make connections to the present in their communities, Maryland, the United States, and the world.

Each of the frameworks presented have clear, strong connections to the social, political, and economic struggle for equality for LGBTQIA+ people in Maryland, across the country, and around the world. Teaching LGBTQIA+ history and culture offers a rich lens into the concepts and processes of authority, power and influence, the diversity and commonality of the human experience, economic decision-making, and plenty of significant events, ideas, beliefs, and themes to identify patterns and trends and to analyze how individuals and societies have changed over time.

Teaching LGBTQIA+ history and culture is not only a powerful vehicle for achieving the state’s instructional goals for social studies, it also improves school climate and culture for all students. According to the 2021 GLSEN National School Climate Survey, LGBTQ students who attended a school with an LGBTQIA+ curriculum reported:

- Decreased instances of hearing biased language,
- Increased GPAs,
- Increased levels of self-esteem,
- Decreased levels of depression, and
- Increased interest in post-secondary education (college or university).

According to GLSEN, only 26.7% of LGBTQIA+ youth in Maryland were taught positive

representations of LGBTQ+ people, history, or events. Nationwide, 14.4% had been taught negative content about LGBTQ+ topics.

While there are clear opportunities for LGBTQIA+ inclusive curriculum in social studies, positive representations of LGBTQIA+ history and culture can and should be included in all content areas at all grade levels. All students benefit from a curriculum that is inclusive of the diversity of multiple cultures and experiences and does not promote discrimination, marginalization or harm. In the groundbreaking 1988 essay "[Curriculum as a Mirror and Window](#)", Emily Style emphasizes the importance of curriculum as a mirror, reflecting student's identity and experiences back to them, as well as a window, allowing students to explore other identities and experiences. Being knowledgeable about the diversity of society also contributes to strong [social and emotional learning](#), as well as college and career readiness, both of which are identified as priorities for student success by the Maryland State Department of Education.

[Six states](#), which include California, New Jersey, Colorado, Oregon, Illinois and Nevada have enacted legislation which requires the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ identity in instructional materials.

In the 2022 session of the Maryland General Assembly, Del. Acevero (D) introduced legislation (HB0890) which would establish a Commission on History, Culture, and Civics in Education to "make recommendations to the State Board of Education and the State Department of Education to further the discovery, interpretation, and learning of the history, culture, and civics of the United States and Maryland." While the bill was not successful, we agree with and applaud these efforts to support additional implementation of inclusive curriculum across the State.

In addition to LGBTQIA+ inclusive curriculum in social studies, similar inclusion is desperately needed in sex education curricula. Less than 10% of LGBTQIA+ youth in Maryland report being taught LGBTQIA+-inclusive sex education. Meanwhile, according to the [2021 Maryland Youth Risk Behavior Survey Results](#), youth who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual report participating in risky sexual behaviors at much higher rates than their heterosexual counterparts.

| Question | % gay, lesbian or bisexual | % heterosexual |
|---|----------------------------|----------------|
| had sexual intercourse for the first time before age 13 years | 5.4 | 2.3 |
| did not use a condom during last sexual intercourse | 58.1 | 47.7 |
| drank alcohol or used drugs before last sexual intercourse | 26.5 | 17.9 |
| experienced physical dating violence | 17.9 | 8.8 |

Comprehensive, medically-accurate, and LGBTQIA+-inclusive sex education provides all students with lifesaving information about how to protect themselves and others in sexual and romantic situations. Currently, many sexual education programs are too narrowly focused on the sexual experiences of cisgender, heterosexual students and are often steeped in outdated, puritanical, abstinence-focused rhetoric that fails to provide crucial information. All students, including LGBTQIA+ students and/or sexually-active students, deserve to know how to achieve optimal, safe sexual health. We echo the [American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists \(ACOG\)](#):

“Comprehensive sexuality education should begin in early childhood and continue through a person’s lifespan. Programs should not only focus on reproductive development (including abnormalities in development, such as primary ovarian insufficiency and müllerian anomalies), prevention of STIs, and unintended pregnancy, but also teach about forms of sexual expression, healthy sexual and nonsexual relationships, gender identity and sexual orientation and questioning, communication, recognizing and preventing sexual violence, consent, and decision making. They also should include state-specific legal ramifications of sexual behavior and the growing risks of sharing information online. Additionally, programs should cover the variations in sexual expression, including vaginal intercourse, oral sex, anal sex, mutual masturbation, as well as texting and virtual sex.”

The [Maryland Comprehensive Health Education Framework](#) was recently updated in 2022, and includes promising guidelines for inclusive sexual education. However, this framework does not require local districts to implement its recommendations. Recent legislation (SB0199/HB0199) to enforce the framework was not successful during the 2023 legislative session. Left unchecked, districts can choose to ignore the crucial, lifesaving inclusion of family life and human sexuality education.

Lastly, we recommend a statewide ban on book bans in all public libraries, including school libraries. Recently, Illinois became the [first state to enact such a law](#). We echo Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker’s [remarks](#): “Book bans are about censorship, marginalizing people, marginalizing ideas and facts. Regimes banned books, not democracies.”

Maryland Governor Wes Moore has similar views on the harmful effects of book bans: “...we don’t want our students to be able to [wrestle] with these really difficult things in times when they are maturing as individuals and difficult historical points...it’s not about making kids feel uncomfortable. It’s about telling other kids that they shouldn’t understand their own power.”

School and classroom libraries are essential for making the connection between instruction and the real-world. Literature helps to develop and reinforce concepts about ourselves, each other and the world around us. The majority of book bans around the country curiously target narratives [involving LGBTQIA+ identity and/or characters of color](#). Rather than making instructional materials safer and more appropriate, book bans work to dampen any perspectives that amplify historically marginalized voices and challenge the myth of white, cisgender and heterosexual supremacy. These book bans are not supported by data, and are often sponsored by groups who espouse hateful, violent beliefs against a variety of groups. A [report](#) by PEN America found that nearly all (98%) of book bans between July 2021 and March 2022 did not follow best practice guidelines as outlined by the National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC) and the American Library Association (ALA). Moreover, according to a CBS News [poll](#), most Americans, regardless of political ideology, are not supportive of book bans.

Debates regarding curriculum center around the central questions: What should students learn in school and who decides? We believe, as with any school initiative, curriculum should be established 1.) with the best academic, social, emotional, and physical interests of the student in mind, and 2.) as a result of strong partnership and representation from students, families and educators. While cultural and religious beliefs present significant challenges for reaching consensus among stakeholders, culture and religion should not justify harm. All youth, including LGBTQIA+ youth, are actively harmed due to willful gaps in curriculum. Curriculum that fails to represent LGBTQIA+ identities ignores the available data, as well as short-changes and offends our students’ abilities to be capacious, critical thinkers, our families’ abilities to adapt and grow, and our educators’ abilities to provide safe, appropriate, enriching instruction.

Additional resources:

- [GLSEN Inclusive Curriculum Resources](#)
- [GLSEN Inclusive Curriculum Standards](#)
- [GLSEN Inclusive Curriculum Guide](#)
- [Learning for Justice - Southern Poverty Law Center](#)
- [Three Rs—Rights, Respect, Responsibility: A K-12 Sexuality Education Curriculum](#)
- [SIECUS: Sex Ed for Social Change](#)

Recommendation #4:

Provide resources for the establishment and growth of Gender Sexuality Alliances (GSAs) at all schools and in all grade levels.

Gender Sexuality Alliances (GSAs) are student-led, extracurricular school clubs that provide supportive, affirming environments for LGBTQIA+ students and allies. Previously referred to as “gay-straight alliances,” GSAs have recently adopted a more inclusive name. Currently, there is no local, centralized place to identify and track student clubs across Maryland; however, we know many of these clubs exist throughout Maryland’s 24 school districts. While most clubs exist at the high school level, there has been recent growth in the number of GSAs in the middle and elementary school levels.

According to the Maryland State Snapshot of the 2021 GLSEN National School Climate survey, about half (50.6%) of LGBTQIA+ youth in Maryland report having access to a GSA in their school.

GSAs have a positive effect on school climate and culture, academic achievement and mental wellbeing. According to the 2021 GLSEN National School Climate Survey, LGBTQIA+ students who attended a school with a GSA:

- Were less likely to hear homophobic remarks, negative remarks about gender expression and negative remarks about transgender people;
- Were more likely to report that school personnel intervened when hearing homophobic remarks;
- Were less likely to feel unsafe regarding their sexual orientation, gender expression and gender identity;
- Experienced lower levels of in-person victimization related to their sexual orientation, gender expression and gender identity;
- Were more likely to report having many supportive school staff and more accepting peers;
- Were less likely to have missed school;
- Felt greater belonging to their school community;
- Performed better academically in school;
- Were more likely to plan on pursuing post-secondary education, and
- Reported better psychological well-being, including higher levels of self-esteem, lower levels of depressions and lower levels of suicidal ideation.

Aside from the academic and health benefits, GSAs also promote student leadership, opportunities for enhanced social-emotional learning and civic engagement. GSAs are often social groups for students to build supportive relationships, advocacy groups that endeavor to educate their schools and communities, activist groups that take action against anti-LGBTQIA+ language and actions in their schools and communities, or some combination of the three.

Schools should be empowered and adequately resourced to establish and support these student groups, which may include:

- A statewide campaign advertising the benefits of establishing a GSA,
- Official resources from the State regarding how to establish a GSA,
- Official resources from the State regarding how to maintain a GSA, including sample discussion guides, project ideas and best practices or lessons learned from other established GSAs,
- Education and training for student GSA leaders on leadership, communication and advocacy,
- Professional development for adult GSA advisors regarding how to be an effective advisor,
- Stipends and/or achievement units for adult GSA advisors,
- Statewide organizing support for GSA leaders across the State including conferences, special events and opportunities for civic engagement,
- Grant funding to support local, regional and statewide GSA activities, and
- A centralized database of GSAs managed by the State.

Additional resources:

- [GLSEN GSA Resources](#)
- [GSA Network](#)
- [Time Out Youth](#)
- [How to Start a GSA–ACLU](#)
- [Elements of a GSA–GSAFE](#)

Recommendation #5:

Provide culturally-relevant resources and support for parents, families and caregivers to become supportive, affirming adults for LGBTQIA+ youth.

With the rise of anti-LGBTQIA+ misinformation, hate speech, and other bias-based incidents, as well as a changing and often contentious legal landscape, family education initiatives are needed to promote inclusivity and acceptance. Parents, family members and caregivers are vital partners in supporting and affirming LGBTQIA+ youth. Schools must implement programs to educate and empower parents, family members and caregivers as active members of a student's support team.

Family acceptance is a key indicator of positive outcomes for LGBTQIA+ youth. According to the [Family Acceptance Project](#), LGBTQIA+ youth who belong to families who display moderate to high levels of rejecting behaviors face severe health challenges, including:

- Depression
- Suicidal thoughts and attempts
- Illegal drug use
- HIV/STD risk

Families must understand the benefits of affirming their LGBTQIA+ child as well as the dangerous risks associated with rejecting behaviors. Family education must be culturally relevant, taking into account race, ethnicity, class, language and religion as launching points for conversation regarding LGBTQIA+ affirmation.

In addition to providing resources to families who are struggling to accept their child's identity, families who are already supportive and affirming may be untapped resources. Schools and families have an opportunity to learn from LGBTQIA+-headed households and other families who have been successful with supporting and affirming their LGBTQIA+ child.

An LGBTQIA+-affirming family and caregiver program may include:

- Free training and education on LGBTQIA+ identity, offered in multiple languages and taught by compensated community members with lived experience,
- Education regarding federal, state and local policy,
- Access to research regarding LGBTQIA+ family acceptance,
- Peer support and affinity groups to build networks of support among families from similar backgrounds,
- Specific resources for Black and Brown families, immigrant families, and families from religious backgrounds, available in multiple languages,
- Intergenerational conversations between caregivers and youth to build understanding and rapport,
- Inclusive school campaigns and events to celebrate family diversity, and
- Restorative conferencing between youth and families who are struggling to accept their child's LGBTQIA+ identity.

Additional resources:

- [Family Acceptance Project](#)
- [Helping Diverse Families Learn to Support Their LGBTQ Children - Family Acceptance Project](#)
- [LGBTQ Youth and Family Resources](#)
- [PFLAG](#)
- [Affirming Black Families by Blaq Equity Baltimore](#)
- [Coalition for Inclusive Schools and Communities](#)
- [Muslims for Progressive Values–LGBTQI Resources](#)

Recommendation #6:

Collect statewide data regarding LGBTQIA+ youth in Maryland, including population size and experiences in public systems.

There remains a constant desire for increased funding, research and data collection regarding the LGBTQIA+ population. While few national data sources are available, fewer exist with specific information about LGBTQIA+ Marylanders and even fewer about LGBTQIA+ youth in Maryland. These Maryland-specific data are crucial to understanding the size and makeup of our LGBTQIA+ community, including racial, ethnic, gender identity, sexual orientation, class, and geographical backgrounds, as well as the needs and experiences of the community as they relate to their interactions with Maryland's public systems.

According to the 2021 Maryland High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey ([Table 4](#)), of the approximately 35,000 students who participated in the survey statewide, approximately 8,700 identified their sexual orientation as either gay, lesbian, bisexual or other/questioning, with the highest number identifying as bisexual. This means, it's possible that nearly 1 in 4 (24.6%) high school students in Maryland identify as something other than heterosexual. This is a significant population. It is also important to note that the Youth Risk Behavior Survey currently does not collect information about transgender, nonbinary and gender-expansive student identity in

Maryland.

While we have the GLSEN National School Climate Survey Maryland State Snapshot of aggregated national data, we should endeavor to collect our own data to confirm or sharpen these findings, enhance collection among students of color and students in rural areas, and measure the effect of school and community interventions over time. With these data, we could assess the challenges and progress related to LGBTQIA+ students in schools statewide, by district and at the individual school level. These insights would be crucial to evaluate the efficacy and highlight the innovations of school communities across the State.

Outside of schools, it is imperative that we learn about the experiences of LGBTQIA+ youth in other systems and domains, such as housing, employment, juvenile justice, foster care and healthcare.

Additional resources:

- [GLSEN Local School Climate Survey](#)

Recommendation #7:

Hire a full-time staff team for LGBTQIA+ Student Achievement at the Maryland State Department of Education

In order to fully implement and operationalize these recommendations, to respond to the myriad concerns for LGBTQIA+ student achievement in Maryland, and to ensure the work is sustained long-term, the Maryland State Department of Education should hire a staff team devoted to addressing LGBTQIA+ inclusion, achievement and well-being in Maryland's schools. The staff team could be comprised of a director, a curriculum specialist, a youth programs specialist, a family and community engagement specialist, a policy specialist, regional liaisons and a professional development facilitation team. The team could be housed within the MSDE Division of Student Support, Academic Enrichment & Educational Policy. Some specific duties of the LGBTQIA+ Student Achievement Team at MSDE could include:

- Advising on local and statewide policy,
- Developing LGBTQIA+-inclusive curriculum resources,
- Providing ongoing professional development and technical assistance to schools and districts,
- Organizing data collection and research efforts,
- Establishing and supporting GSAs across the state,
- Establishing an LGBTQIA+ Employee Resource Group for teachers, administrators and MSDE staff,
- Hosting listening sessions and connecting LGBTQIA+ students and families with resources and support,
- Hosting conferences and other special events, and
- Establishing partnerships with local organizations and other state agencies to support and affirm LGBTQIA+ youth in Maryland.

Recommendation #8:

Draft and publish an update to the 2015 MSDE Guidance Document entitled, “Providing Safe Spaces for Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Youth: Guidelines for Gender Identity Non-Discrimination,” in collaboration with a paid workgroup comprised of students, families and community members.

It has been over eight (8) years since the guidance document *Providing Safe Spaces for Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Youth: Guidelines for Gender Identity Non-Discrimination* and the additional companion documents were released. Since then, there have been several key advances in best practices, local and national resources, education policy, and other legal considerations. Since 2015, the landscape has changed drastically for how schools address topics related to gender identity. In the absence of any statewide policy, schools are in desperate need of statewide guidance for implementing and, at times, defending LGBTQIA+ inclusive practices.

The 2015 drafting of these guidelines was a monumental, important effort which involved several key stakeholders. This new update should engage a broader range of voices, including input from youth, families, caregivers, teachers, administrators and community members. Contributors who do not work for MSDE should be offered a competitive stipend for their time and expertise. Recruitment for the project should involve intentional outreach to transgender, nonbinary and gender-expansive youth and adults of color, from low-income backgrounds, from diverse ethnic and faith backgrounds, with disabilities, and from rural and urban areas.

Conclusion

The barriers facing Maryland’s LGBTQIA+ youth are severe and numerous. This set of recommendations focuses on schools and education: however, LGBTQIA+ youth are dehumanized, disregarded and discarded in every public institution. This will not end until we have the courage to do something.

The obstacles we face are not easy. There is no single narrative of our community. Many LGBTQIA+ students are thriving, are able to access the support they need, are able to experience safety, joy and pride; others need their parents, educators and peers to contribute to building a world where everyone can thrive.

Solutions exist. Accurate information exists. *We exist.*

“Fears are not facts.” - Chaz Bono

Special thanks to Commissioners:

Jabari Lyles
Joan Bryan
Joe Toolan
Kurt Doan
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