Access to LGBTQ-Related Resources and Curricula

An effective strategy for creating safe and supportive schools involves making LGBTQ-related resources (such as information and support services), and LGBTQ-inclusive curricula available for all students.[1,2] Access to resources can be provided in libraries; through internet resources; through safe zone trainings that identify supportive school personnel; during in-school assemblies and announcements that highlight resources and support; in textbooks and lectures; and through visible images of LGBTQ topics and people in posters on walls in classrooms and hallways. LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum integrates topics related to sexual orientation and gender identity within a standard school curriculum (e.g., health education, literature, science, or mathematics). Multiple studies have shown the importance of access to LGBTQ-related resources, as well as inclusive curricula, for student safety and belonging.

LGBTQ-RELATED RESOURCES AND SAFE SPACES CREATE VISIBILITY AND BELONGING

A recent national survey of LGBTQ students[9] found that when students know how and where to access appropriate and accurate information regarding LGBTQ people at school, they feel that their schools are safer, both for themselves and for other LGBTQ and gender non-conforming students. Another study found that students with access to LGBT-related resources score higher on resilience factors such as perceptions that adults care or that teachers treat students fairly.[19]

The identification of "safe spaces" or "safe zones" for LGBT students has emerged in several studies as another school resource associated with positive school climates.[51] Safe Zone initiatives are programs aimed to promote inclusivity and support by providing voluntary trainings on LGBT issues, and providing training participants with "safe zone" stickers that they can post to identify spaces where students may feel free to openly discuss sexual orientation and gender identity.[52] The available research on "safe spaces" has shown that such initiatives contribute to greater safety, inclusiveness, and connection at school for LGBT students.[9,51,53]

LGBTQ-INCLUSIVE CURRICULA ARE LINKED TO ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND STUDENT HEALTH

There is strong evidence that LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum helps create a safe and fair learning environment for all students.[54,55] According to research, students who say that they have learned about LGBT issues at school report less bullying,[12,55,56] more safety,[38,57] less absenteeism[9,12] and less homophobic language and negative remarks based on gender expression in their schools.[9] LGBT-inclusive curriculum has also been shown to directly promote the health of LGB youth: in one state-wide study, teacher sensitivity to LGB issues in HIV education was linked to lower sexual risk-taking for LGB youth.[58]

Most students in U.S. schools report that they do not have access to LGBT-related resources in school.[9] Currently, California and Illinois are the only states to mandate LGBT-inclusive history classes in public schools. More common are "no promo homo laws" which prohibit the discussion of, or positive portrayal of, LGBT issues in some forms of instruction (e.g., HIV education). Such laws are currently in place in 7 states, including Texas, and have been shown to be associated with less inclusive curriculum and less supportive school personnel, as well as less acceptance of LGBT people by students, more homophobic remarks, and more school bullying.[73]

RECOMMENDATIONS

☑ Policymakers and school administrators should work to ensure that LGBTQ people and history are included in school curricula through state laws, educational guidelines, and school district policies, as well as professional development for school personnel for inclusive curriculum.

☑ School personnel should:

- Be a resource for LGBTQ youth.
- Ensure that libraries have resources for LGBTQ youth.
- Request and attend safe zone trainings.
- Promote visibility and inclusion through visual materials (posters), in public settings (school assemblies), and in classroom curricula.

☑ Students can request that LGBTQ resources be made available at school.

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