Report of the Burlington School District LGBTQ+ Task Force

Artist: LD, HMS Stop the Hate Art Competition Winner
HMS, SA and IAA Stop the Hate Campaign Student Art is used throughout this report.

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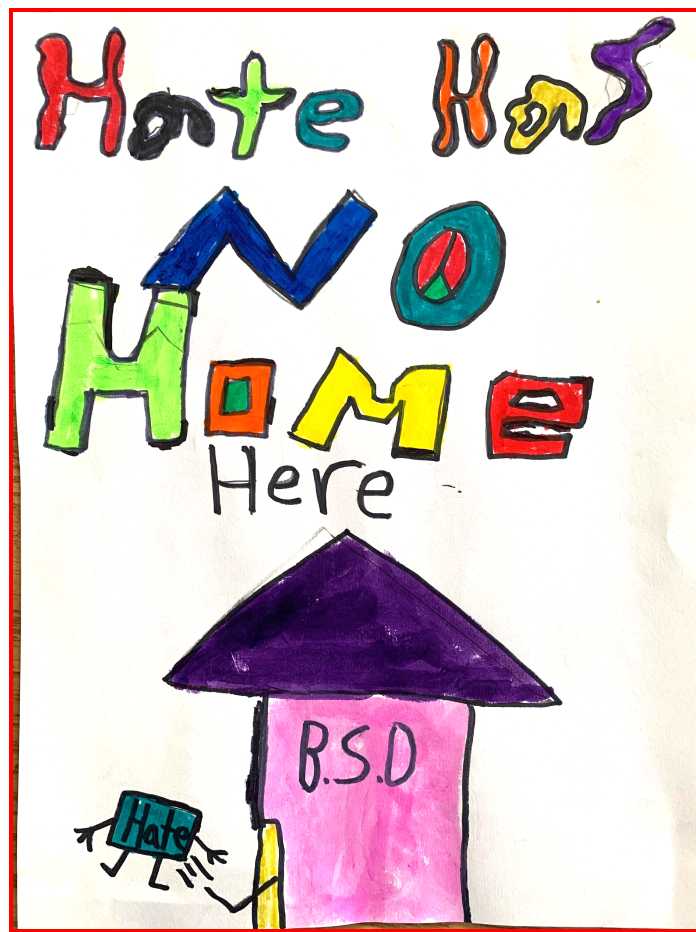
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![Burlington School District logo] **Statement on LGBTQ+ Advocacy**

We at the Burlington School District (BSD) stand committed to transforming BSD into a national model for holistic wellness for LGBTQ+ people, youth, and adults. We stand in solidarity with LGBTQ+ students, staff, and community members and believe that schools can truly be safe only when every student is assured access to an education without fear. We stand behind our BSD staff who pursue a safe and supportive environment for *all* students. We also stand behind our educators who teach an inclusive curriculum that features LGBTQ+ people, history, and events and raises awareness to counter discrimination, stereotypes, bias and harassment.

Note: As part of our recommendations, this statement should be approved by the Superintendent and additionally included in all handbooks, calendars, websites and put on display at school sites.

Scope of Work

Background: *In October 2021, Superintendent Flanagan sent a message to the greater community emphasizing the urgent need for increased support for the LGBTQ+ community in BSD schools. He then directed the [Office of Equity](#) to form BSD's first ever LGBTQ+ Task Force. The newly formed task force was created in December 2021 after an application process that was open to students, staff, family members, and members of the greater Burlington community. The group met biweekly from January 2022 to April 2022 for a total of 12 hours of team meetings and worked to present a plan that accomplishes the following objectives as part of the District's priorities of equitable and safe, inclusive schools:*

- Identify and document what is already being accomplished in BSD schools that builds awareness and advocacy for the LGBTQ+ community
- Ensure the safety of Burlington's students during and outside of school hours as related to teasing, taunting, and harassment due to gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation
- Create a list of recommendations that will inform the BSD Strategic plan and present recommendations and Task Force final report to the Superintendent

Based on these objectives, the Task Force identified **four key areas of growth:**
1. **Curriculum and Resources**
2. **Non-Discrimination Policies**
3. **Environment**
4. **Safety**

The Task Force also identified the following overarching goal as the purpose for our work:

To transform the Burlington School District into a national model for holistic wellness for LGBTQ+ people, youth and adults.

Terms and Definitions

This glossary is provided in order to clarify the intended meaning of terms that appear throughout this report and its supporting references. Due to the expansive, culturally specific, highly politicized, and deeply personal nature of sexuality and gender identity, no singular definition can completely and exclusively encompass any of the communities to which we refer. In understanding matters of sexuality and gender identity, it's best practice to remain open to a variety of meanings individuals may assign to the identities they hold.

LGBTQ+

Used as an umbrella term. An acronym for "lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer" with a "+" sign to recognize the infinitely diverse spectrum of sexual orientation and gender identity as experienced by members of the community. This acronym may appear in a multitude of variations beyond the one used by the task force in this report.

Gender

One core aspect of a person's internally held sense of identity. Gender/gender identity can fall along lines of masculinity, femininity, and/or androgyny; outside that framework; or be absent altogether.

Gender Expression

Aspects of a person's presentation that convey messages about their gender. This can include visual signals like clothing or personal grooming, linguistic signals like pronouns or vocal pitch, and kinesthetic signals like gait or mannerisms, and these aspects can be conscious or unconscious.

Transgender

Does not identify exclusively with the gender associated with the sex assigned at birth. Not to be conflated with sexuality: transgender people may identify as heterosexual or they may be gay, bisexual, or any other sexuality.

Cisgender

Identifies with the gender associated with the sex assigned at birth. (example: a person who is assigned male at birth, and identifies exclusively as a boy or a man.)

Gender Nonconforming

Person whose behavior or appearance does not conform to prevailing cultural and social expectations about what is appropriate to their actual or perceived gender.

Gender-Segregated Spaces

Situations or physical spaces where people are required to separate based on gender. Historically, they have been limited to male (boys) and female (girls).

Gender-Affirming/Gender-Liberated

An environment of acceptance that promotes the agency of individuals to define and express their gender. Free from rigid, constraining gendered expectations of behavior and expression

GSA

Gender and Sexuality Alliance. A student group with the purpose of creating a welcoming environment for LGBTQ+ students and allies.

Sexuality

Patterns of attractionality (sexual, romantic, or otherwise) that constitute a personal identity and sense of belonging to a group. Heterosexual, gay, asexual and bisexual are a few examples of sexuality, which exists as a broad spectrum.

Intersex

A spectrum of natural variations in a person's anatomy that differentiate the person's body from binary, or "dyadic", understandings of sex. This can include physiological variations in primary and secondary sex characteristics, and other aspects of anatomy such as hormonal response or chromosomal makeup. *Note: Some intersex individuals identify as LGBTQ+ and some do not.*

Cissexism

A biased belief system positioning cisgender (see above) experiences as normal and expected, and all other forms and expressions of gender as "other," pathological, and devalued.

Heterosexism

A biased belief system positioning heterosexuality as normal and expected, and all other forms and expressions of sexuality as "other," pathological, and devalued.

Homophobia

Systems and structures that marginalize non-heterosexual people, relationships, culture and community. Can also refer to personal or cultural attitudes of hatred, disgust, discomfort or dislike towards people or communities based on those peoples' nonconformity to heterosexual norms.

Transphobia

Systems and structures that marginalize transgender, gender-nonconforming, or non-cisgender people, relationships, culture and community. Can also refer to personal or cultural attitudes of hatred, disgust, discomfort or dislike towards people or communities based on those peoples' nonconformity to cisgender norms.

Recommendations

We begin each section with Burlington students' responses to this question: *"What would make our schools better for LGBTQ+ students and staff?"*

Curriculum

"More curriculum about [LGBTQ+ people]."

"More materials in classes on gender identity and sexuality."

"Improve the health class curriculum around LGBTQ+ topics."

"Teach people that sexuality and gender aren't black and white, and that people don't need to conform to binaries or society's perceived notion of gender."

"Teach about microaggressions and unintentional homophobia/transphobia."

1. **Develop an Equity Audit Tool and conduct a thorough curriculum audit that examines the overall materials for LGBTQ+ visibility and inclusion of people, history and themes.**
   - Use the results of the curriculum audit to make concrete recommendations for improvement to increase LGBTQ+ representation across departments.
   - Conduct a targeted review of K-12 Health Curriculum as part of Equity Audit.
2. **Implement mandatory training on gender and sexuality for all school counselors, nurses, health teachers and pediatricians working in partnership with the schools.**
   - Annual training for all school nurses and pediatricians to ensure puberty and sexuality talks are up to date and inclusive of LGBTQ+ identities.
   - Designate a lead school nurse to oversee implementation of training and ensure consistency between pediatrician talks.
   - Include mandatory training on gender and sexuality as part of required professional development for new teacher orientation.
3. **Fully incorporate LGBTQ+ advocacy statement ([p.4](#)) into BSD mission statement/ student and family handbooks, calendars and websites and distribute laminated signs into school and classroom spaces.**

**Commitment to
Diversity and Equity in
Burlington School District**

The diversity of our students is an asset to the Burlington community. Burlington School District believes that all students and staff deserve a safe, inclusive learning and work environment where differences are valued and celebrated. The District also believes that every student has a right to strive to learn at their highest and greatest potential.

The District has committed itself to closing the opportunity gap in student outcomes based on racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, linguistic, ability, or any other real or perceived disparities that may limit any student's opportunity to be fully included and successful in school.

BSD firmly believes racism and white supremacy culture negatively impact our entire District and is committed to the eradication of racism and white supremacy culture in our District. In SY '23, BSD's entire leadership team will work with Truss Leadership and The Leadership Collaborative to engage in anti-racist and culturally responsive leadership training.

We are also committed to transforming BSD into a national model for holistic wellness for LGBTQ+ people, youth, and adults. We stand in solidarity with LGBTQ+ students, staff, and community members and believe that schools can

(Continued on next page.)

**Commitment to Diversity and Equity
in Burlington School District (continued)**

truly be safe only when every student is assured access to an education without fear. We stand behind our BSD staff who pursue a safe and supportive environment for all students. We also stand behind our educators who teach an inclusive curriculum that features LGBTQ+ people, history, and events and raises awareness to counter discrimination, stereotypes, bias and harassment. To further this work, the District created an LGBTQ+ Task Force in FY22; that group's report and recommendations (including this statement of advocacy) can be found at **www.bsdvt.org/district/superintendent/school-assessments-data**

The Burlington Board of School Commissioners continues its support and commitment to the District's diversity, equity, and inclusion work. The Office of Equity provides District leadership around issues of equity and access, including fully implementing Restorative Practices and providing resources, support, and advocacy towards just, equitable, and inclusive solutions.

Vermont Agency of Education Best Practices for Schools Regarding Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Students

Visit https://education.vermont.gov/sites/aoe/files/documents/edu-best-practices-transgender-and-gnc.pdf

(*updated calendar statement inserted August 2022)

4. **Mandate the teaching of proactive lessons focusing on prevention and safety that teach into diverse gender and sexual orientation identities and address name-calling, bullying and harassment.**
   - Integrate professional development time into calendar to facilitate development of proactive lessons
   - Work with the Office of Equity and Harassment, Hazing, and Bullying (HHB) Investigations Coordinator to create a learning tour that teaches into HHB prevention.

Non-Discrimination Policies

"Make sure teachers are held accountable for misgendering students."

"Make sure that students and staff have a base level of understanding of what it means to be LGBT… through learning about it in class or optional additional seminars."

"At the start of a new class, students should have a chance to say their pronouns (if comfortable). In classes (and in hallways) people should be corrected if they misgender someone (including characters in a book, etc.). Punishment should be given for being transphobic or homophobic."

"[Regularly] check in on pronouns and chosen names so everyone can share if it's changed."

1. **Adopt and implement clear, consistent, and comprehensive non-discrimination policies at the district level that explicitly protect and affirm staff and students' sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or gender expression, alongside other characteristics (e.g., race, religion, etc.), and prohibit discrimination against students, families, and educators on those bases.**
   - Conduct a targeted review of district/school policies and practices and ensure there is no discrimination on such bases. Policies, including but not limited to those related to clothing/dress code, school-sponsored activities, athletics, and access to restrooms and other school facilities, should be affirmative in supporting students and staff in their gender expression and identity.
   - Ensure that district policies conform with [VT AOE Continuing Best Practices for Supporting Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Students](#).
   - Widely and regularly disseminate accessible information on any relevant state and federal laws addressing discrimination that apply to LGBTQ+ students and staff to educators, school staff students, and families.
   - Ensure that anti-bullying and harassment policies enumerate and specifically include protections for LGBTQ+ students and staff.
2. **Ensure that discipline policies rely on positive and restorative approaches, when appropriate*, and do not disproportionately target LGBTQ+ youth, students of color, English Language Learners (ELL), or students with disabilities.**
   > **We strongly recommend that restorative practices not be applied in situations where there is no relationship between the harmer and the harmed, or in any other way that is traumatizing for the harmed. There are cases in which harm goes beyond restoration and disciplinary action should be taken. There are also cases when ongoing training should be required in order to move forward from harm motivated by identity-based discrimination.*
3. **Ensure that district and school policies are designed and implemented with particular attention to supporting transgender and gender nonconforming students, faculty and staff who face especially hostile school climates and a high level of risk.**

4. **Ensure that professional development and educator resources include a focus on creating inclusive learning environments in which all students, faculty and staff, including LGBTQ+ students, faculty and staff, feel safe and welcome. For example: mandatory yearly training and mandatory new hire training.**

5. **Initiate a comprehensive review and revision process to update non-discrimination, harassment and bullying policies and ensure they are coordinated, internally consistent, regularly reviewed, written in language that is easy to understand, and easy to locate on the District website.**

Environment

"Feature art by openly LGBTQ+ people."

"Let people know that there is a safe space to go if they want to talk about their identity."

"More pride representation around the school."

"It needs to be easier to get name changes in the system, as well as educating people on genderqueer people, especially. As a genderqueer student in this school, I know that it really feels bad to have to correct teachers on your pronouns every day. "

"Too many times, I've had to wait for ten minutes to use the bathroom because cisgender people were using the bathroom to skip class, or cisgender teachers were using the bathrooms despite having a staff bathroom."

"Maintain quality facilities intended specifically for LGBTQ+ students [including] cleanliness and function of gender-neutral bathrooms… [and] menstrual product accessibility."

"[Gender neutral bathrooms] are constantly misused, making it difficult for trans people to use them. I often find myself having to wait a long time."

1. **Construction of the new high school should facilitate easeful incorporation of the below.**

2. **Library offerings and aesthetic should complement a diverse curriculum and reflect diverse identities.**
   - Develop systems to incorporate student voice and input into appropriate representation in the library's aesthetic and content.
   - Books containing positive representation of LGBTQ+ people should be visible and accessible to all students at all times of year.
   - Books containing LGBTQ+ characters and themes should be incorporated into every section of the library (nonfiction, sci-fi, history, sports, etc.).

3. **Ensure accessibility of all-gender facilities at all schools. All-gender facilities should have these features:**
   - Open and unlocked during school hours, without the need to ask for a key, access, special permission or exceptions.
   - Accessible from any location on campus in approximately the same amount of time it would take to access gender-segregated facilities.
   - Labeled with clear, permanent signage.
   - Accessible by a designated, separate entrance: a student should not have to walk through a gendered facility to get to the all gender facility.
   - Equipped with all the same accommodations as the gender-segregated facilities, such as menstrual supplies, waste disposal containers, lockers, or showers.
   - Designated specifically for student use.

- Supported by a high level of awareness, with students adhering to the same behavioral expectations as other school facilities.

4. **Affirming signage, visuals, and messaging should be intentionally incorporated into all areas students congregate to provide diverse, positive representation. Examples include the following:**
    - Multiple identity-specific pride flags in addition to the rainbow flag.
    - Imagery of LGBTQ+ role models past and present.
    - Art and decorations made by openly LGBTQ+ people.
    - Pronouns in email signatures and signage.

5. **Nonpartisan messaging in support of LGBTQ+ people should not be considered political speech.**
    - Teachers and school staff wishing to demonstrate willingness to support students' learning and self-knowledge around gender and sexuality should be made to feel welcome to display pride flags and other symbols of support for LGBTQ+ people.

Safety

"More diversity among the staff, so that we would be able to see more examples of how people do and can exist, as well as having positive role models and validation in their identity."

"Continued development and support around affinity spaces. Continued education around gender identity and sexual orientation."

"For students who don't understand [or] have negative attitudes towards LGBTQ+, having a variety of clubs and activities that attract participants across identity lines would be a great way to improve understanding."

1. **Improve hiring and retention of LGBTQ+ staff. Establish benchmarks and metrics to quantify and document progress.**
2. **Create and maintain LGBTQ+ Staff Affinity Spaces to allow staff the space to maintain mental wellness and continue advocacy work as indicated in the LGBTQ+ Task Force report.**
3. **Integrate school-based extracurricular groups such as GSAs to address inequality within the LGBTQ+ community. These groups can provide support, generate awareness, and help reduce discrimination.**
   - Extracurricular groups can make certain that school policies and curriculum are inclusive and can help make sure that students have positive experiences at school.
4. **Work with BSD GSA faculty advisors to arrange optional listening tour visits from school leaders at least two times per year so that leadership is attuned to the needs of the LGBTQ+ community.**
5. **Work with the Office of Equity to provide a mandatory HHB presentation in the fall of 2022 for all schools that is age appropriate and focused on prevention.**
6. **Work in partnership with Spectrum and Howard Center to provide additional mental health resources specifically allocated for LGBTQ+ students.**
   - Office of Equity creates a Crisis Response Team to manage emergency events that may adversely affect the mental health of students and staff (ie. suicide, media exposure, harassment incidents, etc.) The Crisis Response Team would address safety concerns, provide thorough wrap around care models, share resources and provide healing space for students, staff and families to process.
   - Integrate Howard Center School-based clinicians into mandatory trainings for school counselors, nurses and pediatricians
   - Expand financial resources delegated towards mental health practitioners who work in partnership with BSD schools.
7. **Develop a district-wide procedure for when a student requests a change related to gender identity and work with school counselors, nurses, pediatricians and mental health personnel to develop systemic procedures to create gender support plans in partnership with families.**

- Share policies regarding pronouns and name changes on BSD websites and student and family handbooks
- Present pronoun and name change policies/procedures in schools K-12 to students at the beginning of each school year

8. **Work with school nurses to promote the implementation of gender affirmative care models to proactively support policies and protections that promote inclusion and safety of all students.**

9. **The Office of Equity should provide a buffer in communication to ensure staff are protected.**
   - When community or family members contact school staff with concerns regarding curricular implementation and gender affirming initiatives, the Office of Equity should promptly respond to family and community member concerns.
   - All targeted incidents of hate directed towards BSD staff on the basis of identity or teaching about gender identity and sexual orientation will be thoroughly documented and addressed.

Tasks

Below is a list of the specific tasks completed by the Task Force under the four areas.

1. Curriculum

Examine how Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Gender Expression are currently addressed and discussed in our schools

- ☐ Conduct a targeted curricular review of Puberty & Sex Education in 4/5 grades, Guidance K-5 and Health Classes
- ☐ Survey BSD students to determine curricular representation, assess classroom practices, and evaluate feelings of safety and belonging;
- ☐ Work with librarians to create a booklist and fund the purchase of specific resources to support gender and sexuality affirming curricula
- ☐ Present a school district statement that explicitly states that teaching and learning about gender and sexuality are critical and accepted pieces of the BSD curriculum

2. Non-Discrimination Policies

Collect information on current policies that protect LGBTQ+ youth and staff in BSD and make recommendations for BSD to adopt specific non-discrimination policies that support and affirm LGBTQ+ youth and staff

- ☐ Research and review AOE best practices
- ☐ Draft recommendations for the implementation of policy explicitly for supporting youth whose families do not support their needs for safety, acceptance, and care at home due to their gender and/or sexual identity.
- ☐ Investigate existing systems of response for when teachers, staff or administration perpetuate a culture of homophobia, heterosexism, and transphobia at school

3. Environment

Assess successes and challenges in creating a sexuality and gender affirming/gender liberated environment

- ☐ Create a set of explicit recommendations around best practices for gender segregated spaces to ensure that everyone has safe and easy access to facilities that are consistent with their identity
- ☐ With the assistance of the BSD LGBTQ+ Advocacy Coordinator, develop and pilot a walkthrough observational tool that assesses the extent to which classroom, hallway, and other public spaces are gender/sexuality affirming and liberating
- ☐ Invite statewide GSA faculty advisors and students to comment on drafted recommendations
- ☐ Pilot Elementary Gender Sexuality Alliance at Sustainability Academy
- ☐ Publicize the information and resources vetted and created by the Task Force

4. Safety

Ensure the safety and affirmation of Burlington's students and staff during and outside of school hours as related to teasing, taunting, and harassment due to actual or perceived gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation

- ☐ Research anti-harassment and anti-discrimination policies from other school districts that protect LGBTQ+ students and staff
- ☐ Hold an information gathering optional drop in meeting for LGBTQ+ staff
- ☐ Collect data on incidents of substantiated and unsubstantiated harassment directed towards LGBTQ+ community
- ☐ Review statistics related to LGBTQ+ students' mental health in the VT Youth Risk Behavior Survey
- ☐ Review what resources are available to support mental health for LGBTQ+ staff and students

Findings

Curriculum

According to the [GLSEN Inclusive Curriculum Guide](#), one way that educators can promote safer school environments is through the development of an inclusive curriculum with lessons that avoid bias and stereotypes and include positive representations of LGBTQ+ people, history and events. During the curriculum review process, the Task Force chose to focus on where students typically first encounter information on gender and sexuality in a formalized environment. We focused our targeted curricular review on Puberty & Sex Education in 4th & 5th grades, Guidance K-5, and Health Classes. We reached out to pediatricians that work in partnership with school nurses, elementary school counselors, and health teachers.

Elementary HHB Curriculum

"Part of our responsibilities as school counselors is to talk about harassment and part of this is teaching multiple identities." - Elementary School Counselor

A special thank-you to the three Elementary School Counselors (Melissa Hathaway of EES, Meredith Hoisington of IAA, and Kate Guilmette of CP Smith) who offered insight about the curricular materials used.

Students at BSD schools first learn about diverse sexual orientation and gender identities as part of the anti-bullying curriculum that is introduced by their elementary school counselor as part of the required Hazing, Harassment and Bullying (HHB) curriculum. Counselors are trained by [Prevent child Abuse Vermont](#). At BSD, school counselors use [Second Step](#), which is a socioemotional learning curriculum that has a required HHB component.

K/1 students learn a "Safe Bodies" unit where students learn the correct terminology for body parts and talk about consent. Counselors intentionally pay attention to language and use gender neutral language whenever possible such as "Some people have..." followed by anatomically correct names.

Anti-harassment curriculum includes grade-specific content around identities and protected categories, including gender and sexual orientation.
- Grades 1-2: Diverse Families & Similarities and Differences
- Grade 3: Identity and Protected Categories
- Grade 4: Sexual Harassment + review of protected categories
- Grade 5: Sexual Harassment + review of protected categories
- Grade 6: Recognize, Refuse and Report Harassment + review of protected categories

Puberty and Reproduction Talks

Additionally, there are Puberty Talks in the 4th grades and Reproduction and HIV/Infectious Disease Talks in the 5th grades that are conducted by local pediatricians. Dr. Elizabeth McDonald shared the following in an email correspondence:

"4th Grade covers puberty. We focus on anatomy and body changes that occur in puberty - what changes happen, when they occur and how to keep your body healthy with puberty changes. We aim to use inclusive language and focus on both the introduction of anatomy and then changes that happen to all bodies and the changes that are different based on your anatomy. I have covered the very basics on gender identity - that some people are born looking like a boy on the outside and on the inside feel that they are a girl. And let them know that we are covering what happens on the body based on the body parts someone has. 5th Grade covers Reproduction - We briefly review puberty. And then mostly the science of how reproduction occurs, how a fetus grows. I briefly cover that families are created in many ways-review some of the ways that families are made - (adoption, two moms, two dads, grandparents, etc) and then we discuss the science of how new babies are created. For the HIV/Infections disease section, we do not discuss gender/sexual orientation in this curriculum."

Based on this information, we found that the current Puberty and Sexuality talks as shared above are based on best practices. However, in speaking with 4th and 5th grade teachers and students, they shared that this is not always the case. There is a discrepancy between different pediatricians and how they deliver the content.

Students from the LGBTQ+ YPAR group at EMS recommended that there is a separation between anatomy and gender and to teach into the gender unicorn.

Middle School Health

The Task Force reached out to Middle School health teachers and received a copy of the Health Scope and Sequence. The curriculum is intentionally LGBTQ+ inclusive at all grade levels. In the 6th grade the unit *It's Perfectly Normal: Decision-Making and Puberty* asks the students to consider the Essential Question: "What do you need to know to make healthy/informed decisions for yourself and others?" It covers identity beyond the binary through the Gender Unicorn tool and recommends that these concepts are "threaded throughout all sexuality units and seamlessly incorporated for all sexual health education." In the 7th and 8th grades, there are Sexual Health units such as *Rights, Respect and Responsibilities,* which includes information on confronting gender stereotypes and enhancing healthy relationships.

When we surveyed middle school students we sought to discover if BSD covers a comprehensive health education that covers sexuality, gender and identity in affirming and healthy ways. In a meeting with EMS YPAR LGBTQ+ student committee, students suggested that the health curriculum should cover safe sex between queer people. They also requested the inclusion of accurate and non-pathologizing or stigmatizing information about intersex.

High School Health

When researching Burlington High School health curricula we found that BHS goes into depth on numerous topics surrounding the LGBTQ+ community. One specific health teacher, who is working to include as much as they can in regards to LGBTQ+ health, has included units and activities that focus on gender stereotypes and the impact stereotyping can have on relationships. This teacher includes lessons on sex, gender, gender identity and sexuality and discusses these from a variety of perspectives.

Non-Discrimination Policies

District Policies

In general, BSD's non-discrimination policies, including policies relating to hazing, harassment and bullying are not coordinated, not well organized, not regularly reviewed, not written in language that is easy to understand and not easy to find.

- BSD Equal Employment Opportunity And Non- Discrimination Policy This policy opens with a 173 word sentence that includes an inexplicable commitment to provide "equal access to the Boy Scouts of America…." The policy also refers more than once to "laws listed below," but there do not appear to be any laws listed below. This policy is not dated, nor is there any indication that it has been regularly reviewed or updated. People aggrieved under this policy, which includes applicants for admission and employment are instructed to use "The District's internal Complaint Procedures" to pursue complaints. It is not clear where those "internal Complaint Procedures" are located.

- Prevention of Harassment, Hazing & Bullying of Students There is a page on the BSD website titled BSD Bullying, Hazing, and Harassment. The page reads like a policy, but nowhere does it say that it is a policy and there is no link to the actual policy (linked above), which is much harder to find. There is no date on the web page indicated when it was adopted, or by whom, nor when it was last updated or when it is due to be reviewed. The actual policy appears to have been adopted in 2015 and does not appear to have been reviewed or revised since. The web page also does not say anywhere clearly that bullying, hazing and harassment are prohibited, although that is implied. The web page does not describe clear outcomes when discrimination is found. The statements generally apply to conduct directed toward students, but does include a somewhat random section at the end that "prohibits discrimination and or harassment of employees and others." The actual policy only applies to students. It is not clear whether there is a policy that prohibits harassment, hazing or bullying of staff or faculty.

School-Specific Handbooks

- BHS Handbook – Section on Bullying and Harassment. The BHS "policy" is similar to the BSD policy, but not identical. The handbook section on bullying and harassment does say that "bullying will not be permitted or tolerated" and includes similar language regarding harassment. The BHS Handbook states that "[t]he District will address all complaints of harassment promptly and take reasonable steps to end harassing conduct in accordance with its Policy, Prohibition of Student Harassment. We were not able to locate that policy.

- [Burlington Technical Center](). The BTC handbook has a section on Bullying, Hazing and Harassment that is similar to the BHS/BSD policy, but not identical.

- [BSD Elementary School](). The BSD Elementary School handbook has a section on Harassment, Hazing and Bullying that links to the BSD webpage on HHB. The handbook does not say that BHH is prohibited. The handbook does say that "BSD has adopted policies and procedures to prevent and address student harassment, hazing, and bullying." We could not locate any policy or procedures relating to preventing HHB, only procedures to address it.

- [Edmunds Middle School.]() The EMS handbook has a section on Harassment, Hazing and Bullying that links to the BSD webpage on HHB. The handbook does not say that BHH is prohibited. The handbook does say that "BSD has adopted policies and procedures to prevent and address student harassment, hazing, and bullying." We could not locate any policy or procedures relating to preventing HHB, only procedures to address it.

- [Hunt Middle School]() The HMS handbook has a section on Harassment, Hazing and Bullying that links to the BSD webpage on HHB. The handbook does not say that BHH is prohibited. The handbook does say that "BSD has adopted policies and procedures to prevent and address student harassment, hazing, and bullying." We could not locate any policy or procedures relating to preventing HHB, only procedures to address it.

Model Dress Code

Below is the HMS dress code, included as a model policy for LGBTQ+ inclusion. The HMS and EMS dress codes celebrate and encourage freedom in gender expression.

The middle school student dress code supports equitable educational access and is written in a manner that does not reinforce stereotypes. To ensure effective and equitable enforcement of this dress code, school staff shall enforce the dress code consistently and in a manner that does not reinforce or increase marginalization or oppression of any group based on race, sex, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, cultural observance, household income, disability or body type/size.

Our values are:
- *All students should be able to dress comfortably for school and engage in the educational environment without fear of or actual unnecessary discipline or body shaming.*

- *All students and staff should understand that they are responsible for managing their own personal "distractions" without regulating individual student's clothing/self-expression.*
- *Student dress code enforcement should not result in unnecessary barriers to school attendance.*
- *School staff should be trained and able to use student/body-positive language to explain the code and to address code violations.*
- *Teachers should focus on teaching without the additional and often uncomfortable burden of dress code enforcement.*
- *Reasons for conflict and inconsistent and/or inequitable discipline should be minimized whenever possible.*

Our student dress code is designed to accomplish several goals:
- *Allow students to wear clothing of their choice that is comfortable.*
- *Allow students to wear clothing that expresses their self-identified gender.*
- *Allow students to wear religious attire without fear of discipline or discrimination.*
- *Prevent students from wearing clothing or accessories with offensive images or language, including profanity, hate speech, and pornography.*
- *Prevent students from wearing clothing or accessories that denote, suggest, display or reference alcohol, drugs or related paraphernalia or other illegal conduct or activities.*
- *Prevent students from wearing clothing or accessories that will interfere with the operation of the school, disrupt the educational process, invade the rights of others, or create a reasonably foreseeable risk of such interference or invasion of rights.*
- *Prevent students from wearing clothing or accessories that reasonably can be construed as being or including content that is racist, lewd, vulgar or obscene, or that reasonably can be construed as containing fighting words, speech that incites others to imminent lawless action, defamatory speech, or threats to others.*
- *Ensure that all students are treated equitably regardless of race, sex, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, cultural observance, household income or body type/size.*

Environment

In key areas of the school environment that are common sites of harm and tension, support should be implemented to reduce the intensity and rigidity of gendered expectations and foster a gender-affirming, gender-liberated environment where all students can thrive.

Different students will require different types of support. There is no single policy, accomodation, or approach that will produce a gender-affirming, gender-liberated environment for all students in all cases. The structure of a building and the design of its signage can go only so far; without attending robustly to the other 3 Task Areas, alterations to the Environment fall short of gender liberation. However, there are environmental factors that make a meaningful impact on LGBTQ+ people's experiences.

We provide below a few examples of school environments that were commonly noted in literature and firsthand accounts to contain barriers and create friction for LGBTQ+ people in navigating the school.

Gender-Segregated Spaces

Bathrooms and locker rooms are common examples of explicitly gender-segregated spaces. Under Title IX, transgender students must be permitted to use facilities and participate in activities in accordance with their gender identity. All-gender facilities are a complimentary support to protections covered by Title IX because they allow students of ALL identities to meet their needs without having to align themselves with one binary gender or another.

Some concerns that helped inform the Task Force's recommendations were identified by students and community members:
- All-gender restrooms sometimes become impromptu gathering/socializing spaces, making them unavailable to students who need them.
- All-gender restrooms in BSD have been subject to vandalism.
- Some students have expressed discomfort with using the same facilities as LGBTQ+ peers.

Visual Messaging

Visual messaging of support is a powerful tool for suicide prevention. **Youth who know at least one adult at school they can talk to are at a significantly reduced risk of suicidal thoughts and attempts.** Pride flags are a way for staff to discreetly signify to youth that they are available to talk. In combination with accessible resources to develop cultural competency, visibility of safe adults is a powerful tool for schools to develop a culture of gender affirmation.

Messaging that affirms LGBTQ+ identity is also a way for LGBTQ+ instructors to combat erasure and invisibility, and create an environment in their classroom where they feel comfortable and able to bring their full selves to work.

Visibility of LGBTQ+ identity and pride within the school normalizes these identities and reduces stigma.

Nurse's Office

Spaces outside the classroom are just as important to consider when assessing what is already within the schools and district. Through a meeting with head nurse Rebecca McCray, we learned that school nurses are educated by UVM and Outright Vermont on LGBTQ+ issues. In addition to this, she did emphasize that experience and hearing about trans and nonbinary experiences from the people themself do help build comfort with such topics. McCray really had enjoyed the presentation Nikki and JFunke did on gender fluidity and nonbinary.

In terms of making the space inclusive, the nurse's offices have the safe space signs put up. McCray mentioned that making the office confidential can be hard since sometimes there are multiple students in there at once. Asking students their thoughts on the space and other spaces outside of the classroom would lead to valuable information.
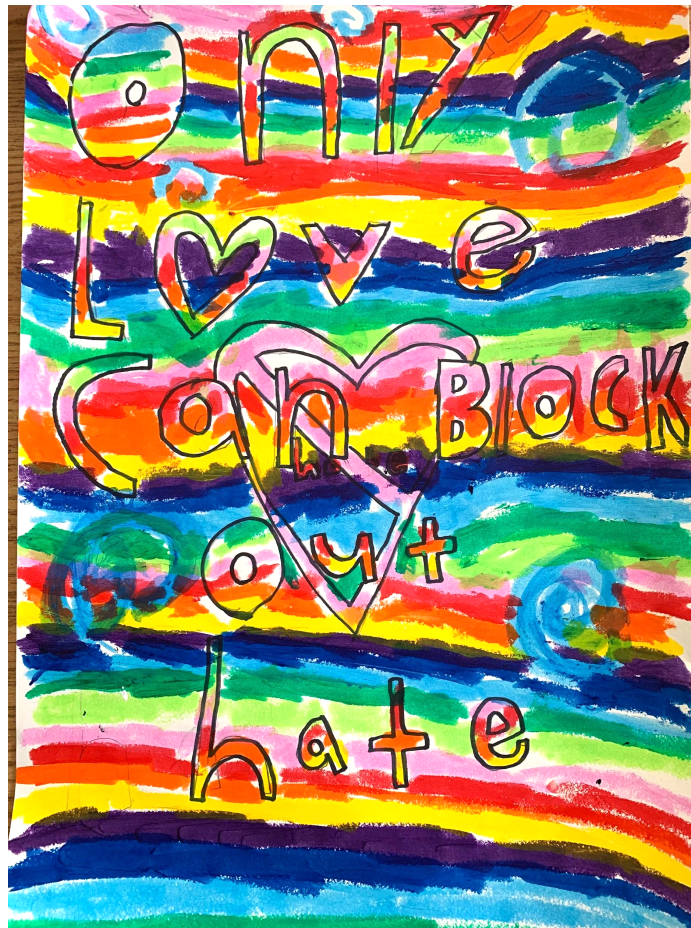
We reviewed the [American Academy of Pediatrics' Ensuring Comprehensive Care for Transgender and Gender-Diverse Children and Adolescents](#) to best understand how school nurses and counselors can support transgender and gender nonconforming youth. From this, we learned about Gender-Affirmative Care Models (GACM), which emphasize understanding and a strong, non-judgemental partnership. "The GACM is best facilitated through the integration of medical, mental health, and social services, including specific resources and supports for parents and families. Providers work together to destigmatize gender variance, promote the child's self-worth, facilitate access to care, educate families, and advocate for safer community spaces where children are free to develop and explore their gender."

Some transgender and gender nonconforming youth encounter adverse experiences at school, including verbal harassment, physical assault, sexual assault and leaving school because of maltreatment. School environments play a significant role in lessening these challenges including considering name/pronoun use, use of bathrooms and locker rooms, sports teams, dances and activities, and peer groups. Schools must proactively support policies and protections that promote inclusion and safety of all students.

Walkthrough

The purpose of this tool is to assess whether or not classrooms and spaces outside the classroom are LGBTQ+ affirming and supportive (i.e. books, posters, pins, flags, etc). This tool will only look at what is in the environment and not at what is taught or language regarding the LGBTQ+. LGBTQ+ students need to be shown that there is support for their identity and that they are welcomed. Visible signs of support are a powerful tool for suicide prevention.

Here is the pilot tool at Sustainability Academy. Walkthrough: SA

Safety

Staff Safety

In terms of staff safety, the LGBTQ+ Task Force discussed the necesity of a non-discrinmination policy that includes steps for how HR, and our district, will act when a staff member experiences identity-based discrimination or harassment. It is essential that all staff feel safe and supported in the workplace through a combination of comprehensive preventative measures and rigorous response to discrimination. This policy should cover our district's many staff members who hold protected identities in the categories of race, color, religion, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, veteran status, and disability status. Interviews with several staff members uncovered real discrimination that has occurred in this district in the past related to sexual orientation and gender identity. These are just the noted experiences, but there are likely many more.

Student Safety

Gender Support Plans

Elementary school counselors shared the following resources for supporting students who are transitioning in elementary school. This includes staff presentations on Gender Spectrum and the use of the [Gender Support Plan](#) (GSP), a tool developed by the organization Gender Spectrum for determining supports that meet the unique needs of individual transgender or gender questioning youth. Gender Spectrum also offers the Gender Communication Plan (GCP) tool for students wishing to share information about their gender identity. A GSP is useful for coordinating wrap-around supports for the student, and the GCP helps to ensure that clear information and expectations are being communicated to all.

At IAA, the school counselor created the following procedure for when a student requests a change related to gender identity and delivered Professional Development sessions to the staff:

Act in partnership with families, especially around such sensitive issues as gender diversity. Students may be more comfortable with this than parents so even if they say their guardians are fine with any changes, we must follow a process. Anytime a student requests a change in the way they express their gender (ie. change in pronouns, name, expression, etc.) be sure to communicate with the school counselor. The school counselor will inform and update the principal throughout the process, which is as follows:

1. *Teacher informs the school counselor.*
2. *School counselor meets with the student and confirms their requests.*
3. *School counselor contacts the parents/guardians.*
4. *School counselor, parents/guardians and the student complete the Gender Support Plan.*
5. *School counselor and the teacher confirm how the information will be communicated to the class based on the Gender Support Plan.*
6. *Information is shared with the class based on the Gender Support Plan.*

Mental Health

Mental Health America reports that 4.5% of the population identifies within the LGBTQ+ community with over 39% of those individuals reported having a mental illness in the last year. Mental Health America reports that transgender and bisexual communities have the highest rates of mental health worries with younger individuals of the LGBTQ+ struggling the most with mental health concerns of all the age groups. Locally, using the LGBTQ+ Youth-led Participatory Action Research (YPAR) Pre-Reflection Survey, it was reported out of 218 responses that 24.3% of the respondents identify as part of the LGBTQIA+ community with 11.5% of respondents identifying as questioning/unsure. LGBTQ+ teens are six times more likely to experience symptoms of depression than non-LGBTQ+ identifying teens. LGBTQ+ youth are more than twice as likely to feel suicidal and over four times as likely to attempt suicide compared to heterosexual youth. Forty-eight percent of transgender adults report that they have considered suicide in the last year, compared to 4 percent of the overall US population.

The Task Force believes that addressing the needs within the LGBTQ+ community is necessary to ensure we are addressing the mental health needs of our students. The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) found that LGBTQ+ student organizations show great promise in "reducing discrimination against LGBTQ students, promoting their well-being, and fostering safe and affirming school environments." These school-based groups can provide support to students while also bringing awareness into the school in general to reduce prejudice and to safeguard that school policies and curriculum are inclusive.

Local Data

HHB Incident Reports

One of our tasks was to "collect data on incidents of substantiated and unsubstantiated harassment directed towards LGBTQ+ community" in order to create a snapshot of student safety issues. We received tracking data related to harassment and bullying incidents that have been reported August-December of 2021. There were a total of 58 incidents reported. Out of those reported, 9 incidents were related to LGBTQ+ identities which is 16% of the total incidents reported. The reported offensives included the use of homophobic and transphobic slurs and inappropriate name-calling including perjoratively calling others "gay", "lesbian" and repeated uses of the "f-slur", misgendering and deadnaming, teasing about preferred use of they/them pronouns, teasing about gender expression, and cyberbullying.
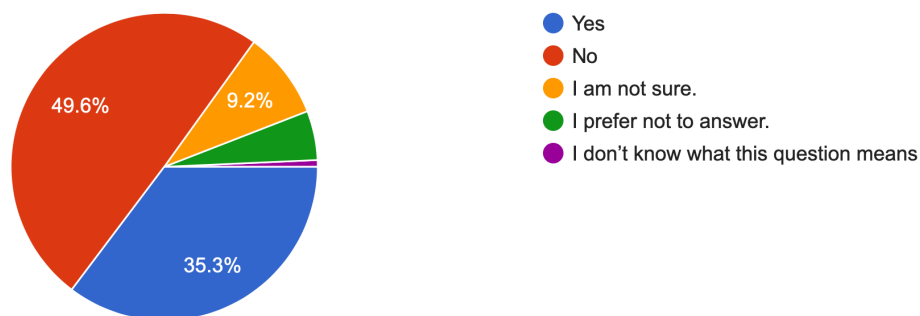
Student Survey

The Task Force issued a student survey that was filled out by over 400 EMS, HMS and BHS students, a number constituting nearly 10% of the student body. 35% of the survey respondents reported that they identify as LGBTQ+, which represents nearly 150 students.

Since it is a value of the Task Force to subvert adultism and center youth voice, this informal survey was designed to solicit meaningful feedback directly from youth. **The survey does NOT constitute a representative sample of the Burlington School District's student population.** However, it was a meaningful and valuable surprise to the Task Force to find that a substantial segment of the BSD student body identifies as LGBTQ+.
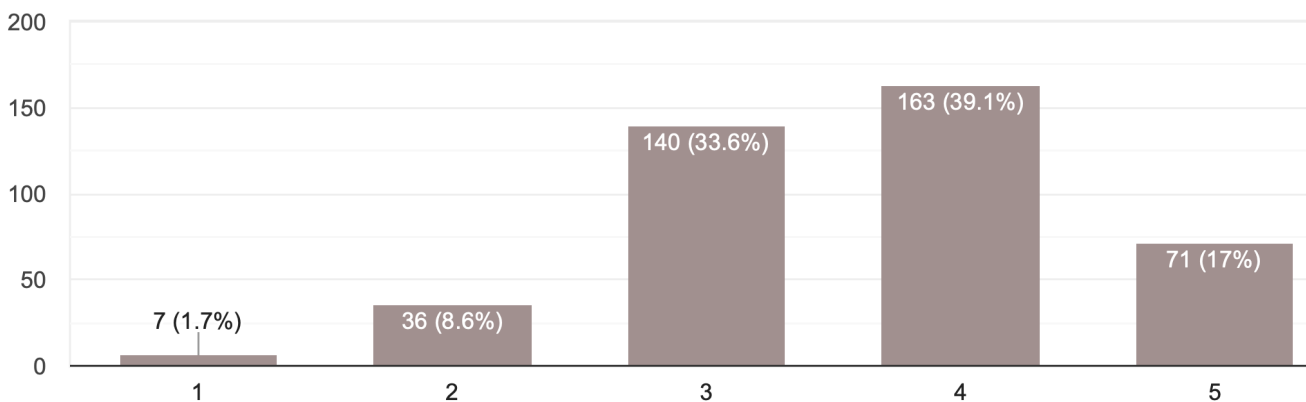
Do you identify as LGBTQ+?
425 responses

- Yes
- No
- I am not sure.
- I prefer not to answer.
- I don't know what this question means

The quantitative survey results are as follows:

Key
1=Strongly Disagree
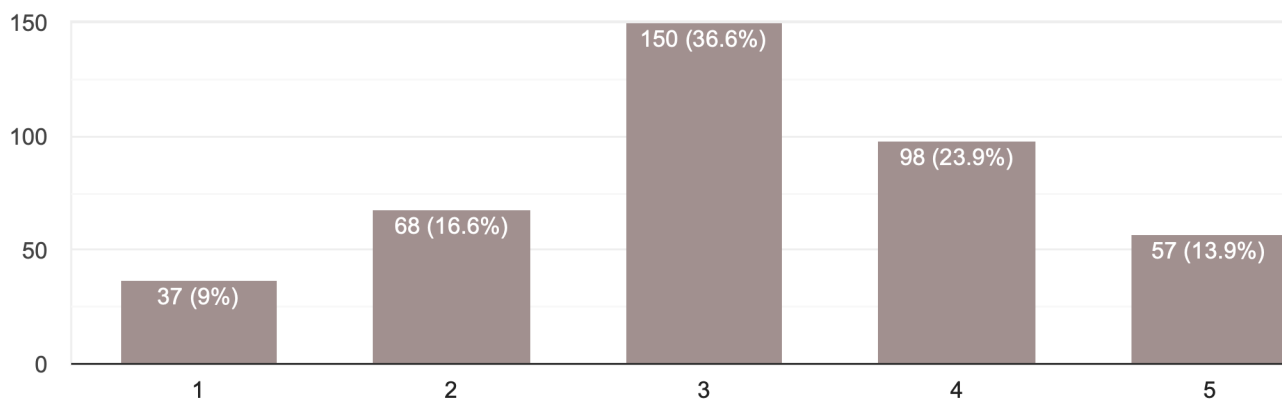**5=Strongly Agree**

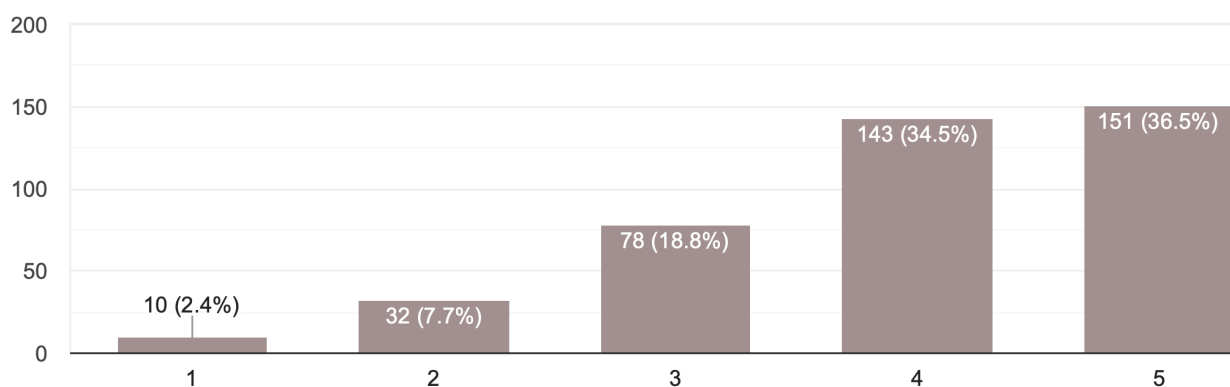## People at my school treat LGBTQ+ people well.

417 responses

LGBTQ+ people are represented in my class curricular materials.
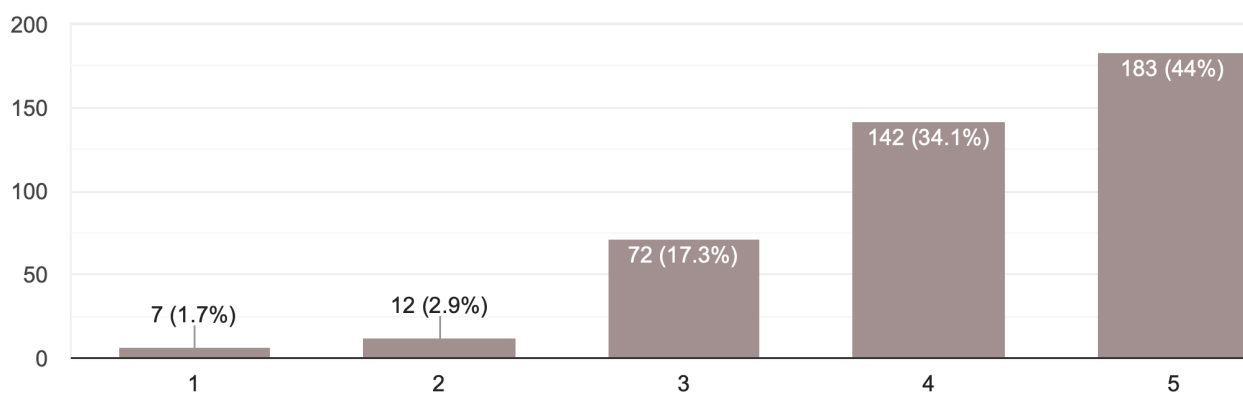
410 responses

In general, teachers allow space to disclose pronouns and respect pronouns in class.
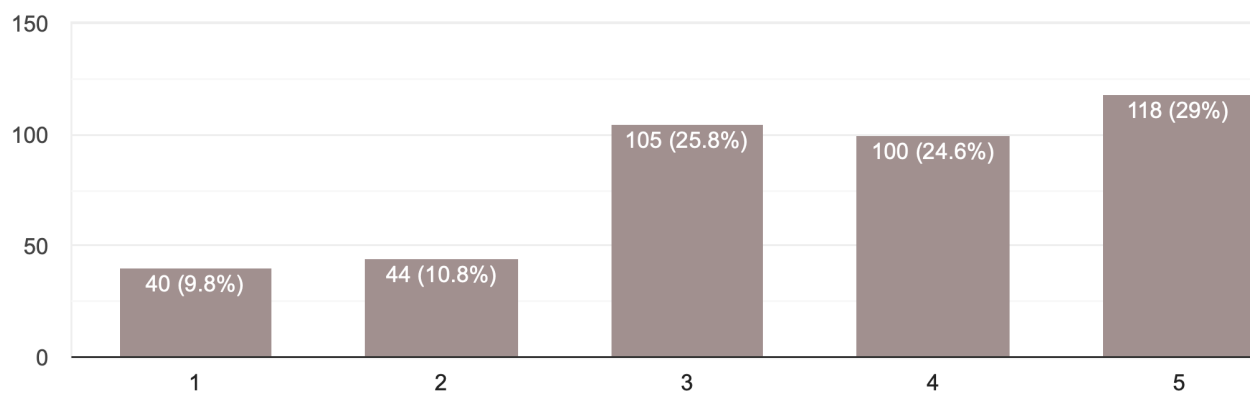
414 responses

In general, teachers use chosen names in class.

416 responses

There is someone at my school that I feel I can talk to about gender identity and sexual orientation.

407 responses

Resources

Relevant Laws and Regulations

Vermont Agency of Education Educator Disciplinary Action.

https://education.vermont.gov/educator-licensure/professional-standards/educator-disciplinary-action

Vermont Legislature Statutes Chapter 51: Professional Educators.

https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/chapter/16/051

Vermont Agency of Education Rules Governing the Licensing of Educators and the Preparation of Educational Professionals

https://education.vermont.gov/sites/aoe/files/documents/Rules%20Governing%20the%20Licensing%20of%20Educators%20-%20Effective%20June%2011%2C%202021.pdf

Vermont Agency of Education Continuing Best Practices for Schools Regarding Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Students.

https://education.vermont.gov/sites/aoe/files/documents/edu-best-practices-transgender-and-gnc.pdf

Vermont Agency of Education Educator Licensure Professional Learning

https://education.vermont.gov/educator-licensure/professional-learning

US Department of Education Vermont Compilation of School Discipline Laws and Regulations

https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/sites/default/files/discipline-compendium/Vermont%20School%20Discipline%20Laws%20and%20Regulations.pdf

US Department of Education Office for Civil Rights Resources for LGBTQI+ Students

https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/lgbt.html

Welcoming Schools An Overview of Laws & Policies that Support Safe and Welcoming Schools

https://assets2.hrc.org/welcoming-schools/documents/WS_Laws_Policies_Safe_Welcoming_Schools.pdf

Tools for Improving School Climate

Gender Spectrum Educator Resources [Supporting Gender Expansive Students](https://genderspectrum.org/articles/supporting-ge-students)
https://genderspectrum.org/articles/supporting-ge-students

Gay & Lesbian Student Education Network (GLSEN) [Inclusive Curriculum Guide](https://www.glsen.org/activity/inclusive-curriculum-guide)
https://www.glsen.org/activity/inclusive-curriculum-guide

Gay and Lesbian Student Education Network (GLSEN) [Model School District Policy On Transgender And Gender Nonconforming Students](https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2019-10/GLSEN-Model-School-District-Policy-Transgender-Gender-Nonconforming-Students.pdf)
https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2019-10/GLSEN-Model-School-District-Policy-Transgender-Gender-Nonconforming-Students.pdf

U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [Supporting LGBTQ Youth](https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/safe-supportive-environments/lgbtq_youth.htm)
https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/safe-supportive-environments/lgbtq_youth.htm

U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights & U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division [Confronting Anti-LGBTQI+ Harassment in Schools](https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/ocr-factsheet-tix-202106.pdf)
https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/ocr-factsheet-tix-202106.pdf

U.S. Department of Education [Supporting Transgender Youth In School](https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/ed-factsheet-transgender-202106.pdf)
https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/ed-factsheet-transgender-202106.pdf

Welcoming Schools [Inclusive Schools Booklists](https://welcomingschools.org/resources/welcoming-schools-secondary-resources)
https://welcomingschools.org/resources/welcoming-schools-secondary-resources

Model Nondiscrimination Policy Examples

Des Moines Public Schools [Policy on Non-Discrimination, Affirmative Action and Equal Employment Opportunity](https://www.dmschools.org/departments/administration/policies-and-procedures/series-400/#402)
https://www.dmschools.org/departments/administration/policies-and-procedures/series-400/#402

Spectrum Youth & Family Services [Employee Handbook: Discrimination, Harassment and/or retaliation](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1d1j3pwyfIokVdIWoNtXMsrYjNRapsKtxBXnppDN0XMM/edit)
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1d1j3pwyfIokVdIWoNtXMsrYjNRapsKtxBXnppDN0XMM/edit

Resources for Further Learning

The 19th News [School Districts Have Begun Banning Pride Flags as Political Speech](https://19thnews.org/2021/10/school-districts-have-begun-banning-pride-flags-as-political-speech/)
https://19thnews.org/2021/10/school-districts-have-begun-banning-pride-flags-as-political-speech/

American Federation of Teachers [More Than a Safe Space](https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/ae-winter2016.pdf)
https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/ae-winter2016.pdf

BSD Equity Community Workshops [Let's Talk about Gender Identity and Expression](#)
Note: Not available for public access. The curriculum and footage is available to the District.

California SB 48 [Pupil Instruction: Prohibition of Discriminatory Content](https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201120120SB48)
https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201120120SB48

Massachusetts Commission on LGBTQ Youth and the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) [Safe Schools Program for LGBTQ students](https://www.mass.gov/info-details/safe-schools-program-for-lgbtq-students)
https://www.mass.gov/info-details/safe-schools-program-for-lgbtq-students

Mental Health America [LGBTQ Communities and Mental Health](https://www.mhanational.org/issues/lgbtq-communities-and-mental-health)
https://www.mhanational.org/issues/lgbtq-communities-and-mental-health

Movement Advancement Project (MAP) [Vermont's Equality Profile](https://www.lgbtmap.org/equality_maps/profile_state/VT)
https://www.lgbtmap.org/equality_maps/profile_state/VT

National Library of Medicine [School Connectedness and Suicidal Thoughts and Behaviors](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5359058/)
https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5359058/

Policy Insights Behavioral Brain Science [Promoting School Safety for LGBTQ and All Students](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8454913/pdf/nihms-1740286.pdf).
https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8454913/pdf/nihms-1740286.pdf

U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [Safe and Supportive Environments](https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/safe-supportive-environments/index.htm)
https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/safe-supportive-environments/index.htm

Vermont Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights [Disparities in School Discipline in Vermont](https://www.usccr.gov/files/pubs/2020/02-19-VT-SAC-School-Disparities.pdf)
https://www.usccr.gov/files/pubs/2020/02-19-VT-SAC-School-Disparities.pdf