

Position Statement: Best Practices in Meeting the Needs of LGBTQ+ Youth

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Adopted by the MASP Board of Directors: March 19th, 2020

The vision of the Michigan Association of School Psychologists (MASP) is simple: all Michigan students will achieve to their fullest potential. To fulfill this goal, schools and educators must address the needs of students whose identities (declared or perceived) put them at risk for marginalization, harassment, and/or discrimination. Specifically, MASP is endorsing the use of best practices in meeting the needs of one of the most vulnerable groups, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LGBTQ+) youth; this group is inclusive of all students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or questioning, and/or who express diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, and/or gender expression.

Research indicates that LGBTQ+ students, nationally and in Michigan, are targeted with physical violence and experience a hostile school environment more frequently than their non-LGBTQ+ peers:

- Data from the Michigan Youth Risk Behavior Survey¹ (CDC, 2015) show that of students who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB), 8.4 percent of high school students, are 2.3 times more likely to be threatened or injured with a weapon on school property than their non-LGB peers. They are also 2.3 times more likely to skip school because they feel unsafe. Forty-one percent of LGB students report being bullied on school property and are 4.5 times more likely to attempt suicide compared to non-LGB youth.
- According to the GLSEN national report (Greytak, Kosciw, Diaz, & Bartkiewicz, 2009), 26 percent of transgender and gender diverse students were physically assaulted, (e.g., punched, kicked, or injured with a weapon) in school in the past year because of their gender expression. Overall, LGBTQ+ students who are bullied and harassed are more likely to experience depression and anxiety, feel excluded from the school community, display lower levels of academic achievement, and experience stunted educational aspirations.
- As indicated by Morton, Samuels, Dowrksy & Patel (2018), lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and gender diverse (LGBTQ+) students are over-represented in the unaccompanied homeless youth population, creating significant barriers to health, safety, and school success.
- Not all LGBTQ+ students are equally affected by these risk factors. LGBTQ+ students with intersecting marginalized identities are at greater risk of negative outcomes, including school failure and dropout (Fisher, Komosa-Hawkins & Routledge, 2013).
- The adverse health and educational consequences for transgender and gender diverse students are even greater than those for LGB students.

School psychologists are uniquely positioned to guide the process of creating safe learning environments for all students in a variety of ways. The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) believes school psychologists are ethically obligated to ensure all youth with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, and/or gender expressions, are able to develop and express their personal identities in a school climate that is safe, accepting, and respectful of all persons and free from discrimination, harassment, violence, and abuse. Specifically, NASP's ethical guidelines require school psychologists to promote fairness and justice, help to cultivate safe and welcoming school climates, and work to identify and reform both social and system-level patterns of injustice (NASP, 2010). NASP further asserts all youth are entitled to equal opportunities to participate in and benefit from affirming and supportive educational and mental health services within schools.

The Michigan State Board of Education has created and adopted two documents which support our efforts to ensure that Michigan's schools are safe places for all students to learn and flourish. These documents include:

- State Board of Education Statement and Guidance on Safe and Supportive Learning Environments for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LGBTQ) Students
https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/SBEStatementonLGBTQYouth_534576_7.pdf
- State Board of Education Model Anti-Bullying Policy
https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/SBE_Model_AntiBullying_Policy_Revised_9.8_172355_7.pdf

The State Board of Education *Statement and Guidance on Safe and Supportive Learning Environments for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning (LGBTQ) Students* serves to promote the positive and respectful school climate that supports healthy development and improved educational outcomes for all students through specific and concrete recommendations for schools. The following areas are addressed:

1. Adopt, implement and enforce inclusive policies
2. Provide professional development opportunities regarding LGBTQ+ students
3. Provide family engagement to assist families in supporting LGBTQ+ students
4. Encourage respect throughout educational culture
5. Collect and review data to identify barriers present in school for LGBTQ+ students
6. Designate building-level staff who are experts in supporting/advocating for LGBTQ+ students
7. Provide developmentally appropriate information in school libraries about LGBTQ+ issues
8. Support the formation of Gay-Straight Alliances, which are afforded with equal protection/rights as other organizations in the school as noted by the Equal Access Act

The following areas are also addressed specifically in meeting the needs of transgender and gender diverse students:

1. Student Identity
2. Names and pronouns: Use of preferred pronouns in reports, school documents, classrooms, and records
3. Privacy & Confidentiality Regarding Disclosures
4. Gender-Segregated Activities & Facilities
 - Restrooms
 - Locker Rooms or Changing Facilities
 - Physical Education Classes & Intramural Sports
 - Interscholastic Sports
 - Gender-Based Activities or Practices consistent with their identity
 - Dress Code- Students should not be required to dress in accordance with their gender assigned at birth.

In addition to supporting students through the creation of GSAs and providing a safe space for students, school psychologists are also experts in school climate and the prevention of bullying. Advocating for policies that protect all students from bullying is an important role of school psychologists on a local, state, and national level. Unlike requirements in Michigan's anti-bullying legislation, adopted in December 2015, the State Board of Education Model Anti-Bullying Policy includes enumeration that provides protections for LGBTQ+ youth through this language: 'Bullying' or 'harassment' is any gesture or written, verbal, graphic, or physical act (including electronically transmitted acts) that is reasonably perceived as being dehumanizing, intimidating, hostile, humiliating, threatening, or otherwise likely to evoke fear of physical harm or emotional distress and may be motivated either by bias or prejudice based upon any actual or perceived characteristic, such as race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression." In this context, enumeration is defined as specific characteristics of students that could be the basis of bullying. Enumerated anti-bullying laws or policies usually refer to those policies that list the traits of students who have historically been targets of bullying. Common characteristics include race, disability, religion, sex or gender, national origin, sexual orientation, ancestry/ethnicity, and gender identity or expression. Enumeration sends a powerful message to school staff, students and families about the values regarding appropriate behavior in a school. Enumeration is

listed as one of eleven key components of anti-bullying policy by the U.S. Department of Education. The GLSEN National School Climate Survey (Kosciw, Greytak, Zongrone, Clark, & Truong, 2017) found that LGBTQ+ students in districts with enumerated policies reported greater school safety, less victimization based on their sexual orientation and gender expression, and less social aggression than students in districts with generic policies or no/unidentified policies.

School psychologists serve as experts in school climate, mental health, and supporting LGBTQ+ students. This role enables us to work as strong advocates and powerful allies for LGBTQ+ students through the creation of GSAs, advocating for inclusive sex education, professional development for staff/students, and the dissemination of knowledge regarding best practices in supporting LGBTQ+ students. By working to secure a safe space for LGBTQ+ youth in schools, school psychologists can significantly contribute to positive outcomes for LGBTQ+ youth. Specifically, when LGBTQ+ youth perceive having supportive school climates, identified youth exhibited fewer past-year suicidal thoughts compared to those who experience a less protective school environment (Hatzenbuehler, Birkett, Van Wagenen, & Meyer, 2014). Furthermore, when LGBTQ+ youth endorsed feeling supported and accepted, they also display higher self-esteem, and lower levels of depression, substance use, suicide attempts, and risky behavior (Ryan, Russell, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2010). By committing to advocate for LGBTQ+ youth in schools via the aforementioned recommendations, school psychologists can fulfill their commitment to help students- specifically LGBTQ+ youth- achieve their fullest potential.

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RESOURCE:

Please reference this comprehensive NASP online resource page that includes a range of services that will connect and support LGBTQ+ youth:

<https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/diversity/lgbtq-youth/organizations-supporting-lgbtq-youth>