Recognizing & Supporting LGBTQ+ Students in Arizona Schools: A Guide for Legislators & Educators

* *LGBTQ+ youth are victimized at higher rates than heterosexual youth*: The CDC’s 2017 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) noted that LGBTQ+ youth in high school experienced physical assaults and threats, bullying (including electronic bullying), and both sexual and dating violence more often than heterosexual youth[[1]](#footnote-0).
* *LGBTQ+ youth are more likely to miss school due to safety concerns*: 10% of LGB students and 10.7% of students unsure of their sexual orientation reported missing school because of concerns for their own safety--compared with 6.1% heterosexual youth (YRBSS)[[2]](#footnote-1).
* *LGBTQ+ youth are at greater risk for suicide attempts than heterosexual youth*: The Trevor Project reports that LGBTQ+ youth contemplate suicide at nearly 3 times, and attempt suicide at nearly five times the rate of heterosexual youth[[3]](#footnote-2).
* *AZ school climates are largely hostile toward LGBTQ+ students*: According to a 2017 GLSEN report on Arizona school climate, the vast majority of LGBTQ+ students experienced verbal harassment from peers, including overhearing homophobic/transphobic remarks from both students and school staff. Additionally, over 3 in 5 transgender students were prevented from using the restroom that aligned with their gender identity. [[4]](#footnote-3)
* *Policies that support and/or protect Sexual Orientation & Gender Identity (SOGI) are scarce in AZ schools*: Only 7% of students attended a school that had implemented an anti-bullying/protection policy that specifically protected LGBTQ+ students.[[5]](#footnote-4)
* *Multi-pronged, SOGI-inclusive policies are related to positive academic and interpersonal outcomes for LGBTQ+ youth:* Schools’ adoption of multiple SOGI approaches are associated with less victimization and bullying of LGBTQ+ students, less student truancy overall, and higher achievement among transgender youth. Less positive outcomes were associated with “one-size-fits-all” approaches to SOGI policy/practice.[[6]](#footnote-5)
	+ *SOGI policies/practice examples*: Gay-Straight Alliances, LGBTQ+-inclusive curriculum, and teacher trainings surrounding supporting LGBTQ+ youth
* *In particular, Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) have been associated with favorable interpersonal and health outcomes amongst LGBTQ+ youth:* LGBTQ+ youth who attend schools with a GSA organization reported perceiving “stronger feelings of safety, tolerance, and connectedness to the school community” (Barret & Bound, 2015, p. 268).
* *Cultivating a safe school environment for LGBTQ+ youth has implications for young adulthood*: LGBTQ+ students who are forced to closet their identity during high school are more likely to experience depression in young adulthood. Being out in high school is related to higher levels of self-esteem, satisfaction, and lower levels of depression in young adulthood.[[7]](#footnote-6)
* *With respect to pandemic-related social distancing and isolation, LGBTQ+ youths’ vulnerabilities increase*, *and meaningful connection with peers and supportive adults are crucial for their psychological, emotional, and physical well-being*: The Trevor Project contends that COVID-19 restrictions not only hamper supportive social interactions, but also compromise the mediating effect these interactions have on the suicidality of LGBTQ+ youth,[[8]](#footnote-7) placing them at greater risk for suicide.
* *Virtual GSAs can provide a critical source of protection, validation, and support for LGBTQ+ youth:*
1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2017). *Youth Risk Behavior Survey: Data Summary and Trends Report 2007-2017.* National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention, Division of Adolescent & School Health.[*https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/pdf/trendsreport.pdf*](https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/pdf/trendsreport.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2017). *Youth Risk Behavior Survey: Data Summary and Trends Report 2007-2017.* National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention, Division of Adolescent & School Health.[*https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/pdf/trendsreport.pdf*](https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/pdf/trendsreport.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. Kann, L., Olsen, E.O., McManus, T., et al. (2016). *Sexual identity, sex of sexual contacts, and health-related behaviors among students in grades 9–12 — United States and selected sites, 2015* (MMWR Surveillance Summaries 65, Issue 9). Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/65/ss/pdfs/ss6509.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. Gay, Lesbian, & Straight Education Network. (2017). Gay, Lesbian, & Straight Education Network report: 2017 state snapshot: School climate in Arizona. GLSEN. <https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/Arizona_Snapshot_2017_2.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. Gay, Lesbian, & Straight Education Network. (2017). Gay, Lesbian, & Straight Education Network report: 2017 state snapshot: School climate in Arizona. GLSEN. <https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/Arizona_Snapshot_2017_2.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
6. Day, J., Ioverno, S., & Russell, S. (2019). Safe and supportive schools for LGBT youth: Addressing educational inequities through inclusive policies and practices. *Journal of School Psychology*, *74*(2019), 29-43. Doi: 10.1016/j.jsp.2019.05.007 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
7. Russell, S., Toomey, R., Ryan, C., & Diaz, R. (2014). Being out at school: The implications for school victimization and young adult adjustment. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 84*(6), 635-643. Doi: 10.1037/ort0000037 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
8. Green, A.E., Price-Feeney, M. & Dorison, S.H. (2020). *Implications of COVID-19 for LGBTQ youth mental health and suicide prevention.* [*https://www.thetrevorproject.org/2020/04/03/implications-of-covid-19-for-lgbtq-youth-mental-health-and-suicide-prevention/*](https://www.thetrevorproject.org/2020/04/03/implications-of-covid-19-for-lgbtq-youth-mental-health-and-suicide-prevention/) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)