

Policy Memorandum Based on the Youth Survey in San Mateo County

Issue: National research¹ shows that LGBTQ children and youth, as compared to their non-LGBTQ peers experience substantially higher levels of physical violence and bullying than other students, have a lower sense of school belonging, higher depression, and miss school because they do not feel safe at school. They also experience a lack of support from the adults and public services intended to protect and promote their health and well-being. The San Mateo County youth survey results are consistent with this research.

General Policy Recommendation:

Recommend that community leaders, faith leaders, school superintendents, and all county departments use this data to inform practices and the provision of services in the county. Also recommend that resources be allocated to implement these policy recommendations.

Rationale:

For children and youth to thrive in schools and communities, they need to feel socially, emotionally, and physically safe and supported. Yet when they look to school, community, and faith leaders, they do not always perceive these supports. In a recent county survey, children and youth ranked teacher-student groups, community leaders, and the faith community last when it came to receiving positive messages about being LGBTQI. Survey respondents reported being careful and selective about whom they would come out to—only a handful reported being out to their religious or spiritual groups, coaches, or counselors.

Behavioral, Mental, and Physical Health Policy Recommendations

- 1. Develop and rigorously evaluate interventions** to reduce health disparities for LGBTQI children and youth in the public mental/behavioral and physical health systems (these settings).
- 2. Provide culturally competent training** for service providers in these settings to improve the support, validation, and accurate information given to LGBTQI children and youth.

Rationale

LGBTQI children and youth are at greater risk for depression and suicide. Survey respondents confirmed feeling high levels of stress and suicidality.

- 74% of youth considered harming themselves in the past 12 months;
- 63% of youth reported they felt stress quite a bit or very much (stress was defined as when a person feels tense, restless, nervous, or anxious, or is unable to sleep at night because his/her mind is troubled all the time); and
- 74% of youth reported that that they stopped doing some usual activities during the past 12 months, because they felt so sad, hopeless or anxious almost every day for two weeks or more in a row (usual activities were defined as not seeing friends, skipping meals, skipping school or an after-school activity, and not doing homework).

¹ National survey data is provided as context and can be viewed here

http://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/NSCS_ExecSumm_2013_DESIGN_FINAL.pdf.

In California, LGBTQI youth aged 15-24 have the lowest utilization of medical office visits of any age group.² The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that health care professionals discuss issues of emerging sexuality with all adolescents. Statewide sexual education standards require that when schools have sexual educational classes they give information about safe sex and LGBTQI dating. Children and youth want school and health care professionals to treat them with respect and honesty, to be medically well-educated, and to give them accurate information. Yet most of the respondents did not know where to access healthcare (67% did not know where to go to get LGBTQI friendly healthcare) and did not get safe sex information or information about LGBTQI dating at school (59%; note, 41% reported that their school's sex education classes had this information, but ranked these classes as second to the internet to learn about safe sex; most of the youth surveyed looked to the internet, friends, and social media to learn about safe sex, and 8 said that they didn't know of anywhere they could go for this information.)

School Policy Recommendations:

- 1. Adopt a comprehensive anti-bullying policy** at schools that enumerates categories such as race, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation and gender expression/identity.
- 2. Support student efforts** to address anti-LGBT bullying and harassment on campus, such as the formation of a Gay-Straight Alliance or participation in events such as the National Day of Silence and Ally Week.
- 3. Require staff trainings** to enable school staff to:
 - a. Identify and address anti-LGBT name-calling, bullying and harassment effectively and in a timely manner and
 - b. Improve compliance with Education Code Section 51933 by including information on LGBTQI dating and safe sex.
- 4. Conduct focus groups** to enable schools to identify specific steps they can take to make their schools more safe, welcoming, and inclusive for all children and youth.
- 5. Institute age-appropriate, inclusive curricula** to help students understand and respect difference within the school community and society as a whole.

Rationale:

A positive school climate has been associated with decreased depression, suicidal feelings, substance use, and unexcused school absences among LGBTQI students.³ The good news from the survey is that the LGBTQI students in our county felt safer at school than the national average (60% in San Mateo County as opposed to 45% nationally), however, when we explored specific safety questions, we learned:

- 42% avoided gender-segregated bathrooms because they felt unsafe;
- 43% avoided school functions or extracurricular activities because they felt unsafe or unwelcome; and
- 21% skipped at least one day of school in the last month because they felt unsafe.

² First, Do No Harm: Reducing Disparities for LGBTQ Populations in California (2014), HIV and AIDS Chapter

³ Espelage DL, Aragon SR, Birkett M. Homophobic teasing, psychological outcomes, and sexual orientation among high school students: What influence do parents and schools have?[PDF – 104 KB] School Psychology Review 2008;37:202-216.

When we asked about the incidence of anti-LGBT and homophobic remarks at school, we learned:

- 94% heard “gay” used in a negative way (e.g., “that’s so gay”) (as compared to 71.4% of LGBT students in a national survey) and
- 83% heard other homophobic remarks (e.g., “dyke” or “faggot”) (as compared to 64.5% in a national survey).

When we asked about harassment and assault at school, we learned:

- 53% reported being verbally harassed in the past year because of their sexual orientation;
- 16% were physically assaulted in the past year because of their sexual orientation; and
- 29% reported harassment, assault or other discrimination to school authorities and school staff did nothing in response.

Conclusion:

San Mateo County has demonstrated leadership on behalf of its LGBTQ residents and employees by establishing this Commission and adopting the Commission’s recommended policy on sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI). We commend the County departments that are routinely asking these questions and using this data to inform practices and the provision of services in the county. We respectfully ask that the Board of Supervisors consider adopting the recommendations in this memorandum and work in partnership with the County Superintendent and faith leaders to implement them on behalf of our LGBTQI children and youth.

Summary of Actionable Data from Youth Survey

Sense of Belonging- Positive Messages About Being LGBTQI in Our County

- Youth ranked as most positive: the internet, peers, and GSAs
- Youth ranked as least positive: teacher-student groups, community leaders, and the faith community
- Youth almost always disclosed their sexual orientation selectively— just over half (51%) reported being out to their teachers yet only a handful reported being out to their religious or spiritual groups, coaches, or counselors
- While most youth reported that their schools had a GSA, only half said they were active in their school's GSA
- Very few middle schools have a GSA and approximately X% of public high schools in the county have a GSA

School Safety

- 60% felt safe at school
(as compared to 55.5% of LGBT students felt unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation, and 37.8% because of their gender expression in a national survey)
- 42% avoided gender-segregated bathrooms because they felt unsafe
(as compared to 35.4% in a national survey)
- 43% avoided school functions or extracurricular activities because they felt unsafe or unwelcome
(as compared to 68% school functions and 61% extracurricular activities in a national survey)
- 21% skipped at least one day of school in the last month because they felt unsafe
(as compared to 30.3% of LGBT students in a national survey)

Anti-LGBT Remarks at School

- 94% of LGBT students heard “gay” used in a negative way (e.g., “that’s so gay”)
(as compared to 71.4% of LGBT students in a national survey)
- 83% heard other homophobic remarks (e.g., “dyke” or “faggot”)
(as compared to 64.5% in a national survey)

Harassment and Assault at School

- 53% of LGBT students were verbally harassed (e.g., called names or threatened) in the past year because of their sexual orientation
(as compared to 74.1% in a national survey).
- 16% were physically assaulted (e.g., punched, kicked, injured with a weapon) in the past year because of their sexual orientation (as compared to 16.5% in a national survey)
- 29% reported harassment, assault or other discrimination to school authorities and school staff did nothing in response. (National survey responses below:
 - 56.7% of LGBT students who were harassed or assaulted in school did not report the incident to school staff, most commonly because they doubted that effective intervention would occur or the situation could become worse if reported.

- 61.6% of the students who did report an incident said that school staff did nothing in response.)

Healthcare

- 67% did not know where to go to get LGBTQI friendly healthcare
- 41% reported that their school's sex education classes had information about LGBTQI dating and ranked these classes as second to the internet to learn about safe sex; most of the youth surveyed looked to the internet, friends, and social media to learn about safe sex, and 8 said that they didn't know of anywhere they could go for this information.

Mental Health

- 74% of youth considered harming themselves in the past 12 months
- 63% of youth reported they felt stress quite a bit or very much (stress was defined as when a person feels tense, restless, nervous, or anxious, or is unable to sleep at night because his/her mind is troubled all the time)
- 74% of youth reported that that they stopped doing some usual activities during the past 12 months, because they felt so sad, hopeless or anxious almost every day for two weeks or more in a row (usual activities were defined as not seeing friends, skipping meals, skipping school or an after-school activity, and not doing homework)

Resources

Schools

1. [National Welcoming Schools](#), a program of the Human Rights Campaign Foundation's Children, Youth and Families Program, is an LGBT-inclusive approach to addressing family diversity, gender stereotyping and bullying and name-calling in K-5 learning environments.
2. School Climate Surveys
[Self-Assessment Surveys for Schools](#)
 - **Creating a Welcoming Early Childhood Education Program**
This early childhood education self-assessment tool that teachers and administrators can use to begin conversations with staff, parents and guardians. Center and Classroom Family Communications Are forms that families complete for application as well as other center record-keeping family-friendly to diverse families? Do they use language such as parent/parent or parent/guardian rather...
[Read More](#) »
 - *Assessing Your School Climate*
This School Climate self-assessment has been designed for both informal and formal school safety assessments for K–5 educators and administrators. This tool is based on the main categories that were measured in an evaluation of a multi-state pilot of Welcoming Schools. The evaluation looked at the following areas: Policies and... [Read More](#)
 - [Local School Climate Surveys \(K-12\)](#)
Two versions of the LSCS were developed by GLSEN to be used by local communities. The "[School-Based \(pdf\) version](#)" was developed as a tool to be used to assess the climate of a single school. The "Community-Based" version is appropriate when assessing multiple schools or assessing the experiences of students in a city or town. See more at: <http://www.glsen.org/lscs#sthash.PgttfB8O.dpuf>
3. Equality California's Safe and Supportive Schools
Together with the law firm of Latham & Watkins LLP, Equality California is developing a Safe and Supportive School Equality Index, a metric to measure school districts' efforts to prevent bullying and promote LGBTQ acceptance and programs that support LGBTQ students. The metric evaluating each school district will be released publicly to help members of the LGBTQ community and allies to advocate for better school programs supporting at-risk LGBTQ students. The program will also provide training and support for teachers and staff to recognize at-risk LGBTQ students and to prevent bullying.
4. Sexual Health Education in Schools
 - [National Standards on Teaching Sexual Education](#), the GroundSpark is committed to improving school environments for youth everywhere, and our *Straightlaced* Curriculum and Resource Guide, now aligned with the National Sexuality Education Standards, is a powerful tool to help us all create safer, more inclusive classrooms.
 - [Statewide Information on Sexual Health Education](#) In California, 96% of school districts in provide comprehensive sexual health education. Under Education Code Section 51933 it must be age appropriate; medically accurate and objective; available on an equal basis to English language learners; appropriate for use with pupils of all races, genders, sexual orientations, and ethnic and cultural backgrounds; and appropriate for and accessible to pupils with disabilities.

Foster Care

1. Welcoming Agency, see [Working With LGBTQ Families in Foster Care and Adoption](#)
LGBTQ foster children, foster parents, and service providers have a right to equal access to all services, placement, care, treatment and benefits of the foster care system, without discrimination or harassment.
2. The Williams Institute
LGBTQ foster youth are twice as likely to report poor treatment and more likely to live in group homes and to have more foster care placements. Approximately 1 in 5, or 1,400 foster youth in Los Angeles County, home to the nation’s largest population of foster youth, identify as LGBTQ. The finding is twice the estimated percentage of youth not in foster care who are LGBTQ. Generally, LGBTQ foster youth mirror the racial/ethnic demographic of all foster youth in Los Angeles County. The majority are people of color, over 86% are Latino, Black, or API. More than 18% of all respondents reported experiencing discrimination related to their perceived sexual orientation or gender identity/expression, some of whom don’t identify as LGBTQ. The percentage of LGBTQ youth who were hospitalized for emotional reasons (13.5%) was nearly triple the percentage of similar hospitalizations for non-LGBTQ youth (4.2%).
[Click here for the executive summary.](#)
[Click here for the full report.](#)
[Click here for the press release.](#)

Health Care

1. CDC Youth Risk Behavior Survey of LGBTQ High School Students (2016)
CDC released the first nationally representative study on the health risks of U.S. lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) high school students. To understand more about behaviors that can contribute to negative health outcomes among LGB students, a question to ascertain sexual identity and a question to ascertain sex of sexual contacts was added for the first time to the national and standard [Youth Risk Behavior Survey \(YRBS\)](#) questionnaires. These new data offer insight into the health risks of approximately 1.3 million LGB high school students and highlight the need for accelerated action to protect their health and well-being. CDC analyzed data from the 2015 national survey (conducted among more than 15,000 students in grades 9–12) plus data from 25 state surveys, and 19 large urban school district surveys. The findings are described in a CDC *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, “[Sexual Identity, Sex of Sexual Contacts, and Health-related Behaviors Among Students in Grades 9-12—United States and Selected Sites, 2015.](#)” The report documents the rates at which LGB students reported experiencing substantially higher levels of physical and sexual violence and bullying than other students.
2. California’s LGBTQ Reducing Disparities Report (2014)
3. Equality California’s Health Happens with Equality <https://www.eqca.org/health-happens-with-equality/>
4. Human Rights Campaign’s Healthcare Equality Index, launched in 2000, is a benchmarking tool that has helped transform hospitals and healthcare facilities into more welcoming and inclusive places for LGBTQ patients, visitors, and employees.

Faith-based

1. Equality California

California Faith for Equality is now a program of the Equality California Institute. After working with faith communities to promote LGBTQ equality and safeguard religious freedom for nearly a decade, California Faith for Equality's network of hundreds of faith leaders is now working with Equality California to advance acceptance and equality for the LGBT community.

2. Welcoming Churches and Synagogue Movement materials (www.WelcomingResources.org)

- There are several Christian denominations that have been engaged in an ongoing effort to create an LGBTQ Welcoming Congregations Movement for over 20 years. In researching the process, they have found several important links between pro-LGBTQ advocacy and religious community vitality. Jane Heckles (1997) found that, during 11 periods from 1981-1995, churches that took on an Open and Affirming (ONA) process⁴ experienced increases in memberships. Open and Affirming is the designation for congregations, campus ministries, and other bodies in the United Church of Christ which make public statements of welcome into their full life and ministry to persons of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions. See <http://www.ucccoalition.org/programs/ONA/> for more information.
- The Welcoming Synagogues Project was partially developed to conduct a never before assessment of Jewish denominations around LGBT inclusion. As part of the research phase, which began the Welcoming Synagogues Project, every synagogue in the country across denominations (over 3000 synagogues in North America) were surveyed. Of the 760 rabbis who responded, 41% indicated that when their congregations pro-actively reached out to gay and lesbian Jews, they gained members, and only 2% reported losing members (Aviv, Cohen, & Veinstein, 2009). The research shows that congregations that engage in a Welcoming process actually become involved in and hold more progressive attitudes toward a wider breadth of social justice issues (Schlager, 2004). In fact, in *To Do Justice*, Voelkel found that over half of the pastors of Welcoming congregations felt that their work on LGBT issues made the congregation more active regarding other social justice issues, such as universal human rights, homelessness, immigration, economic justice, racial justice, environmental justice, HIV/AIDS, health care, hunger, women's rights, disability rights, and hate crimes. That research shows that these same congregations, while attracting new LGBT members, also attract younger heterosexuals and their families and others who want to support an "extravagantly" welcoming congregation.
- References & Resources on Welcoming Movement
Cohen, S., Aviv, C., & Veinstein, J. (2009). *Welcoming Synagogues Project: Preliminary results from the 2009 Synagogue Survey on Diversity and LGBT Inclusion*. Presented February 26 and March 1, 2009. (http://www.jewishdatabank.org/Reports/SynagogueSurvey2009_DiversityAndLGBT.pdf)
Day, A. B. (1999). *ONA 1999: Perspectives and Experiences of More than 100 Churches on Becoming and Being Open and Affirming Congregations in the United Church of Christ*. Holden, MA: The United Church of Christ Coalition for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Concerns.
Goldberg, N. & Cooper, P.J. (2010) The Charles R. *Williams Institute* on Sexual Orientation Law. (http://www.jewishjournal.com/oy_gay/item/how_many_members_of_the_tribe_are_family_20100719/)

⁴ Open and Affirming is the designation for congregations, campus ministries, and other bodies in the United Church of Christ which make public statements of welcome into their full life and ministry to persons of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions. See <http://www.ucccoalition.org/programs/ONA/> for more information.