

HOW EDUCATORS & SCHOOLS CAN SUPPORT LGBT YOUTH IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

An estimated 2.9 to 3.8 million lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people live in rural communities across the United States, and they are part of the fabric of rural American life. Research shows that rural youth are just as likely as urban youth to identify as LGBT.



However, the structural challenges facing all rural residents, such as fewer doctors or employers, can add to the challenges facing LGBT people in rural and urban areas alike, such as discrimination or mistreatment. For LGBT youth or youth who are questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity, as well as for their families, it can be particularly challenging to have fewer LGBT-supportive resources available or to need to travel long distances to find them. By addressing the overall needs and challenges of rural areas, while also directly addressing LGBT-specific experiences in rural areas, meaningful and long-lasting change is possible in rural America, for both LGBT and non-LGBT residents.

ACTIONS EDUCATORS & SCHOOLS CAN TAKE TO SUPPORT LGBT YOUTH LIVING IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

Changing Laws & Policies for More Inclusive Schools

- Advocate for district policies and state laws that prohibit discrimination in education based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and association.
- Advocate for district-level and state-level anti-bullying policies and laws that prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and association. Ensure that these policies take a restorative justice approach focused on healing communities and addressing the need for increased understanding.
- Advocate for district-level and state policies and laws that allow transgender students to access facilities and participate fully in school activities in accordance to their gender identity.
- Oppose new policies and work to repeal laws that harm LGBT youth, including:
 - Anti-LGBT school laws, which forbid school districts from passing anti-discrimination or anti-bullying policies that protect LGBT youth.

- “Don’t Say Gay” laws, which restrict teachers and staff from even discussing LGBT people or issues.
- Other legislation designed to restrict transgender students’ access to school bathrooms or limit their participation in school activities and extra-curriculars.

Ensuring Welcoming School Communities

- Provide age-appropriate, LGBT-inclusive school curriculum, teaching practices, and resources (such as library books).
- Share and promote LGBT-inclusive resources in the local community, including by displaying [this flyer](#).
- Regularly participate in LGBT educational events, cultural competency trainings, professional development, and community service opportunities, either in person or through webinars and virtual communities. Ensure that these trainings are also explicitly intersectional and recognize the unique experiences of, for example, LGBT people of color.

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- Support the formation and activities of gender and sexuality alliances (GSAs, also known as gay-straight alliances) in schools, with resources from GSA Network.
- Provide and ensure students have access to appropriate and affirming mental health and social supports, such as school counselors.
- Implement suicide prevention policies, given the higher risk of bullying, harassment, self-harm and suicide experienced by LGBT youth and the lower rates of supportive schools or staff in rural areas.
- Ensure that school computers allow access to LGBT content. The internet may be the primary, if not the only place where many LGBT youth in rural areas can access LGBT-affirming information, but youth in rural areas are more likely to use a computer at school than at home.

ACTIONS EDUCATORS & SCHOOLS CAN TAKE TO SUPPORT ALL YOUTH, INCLUDING LGBT YOUTH, LIVING IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

- Advocate for increased school funding, including through the federal Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP), and teacher training programs to recruit, prepare, and retain teachers particularly in subjects like mathematics, science, and special education.
- Create additional educational opportunities for youth who are parents, or may be low-income, students of color, young adults, and/or students with disabilities that meet their needs and allow them to obtain the education and skills they need to be successful in adulthood.
- Create ongoing educational opportunities for adults and parents, for improving access to job training or skill-based learning opportunities, as well as for personal enrichment.
- Examine options to reduce the impact of geographic (and social) isolation for students' attendance and persistence in school.
- Explore multiple pathway options for rural students such as vocational training programs, dual enrollment in community colleges, or online college courses to support rural student success.
- Invest in quality, high-speed internet to allow students to access resources both at home and at school.
- Offer free breakfast and lunch for all students, regardless of income, to reduce stigma and encourage participation by rural children, who are more likely to struggle with food insecurity.

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE EXPERIENCES OF LGBT PEOPLE IN RURAL COMMUNITIES IN THE NEW REPORT

WHERE WE CALL HOME: LGBT PEOPLE IN RURAL AMERICA

www.lgbtmap.org/rural-lgbt

View your state's LGBT policy profile at www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps

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