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New Research Shows LGBTQ-Inclusive Lessons Improve School Climate

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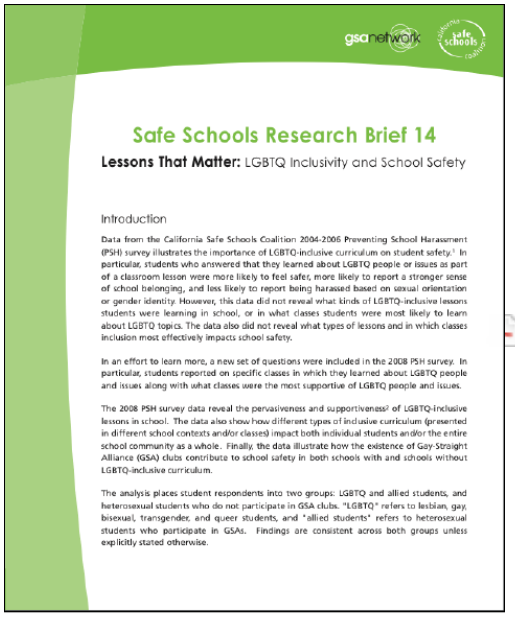
Gay-Straight Alliance Network and the California Safe Schools Coalition release the latest report in their School Research Brief series, ?Lessons That Matter: LGBTQ Inclusivity and School Safety.?

San Francisco ?A report released today by Gay-Straight Alliance Network and the California Safe Schools Coalition (CSSC) provides new insight into the impact on individual students and school climate as a whole when different class lessons include lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people and issues.



Safe Schools Research Brief 14

Lessons That Matter: LGBTQ Inclusivity and School Safety

Introduction

Data from the California Safe Schools Coalition 2004-2005 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? 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!

[1]?These data prove what Gay-Straight Alliance activists

have known for years: when students have factual lessons that honestly reflect the world and the people around them, they are more likely to succeed and feel safe in school,? said Carolyn Laub, Executive Director of Gay-Straight Alliance Network. ?This important research supports emerging best practices on the school, district, and state level, including California?s groundbreaking FAIR Education Act, which updates education guidelines to end the exclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people from social studies lessons.?

Among the report?s key findings is that LGBTQ-inclusive lessons, when rated by students as ?mostly supportive,? positively impact school climate across the board. Additionally, any mention of LGBTQ people or issues in class ? supportive or not ? increases individual students? feelings of safety regardless of their sexual orientation. Physical education (PE) classes are the only exception, where ?neutral/mixed? LGBTQ-inclusive lessons have a negative effect on students.

?This new research clearly shows how important inclusive lessons can be in today?s schools,? said University of Arizona Professor Stephen T. Russell, the lead researcher for the California Safe Schools Coalition. ?At a time when there is more concern than ever about LGBTQ bullying and safety in schools, this research confirms that students need to see themselves reflected in lessons. When they do, they feel safer and more connected at school ? and the school climate is healthier for everyone.?

The Lessons That Matter report expands on previous research from organizations including the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) as well as the California Safe Schools Coalition that found a correlation between schools with LGBTQ-inclusive lessons and student-reported feelings of safety. Today?s report honed in on the specific classes and types of inclusive lessons that most positively impact school climate. The report analyzed data from the California Safe Schools Coalition?s 2008 Preventing School Harassment (PSH) survey, which asked 1,232 students at 154 California high schools about school safety and the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning students and their straight allies.

Download the full report: Lessons That Matter [1]

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Gay-Straight Alliance Network (GSA Network) is a national youth leadership organization that empowers youth activists to fight homophobia and transphobia in schools by training student leaders and supporting student-led Gay-Straight Alliance clubs throughout the country. In California alone, GSA Network has brought GSA clubs to 56% of public high schools, impacting more than 1.1 million students at 880 schools. GSA Network's youth advocates have played a key role in changing laws and policies that impact youth at the local and state level. GSA Network operates the National Association of GSA Networks, which unites 35 statewide networks of GSA clubs throughout the country. GSA Network is also the founder of the Make It Better Project, which aims to stop bullying and prevent suicide.www.gsanetwork.org[2]

The California Safe Schools Coalition is a statewide partnership of organizations and individuals dedicated to eliminating discrimination and harassment on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity in California schools. The California Safe Schools Coalition?s

chief goal is to ensure the effective and comprehensive implementation of the California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act of 2000. www.casafeschools.org [3]
Press Release
http://www.gsanetwork.org [4]

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