



Leveraging Teachers' Perspectives and Federal Opportunities to Build Inclusive Environments for LGBTQ+ Students

Pride Month is a time to celebrate the LGBTQ+ community, and it provides an opportunity to reflect on the unique challenges faced by LGBTQ+ Americans. In *Voices from the Classroom 2022*, teachers were asked two questions related to LGBTQ+ youth: One about when—or if—students should be taught about the history and experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals, and the other about whether their schools are supporting these students.

Without a doubt, societal acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals has skyrocketed over the past two decades. Despite this, in 2020 more than 1 in 3 LGBTQ+ Americans reported facing discrimination of some kind in the past year, and more than half reported hiding a personal relationship to avoid discrimination.¹ Young people and schools are, of course, not immune to this. A majority of LGBTQ+ youth report experiencing hostile school environments, resulting in poorer social-emotional and academic outcomes.² Forty-five percent of LGBTQ+ youth reported seriously considering attempting suicide in the past year, up from 40 percent in 2020, with particularly high rates among LGBTQ+ youth of color and transgender and nonbinary youth.³ LGBTQ+ disabled students face unique challenges; in one survey, only 15% reported always feeling safe in the classroom, compared to 30% of LGBTQ+ non-disabled students.⁴

Knowing many LGBTQ+ students are not experiencing accepting school environments, we wanted to explore teachers' perspectives on areas where curriculum and schools could be more inclusive. In this brief, we use the *Voices from the Classroom* survey questions to explore whether teachers believe their school is meeting the needs of LGBTQ+ students, and to what extent they believe curricular materials should cover the histories and experiences of those of similar identities. We then outline legislative opportunities to support the creation of inclusive environments for LGBTQ+ students.

Teachers' Perspectives

Teachers were asked whether they believed 14 different topics—including the Civil War, racial inequality in America today, and the history and experiences of Latinx people—should be taught in school, and at what grade level. Alarming, of all of these topics, teachers were least likely to report they believed students should learn about the history and experiences of LGBTQ+ people, with one in three reporting this should not be taught in school. However, only 3 percent of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) teachers believed that the history of this group of people should not be taught in school. Looking deeper into the data, 75 percent of BIPOC teachers compared to 42 percent of all teachers think this should be taught in middle school, indicating BIPOC teachers are more comfortable introducing this history in earlier grades.




“Because of the culture of fear that’s been created, teachers are afraid to have these

conversations with their students. They have to find subtle ways to bring it up, to challenge gender stereotypes and censorship. But we don’t have the support, resources, or curriculum to know how to do that effectively.”

Leona S. Fowler, Queens, New York

When asked how often schools are meeting the needs of various subgroups of students, teachers were least likely to say their school was meeting the needs of LGBTQ+ students. Twenty-seven percent of the national sample and 69 percent of the BIPOC sample say their school is rarely or never meeting the needs of these students. On the other extreme, only 6 percent of the BIPOC sample and 22 percent of the national sample report that their schools are often meeting the needs of these students.

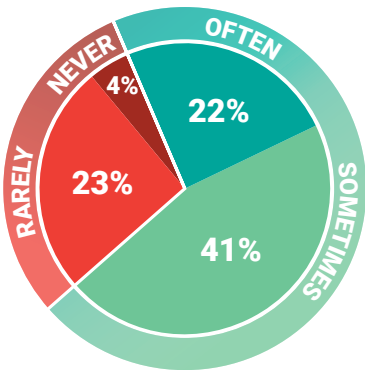
In last year’s survey, only one in three teachers reported that their school was often meeting the needs of LGBTQ+ students in remote learning, demonstrating that this problem has persisted over time and across different school environments.



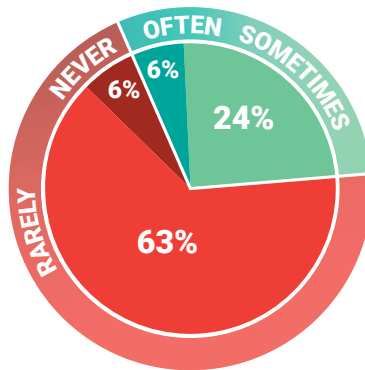
1 out of 3 teachers in the national sample think the history and experience of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people should not be taught in school.

Q.39 VOICES FROM THE CLASSROOM 2022

How often would you say that your school meets the needs of LGTBQ+ youth?



National Sample



BIPOC Sample

Q.59 VOICES FROM THE CLASSROOM 2022

Moving Backward

Unfortunately, policymakers in statehouses across the country are introducing legislation that could worsen hostile school environments for LGBTQ+ youth, making it more likely that schools will not be able to meet their needs. They've proposed more than 200 pieces of legislation targeting inclusion of LGBTQ+ topics in the curriculum or protections for LGBTQ+ students in schools.⁵ Most notoriously, Florida legislators signed into law the "Parental Rights in Education" bill—nicknamed the "Don't Say Gay" bill by critics—which prohibits classroom instruction related to gender identity or sexual orientation before grade three.⁶ And in Texas, Governor Greg Abbot directed the Department of Family and Protective Services to investigate the parents of young people seeking gender-affirming care for child abuse.⁷



"I work with a highly special needs population, but am co-located with a general education high

school. I can see that for the general education population of LGBTQ+ students, some of these resources exist. I see gay-straight alliances and other indications of a supportive community. But those things don't exist for my LGBTQ+ students. If we are going to say we believe in inclusion, we need to consider intersectionality and demonstrate inclusion for all populations."

Rachael Goeler, New York, New York

Moving Forward

How can schools support LGBTQ+ students amidst this backwards momentum? At the school level, more work is needed to both proactively protect LGBTQ+ students from bullying and harassment and to create inclusive environments where LGBTQ+ students feel safe and seen.

Preventing and Responding to Bullying

With a majority of LGBTQ+ youth reporting they experience hostile environments at school, work clearly still needs to be done to help these students feel safe and included. The federal government can incentivize states to create better systems for both proactively preventing and effectively responding to bullying, including bullying of LGBTQ+ students. The *Safe Schools Improvement Act of 2021 (SSIA)* would require states to require their districts to adopt evidence-based best practices for preventing and responding to bullying and harassment, including of LGBTQ+ students, and to implement restorative discipline practices in order to avoid the unnecessary exclusion created by punitive discipline practices that disproportionately impact marginalized groups, including LGBTQ+ students.

Advocacy Opportunity

E4E acknowledges and appreciates the expertise of advocacy groups that focus deeply on specific communities and as a result are experts and thought leaders in the space.

GLSEN is a proven leader in this work, and we want to elevate their calls to action and collective support for LGBTQ+ rights. Teachers, school and district staff, and other education leaders and advocates, can take action on GLSEN's website [HERE](#) by sending an email to their legislators asking them to co-sponsor the **Safe Schools Improvement Act of 2021 (SSIA)**.

Endnotes

- 1 Gruberg, S., Mahowald, L., & Halpin, J. (2020, October 6). The State of the LGBTQ Community in 2020. Center for American Progress. Retrieved from <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/state-lgbtq-community-2020/>
- 2 GLSEN. (2019). The 2019 National School Climate Survey. Retrieved, from https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/NSCS-2019-Executive-Summary-English_1.pdf
- 3 The Trevor Project. (2022). 2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health. Retrieved from <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2022/#trends>
- 4 Human Rights Campaign Foundation. (2020). Advocating for LGBTQ Students with Disabilities. Retrieved from https://hrc-prod-requests.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/welcoming-schools/documents/LGBTQ-Students-wDisabilities_052521.pdf
- 5 Kindy, K. (2022, March 25). GOP lawmakers push historic wave of bills targeting rights of LGBTQ teens, children and their families. The Washington Post. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/03/25/lgbtq-rights-gop-bills-dont-say-gay/>
- 6 Diaz, J. (2022, March 28). Ron DeSantis signs the so-called 'Don't Say Gay' bill. NPR. Retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/2022/03/28/1089221657/dont-say-gay-florida-desantis>
- 7 Governor Greg Abbott. (2022, Feb. 22). Letter to the Honorable Jaime Masters, Commissioner of the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services. Retrieved from <https://gov.texas.gov/uploads/files/press/O-MastersJaime202202221358.pdf>

VOICES FROM THE CLASSROOM

A SURVEY OF AMERICA'S EDUCATORS

Designed by teachers for teachers, *Voices from the Classroom 2022* was conducted with a nationally representative sample of 1,000 full-time public school teachers, plus an oversample of 300 BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) teachers. The sample reflects the nation's district and charter public school teachers and aligns with key demographic variables of gender, race/ethnicity, age, and years of teaching experience. The poll was taken in January 2022 during the height of the Omicron variant outbreak of COVID-19. While teachers designed this survey, Gotham Research Group helped ensure it was valid and reliable.



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