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Announcing New Research: Lessons That Matter

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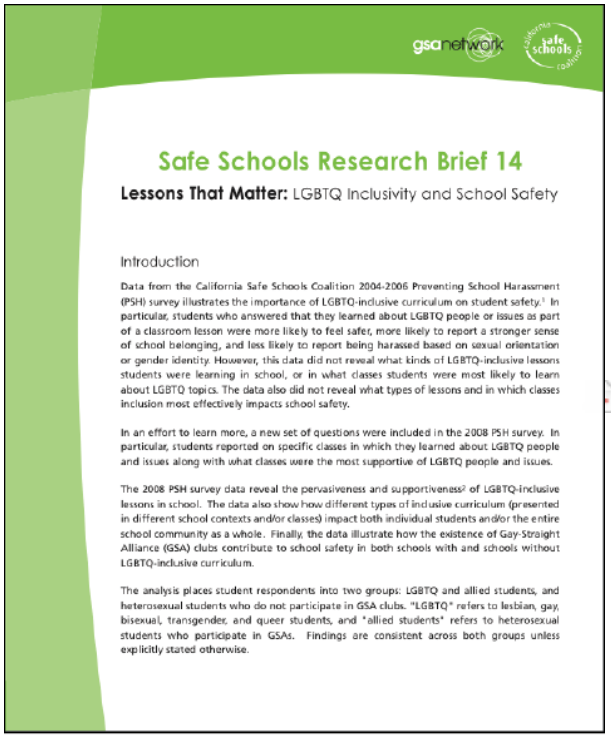
Today, we're proud to release our newest research brief with the California Safe Schools Coaltion, Lessons That Matter: LGBTQ Inclusivity and School Safety. *Check out the press release [1] for more details!*



Safe Schools Research Brief 14

Lessons That Matter: LGBTQ Inclusivity and School Safety

Introduction

Data from the California Safe Schools Coalition 2004-2006 Preventing School Harassment (PSH) survey illustrates the importance of LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum on student safety.[1] In particular, students who answered that they learned about LGBTQ people or issues as part of a classroom lesson were more likely to feel safer, more likely to report a stronger sense of school belonging, and less likely to report being harassed based on sexual orientation or gender identity. However, this data did not reveal what kinds of LGBTQ-inclusive lessons students were learning in school, or in what classes students were most likely to learn about LGBTQ topics. The data also did not reveal what types of lessons and in which classes inclusion most effectively impacts school safety.

In an effort to learn more, a new set of questions were included in the 2008 PSH survey. In particular, students reported on specific classes in which they learned about LGBTQ people and issues along with what classes were the most supportive of LGBTQ people and issues.

The 2008 PSH survey data reveal the pervasiveness and supportiveness[2] of LGBTQ-inclusive lessons in school. The data also show how different types of inclusive curriculum (presented in different school contexts and/or classes) impact both individual students and/or the entire school community as a whole. Finally, the data illustrate how the existence of Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) clubs contribute to school safety in both schools with and schools without LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum.

The analysis places student respondents into two groups: LGBTQ and allied students, and heterosexual students who do not participate in GSA clubs. "LGBTQ" refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer students, and "allied students" refers to heterosexual students who participate in GSAs. Findings are consistent across both groups unless explicitly stated otherwise.

Download the full report!

[2]Did you know that LGBTQ-inclusive class lessons?especially those rated as supportive of LGBTQ people and issues?dramatically affect students? feelings of safety at school? *Lessons That Matter*, a new report published by GSA Network and the California Safe Schools Coalition, provides insight into the impact on students when different class lessons include lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people and issues.

If you?re in high school, these findings probably won?t come as a shock ? but they might surprise your teachers and administrators, and give you research to back up your experience.

Thanks to years of youth activism, California passed the FAIR Education Act, updating education guidelines to end the exclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people from social studies lessons. Students like you campaigned to see themselves reflected in lessons at school and they have been working to create a school environment where all students can feel safe. But the FAIR Education Act only went into effect this year, while districts, administrators and teachers are struggling with budget cuts and other challenges. Given all these challenges, what should schools prioritize?

Key findings from *Lessons That Matter* illustrate that LGBTQ-inclusive lessons significantly increase school safety for individual students and for the school climate as a whole. At a time when there is more concern than ever about LGBTQ bullying and safety in schools, this research shows that LGBTQ-inclusive lessons should be a top priority for schools.

If your school is still not following the FAIR Education Act's updates to the education guidelines by next year, it will be time to take action! We've got resources for you at www.gsanetwork.org/FAIR [3], and you can use research from Lessons That Matter to make your case. Findings like these make it more difficult for school officials to reduce your experience into an isolated incident. Remind them that they are required by law to include lessons about LGBTQ people and issues in their social studies and history lessons. And if they argue that they need resources? Send them to www.faireducationact.com [4].

Together, we can end the exclusion of LGBTQ people and issues from lessons ? and make schools safe for ALL students.

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[1] http://www.gsanetwork.org/news/new-research-shows-lgbtq-inclusive-lessons-improve-school-climate/060512
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