

Creating LGBTQ Inclusive Schools

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References

Gay, Lesbian, Straight Educators Network, www.glsen.org

Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, www.pflag.org

Queerly Elementary, www.queerlyelementary.com

SFUSD LGBTQ Support Services, www.healthiersf.org/LGBTQ/index.php

Initial Guiding Principles

Embrace all diversity.

Creating a welcoming school for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning (LGBTQ) community includes embracing and honoring all identities including, but not limited to: race, religion, age, ability, culture, family structure, gender, nationality, ethnicity, and orientation. Consider how efforts to create LGBTQ inclusive schools may be enhanced by combining with parallel efforts to embrace other aspects of the community. By honoring and celebrating all identities we will truly create schools that welcomes *everyone*.

Start at the beginning.

The first step to create a school that is welcoming for all is to begin by committing to the idea that everyone deserves equal treatment and a fair education. Review the OUSD LGBTQ Tool Kit for strategies, tips, and guidance when you are ready to take the next step.

Even small gestures of inclusion make a big difference.

Every effort taken to respectfully welcome lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning (LGBTQ) people and their allies will positively impact the school environment.

Trust your instincts.

You will be able to successfully lead a classroom discussion on LGBTQ topics by simply doing your best to be respectful of differences and keeping an open mind.

You will not be perfect.

If you feel you didn't facilitate part of a conversation as well as you could have, simply revisit the discussion at a later date.

You aren't alone.

Contact your principal, district staff or supportive colleagues if you have questions or need support.

The ***OUSD and Community Resource*** section (pages 40-47) lists organizations and OUSD staff that support this work!

What Every Teacher Should Know about Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning (LGBTQ) Themed Lessons

The California Board of Education and Oakland Unified School District have clear policies that support LGBTQ inclusive lessons.

LGBTQ discussions are expected, required, and make a huge difference in creating safer schools for all students.

You will not be talking about sex or reproduction.

An overview of related policies can be found on pages 1-3.

Talking about LGBTQ people, historical and current events, and families are not discussions about sex or reproduction.

You do not need to know everything.

Be honest by saying, "I'm not sure how to answer that," or, "I will find the answer and get back to you." When appropriate, open the

question to the rest of the class, "Does anyone in the class have an answer to this question?"

You are not expected to answer every question.

If a student asks a question that is not appropriate or on topic, it is okay to say, "We aren't talking about that right now," or "Perhaps that is a good question to ask an adult at home."

Parent permission or notification is NOT required before LGBTQ inclusive discussions (per California Education Code 51938).

Students in schools with an inclusive curriculum heard fewer homophobic remarks and fewer negative comments about someone's gender expression than those without an inclusive curriculum. GLSEN 2011 National School Climate Survey

Differing opinions are okay.

As long as the students are respectful, expressing differing opinions should be encouraged. At any point if someone is being picked on for expressing his or her opinion, immediately stop the discussion and revisit classroom expectations about respecting others. Later you can privately check-in with individuals who may have felt isolated during the classroom discussion.

You don't need a formal lesson plan.

Although lesson plans and activities on various LGBTQ topics are readily available, they aren't always necessary. Lesson plans are not required when: using LGBTQ vocabulary, teaching about different families, discussing current events, answering questions, or when intervening in name-calling or bullying.

Activities, links to lessons, as well as video and book suggestions are included throughout this binder.

Addressing Anti-Gay Slurs

Don't Ignore It.

Almost any response is better than ignoring the situation.

If students see that name-calling and hurtful teasing is repeatedly ignored, they get the message that there is nothing wrong with that behavior and they will not be protected from harassment.

Be Consistent.

Intervene each and every time a slur is heard so students will learn that slurs are never tolerated.

Respond to anti-gay slurs in the same way you would intervene when a slur is used about a person's race, religion, ethnicity or any other identity.

"We don't use slurs in our school."

"I heard what you said and it is not okay, it is against school policies, and it is hurtful."

The ***Classroom Resources*** section (pages 23-32) lists books, websites and vocabulary to help guide classroom discussions and activities.

Teachable Moments

When students use slurs, use it as an opportunity to teach why those words may be hurtful.

"What you just said was not acceptable because it implies that there is something wrong with being gay or lesbian when there isn't."

Different ways to respond to "That's So Gay."

- Use Humor: *"Really, that homework is gay? I had no idea an assignment could be gay!"*
- Brainstorm Alternatives: *"What can you say instead of 'That's so gay?'"*
- Explain: *"When you use the word 'gay' to mean something bad or lame, it is hurtful."*
- Start Over: *"Please say that again without the hateful language."*

Follow up for later

If you aren't happy with how you responded you may always follow up later. Making a mistake is far less serious than not acting at all.

Complete an **OUSD Incident Reporting Form** when appropriate.

During class teach what gay means and explain why it is hurtful and disrespectful when used in a negative way.

Provide individual support for students (whether as a bully, target, or bystander) who are repeatedly involved in name-calling, bullying or harassment.

The ***Creating Safer Schools*** section (pages 33-39) provides strategies to respond to and prevent bullying.

Tips to Make your Classroom Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning (LGBTQ) Inclusive

Establish a foundation of respect.

Develop an environment of respect and caring for all students in your class. Post school-wide policies, classroom room rules, and expectations in your classroom. Refer to them regularly. Be explicit that all name-calling and bullying will not be tolerated.

Display visuals that represent diversity.

Without saying a word, some classrooms clearly celebrate diversity. Take a look at the visuals in your room. Do they represent a variety of people? Is there one group represented while others are missing? Are stereotypes reinforced within the visuals? Create a plan with your class to ensure different groups of people are appropriately represented in the visuals posted throughout the classroom.

Read books with LGBTQ characters or themes. Introduce books that include LGBTQ characters from a variety of backgrounds.

Book recommendations
are on pages 22 & 26.

Intervene every time you hear anti-gay words or teasing.

Ignoring hurtful behavior sends the message to all students that it is okay to engage in that type of behavior.

Intervene when you hear gender-based stereotypes.

When students make statements such as, “all boys like pirates,” or “all girls like princesses,” ask them if they know any examples of people that challenge those stereotypes. Point out when characters in literature test traditional gender roles.

Invite an LGBTQ person from your school community to your class to share their experiences. You may consider inviting: a student’s family member, a Gay-Straight Alliance representative, or LGBTQ colleague. Keep in mind that some people may not be comfortable sharing their personal experiences publically.

When appropriate encourage **LGBTQ inclusive classroom discussion** by mentioning various family structures, current events, and historical figures that include LGBTQ persons and experiences.

Don’t make assumptions.

Unless an individual person shares information about himself or herself, it is impossible to be absolutely sure if a person is gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or straight.

Review the ***Classroom Resource*** section on pages 23-32 for activities, links to lessons and vocabulary.

Make family discussions reflect all families.

Family discussions should be open-ended to honor many types of families. Whether creating family trees, or celebrating mother’s or father’s day, be sensitive that students in your class come from a variety of family structures.

Supporting a Student Who Comes Out to You

Say thank you! It is an honor to be trusted with this personal information.

Take the student's lead. She may be excited, scared, confused or a mixture of many different emotions. Mirror the language she uses to define herself. For example, if she refers to herself as "queer" do not use the term "gay."

Listen. Often times just listening is the best way to show support and respect. In addition, you may learn what additional guidance may be needed.

Be honest. If you aren't sure what to say or how to react, you may say, "I'm honestly not sure what to say or do, but I am here for you and will support you," or "Let me know how I can support you."

Identify allies. Create a concrete network of support by brainstorming a list of friendly adults and peers. Add yourself to the list!

Make appropriate referrals. Suggest attending a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA). Although she may not be comfortable attending a public GSA meeting, simply knowing the student group is available may be very reassuring. Help her connect with counseling or health services if needed. *Not all LGBTQ persons will need these services.*

Protect her privacy. Allow him to come out to others in his own time and way. He should know that you would get help if at any point you become concerned about safety issues such as homicide or suicide. *This would very unlikely require you to share information about his sexual orientation or gender identity.*

Follow Up. Check-in with the student regularly to show your on-going support.

Complete an Incident Report. In the event of harassment or bullying on school site, encourage completing an OUSD Incident Report. Offer to fill out the report together.

Say Sorry. It is always okay to say sorry and start over if you feel badly about something you said or did.

Take care of yourself. If you are feeling overwhelmed, confused or in need of guidance reach out to a friend, colleague or principal for advice and support.

Take Warnings Seriously. If you suspect that a student may be in danger, may possibly hurt himself, or someone else, do not leave him alone and contact 911 immediately. When available you may contact on-site mental health resources to help assess the situation. Although the incidents of suicide and suicide ideation are significantly higher among LGBTQ youth, **not all LGBTQ youth are suicidal.**

Frequently Asked Questions About Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LGBTQ) Topics and Classroom Discussions

1. Why is it necessary to have lessons that specifically address LGBTQ issues?

The California Department of Education and Oakland Unified School Districts policies require such efforts, but the reasons for including LGBTQ topics in classrooms are beyond simply adhering to State and District Policy.

Students have a right to talk about their LGBTQ family members or friends in an affirming environment. Students who identify as LGBTQ have a right to be open about this part of their identity.

In addition, our obligation as educators is to make schools safe for all students and families. One of the most common forms of verbal violence heard at schools targets staff or students who are perceived as gay. These slurs can escalate to physical violence on school sites. Schools are safer for all students when LGBTQ topics are taught.

2. I don't think it is appropriate for elementary students to learn about sex or reproduction.

Reading books that have LGBTQ characters or themes, discussions about LGBTQ people, families, historical figures, or current events are not discussions about sex or reproduction.

3. What do I say to parents who suggest we aren't doing enough to support LGBTQ students and families?

Parent notification isn't required when discussing LGBTQ topics in class so it is possible they are unaware of LGBTQ inclusive lessons and discussions which may have already occurred.

It is important to respectfully acknowledge parent concerns by allowing them an opportunity to express their opinions. However, if a parent approaches you at a time that is not convenient or if you are unsure how to answer their specific questions, it is okay to tell the parent, "I would like to hear your concerns. I will let you know a few possible times that I'm available to meet over the next week." Be sure to get back to them in a timely fashion.

When meeting with the parent or family member, listen to their concerns and brainstorm solutions. Use the Tool Kit as a resource to guide your answers to their questions. Invite an administrator or a colleague to join your meeting if you think you will need support.

4. But this type of name-calling is rare at our school.

Although you may not hear anti-gay insults, it does not mean that students are not using them. In addition, lessons that include discussion on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people are not simply to minimize name-calling and teasing. It is also to affirm that LGBTQ people and families exist and they are a valuable and equal part of our community.

California State Bill 48 requires lessons in social studies to be inclusive of the contributions of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons. See page 3 for more information.

5. There are no gay kids at our school so these lessons are not necessary.

It is not possible to determine which students identify as, or may one day identify as, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ). And it is not possible to determine the exact number of students who have LGBTQ family members.

In addition, inclusive lessons benefit all students, not just those who are members of the LGBTQ community. By educating students about LGBTQ persons and issues, we teach respect for the diversity of the larger community.

6. Isn't talking about gay issues taking precious time away from the essentials of reading, writing, and arithmetic?

The Social Emotional Learning Standards are on page 23.

By taking time to create safer and more inclusive classrooms, students will be more focused on learning and teachers will spend less time in the long run addressing classroom management concerns. In addition, many gay-themed lessons touch upon California educational standards and benchmarks.

7. How can we teach these topics when our students are from a variety of cultures?

LGBTQ students and families cross all cultural, racial, and socio-economic boundaries. Inappropriate terms about LGBTQ issues and people exist in every language and culture. By addressing name calling, we teach students to respect differences that also include LGBTQ persons.

8. What about religious beliefs that may conflict with teaching LGBTQ inclusive lessons?

We teach students to respect differences that include LGBTQ persons. This does not mean students are expected to like everyone who is different, but to respect the rights of others in our community. This does not infringe on any religious beliefs.

9. Should notification be sent out when LGBTQ topics are going to be discussed?

As per the California Education Code, parent notification is not required for LGBTQ social studies lessons, discussion on families, or when confronting homophobic slurs. Parent notification is not necessary when:

- Answering student questions such as: *What does gay mean?*
- Intervening in name calling incidents;
- Discussing different families;
- Reading a book with LGBTQ characters or themes;
- Speaking about LGBTQ persons and historical events;
- Discussing gender variant behaviors;
- Challenging LGBTQ stereotypes and assumptions or
- Celebrating events such as: Gay Pride or Transgender Remembrance.

You are not required to provide notification prior to teaching LGBTQ lessons or when intervening in name-calling.

10. What do I say to a parent who is concerned about LGBTQ lessons and discussions?

It is important to respectfully acknowledge parent concerns by allowing them an opportunity to express their opinions. However, if a parent approaches you at a time that is not convenient or if you are unsure how to answer their specific questions, it is okay to tell the parent, "I would like to hear your concerns. I will let you know a few possible times that I'm available to meet." Be sure to get back to them in a timely fashion.

If you think you will need support, invite a colleague, principal or other staff member to the meeting. When you meet with the parent, listen carefully and ask what their specific concerns are so you may address them directly and brainstorm possible solutions. Use the resources throughout this Tool Kit to guide your response to specific concerns.

11. What can I say to a parent whose child has just come out?

Congratulations! Your child opened up to you about this very personal part of their life. Take a moment to be proud that you have a relationship with your child that welcomes open communication.

Although it may take time to adjust to this new aspect of their identity, your child is fundamentally the same person. Gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people can be parents, professionals, spiritual, and productive members of society in the same ways a straight person may be.

Read *Supporting a Student Who Comes Out to You* (page 8) and *Supporting a Transgender Child* (page 21) to learn how to support these youth.

A resource for family members who recently had a loved one come out to them is *Parents, Friends of Gays and Lesbians*. You may browse their website at www.pflag.org, or call their hotline, (510-562-7692) to find a local meeting for support.