

School Personnel Support and Training

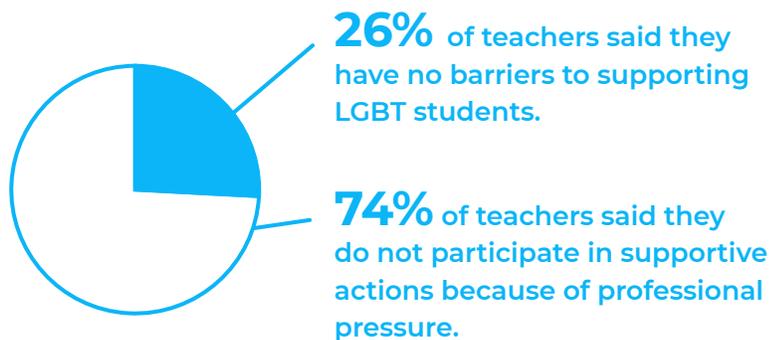
Support from school personnel is another essential strategy for creating school contexts in which LGBTQ and all youth can thrive. Caring and supportive adults are critical to the safety and well-being of all students, especially those who are vulnerable such as LGBTQ students. Most school personnel want to be supportive of students, but may not be aware of the distinct challenges or needs of LGBTQ students, or may not feel capable of intervening in bullying. For these reasons, providing training for school personnel to understand and support LGBTQ students is essential.



SUPPORT FROM SCHOOL PERSONNEL IS CRUCIAL

Studies show that when LGBTQ youth view school personnel as supportive, they feel safer, have fewer absences for safety reasons, report fewer school-related problems, and have higher grades.^{9,12,22}

A critical aspect of support for LGBTQ students is intervening when bullying happens. According to some national studies, students say that teachers intervene less often when homophobic remarks are made than when racist or sexist remarks are made.⁹ A recent report⁹ also found a decrease in the frequency of intervention by school personnel in homophobic remarks from 2013 to 2015. Lack of intervention by school personnel may stem from barriers to intervention including lack of education about LGBTQ issues, lack of institutional support, and fear of backlash.¹⁵ A national report from 2016⁸ found that only 26% of teachers said they have no barriers to supporting LGBT students, such as discussing LGBT issues and advocating for inclusive policies. The remaining 74% of teachers said they do not participate in supportive actions because of professional pressure (e.g., lack of administrative support, or backlash from parents or community), personal beliefs (e.g., that addressing LGBT issues is not necessary or appropriate), or practical concerns (e.g., lack of time; not knowing how to include LGBT issues).



It is especially concerning that some LGBTQ students say that school personnel are often the ones using homophobic language. Over half (56%) of LGBTQ students in a national study reported hearing homophobic remarks from school personnel.⁹ When adults at school neglect to intervene in homophobic remarks or make these kinds of remarks, students learn that homophobic language is normal and prejudice is acceptable at school.

When school personnel intervene to stop negative comments, students are more likely to:

- 1 Feel that their schools are safe for LGBT students.
- 2 Hear fewer LGBT-related slurs.¹⁴
- 3 Experience less LGBT bullying.
- 4 Participate more in school.
- 5 Report more caring relationships with teachers.¹⁹

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TRAINING SCHOOL PERSONNEL MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Pre-service and in-service professional development for school personnel can build awareness, empathy, and self-efficacy, resulting in actionable supportive behaviors for LGBTQ students.^{23,24} For example, teacher training that provides opportunities for exposure to LGBTQ people, that raises awareness of homophobic bullying, and that builds teachers' skills to intervene in homophobic behaviors have been suggested as effective strategies to promote teachers' interventions in homophobic bullying and harassment.²⁵

Several studies show that professional development for school personnel on LGBTQ issues is effective. A study from a national sample of secondary school teachers⁸ found that professional development on LGBT issues was related to more interventions when hearing homophobic remarks, yet general professional development on bullying was not related to more teachers' interventions in the same circumstances. These findings were supported by another study which showed that professional development on LGBT issues was positively associated with behaviors and activities to support LGBT students.¹⁷ Finally, another study found that students reported less bullying in schools with multiple LGBT-supportive practices in place, including having an LGBT point-person available and providing LGBT-related professional development.²⁶

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✓ Schools of education at colleges and universities should integrate education about LGBTQ issues and the needs of LGBTQ students into teacher education.
- ✓ Professional education associations (e.g., the Texas Classroom Teachers Association, or the Texas Association of School Administrators) should offer continuing education and professional development about LGBTQ issues and the needs of LGBTQ students.
- ✓ School personnel should:
 - Intervene in discriminatory bullying.
 - Seek out resources and training to understand and support LGBTQ students.
- ✓ Parents should support efforts by schools and school districts to provide LGBTQ-focused professional development and training to school personnel.
- ✓ Students can advocate for, and participate in, LGBTQ-focused professional development for their teachers and other school personnel.



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