



U.S. Department of Education Supporting LGBTQI+ Youth and Families in School

The U.S. Department of Education (Department) is committed to helping schools and districts provide welcoming, safe, and supportive educational environments for all students, including students who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex (LGBTQI+), and students with LGBTQI+ parents and family members. Recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) show that [LGBTQI+](#) and [transgender youth](#) experience more bullying and violence, and [as a result of stigmatization and discrimination](#), are more likely to experience depression and other mental health challenges than their peers.

This resource includes examples of policies and practices that schools and districts can consider developing to support LGBTQI+ students and families. It also highlights Federal resources that schools, students, and parents may find helpful in working to ensure that all students are free to learn in an educational environment without harassment or other discrimination.

There are many ways for schools to provide safe and supportive environments and equal access to educational opportunities for all students, including LGBTQI+ students. Here are some examples that schools can consider developing in partnership with students and families:

- Using **welcoming and inclusive language** in school and district mission statements and other similar communications that express a commitment to providing a safe, supportive, and nondiscriminatory educational environment for all students, including LGBTQI+ students.
- Facilitating **opportunities for students to find support from peers, teachers, and staff**, such as student-led organizations, and **identifying supportive spaces** on campus. *For example, teachers and administrators can help students establish a Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA) to help build a more inclusive school environment.*
 - ***Did you know?*** According to the CDC, when schools implement supportive policies and practices for LGBTQI+ youth, all students experience less emotional distress, less violence and harassment, and fewer suicidal thoughts and behaviors.
- Providing **professional development opportunities for educators** on ensuring equitable and supportive treatment of historically underserved students, including LGBTQI+ youth. *For example, school districts can offer trainings for teachers on how to meet all families where they are, engage parents in learning, and address family needs – including those of LGBTQI+ students and students with LGBTQI+ parents and family members.*
 - ***Did you know?*** According to the CDC, conducting professional development with school staff is a best practice for improving the health, safety, and school connectedness for LGBTQI+ youth. The CDC provides free Professional Development Learning Modules for Creating Safe Schools for LGBTQI+ Youth. Youth.gov, which is organized by the Department of Health and Human Services,

also has a page of key terms and concepts related to sexual orientation and gender identity/expression that may be a helpful resource for schools, and the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) has a specialized resource for students, families, and educators on [Supporting Intersex Students](#).

- Protecting LGBTQI+ students from **book bans** that create a hostile environment in violation of Federal civil rights laws.
 - **Did you know?** Book bans may violate Federal civil rights laws, depending on the facts and circumstances. OCR can investigate whether students have experienced a hostile environment at school based on sex, race or disability. OCR has a webpage with [Resources for LGBTQI+ Students](#), which includes a wide range of legal and other resources and information about how to [file a complaint](#) with OCR for students who believe they may have experienced discrimination, including harassment, at school.
- Adopting **school policies** that clearly affirm students' right to be free from harassment and other discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity in all aspects of school.
 - **Did you know?** Harassment can be a form of discrimination. As noted above, OCR has a webpage with [Resources for LGBTQI+ Students](#), which includes a wide range of legal and other resources and information about how to [file a complaint](#) with OCR for students who believe they may have experienced discrimination, including harassment, at school.
- Adopting school policies, training, and activities to **reduce and prevent bullying**, including bullying of LGBTQI+ students. Bullying can derail students from participating fully at school and in school-related activities, and policies that specifically address bullying against LGBTQI+ students can make those protections clear to all members of the school community.
 - **Did you know?** You can find information, including resources and suggestions for preventing and addressing bullying of LGBTQI+ youth and all youth, at [StopBullying.gov](#).
- Making clear that LGBTQI+ students must not be subjected to discriminatory discipline.
 - **Did you know?** Evidence shows that [LGBTQI+ students face higher rates of school discipline](#) than students who are not LGBTQI+, often related to their gender expression – and especially for LGBTQI+ youth of color. OCR currently offers resources that address discrimination in the use of discipline based on [race](#) and on [disability](#), both of which provide useful information for LGBTQI+ students who experience discipline based on those characteristics.
- Expanding **mental health resources** that meet the needs of LGBTQI+ students. As discussed above, CDC research shows that LGBTQI+ youth are more likely to experience depression and other mental health challenges than their peers, often associated with their experience of higher levels of stigmatization and discrimination.
 - **Did you know?** The Department provides funds to public schools that can be used to support mental health care for LGBTQI+ and other students. See below for more information.
- Making clear that **school activities for families**, such as teacher conferences, family picnics, or other events are welcoming for all types of families, including students with LGBTQI+ parents or guardians.

- **Did you know?** Updating school policies and forms to use gender-neutral terms (*e.g.*, referring to “parent or guardian” and “siblings” rather than “mother and father” or “brothers and sisters”) can ensure that LGBTQI+ parents can fully participate in their children’s education and can help all types of families feel welcome.
- Designating at least **one staff member** who is knowledgeable about issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity who school community members can approach to discuss their challenges, experiences, or questions.
- Adopting **policies that recognize and respect all students** and implementing policies to **safeguard student privacy**. The Department’s Student Privacy Policy Office has [a Know Your Rights resource](#) on the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)’s protection for student health records.
- Adopting **policies or model plans to guide school staff on how to support students and communicate with families**, such as developmentally appropriate protocols to support students and a checklist of issues to discuss with a student and their family.
 - **Did you know?** Some schools and districts develop gender support plans to promote a supportive environment for transgender students.

What funding does the Department provide to support schools in creating welcoming, safe and supportive educational environments for all students, including LGBTQI+ students?

The Department’s website includes detailed information about the grants it offers. Here is some information about Department grants that can be used to support student mental health, efforts to reduce bullying and harassment, and students experiencing homelessness:

Funds under the **Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (BSCA) Stronger Connections Program, Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Programs, and Governor’s Emergency Education Relief (GEER) Programs** may be used for staffing and other support to improve access to high-quality mental health care and support equitable access to welcoming environments that are inclusive with regard to race, ethnicity, culture, language, disability, and for students who identify as LGBTQI+. For more information, please see the Department’s [BSCA Stronger Connections FAQs](#) (Question C-8, p. 21) and the Department’s [FAQS on Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Programs Governor’s Emergency Education Relief Programs](#) (p. 54).

Student Support and Academic Enrichment funds under Title IV, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary School Act, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act, may be used to reduce incidences of bullying and harassment against all students, including bullying and harassment based on a student’s (or their associate’s) actual or perceived race, color, national origin, sex (including gender identity), disability, sexual orientation, religion, or any other distinguishing characteristics that may be identified by the state or local education agency. For more information, please see the Department’s [Non-Regulatory Guidance on Student Support and Academic Grants](#) (p. 30). Title IV, Part A funds may also be used for the purposes in the paragraph above relating to the promotion of mental health and inclusive learning environments.

Funds under the **McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act** support children and youth experiencing homelessness. This population includes a disproportionate number of students who are [LGBTQI+, people of color, English learners, and living with disabilities](#). The Department has made a major investment in supports for children and youth experiencing homelessness through the American Rescue Plan and is developing additional technical assistance on use of this funding for youth experiencing homelessness who identify as LGTBQI+. For more information, please see the Department's [Non-Regulatory Guidance on Education for Children and Homeless Youth's Program](#) (p. 6).

What are some other Federal resources for schools and school districts to support the freedom to learn for all students?

The Department and other Federal agencies have compiled many resources to support students, parents, schools, and school districts, including these:

Department of Education

- [Best Practices Clearinghouse](#) compiles best practices focused on improving school safety and transforming school climate and mental health services.
- The [National Center for Safe Supportive Learning Environments](#), funded by the Department's Office of Safe and Supportive Schools, offers information and technical assistance on improving school climate and conditions for learning.
- The Department-funded regional [Equity Assistance Centers](#) can provide technical assistance and training, upon request, to schools and districts in equity matters related to serving LGBTQI+ students by request.

Resources from other Federal agencies

- [StopBullying.gov](#) includes information and resources on creating a safe environment for students, including for LGBTQI+ youth.
- [Youth.gov](#) offers extensive resources on many topics, including key terms and concepts, behavioral health, child welfare, families, homelessness and housing, juvenile justice, schools, and more.
- [The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) provides extensive resources, research, training information and more for schools and for parents on supporting LGBTQI+ youth.
- [The Department of Health and Human Services \(HHS\)](#) features resources on LGBTQI+ health and well-being, including for youth.
- [The HHS Indian Health Service](#) features information on Two-Spirit people and for families and friends of LGBTQI+ and Two-Spirit youth.

The Department will update this list above as new resources become available.

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