

## SCHOOL-BASED SUPPORT FOR GLBT STUDENTS: A REVIEW OF THREE LEVELS OF RESEARCH

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Gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) students experience harassment, alienation, and violence in schools. Several school-based interventions have been suggested to provide a safe and effective learning environment for these students, but few have been evaluated or investigated experimentally. This review utilizes A.K. Ellis' (2001) model to review the research on school-based interventions for GLBT youth at the levels of theory, applied investigation, and widespread implementation. Results suggest that, although the research base for psychological needs of GLBT youth is well established, applied investigation of small- and large-scale implementation is in the early stages. © 2007 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

Adolescents face numerous challenges during a time of rapid development, rising peer influence, and identity formation (Ryan & Futterman, 1998). Among adolescents, several subgroups emerge, one of which includes sexual minority youth. This group includes youth whose sexual orientation is anything other than exclusively heterosexual, and may include aspects of attraction, behavior, and identity (American Academy of Pediatrics, American Counseling Association, American Association of School Administrators, American Federation of Teachers, American Psychological Association et al., 1999). Therefore, any student who identifies as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender (GLBT), who has engaged in same-sex behavior, or who has experienced same-sex attraction may be considered sexual minority youth.

Unfortunately, school experiences for sexual minority youth frequently include direct and indirect harassment, bullying, belittlement, and even violent attacks (Bontempo & D'Augelli, 2002; Jordan, Vaughan, & Woodworth, 1997; Kosciw, 2004; Malinsky, 1997). However, school personnel should ensure that all students, including sexual minority youth, have equal access to education and mental health services (National Association of School Psychologists, 2004). To provide this equal access, schools may need to provide direct support services, social opportunities, and school climate improvements that increase safety and comfort for sexual minority youth. School climate is particularly important because questioning and undisclosed GLBT youth may not be identified for services, but require support nonetheless. Many GLBT youth may not ask for help due to fear of being harassed or hurt (American Academy of Pediatrics et al., 1999). Therefore, directing school-based services solely at students who identify as GLBT serves only a fraction of those potentially in need.

The problems faced by GLBT students in schools are well documented (Bontempo & D'Augelli, 2002; Busseri, Willoughby, Chalmers, & Bogaert, 2006; Goodenow, Szalacha, & Westheimer, 2006; Jordan et al., 1997; Kosciw, 2004; Kosciw & Cullen, 2002; Malinsky, 1997). School-based interventions, on the other hand, have only recently gained attention as a point of discussion. Several interventions have been proposed, but few have been empirically validated. According to Ellis (2001), educational innovations should be supported by three levels of research: theory (Level I), empirical research (Level II), and program evaluation (Level III). This model helps to define what is meant by "research-based" interventions, and can be applied to any educational innovation. Level I establishes a theoretical basis for the innovations currently in place in schools. This level illustrates the groundwork from which educational innovations are developed. In the case of this review, "theory" is loosely defined to include research that established the need for

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intervention with GLBT youth, rather than a true theoretical model. Empirical evidence of effective implementation in applied settings (schools) is represented by Level II. These studies describe what results emerge when the innovation (i.e., interventions to improve outcomes for GLBT youth) is implemented in schools. Finally, Level III research includes large-scale implementation of interventions. This research should include several sites of implementation, and, in the case that one person or group developed an innovation, Level III research helps to document that the intervention maintains its effectiveness when removed from the developer. This review is organized around these levels and examines the extent to which school-based interventions for GLBT youth fulfill the criteria set forth by Ellis.

#### LEVEL I: THEORETICAL BASE

Level I research establishes a theoretical basis for the innovations currently in place in schools (Ellis, 2001). Research that falls into this category relevant to GLBT youth details what is known about risk factors, identity development and challenges in the school setting.

Researchers and practitioners have established that the needs of GLBT students justify service provision. These needs and experiences may provide insight for intervention development. One may draw the conclusion that research in the areas of identity formation, isolation, and the impact of a hostile climate suggests that GLBT youth will benefit from interpersonal, social, and climate interventions. That is, observations of and empirical research on the experiences of GLBT youth in schools and the negative or positive outcomes associated with specific components helped to build the base upon which to develop interventions.

#### *Risk Factors for GLBT Youth*

The National Longitudinal Adolescent Health Study (also referred to as the Add Health study) provided valuable information about the perceptions and experiences of GLBT youth (Resnick et al., 1997). Results of this study suggested that youth who reported an attraction to people of the same sex also reported higher levels of depression and alcohol abuse than their peers (Resnick et al., 1997). In particular, 9th–12th-grade students who had experienced same-sex attraction or behavior tended to have more emotional distress and are considered at risk for poor emotional health (Resnick et al., 1997). Moreover, in a survey of lesbian and bisexual females, several respondents reported stories of isolation from friends, loneliness, and even suicide attempts (Malinsky, 1997). A more recent study found that the mean score for psychological well-being was significantly lower in groups of bisexual, mostly heterosexual, and same-sex attracted youth than in a group of exclusively heterosexual youth (Busseri et al., 2006).

Suicidal ideation, attempts, and rates are frequently mentioned in discussions of GLBT risk factors (Garofalo, Wolf, Wissow, Woods & Goodman, 1999; Gup, 1998; Macgillivray, 2000; Savin-Williams, 1994), but a note of caution is warranted. When referring to an elevated suicide rate in the GLBT youth community, researchers and readers should exercise caution in interpreting publicized rates. In estimating the true number of successful suicides, it is often difficult to determine the factors that played a role in causing the person to act, and even more difficult to determine sexual orientation for those who are not openly gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or questioning. According to the National Institute of Mental Health (1999), there are no national statistics for suicide rates among GLBT persons, due to the fact that sexual orientation is a personal characteristic that people can and often do choose to hide due to uncertainty or fear. Therefore, reporting suicide attempts and ideation rather than actual suicide rate is easier to interpret with confidence.

Several studies on this topic clearly indicate that GLBT youth are at greater risk for attempting suicide than are heterosexual youth (Garofalo et al., 1999; Gup, 1998; Macgillivray, 2000;

Savin-Williams, 1994). The rate of suicide attempts for youth in the United States in 2003 was approximately 8.5% (National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 2003). Unfortunately, two reviews of research found that studies on GLBT youth reported a 20%–40% suicide attempt rate (Gup, 1998; Savin-Williams, 1994). This rate may hold to more recent samples, as a study published in 1997 reported that 35.3% of the sample of GLBT youth had attempted suicide, and that 47.1% had considered it (Jordan et al., 1997). Other recent studies indicated that gay and lesbian teenagers may be three times as likely to attempt suicide as heterosexual teens, and that gay teenagers may account for 30% of all teen suicides (Macgillivray, 2000), sometimes with close to 10% attempting suicide in a 1-month span (Garofalo et al., 1999). Overall, it appears that psychological stress is elevated and suicide attempts are most frequent when youth first identify as GLBT to themselves or after coming out to others (Savin-Williams, 1994).

### *Identity Formation*

The process of identity formation is one that varies by individual. Although models of development have been proposed, it is important to note that some adolescents may move through the process at a faster pace than others, that factors such as ethnicity and support systems may impact development, and that some steps may not be completed during adolescence, if ever (Ryan & Futterman, 1998). Furthermore, confusion during the identity formation process is normal and also varies by individual. One well-known approach proposed a four-stage model of lesbian/gay identity development (Troiden, 1989). The steps of this model include a period of sensitization, in which the child sees him- or herself as being “different,” a period of identity formation, during which youth become aware of same-sex attraction, identity assumption during mid- to late adolescence or adulthood, when individuals begin to self-identify and disclose their orientation (“come out”) to other GLBT people, and finally the stage of commitment, in which youth incorporate sexual identity into all aspects of their life (Troiden, 1989).

One point of particular importance emerges from this identity development model. Due to the fact that the first two stages take place before youth disclose their identity to others, sexual minority youth must pass through almost all stages before they become visible to others. That is, they deal with much of the process of coming to terms with sexual identity without the explicit support of family members, peers, or school personnel because they have not made their struggle known. This invisibility, taken with the knowledge that only a fraction of youth struggling with sexual identity issues eventually identify as gay or lesbian (others experiencing attraction or having same-sex encounters but identifying as primarily heterosexual) it is clear that school-based support must attend to the broader climate in addition to providing direct support for those who require it.

Unfortunately, GLBT youth may commonly perceive their support network of family and friends to be tenuous or nonexistent (Martin, 1992; Zera, 1992). In the process of identity formation and coming out, GLBT youth are faced with the fear and sometimes reality that their family and friends will react negatively to their sexual orientation, perhaps even rejecting them altogether (D’Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Remafedi, 1987). Positive identity development requires access to supportive peers and adults, accurate information, and connection to a community in which acceptance and validation are provided (Ryan & Futterman, 1998).

### *Risks and Vulnerabilities Related to School Experiences*

A critical understanding must be reached that psychosocial risks and vulnerabilities experienced by GLBT students are not characteristics of their sexual orientation, but are due to negative interactions with peers, adults, and even society as a whole. Victimization is frequent—often in schools and other community settings. Effects include depression, anxiety, fear, low self-esteem,

and self blame, along with somatic symptoms and even Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (Ryan & Futterman, 1998). GLBT people who have integrated a positive identity show better psychological adjustment, greater satisfaction, and higher self-concept, with lower rates of depression or stress than GLBT people in conflict with identity (Ryan & Futterman, 1998). The risks generally associated with GLBT youth are best thought of in this context. In designing interventions to serve GLBT youth, the focus should rest on the school experiences that can help or hinder their development.

*Effect of isolation.* Often-cited risk factors associated with sexual minority status are social isolation and mental health problems (Bontempo & D'Augelli, 2002; Goodenow et al., 2006; Malinsky, 1997; Resnick et al., 1997; Ryan & Futterman, 1998). Students who identify as GLBT may feel lonely and ostracized at school and in broader communities. This can interact with other factors to contribute to low self-esteem, depression, and even suicidal ideation and attempts (Resnick et al., 1997). With adolescence comes an increasingly strong reliance on friendship and peer support (Savin-Williams, 1994). Unfortunately that support may not be available for a large proportion of GLBT youth (Malinsky, 1997; Savin-Williams, 1994). Research stemming from interviews with and surveys of GLBT youth cite several examples of the isolation and loneliness experienced by these students in the schools (Malinsky, 1997; Resnick et al., 1997). One review of research found that GLBT youth across studies rate peers as extremely important in their lives, but that isolation from peers is common for up to 95% of these youth (Gup, 1998).

Interviews with teen and young-adult lesbian and bisexual females yielded a strong theme of social alienation. Two high school students provided the following quotes about their experiences in school: "When I was in eleventh grade, I really began to feel different. . . . I drifted away from my friends. I thought they hated me;" "The biggest problem for me has been the loneliness" (Malinsky, 1997). A review of research of stressors in the lives of GLBT youth indicated that peer harassment and peer relationships in general are linked to feelings of emotional isolation and separation, and that these feelings may be some of the most difficult issues for youth to overcome (Savin-Williams, 1994). Additional research has found that perceived student prejudice is associated with emotional distress and that school connectedness is associated with lower levels of emotional distress and suicidal involvement for students in general (Resnick et al., 1997).

Overall, it appears that the combination of harassment and victimization at school and in society along with attempting to come to terms with or hiding one's identity results in a heightened level of risk for GLBT youth. These findings support the assertion that social isolation and marginalization in the school environment are harmful for GLBT students. Taken together, this body of research supports the need for psychosocial support for GLBT students in schools. Interventions such as Gay/Straight Alliances and support groups might serve to link GLBT youth with other students, providing needed peer interactions and emotional support.

*Effect of a hostile climate.* Hiding one's sexual orientation and/or coping with orientation-based victimization are correlated with substance abuse, suicide, depression, and high risk behavior (Ryan & Futterman, 1998). Events that occur during the school day such as experiencing verbal harassment, hearing homophobic speech, or being bullied exacerbate the challenges of developing a healthy personal identity. Negative feelings about being gay, lesbian, or bisexual are positively correlated with hearing homophobic speech by teachers ( $r = .358$ ) or peers ( $r = .373$ ; Jordan et al., 1997). Furthermore, when teachers do not discipline such derogatory language by students higher levels of negative feelings ( $r = -.462$ ) were reported (Jordan et al., 1997).

An examination of the effects of school victimization experiences (i.e., verbal harassment, being bullied, physical assault) on risk behaviors revealed that GLBT adolescents reporting low victimization were similar in reported risk behaviors to heterosexual adolescents with low

victimization. Of youth reporting high victimization, GLBT youth were significantly more likely than heterosexual peers to have engaged in other risk behaviors such as sexual risk, truancy due to fear, and suicide attempts (Bontempo & D'Augelli, 2002). Thus, the combination of sexual minority status and victimization had a synergistic effect on risk behaviors.

GLBT students may face additional struggles because negative school experiences affect school achievement. The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network's (GLSEN) 2003 National School Climate survey found that verbal and physical harassment, physical assault, and property damage were linked to lower grade point averages for GLBT youth (Kosciw, 2004). In addition, one study that examined risk and protective factors for GLB (transgender students were not included) youth found that supportive friends and parents could not mediate the harmful effect of a negative school climate (Murdock & Bolch, 2005). Even after controlling for prior achievement, student perception of GLB-based exclusion explained 10% of variance in grade point average (Murdock & Bolch, 2005). Similarly, Remafedi (1987) found that 53% of a sample of gay and lesbian adolescents experienced a drop in their grades and 28% dropped out of school. On the other hand, 20% of that sample experienced an improvement in grades (Remafedi, 1987). Online interviews with lesbian and bisexual young women resulted in another divergent result, and revealed that the majority excelled in school, and of 27 participants, only 4 reported having difficulty concentrating on school work (Malinsky, 1997).

The key to untangling the achievement questions may be in examining harassment and victimization rather than sexual orientation. As demonstrated in large-scale studies examining both sexual orientation and victimization, evidence suggests that being both gender minority and a victim of verbal or physical harassment leads to worse outcomes than either status alone (Bontempo & D'Augelli, 2002; Kosciw, 2004). When victimization is left out of the equation and students who have or have not experienced negative school experiences are all in one group, sexual minority students appear to perform at levels similar to their heterosexual peers (Russell, Seif, & Trong, 2001). It appears that school climate issues may affect grade point averages either positively or negatively. However, the potential for harm is hard to dispute, and although some students may become overachievers, others will struggle and possibly even drop out.

In addition to potentially hampered achievement while in high school, GLBT students were twice as likely as the student population as a whole to indicate that they do not plan to pursue postsecondary education (Kosciw, 2004). The desire to extend one's education appears to be linked to victimization, as GLBT students who reported a low level of victimization also reported intention to pursue postsecondary education at rates comparable to the general student population (Kosciw, 2004).

These findings point to the importance of social support and school climate in improving the school experiences of GLBT youth. Issues affecting the individual in terms of self-esteem and emotions are supported by theories of self concept. In such theories, self-concept may be described as a multidimensional construct that is affected by the individual and the environment (Bear, Minke, Griffin, & Deemer, 1997). In addition, school climate research has linked a positive school climate with positive outcomes in achievement, self-concept, and absences, among others (Lehr & Christenson, 2002). The constructs that appear most salient for GLBT students in terms of school climate are caring and sensitivity, equity and fairness, student interpersonal relations, and student teacher relations (Haynes, Emmons, & Ben-Avie, 1997).

Ideas about how to address the needs of GLBT students circulate throughout the literature. A few specific interventions have been widely recommended. Developing school policies to protect sexual minority youth, starting Gay/Straight Alliances, providing psychosocial support for GLBT students, providing staff development in GLBT issues, and incorporating sexual minority issues into the curriculum appear to round out the school-based interventions most often cited in the

literature. Research on the harmful effects of a hostile school climate and social isolation supports the claims that the suggested interventions would improve school experiences for GLBT youth. Although research on the efficacy of these interventions is somewhat sparse, available results are presented herein.

## LEVEL II: PROVEN EFFECTIVENESS

Level II research expands on the observation and experiences of theory by implementing innovations in applied classroom settings. This type of research employs experimental control in a real-life situation to determine the utility of implementation of a particular innovation (Ellis, 2001). Studies documented in this section are smaller in scale when compared to the research reviewed in Level III.

### *School Policies*

It appears that nearly all resources about ending homophobic harassment in the schools agree on one tactic: establishing a clear and explicit written policy that forbids harassment in the school (Boland, 2002; Holzhauser, 1993; Horowitz & Loehnig, 2003; Macgillivray, 2000; Schneider & Owens, 2000; Szalacha, 2003). As many of these resources point out, antiharassment policies without publicity and administrator support are not likely to produce change. As documented by the American Association of University Women (2001), policies alone do not appear to reduce harassment in schools. Although awareness of policies against sexual harassment has increased dramatically since 1993, reported frequency of being harassed has not changed (American Association of University Women, 2001). Nonetheless, a well-publicized school policy protecting the rights of all students may be a valuable component of a GLBT-supportive environment. Although suggestions to implement antiharassment policies inclusive of GLBT students abound, a review of literature uncovered no research examining implementation of policies in applied settings.

### *Gay/Straight Alliances*

Another proposed intervention is to allow and support the formation of Gay/Straight Alliances (GSAs; Boland, 2002). GSAs are typically student-run after-school clubs through which sexual minority students can find peer support and belonging as well as helping to effect positive changes in their school (Horowitz & Loehnig, 2003). As the name implies, GSAs are open to all students, regardless of sexual orientation, who are interested in challenging antigay or heterosexual bias and harassment in schools.

One study investigated the effectiveness of GSAs in a school setting and found that participants believed that participation in the GSA improved their academic performance, facilitated better relationships with adults and peers, helped them develop a sense of pride in who they were, increased feelings of school belonging and identification, and decreased harassment (Lee, 2001). Although no actual improvement in grades was observed following the initiation of the GSA, improved relationships with peers and adults as well as feelings of safety, pride, and belonging were positive outcomes (Lee, 2001). Moreover, qualitative research suggested that GSAs empowered participants and allowed students to become more open and comfortable with their sexual orientation (Garcia-Alonso, 2004). An additional study that considered school-based intervention research found that the presence of GLBT-oriented clubs or groups (GSAs or politically oriented) was strongly correlated ( $r = .801$ ) with increased discussion of sexual minority issues in classrooms (Jordan et al., 1997). It should be noted that these studies involved no experimental or statistical control, relying on reports of participants as the primary outcome measure.

*Staff Development and Behavior*

In studies that surveyed GLBT adolescents and solicited their recommendations and ideas about how to improve schools, a clear message emerged. Students who experienced sexual minority status in high schools asked that teachers and other staff speak out. Students call for staff intervention when other students use homophobic language and open discussion of GLBT people and issues in classrooms (Jordan et al., 1997; Malinsky, 1997). Although students may hear peers using derogatory language daily, they witness teachers correcting this behavior less than once per month (Jordan et al., 1997; Kosciw, 2004; Kosciw & Cullen, 2002). No studies emerged in this review of literature to support the applied implementation of staff development in improving school climate and experiences of GLBT youth. However, several studies support the notion that existence of supportive staff members is related to positive outcomes for GLBT youth (Jordan et al., 1997; Kosciw, 2004; Kosciw & Cullen, 2002; Murdock & Bolch, 2005; Russell et al., 2001). Research that investigates outcomes for students following training of support staff is needed.

The studies reviewed in this section document the results of interventions implemented in isolated settings with small groups of students. What follows is an exploration into broader implementation of school-based interventions supporting GLBT youth.

## LEVEL III: CONSISTENT AND WIDESPREAD IMPLEMENTATION

Widespread implementation is demonstrated in one published study (Szalacha, 2003). It should be noted that other large-scale programs exist and provide services for GLBT youth. Unfortunately, no published research is available to support the efficacy of these programs. The Massachusetts Safe Schools Program for GLBT students conducted a statewide study of the impact of GSA, school policy, and staff development interventions on student outcomes (Szalacha, 2003). This study used a stratified random sample of 33 schools that had implemented recommendations of a statewide commission. Results indicated that GSAs were the most potent forces for institutional change. First, a high percentage of students (90%) were aware of a GSA's presence in their school, compared to far fewer being aware of school policies or staff training. In addition, a higher percentage of students could identify a faculty or staff member who was supportive of GLBT students, students are more comfortable referring a friend questioning sexuality issues to talk to a counselor, and fewer students hear homophobic language daily in schools with a GSA versus without one (Szalacha, 2003). Another study based upon the Massachusetts database found that the presence of a GSA or other support group was significantly associated with greater safety for sexual minority youth (Goodenow et al., 2006). Specifically, sexual minority students in schools with support groups were less likely to report dating violence, incidents of victimization at school, skipping school due to fear, or multiple recent suicide attempts (Goodenow et al., 2006).

Another set of national school climate studies have collected data to suggest that GSAs are related to positive outcomes for students (Kosciw, 2004; Kosciw & Cullen, 2002). While cross-sectional in nature, these studies provide evidence of relationships between school supports and student outcomes in a national sample. Reported school experiences of GLBT students nationwide indicated that youth in schools that had a GSA felt safer than students in schools without a GSA (Kosciw, 2004; Kosciw & Cullen, 2002). Those who could identify at least one supportive faculty or staff member had higher average GPAs and higher postsecondary aspirations (Kosciw, 2004) and were more likely to report that they felt as if they belonged in school (Kosciw & Cullen, 2002). More youth in schools without policies (or without evident policies) reported that they had missed classes or days of school for safety reasons than youth in schools with evident policies about harassment (Kosciw, 2004). Youth were also more likely to report victimization events to

teachers or school staff if they believed their schools had a policy regarding such behaviors (Kosciw, 2004).

#### CONCLUSION

Although little published research exists to support school-based interventions for GLBT youth, the outlook for future research is promising. A clear need exists for interventions to support GLBT students and improve the school sexual diversity climate. Students need social and psychological support. In addition, school staff support and interventions on behalf of these students is beneficial, but research suggests that staff members often do not intervene and frequently do not have any training to encourage change (Macgillivray, 2000; Mudrey-Camino & Medina-Adams, 2006).

Promising data on GSAs, school policies, and staff development exists in the literature. GSAs are the most researched and appear to produce the strongest results at this point. Research on the interaction of school climate and victimization with sexual orientation demonstrates the potential effect of school environment (Bontempo & D'Augelli, 2002; Jordan et al., 1997; Kosciw, 2004; Murdock & Bolch, 2005). The strength of this association demands more attention in intervention research. Interventions that reduce homophobic speech and harassment, increase support systems, and improve the overall climate for GLBT youth must be examined.

The problems of GLBT youth will not be relieved by speculation about best practices. Future research must focus on interventions in the schools that influence outcomes of isolation, academic achievement, and emotional and psychological well-being. In direct interventions of GSAs, support groups, and the like, random assignment may not be possible in most cases due to the low number of students who openly identify as being GLBT, along with the ethical implications of denying services to some students. However, it is not unrealistic to examine pre-post measures of academic achievement, social adjustment, self concept, or risk behaviors. In addition, in districts or states that implement school-based support services or enact climate initiatives, random assignment may be possible. One sample of schools or classrooms might receive intervention during the first year of the program, with others to follow in subsequent years. Whatever the specific design, research on school-based support for GLBT students needs to be expanded in terms of applied research and widespread implementation.

The base for determining what works in school-based interventions for GLBT youth must be developed as a whole. In addition, specific subgroups will need to become a focus of investigation. Of the research that currently exists on school-based interventions and experiences, much focuses on urban schools. As evidenced by GLESEN's national school climate surveys, issues may vary in content and intensity among locales and geographic regions. Intervention research needs to be sensitive to these differences in exploring effective practices for school settings. In addition, research tends to represent a primarily Caucasian participant group. Although data are most commonly collected in urban schools, the diversity of these schools is not represented in the specific population of GLBT students who have been studied. Investigation into support systems and interventions for minority GLBT students is warranted. Finally, school-based support research for transgender students is also called for, as this group is frequently assumed to be covered by the "GLBT umbrella" but may require unique services for their unique issues.

The importance of understanding GLBT issues and how to support the social, emotional, and academic needs of these students fall within the domains of *School psychology: A blueprint for training and practice, III* (National Association of School Psychologists, 2006). School psychologists must develop diversity awareness and culturally sensitive practice, which includes understanding the needs and experiences of students of different sexual and gender orientations. In addition, the *Blueprint* describes the importance of promoting wellness, social skills, mental health and life competencies in the schools. Furthermore, NASP's *Position Statement on GLBTQ Youth*

(National Association of School Psychologists, 2006) calls on school psychologists to develop knowledge, educate school staff, promote a healthy school environment, and provide intervention when necessary in meeting the needs of GLBTQ students. School psychologists must work to promote healthy school environments for all students in order to optimize learning and prepare young people for adult life.

Clearly, the research base for school-based supports of GLBT students is in early stages of development. Much progress has been made in linking school factors with social, academic, behavioral, and psychological outcomes for GLBT youth. We know that supportive staff can make a difference for these students. We know that lack of intervention when homophobic speech is used alienates youth. We also know that existence of support services in the form of GSAs and school policies appear to facilitate favorable outcomes for GLBT students. Overall, we know that there is hope. Schools are beginning to implement services that are hypothesized to help GLBT students successfully participate in and feel safe in schools. GLBT students will benefit from school-based interventions when they are appropriately and effectively applied. It is up to school and research communities to investigate just which interventions will be effective and for whom they are appropriate.

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